

The Secret Life of Organization: Confidential Gossip at Work

Ziyun Fan

School of Management

Royal Holloway, University of London

April 2018

This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Declaration of Authorship

I Ziyun Fan hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Ziyun Fan

1st April 2018

Abstract

In everyday organizational life, most of us have seen, heard and participated in certain ‘water-cooler talks’, which informally communicates and evaluates an absent third party, events or things, and involves particular interaction cues to imply an element of concealment that ‘this goes no further than us’. Such interactions might be considered as on the periphery of organizational life and therefore are trivial. This thesis refers to this particular type of interactions as ‘confidential gossip’, and aims to understand that if confidential gossip is not trivial, then how does it constitute organization? It evokes three related questions: 1) what is confidential gossip?; 2) how should we study it?; 3) how does confidential gossip operate?. Drawing on the constitutive nature of secrecy, communication and gossip, I argue that at the heart of confidential gossip lies organizational relations that are the cause and consequence of confidential gossip and provoke sharing and transgressing secrets through making and breaking bonds. The purpose of the empirical study is to access and to participate in these processes. The empirical study is a three-month ethnographic participant observation with a general focus on informal communication. The fieldwork analysis firstly reports back on the methodological challenges involved in studying secrecy and confidential gossip, drawing parallels between ethnography as a method and the nature of secrecy; secondly it reveals how confidential gossip operates through the ways and markers of the drawing of boundaries around and of confidential gossip; thirdly, scaling up from the local understanding, it sheds a light on confidential gossip in a broader context as a cultural practice where unwritten rules are generated, shared, understood and internalized. Generally, the contribution of this thesis is to illuminate the concept of and the nontrivial trivialness of confidential gossip at work. More specifically, this thesis seeks to firstly contribute to extant studies on gossip by considering gossip specifically as a form of secrecy; secondly add to organizational secrecy theory through the theoretical, empirical and methodological apprehension of confidential gossip; and thirdly supplement the field of Communicative Constitution of Organization (CCO) by applying CCO as a context of understanding secrecy, particularly informal secrecy.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	6
Introduction.....	8
Chapter 1. Conceptualizing Confidential Gossip at Work: The Interface of Secrecy, CCO and Gossip.....	23
1.1. The Constitutive Nature of Secrecy in Organizations.....	27
1.1.1. Secrecy as a Social Construction	28
1.1.2. Formal Secrecy and Informal Secrecy	34
1.1.3. Vulnerabilities of Informal Secrecy	38
1.2. The Constitutive Nature of Communication in Organizations.....	42
1.2.1. From ‘Communication within Organizations’ to ‘Communication Constitutes Organizations’	43
1.2.2. The Three Main Schools and Their Common Ground.....	47
1.2.3. The Distortion and Ambiguity of Communication in Organizations.....	56
1.3. The Constitutive Nature of Gossip in Organizations	59
1.3.1. What Is Gossip?	60
1.3.2. How Does Gossip Work: Functionalities of Gossip	68
1.4. The Constitutive Nature of Confidential Gossip in Organizations	76
1.4.1. From the Three Headline Claims to Confidential Gossip.....	76
1.4.2. The Confidentiality of Confidential Gossip: Coherence and Tensions ...	82
1.5. Chapter Summary	86
Chapter 2. Toward an Ethnographic Approach to Confidential Gossip.....	91
2.1. Possible Methods for Studying Gossip	94
2.2. Ethnography as a Method for Studying Gossip: My Preferred Method.....	100
2.2.1. Ethnography and Participant Observation in General.....	100
2.2.2. Existing Ethnographic Research on Gossip	108
2.3. Research Design	112
2.3.1. The Complexities and Challenges of Studying Confidential Gossip.....	112
2.3.2. Organizational Ethnography as a Method of Studying Confidential Gossip.....	115

2.3.3. Organizational Ethnography as a Way of Writing Confidential Gossip.....	123
2.3.4. Pilot Study.....	125
2.4. Ethics of Conduct.....	129
2.5. Chapter Summary.....	132
Chapter 3. The Double ‘Doubleness’: The Ethnography of Secrecy and the Secrecy of Ethnography.....	135
3.1. The Worried Ethnography.....	141
3.2. The Inability to Go Native.....	150
3.2.1. The Burden of Openness.....	151
3.2.2. The Burden of Hiding.....	157
3.3. In Between Openness and Hiding: The Half-Opened Doors.....	160
3.4. Chapter Summary: The Confused Ethnographer.....	162
Chapter 4. Making Confidential Gossip ‘Boundarrious’.....	167
4.1. The Fuzzy Boundary of Confidential Gossip.....	168
4.2. The Physicality of Boundaries.....	173
4.3. The Negotiation of Boundaries.....	180
4.4. The Enactment of Boundaries.....	190
4.5. Chapter Summary.....	195
Chapter 5. Breaking the Silence: Confidential Gossip as Cultural Practice.....	198
5.1. A ‘Quinza-ed’ Practice of Culture.....	203
5.2. Confidential Gossip and the Organizational Construction of Hierarchy.....	210
5.3. Confidential Gossip and the Organizational Construction of Time.....	218
5.3.1. An Informal-Rule Setting of Time.....	220
5.4. Chapter Summary.....	227
Concluding Discussion.....	229
Bibliography.....	259

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my supervisors Professor Christopher Grey and Professor Dan Kärreman for their vastly diligent and inspirational supervision throughout my PhD studies. This journey has been made wonderful largely due to their encouragement, patience, kindness and generosity, which is more than I deserve.

I reserve my special thank-you for the individuals I cannot name, who worked at Quinza during my fieldwork and who allowed me to intrude into their everyday organizational lives. I appreciate their acceptance, assistance and tolerance of me as both a fieldworker and an intern, and the valuable organizational experiences they shared with me.

I would also like to thank Professor Barbara Czarniawska, Professor Gideon Kunda and Professor Dennis Schoeneborn for their helpful comments and advice.

My friends and colleagues at both Royal Holloway University of London and Copenhagen Business School, especially Ben Credland, Marianne de Beer, Sonia Dhaliwal, Catarina Pessanha Gomes, Jingyu Huang, Yihan Liu, Louisa Murphy and Tianshu Zhang, have been my constant source of great conversations and laughter. I would particularly like to thank Jackie Brackenbury for her support and her sharing of Cockney rhyming slang, which makes the school reception one of the most delightful places to visit at work.

My heartfelt gratitude to my partner Quinten Broekaart for his boundless tolerance, care and motivation which is difficult to acknowledge with a word or two.

My deepest gratitude goes to my family, particularly to my mother, Liuhua Huang, for a lifetime of love, support and encouragement, which I can never repay in any possible ways.

Lastly, this thesis to a limited extent draws on papers I co-authored, including:

Fan, Z. & Grey, C. (2018) 'Where to draw the line? Markers of confidentiality in organizational gossip'. Working paper.

Fan, Z. & Grey, C. (2017) 'The ethnography of secrecy and the secrecy of ethnography:

Ethical and emotional dilemmas of researching organizational secrecy'. Paper presented at the European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS) Colloquium, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Fan, Z. & Grey, C. (2016) 'Extending theories of the constitution of organization'. Paper presented at the European Academy of Management Conference, Paris, France.

Introduction

The inspiration to study this topic is derived from a paradox of gossip, which is that although gossip is involved in two-thirds of conversations' time (Dunbar, et al., 1997), few people feel comfortable admitting that they are participants. There is “a discrepancy between the collective public denunciation and the collective private practicing of gossip” (Bergmann, 1993: 21). People enjoy but simultaneously worry about it. This leads to a taken-for-granted understanding of gossip that gossip is not only ignoble, but also superficial, trivial and vacuous (Waddington, 2012). Therefore, engaging in any sort of gossip is socially condemned and a questionable performance of professionalism and credibility in the context of organizations. Notwithstanding that, some contradictions have been noted in such common-sense remarks about gossip, such as Emler's (1994: 118): “If gossiping really is so unimportant, trivial, vacuous, and idle, whence comes its dangerous qualities? Why is gossip so threatening and why should it be so violently condemned?” With extant literature on gossip rejecting the understanding of its triviality in organizational life (e.g. Guendouzi, 2001; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005; van Iterson, et al., 2011; Waddington, 2012), this thesis brings forward the concept of confidential gossip as the centre of theoretical construction and empirical exploration by specifically focusing upon gossip as a form of secrecy, which has not been paid particular attention by studies of organizational gossip.

Whilst the term ‘confidential gossip’ seems to contain the ability of an exotic shock to us, it might be one of the most mundane activities of our everyday organizational life. Most of us, if not all, have experienced it ourselves, possibly next to photocopiers, water-coolers, coffee makers, fridges, lunch tables, or in restrooms, corridors, unoccupied meeting rooms and in the corners of offices. Amongst many cases I have experienced, such as with family, friends, pharmacists, saleswomen and taxi drivers, merely mentioning the term ‘confidential gossip’ can become a trigger for sharing gossip and confidential gossip. We can quickly respond to the phenomenon of confidential gossip with personal knowledge, or may think we know it already. However, such ubiquitous practice is largely under-researched and under-understood, or perhaps even misunderstood.

This thesis, therefore, aims to understand confidential gossip as a phenomenon and practice of organizational life, and through this, to reveal its nontrivial trivialness in organizations. In particular, this thesis asks: How does confidential gossip constitute organizations? This question cannot be answered without exploring three related and fundamental questions: a) what is confidential gossip?; b) how do we study it?; and c) how does it operate?

Bringing in the Concept of Confidential Gossip

In order to form and to clarify the idea of confidential gossip theoretically, this thesis brings together three sets of literature that each represents a core feature of confidential gossip, and positions confidential gossip at the overlap of them. Specifically, this thesis proposes that confidential gossip can be studied theoretically and empirically through the lens of its constitutive nature to organizations. Therefore, the conceptualization of confidential gossip is achieved through applying the constitutive nature of a) secrecy, b) communication, and c) gossip.

In doing so, the thesis considers confidential gossip in a neutral light without moral presumptions regarding it to be inevitably good or bad. Furthermore, instead of considering it as a performance solely for information conveyed, confidential gossip is approached in a combination of social and informational approaches through considering it as a social process as well as recognizing the value of the information it encompasses.

Secrecy

In his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell describes a totalitarian world which demands absolute control and obedience through the watchful eyes of Big Brother and the all-seeing telescreens that receive and transmit information of daily behaviour to the Party. This is the world the main character Winston Smith lives in, yet inwardly resists. Winston secretly began a diary, sitting in a shallow alcove he thinks is outside the range of the telescreens; what he does not know is that his act of writing is under surreptitious observation – that “his most secret undertaking was itself secretly spied upon” (Bok, 1982: 19). This situation refers to a basis of understanding and conceptualizing secrecy as Bok (1982) emphasizes: it is built upon knowledge and intentional concealment. This

thesis considers such central character as the heart of the constitutive nature of secrecy, as it points to the complexities of differentiation and entanglement between knowing and not knowing, between being and not being known, and between knowing and being known.

Moving to interpersonal relations with reciprocal knowledge and ignorance, one can never know another person completely; neither does one reveal oneself completely or indeed be able to (Simmel, 1950). As Goffman (1959: 13) notes, “many crucial facts lie beyond the time and place of interaction or lie concealed within it”. Therefore, social interaction is interwoven with the elements of knowing and not knowing, and being known and not known. It is inevitably shaped by degrees of conscious concealment. In this way, secrecy is not a sole question of *concealing* from whom, but simultaneously a consideration of *sharing* to whom. In this sense, secrecy, as intentionally keeping secrets from someone, is both a social process and a part of who we are (Simmel, 1950).

Recent scholarship in organization studies has identified secrecy as an important aspect of organizational life (Jones, 2008; Stohl & Stohl, 2011; Costas & Grey, 2014, 2016; Scott, 2013, 2015; Parker, 2016; Curtis & Weir, 2016). Drawing upon this understanding, this thesis specifically refers to the significance of its social processes that build upon social differentiation and dependence as the inherent nature of secrecy. Such social connection and separation generate ‘compartments’ of both knowledge and organizational relations, shaping social recognition of who ‘we’ are through selections of membership. Hence, at the core of complexities and entanglements of knowing and being known is ways of differentiating ‘us’ from ‘them’. In this way, secrecy is constitutive of organizations through forming a ‘hidden epistemic architecture of organizational life’ (Costas & Grey, 2016; see also Parker, 2016).

Within the extant scholarship, Costas & Grey (2014, 2016) generally categorize secrecy into formal and informal secrecy. Within informal secrecy, they recurrently identify “confidential gossip” as being a prime example (e.g. Costas & Grey, 2016: 96-98). They do not, however, provide any detailed empirical investigation of confidential gossip or an explanation of how it operates. Informal secrecy thus is a key component to theoretically conceptualize and to empirically understand confidential gossip. Specifically, it draws attention to particular ways of organizing social relations that form,

maintain and/or split cliques that comes across formal structures in organizations. Through the sense of ‘I know something you do not know’, this thesis suggests that informal secrecy can be a vehicle for socialization and *requires* socialization, providing a platform for conceptualizing confidential gossip through the lens of the constitutive nature of secrecy.

Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO)

Inspired by the linguistic turn into social theory and much informed by Karl Weick’s (1969, 1979) *Social Psychology of Organizing*, from the 1980s onwards management, organization and communication scholars have shifted attention from functionalist to interpretivist understandings of organizational communication. Although the notion of communication both expressing and creating social realities is hardly new, such constructionist viewpoint has been developed and extended in organizational communication studies (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). It is now theoretically well established that communication can be viewed in various ways as fundamentally constitutive of organizations (e.g. Ashcraft, et al., 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009).

Echoing contemporary heterogeneous theoretical endeavour in the field of communication studies, the term ‘communicative constitution of organizations’ was first coined by McPhee & Zaug (2000) for their presentation of the four flows model as a specific view for the constitutive nature of communication (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). Inspired by Giddens’s structuration theory, the four flows model, including communication flows of membership negotiation, self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning (McPhee & Zaug, 2000), is identified as one of the three main theoretical approaches of CCO scholarship. Organization, as McPhee & Zaug (2000) note, emerges at the interaction of the four flows.

The Montréal School of organizational communication, pioneered by the work of James Taylor, involves scholars who are or were affiliated with Université de Montréal, such as François Cooren, Elizabeth van Every and Consuelo Vásquez, is another leading school (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). It is based strongly on actor-network theory and explores organizing proprieties of communication as the basis of its constitutive nature (e.g. Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Organization, as Taylor & Van Every (2000: 104)

remark, “does not precede communication, nor is it produced by it...It emerges in it” with communication recursively formed in conversational and textual forms.

Sharing a processual comprehension of social reality with the Montréal School, Niklas Luhmann’s theory of social systems (e.g. Luhmann, 1995, 2000) has been recognized as the third school of CCO. Luhmann and his follows, such as Steffen Blaschke, Dennis Schoeneborn and David Seidl, contribute to the conceptual debate of “*how* communication constitutes organization” (Schoeneborn, 2011: 663) through applying the key notion of *autopoiesis*, pointing to the self-referentiality of communication. Specifically, Luhmann focuses on interconnected events of decisional communication as the constitutive force of organization (e.g. Luhmann, 2003). Organization, according to Luhmann (2000: 63, translated from German), “emerges and gets reproduced as soon as decisions are communicated”.

Notwithstanding significant differences, this thesis draws on the common ground shared amongst the three schools, specifically regarding the notion of communication as well as organization-communication relations. Communication is not just something done in and/or by organizations. Rather, organization is regarded as an emergent and ever-fluctuating network of interlocking communication processes. From this ontological assumption of the communicative constitution of reality, communication is seen as “primary mode of explanation” (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014: 307) that serves sense-making of situations in and of organizations. As Ashcraft, et al. (2009: 9, emphases added) mark, “communication does not merely *express* but also *creates* social realities” in organizations (see also Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999, 2004; Orlikowski, 2000; Cooren, 2012).

In this context, bridging CCO to the conceptualization of confidential gossip, this thesis centrally suggests that the fact that communication is not solely or even primarily an informational process implies in particular that it has a role in the socialization of organizational members. That is to say, communication may serve to enact organization by impinging on individual identities (who am I?) and the relations between them (who are we? who are they?) via local and situational interaction. Such constitutive nature shapes the relational apprehension between communication and secrecy. At first sight communication and secrecy appear to contradict each other, since one seems to be about

the sharing of knowledge and the other to be about its concealment. In fact, on closer examination, they are both about different ways in which knowledge is selectively shared and not-shared as politically symbolic and material acts. The socialization role of communication thus allows people to construct a world image “which, collectively considered, form[s] a patterned representation of their environment” (Taylor & Van Every, 2000: 4).

Gossip

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, gossip carries a longstanding and commonsensical reputation as the spreading of ‘dirt’. Organizationally, as one of the most basic forms of informal communication at workplace (e.g. Dunbar, et al., 1997), gossip has been considered as a sort of wrongdoing that can come across and affect formal structures of organizations, triggering studies investigating the management of gossip in order to prevent or control the negative consequences (e.g. Mishra, 1990; Blakeley, et al., 1996). Such influence of gossip arouses the rise of business and management articles prompting ways of ‘what you can do’ to deal with, for example, “a gossiping boss” (Harvard Business Review, 2016) or “a coworker who is spreading gossip about you” (Business Insider, 2017). Some advice even goes as far as to “stop negative office gossip” (Forbes, 2013). Regardless whether such instructions are truly beneficial and such ends are (eventually) possible and necessary to achieve, they reflect gossip as being “among the most important societal and cultural phenomena we are called upon to analyze” (Gluckman, 1963: 307).

Gossip is mainly engaged via two forms of dissemination, including the ones exposed with a high level of publicity and a wide range of circulation, such as celebrity gossip in magazines, family affairs discussed via television shows and social media comments, and the ones that are not communicated in public forms, which will be the main focus in this thesis. Two examples will serve to illustrate such forms of dissemination: firstly, a total stranger I encountered in an airport supermarket told me her lifelong conflicts with her sister-in-law who has been high-maintenance and also drinks the brand of coconut water I accidentally chose; and secondly, corridor chitchat without inviting participation of anyone else before an office meeting. The two examples together show a variety of trust and familiarity as a nest with levels of concealment embraced in general gossip and

indicates the difference of positions general gossip and confidential gossip have in the nest of concealment.

Following the airport supermarket example, it is a common myth to consider gossip as women's way of talking and knowing. A Chinese proverb 'three women make a real drama' notes gossip being an inherent feature of women as well as the social power of gossip. Dated back to the early 17th century, the 'brank' or 'scold's bridle' was an iron device of punishment primarily utilized to "curb women's tongues that talk so idle" (Chambers, 1869: 211). Whereas this thesis disagrees with the reductionist treatment of gossip such as men report and women gossip (Tannen, 1990), it suggests the relations between gender and gossip is important, as it is a constitutive part of the socially constructed understanding of gossip, and retrospectively gossip can be a part of gendered identity construction.

Defining gossip is not straightforward, and a robust definition of it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide, owing to the fact that gossip is an ephemeral activity that is unmanageable to catch in the act of being perpetrated (van Iterson, et al., 2011) and to the fact that to some degree it is comprehended differently across disciplines. Nevertheless, a working definition of gossip suggests that it involves at least two people and is often concerned with the "positive or negative evaluation of someone who is not present" (Eder & Enke, 1991: 496, see also Fine & Rosnow, 1978; Nevo, et al., 1993; Taylor, 1994; Foster, 2004). This thesis extends the meaning of 'evaluative' as a key identified feature of gossip by considering such evaluation as a process of social selection, bringing it closer to the social characters of gossip that are embedded with social connectedness and, simultaneously, with separation. This extension is important as it maintains and strengthens situated relations as a particular point of departure to understand gossip as a social process above its linguistic and informational feature. More significantly, it points to the heart of the constitutive nature of gossip underlying such dynamics: gossip is not just an activity but expressive of certain kinds of social relations. In this way, this thesis brings forward the interactional dynamics embedded in gossip, and gossip's embeddedness in socialization processes at work.

Overall, building upon such constitutive nature, this thesis centrally argues that being a phenomenon of individuals, groups and organizations, through ways such as information

gathering (e.g. Rosnow & Fine, 1976), social comparison (e.g. Wert & Salovey, 2004), politicking (e.g. Deal & Kenny, 1982) and entertainment (e.g. Ben-Ze'ev, 1994), gossip is a way of understanding and generating organizational relationships. That is to say, despite its everyday image as something rather inconsequential and perhaps even morally dubious, gossip is a potentially important part of organizational work – the work of making or constituting organization.

Confidential Gossip

Moving from general gossip to a specific genre, this thesis, therefore, regards confidential gossip as having various characteristics of gossip introduced above, but with the central feature of being shared as a form of informal secrecy. Gossip and confidential gossip share many features, but confidential gossip does differ from general gossip in terms of a different position on the continuum of concealment. This entails the use of particular verbal and non-verbal cues which highlight the confidentiality of a particular exchange of gossip. Expressions such as ‘you must keep this to yourself’, ‘between us’ or ‘within these four walls’ can be examples of such cues. Confidential gossip might be exchanged with a particular injunction about who it can and cannot be shared (e.g. ‘don’t tell X’) but more generally participants are expected and/or confused to know with whom it is appropriate or inappropriate to share the gossip (Costas & Grey, 2016: 97).

More importantly, this thesis analytically develops the notion of confidential gossip as not just ‘gossip plus confidentiality’ if it is considered not just to be a form of gossip but also a form of secrecy. This means that the various things that gossip ‘does’ in organizations are likely to be inflected differently and perhaps heightened when confidentiality is added to the mix. If gossip can shape group boundaries and norms then gossip which is confidential may do so in especially strong ways. The reason for this is the particular and powerful nature of secrecy itself. Specifically, Simmel (1906/1950) suggests that secrecy shapes social relations by creating insiders and outsiders who share (or are excluded from) very strong bonds. Such development of understanding is central here, as it brings into focus the confidentiality of confidential gossip that can generate and is itself an indication of the informal badging of membership and boundary (re)drawing.

Besides the sense of social exclusivity, this thesis draws attention to one of the hallmarks of secret knowledge: that it entails a mystique so that the tendency is to regard something secret as being ‘more true’ or ‘more real’ than other kinds of knowledge. It gives voice to a particular epistemological and ontological status secret knowledge entailed in organizational life. If communication was just something that organizations, or people within them, do then this would not necessarily be of great interest. But if we go back to the claims of CCO that communication is constitutive of organization then we could conclude that the communication of secret knowledge has a particular status in such a constitution. For example, to pick up the case of socialization, a new organizational member might very well feel that the things s/he is told in the course of a formal induction process are all very well and good, but the things that s/he is told in confidence by a co-worker are what s/he ‘really’ needs to know or is the ‘real truth’ about how things are ‘done around here’. Similarly, to pick up the example of group boundaries, knowledge about what ‘we’ are or do and what ‘they’ are and do which is imparted as a secret then it is more likely to be taken as the reality and therefore more likely to have a strong impact upon group (and individual) identity construction.

Therefore, as a core of the theoretical construction, this thesis proposes that at the heart of confidential gossip lies organizational relations that are the cause and consequence of confidential gossip, and entails sharing and breaching secrets through making and breaking bonds. The purpose of the empirical study, therefore, was to access and partake in these processes.

Empirical Exploration: A Case Study

Studying confidential gossip is by definition methodologically challenging, derived as it is from social contextuality, embeddedness, ephemerality and the sensitivity of confidential gossip. Being socially produced and historically sensitive, confidential gossip is always inscribed in particular contexts and requires contexts for it to be understood. Thus, as Edgar Schein notes in relation to his work on secrecy and in-groups, “you had to be a real insider to know” (Schein, 2010: 100). Particularly, in order to empirically investigate ‘how confidential gossip constitutes organizations’, it is necessary to both observe and participate in it; to become to some extent an insider of it.

Hence, this study adopted an ethnographic participant observation approach as the conduct of a single case study.

The empirical study was undertaken in a British media firm named Quinza, where for my three-month field study I became a full-time intern. I positioned the study as informal communication in general. The gatekeeper was informed that this would be the focus and that within it I would be seeing if there were examples of confidential gossip. Such positioning was decided for three pragmatic reasons. Firstly, it would be impossible to conduct a study that involves observation of, and participation in, only confidential gossip. If it was to be found, it would be embedded in wider interactions. Secondly, ethics dictated that the gatekeeper be aware of what the project was hoping to achieve, but to have made it explicit to the employees that confidential gossip was the focus would almost inevitably have made it impossible for the researcher to be included in confidential gossip. Thirdly, in any case, I did not know at the outset that the study would capture any desirable empirical evidence of confidential gossip; had it not, then the focus of the research would necessarily have had to be some other aspect of informal communication.

Participation and observation involved nine-to-five interactions at work with occasions away from the office such as eating out and visits to a food market and a cat café, and off-work activities such as the reading club and the Christmas party. More specifically, the approach was not a ‘fly on the wall’ method as it involved informational and social exchange from the researched to the researcher and vice versa. This research design considers and connects to the complexity and fluidity of the social construction feature of informal communication and confidential gossip in particular, and therefore allowed me to tap into the social environment and interaction surrounded and within its social groups.

Following the research design, this thesis presents cases not only of confidential gossip. The empirical material is blended with a mixture of informal communication and general gossip for the reason that they are social surroundings for confidential gossip to be recognized and understood. In many examples, confidential gossip does not show up suddenly by itself. Rather, participants reached confidential gossip through a gradual flow and development from other sorts of informal communication or from general

gossip. This is partially contributed to by the fragmentary nature of confidential gossip that can make it difficult to track the beginning and/or ending of its stories, which often submerge and re-emerge again later when, for example, similar topics are mentioned within a particular group of people.

Thesis Overview

This thesis is structured into five chapters followed by a concluding discussion. The first chapter, ‘Conceptualizing Confidential Gossip at Work: The Interface of Secrecy, CCO and Gossip’, presents the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis. It outlines why and how I seek to explicate and contextualize the idea of confidential gossip in organizational life. Specifically, this chapter follows a logic of conceptualization built upon the interlocking issues amongst the three basics of confidential gossip, meaning secrecy, communication and gossip: Just as communication is constitutive of organizations so is gossip, as a specific form of communication, constitutive of organizations in a specific way. Implicitly within some of the studies of gossip is at least a hint of the confidential gossip which Costas & Grey (2016) give as an example of informal secrecy. Just as secrecy is constitutive of organizations so is informal secrecy, as a specific form of secrecy, constitutive of organizations in a particular way. The analytical development of the interlocking aspects allows me to subsequently foreground the argument that confidential gossip as an intersection of the aspects can contribute to the constitution of organizations in some ways. This logic of concept construction consequently highlights the proposition that confidential gossip can be understood through the lens of its constitutive nature of organizations.

Following chapter one as both a ‘literature review’ and a development of substantive theoretical arguments, chapter two, “Towards an Ethnographic Approach to Confidential Gossip”, discusses how to study confidential gossip at work empirically, and outlines methodological aspects of the empirical research. As a reference to confidential gossip, this chapter looks into empirical studies on gossip, which have been conducted mainly via seven approaches including archive studies, diary studies, experimental research, online research, participant observation, questionnaire studies, and interview studies. Through noting the methodological challenges embedded and might be encountered in

researching confidential gossip and illustrating empirical implications underneath the research question ‘how confidential gossip constitutes organizations’, this chapter emphasizes how participant observation is significant to my research interests, and why the other research techniques of gossip are not fitted to apply in this study. The research design is further justified by the empirical results of a pilot study.

The empirical study points to a series of ethical and emotional dilemmas, which are critically explored and reflected in chapter three, ‘The Double Doubleness: The Ethnography of Secrecy and the Secrecy of Ethnography’. The aim is to report back on the methodological challenges involved through first-hand experience, drawing parallels between ethnography as a method and the nature of secrecy. The title ‘double doubleness’ is named after such parallels that ethnography as a method in general involves a practice of secrecy, but when twisted together with the fact that this was an ethnography of a form of secrecy a kind of ‘doubling’ occurs. Both the method and the object of study involved secrecy. The parallels are drawn in four ways through my field relations, involving mental struggles of worry, the inability of going native with the burden of hiding, the half-opened door in between openness and hiding of socialization, and consequently the state of being confused during and after fieldwork. In elaborating the encountered conflicts at many stages, this chapter emphasizes the importance of the parallels as not *just another* illustration of fieldwork and its dilemmas when the focus of the study is itself the practices of secrecy.

Chapter four, ‘Making Confidential Gossip ‘Boundarrious’’, brings into focus the significance of boundaries of confidential gossip as how it works in an organization, and discusses the ways in which the boundaries are drawn. Here I ‘invented’ the word ‘boundarrious’ to mean ‘having the quality of boundaries’. In this chapter, I note that whereas the conceptual distinction between gossip and confidential gossip is clear as illustrated in chapter one, such distinction in practice may be a rather hazy and porous one, and certainly will be socially negotiated and context-specific. The analysis of boundaries demonstrates how boundaries can be structures of social relations with forms of markers influenced by both physical and social construction of a space. Specifically, I apply examples that occurred in the kitchen of Department H, as such a space legitimizes causal socialization as being equipped with ‘the social affordance of informal interaction’ (Fayard & Weeks, 2007). In doing so, I emphasize *how* bodily expressions

that people used in the kitchen make it a space of particularly confidential gossip. However, I also discuss how confidential gossip can be restricted by such space. Following boundary construction, I draw on how boundary negotiation of confidential gossip, which is weakly regulated and emotionally charged, creates processes of group identity negotiation. Built on the critique of general organizational theory for falling into social determinism, this chapter gives voice to the interrelation and interaction of physical and social structures as constitutive of constructing and understanding confidential gossip.

Scaling up from chapter four with the micro and local analysis of communicative interaction episodes, chapter five, 'Breaking the Silence: Confidential Gossip as a Cultural Practice', reveals why confidential gossip should be considered as a cultural practice, and how it constitutes the understanding and (re)creation of the organizational culture. Particularly, this chapter shows how by participating in confidential gossip unwritten rules get to be communicated, understood, shared, and internalized as an integral part of the participants' sense of self. This is illustrated by two cultural aspects of Quinza. The first aspect is the organizational construction of hierarchy that indicates how such unwritten rules serve as connotations and ramifications of power order that communicate the hierarchically constructed reality at work into being. In presenting such ways of confidential gossip (re)constructing and making sense of 'what it is *really* like in here', I apply two metaphors: mirror and origami box, to demonstrate how concerns and opinions are translated into daily activities and subsequently transforms one into who one *should* be in a particular context. Following this, this chapter illustrates the second aspect as the organizational construction of time in the office in relation to 'everyday presentation of self' (Goffman, 1959), such as professionalism and 'presenteeism'. Through the two cultural aspects, I stress that spheres of the organizational culture are actively engaged in, deeply interwoven with, and retrospectively reproduced in and through practices of confidential gossip.

The subsequent concluding discussion knits together the main arguments and findings developed throughout the thesis, and discusses further implications on understanding and researching confidential gossip and secrecy in organizations. Specifically, building upon the understanding of secrecy indicated particularly in chapter one, it further challenges Simmel's (1950) view on the irrelevance of moral valuations in the significance of

secrecy by firstly suggesting that ethical considerations matter to informal secrecy and the study of informal secrecy; and secondly discussing the ethical accountability of informal secrecy and confidential gossip in organizations. Drawing on Birchall (2011a; 2011b) on secrecy and transparency, it points out that secrecy and transparency are not necessarily moral antonyms. The central point of my argument is that whilst informal secrecy and confidential gossip does play a role in practices of organizational wrongdoing, it is not necessarily the case. Moreover, reflecting upon the ‘double doubleness’, this chapter brings up a possible criticism of chapter three for being ‘too intimate’ or ‘self-referential’ to note the importance of field relations in understanding and analyzing research on confidential gossip. Furthermore, developing from chapter four on markers and boundaries around confidential gossip, this chapter challenges the longstanding theoretical claim in the sociology of secrecy that goes back to Simmel (1906/1950) and is made strongly by Costas & Grey (2016) in relation to organizational secrecy that the content of secrecy is relatively unimportant to secrecy processes. It stresses the relevance of content in providing a social understanding of secrecy, although we might not always be able to find out what the content is. Following the chapter-by-chapter review and further discussions, this chapter then outlines possible directions for future research and limitations of the research. Lastly, this thesis ends with some reflections on relations between this study and understanding organizations, between secrecy and PhD studies that is itself a secrecy paradox, and between this study and my understanding of organization studies as a whole.

Taken together, the contribution of this thesis is, generally, to illuminate the concept of confidential gossip that gives voice to a significant yet largely ignored aspect of organizational life. It is, after all, an everyday experience in organizational life to be told things that ‘should not go any further’ or are ‘just between us’. Whenever that happens, organization is being constituted; knowledge is being shared, but with conditions; an ‘us’ is being constituted and therefore a ‘them’; organizational relationships are being enacted but in ways that are socially regulated. In this sense, confidential gossip provides a lens of understanding the complexities and entanglements of involvement and detachment of social relations at work. Therefore, understanding confidential gossip matters to organizations and to understand organizations.

More specifically, firstly, this thesis seeks to contribute to existing research on (organizational) gossip by specifically regarding gossip as a form of secrecy. Although some works do sometimes touch on the secrecy feature of gossip (e.g. Bergmann, 1993; Kurland & Pelled, 2000; Michelson, et al., 2010), such feature has not yet been the central focus of analysing and understanding gossip in organizational life.

Secondly, this thesis seeks to add to the field of organizational secrecy theory with the theoretical, empirical and methodological understanding of confidential gossip as a specific sort of secrecy. For example, the parallels drawn between ethnography and secrecy are not only epistemologically productive in understanding secrecy in a methodological context, but also demonstrate how secrecy, especially informal secrecy, arises of a set of contextually specific roles and relationships; in this case, those of ethnography.

Thirdly, this thesis seeks to supplement the field of CCO through applying CCO as the context of understanding secrecy, particularly informal secrecy. Secrecy as a particular form of communication, or a particular and influential element of the communicative constitution of organization, has not yet been brought forward as a central focus. This thesis shows that secrecy offers more than *'just another'* aspect of such constitution owing to its particular epistemological and ontological status of being able to construct 'what it is *really* like in here'. Furthermore, this thesis provides a possibility to resolve the micro-macro conundrum of CCO analysis as a way to "bridge the gap that seems to exist between communication which always appears to be micro and local, and structures, which always appear to be global and macro" (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009: 122), by scaling up from the local analysis of communicative interaction episodes of confidential gossip to paint a bigger picture of it as a cultural practice.

Chapter 1

Conceptualizing Confidential Gossip at Work: The Interface of Secrecy, CCO and Gossip

Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.
(Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973: 5)

Secrecy...is one of man's greatest achievements. In comparison with the childish stage in which every conception is expressed at once, and every undertaking is accessible to the eyes of all, secrecy produces an immense enlargement of life: numerous contents of life cannot even emerge in the presence of full publicity. The secret offers, so to speak, the possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world; and the latter is decisively influenced by the former.
(Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, 1950: 330)

Without communication, there would be no organization.
(Karen Lee Ashcraft, Timothy R. Kuhn & François Cooren, *Constitutional Amendments: "Materializing" organizational communication*, 2009: 7)

It is likely that anyone with experience of organizational life has had a corridor or ‘water cooler’ conversation which starts with words to the effect of ‘keep this between us, but ...’ followed by the sharing of some piece of information about a colleague or workplace event. Such experiences are common enough to suggest that they are of interest to organizational analysis as one of the “nontrivial trivial[s]” (van Iterson, et al., 2011: 382) which make up the daily fabric of organizations and reveal aspects of social organizations of work. These experiences are named ‘confidential gossip’ and the aim of this chapter is to conceptualize and clarify the idea of confidential gossip as the foundation of this thesis and which meanings and importance are located at the intersections of these three quotes.

Gossip has been the subject of a considerable social scientific attention (e.g. Gluckman, 1963, 1968; Suls, 1977; Fine, 1986). Research on gossip notes that gossip has been apprehended and intentionally disregarded as “maliciousness, idleness and the potential to harm” (Waddington, 2012: 75), and been “socially constructed as undesirable” (Michelson & Mouly, 2000: 339), often carrying “with [their] negative associations” (Noon & Delbridge, 1993: 24). Notwithstanding that, Noon & Delbridge (1993) mark on their agenda-setting paper that “not all gossip is negative” (1993: 24, see also Fine & Rosnow, 1978; Elias & Scotson, 1994), and encourage research to critically understand gossip process in preserving and perpetuating organizations that go beyond its moral presumption (1993: 35). Following this view that challenges the eliminated understanding of gossip, this chapter does not limit to the taken-for-granted consideration and considers gossip in a neutral colour. That is to say, gossip could be malevolent and noxious, whereas it is not necessary to be.

Colloquially, confidential gossip may be thought as the kind of gossip which is informally communicated and shared on the understanding that it will ‘go no further’ i.e. not be repeated or, at least, not repeated to ‘inappropriate’ others. It implies three main characters of confidential gossip as being a genre of informal communication, a type of gossip, and embedded with aspects of concealment as a sort of informal secrecy. Drawing on the characters, I propose a conceptual map of confidential gossip (see Figure 1) that brings together three sets of literature and positions confidential gossip as both an intersection and an extension of them: the relatively rich amount of literature on

communicative constitution of organizations, the very small literature on gossip in general, and the even smaller one on secrecy in organizations.

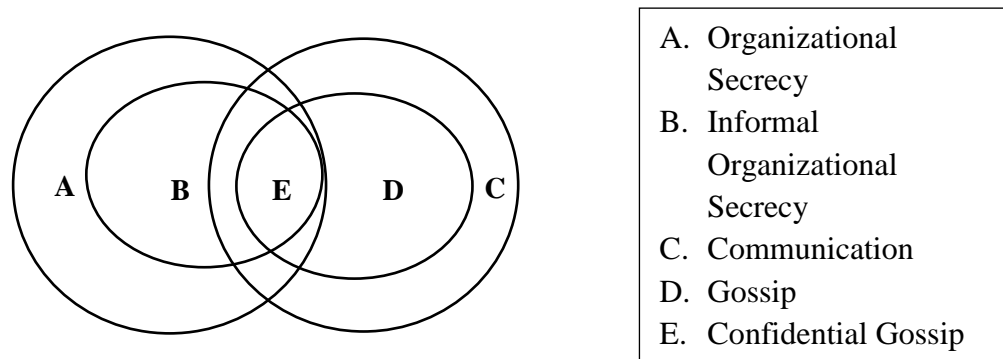


Figure 1. A Conceptual Map of Confidential Gossip

This chapter is therefore structured into four parts with the logic of four headline claims that firstly, secrecy serves to constitute or construct organizations. The first part illustrates the concept of organizational secrecy in general and definitions of formal and informal organizational secrecy in specific. This part emphasizes that secrecy, as being different from secrets, not only contains informational value, but also is a social process of establishing and maintaining boundaries.

Secondly, being parallel to secrecy, communication is not just as something that happens within organizations but serves to constitute organizations. Through a constructionist understanding of communication, this part illustrates why and how the constitutive role of communication is important. It stresses that communication not only is an explanatory lens that can make sense of situations in organizations and of organizations themselves, but also reconstructs and creates social realities of organizations (e.g. Ashcraft, et al., 2009).

One of the key points where secrecy and communication intersect is the informal sharing and concealment of knowledge within organizations, which has implications for, for example, socialization. Such informal communication is captured by a third body of research, which is concerned with ‘gossip’ in organizations. Therefore, in line with the constitutive feature of communication, the third headline claims that gossip has a constitutive role in organizations, particularly in generating and understanding

organizational relations. In presenting such role of gossip, this part draws on extant literature on (organizational) gossip to indicate challenges and dynamics of defining gossip. Through illustrating the structural relations and functions of gossip, this part shows how gossip is a collaborative production and social achievement.

When gossip is considered in relation to secrecy then what emerges as a new focus for theory is what might be called ‘confidential gossip’. Therefore, the fourth headline seeks to establish that with the interlocking aspects of the constitutive feature of secrecy, communication and gossip, confidential gossip in some ways can contribute to the constitution of organizations. Built upon the previous three fundamental bases, this part forms the theoretical clarification of confidential gossip by utilizing a combination of informational and social approaches. As Bellman (1981) draws on Longhi (1974) and notes, “a secret is both a product and a process. The information that is hidden can be either an action or knowledge, and it can be potential or effective, stable or unstable, factual or imaginary” (1981: 1). The creation, withholding and revelation of secret knowledge are embedded with a relational prerequisite as social relations. Thus, the combination of informational and social approaches focuses on the social understanding and processes of keeping and exchanging a thing secret without ignoring or denying the (relational) value of the information carried by practices of confidential gossip.

Additionally, being structured with the four headline claims, this chapter is written in extended length. It seeks to not only review the extant literature on the three concepts (i.e. secrecy, CCO and gossip) that do not really go together, but also to establish a theoretical construction of the fourth concept ‘confidential gossip’.

1.1. The Constitutive Nature of Secrecy in Organizations

History is intertwined with secrecy that has been influential in (the outcomes of) monarchies, wars and individual lives. Since humans began writing, they have been communicating in code (Singh, 1999). It dates back to at least Herodotus's account on how secret writing was used to save Greece from being conquered by the Persian King, Xerxes:

“As the danger of discovery was great, there was only one way in which he could contrive to get the message through: this was by scraping the wax off a pair of wooden folding tablets, writing on the wood underneath what Xerxes intended to do, and then covering the message over with wax again. In this way the tablets, being apparently blank, would cause no trouble with the guards along the road” (Singh, 1999: 4).

Traces of the existence and applications of secrecy, such as uses of code and rituals, have been rich in forming and shaping everyday operation of organizations. This is well-illustrated by cases of secret societies such as Freemasonry (e.g. Robinson, 2014) and the Skull and Bones (e.g. Sutton, 2002), of secret intelligence services, and through various kinds of leak and whistleblowing such as the Enron scandal and Paradise Papers that investigated the offshore secrets of tax avoidance and revealed 13.4 million files largely related to the law firm Appleby and setting out myriad ways in which individuals and companies avoid tax using artificial structures. Tiandihui, a Chinese secret society, established rituals of swearing brotherhood in blood and to sacrifice chickens for the ritual drinking of blood and wine (Murray & Qin, 1994). A rule established to govern branches across geographical locations was the use of the Tiandihui's secret codes: “When passing objects, never forget ‘three’ (*kaikou buli ben; chushou buli san*)” (Cai, 1984: 493). Such characteristics of many secret societies, like codes, roles, rules and rituals, bear some resemblance to features of non-secret organizations (Parker, 2016). Therefore, secrecy is not solely found in special organizations or at certain organizational settings; rather, it is “woven into the fabric of all organizations in a multitude of ways” (Costas & Grey, 2016: 1).

However, secrecy, as a phenomenon and practice in organizations, is under-researched with inadequate attention (e.g. Anand & Rosen, 2008; Jones, 2008; Keane, 2008; Costas & Grey, 2014). In particular, Costas & Grey (2016) point out the paradoxical nature of studies on and touched upon secrecy in organizations that “there is both a little and a lot in the way of relevant existing research: on one hand there is no single literature on organizational secrecy, on the other there are multiple mentions of it scattered across many different literatures and disciplines” (2016: 1). It brings up the challenge of both recognizing the diversity of apprehensions and practices of secrecy and providing a means of definition that can to some degree describe the meaning of their unity. This section will hence firstly introduce the concept and main characteristics of secrecy that are applied throughout this thesis before focusing on key characters of informal secrecy and its vulnerabilities.

1.1.1. Secrecy as a Social Construction

There are known knows; there are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns; that is to say, there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns – there are things we do not know we don't know.

– Donald Rumsfeld

The previous example of Herodotus's account on the secret writing illustrates the distinction and connection between a secret message that needed to be hidden and the process of hiding it, showing secrets and secrecy are two different but interconnected concepts. Secrets refer to the content of information that is kept or is meant to be kept unknown to others. As Derrida & Ferraris (2001) note, there are things secret, but they do not conceal themselves. Secrecy, as keeping a secret from someone, is to “block information about it or evidence of it from reaching that person, and to do so intentionally: to prevent him from learning it, and thus from possessing it, making use of it, or revealing it” (Bok, 1982: 6). Such intentionality of concealment is stressed by Bok (1982) as the key to understand and conceptualize the trait of secrecy. Secrecy here could be comprehended as “the methods used to conceal, such as codes...and the practices of concealment...as professional confidentiality” (Bok, 1982: 6). Furthermore, Bellman

(1984) stresses a paradox surrounds practices of secrecy in possibly every society is that secrets are ought to be told (see also Piot, 1993: 358). She emphasizes such paradox as an essential contradiction of secrecy that “the informant who is telling a secret either directly or tacitly makes the claim that the information he or she speaks is not to be spoken” (Bellman, 1981: 10). However, here is to argue that what the paradox indicates is more an implication of selection embedded in secrecy than a contradiction of secrecy. It brings up a tension as well as a potential confusion of secrecy that it considers not only what should be told to whom, but also what should *not* be told and to whom it should *not* be told to. In this sense, secrecy is embedded with the inextricable dialectics between “the withdrawal and the communication of knowledge” (Horn, 2011: 15). It is both known and unknown, both silent and communicable, in terms of different groups and identities of people.

This dual feature points to an essential cause and consequence of the formation and existence of secrecy as the construction of social relations and behaviour. In particular, it characterizes relations between the known and the unknown, and between who supposes and who are ‘supposed to know’ (Derrida, 1994: 254). Derrida (1994: 245) names this as a ‘secrecy effect’ that derives from an awareness and speculation of the existence of a certain secret, rather than the actual secret. Therefore, secrecy, both of its genuine existence and possible supposition, generates social processes of differentiation that form in-groups with the creation of out-groups. Organizationally, as Costas & Grey (2016) argue, what secrecy does is to make and shape organizations by creating ‘compartments’ within which there is shared knowledge and around which there are boundaries, so that there are insiders and outsiders of secrecy according to who is in possession of secrets and who is excluded from them. In this sense, they argue, secrecy constitutes organization (see also Parker, 2016).

Such creation of compartmentalization and boundary drawing constitutes and is constituted by two main features of secrecy as a social formation of specialness and a social establishment of ‘truth’ and value:

A Social Formation of Specialness

Building upon Costas & Grey’s (2016) argument of compartmentalization, concealment as the core trait of secrecy thus generates a property as ‘don’t tell anyone, *but*’. The ‘but’

places an emphasis on the exclusion of outsiders and creates a correspondingly strong feeling of specialness through inclusion. As Simmel (1950: 332) articulates, “For many individuals, property does not fully gain its significance with mere ownership, but only with the consciousness that others must do without it”. The state of possession provides a sense of ‘knowing more’, serving as a social and psychological statement of privilege and status that ‘I know something that you don’t know’, and of self-belongingness that oneself is located within a social network and considered as being relevant. It generates belongingness and constructs a mind-set that one is more important in the social network than the ‘knowing less’ others. Both the feeling of superiority and the awareness of self-belongingness triggers and constructs insiders’ social recognition of ‘us’.

Besides the possession of concealed knowledge, the feeling of specialness is reinforced through various indirect ways that hint at the concealment of knowledge. For example, at professional service firms, particular information is indicated implicitly as secrecy through the use of expressions like ‘let me close the door’ before it is shared (Costas & Grey, 2016: 93). Moreover, in situations where secrets are shared with the presence of outsiders or inappropriate insiders, participants might “communicate to selected cohorts messages through innuendo, metaphoric expression, allegory, and indirect reference” (Bellman, 1981: 18). The presentation of interpretive keys and the ability to understand what is being said requires a shared knowledge and understanding, and the possession of such understanding identifies and differentiates “one group from another and one person from the rest” (Luhmann, 1989: 137). The use of implications as a sort of secret language stresses members as insiders through the sense that it intensifies the social exclusiveness of possession of a mystery as a way to maintain the excitement of secrecy and internal cohesion of a group. By doing so, it underscores the aristocratic sensation that “[Insiders] has more power over outsiders” (Luhmann, 1989: 137).

Such differentiation does not only bring separateness between insiders and outsiders, it also generates connection amongst insiders as an affective component of solidarity and openness (Bok, 1982). The connection engenders a sense of trust and security through “the mutuality of sharing something private with others, and trusting them not to violate that privacy” (Luhmann, 1989: 158). In this way, concealment enables insiders to construct a private second world in which they feel in control and more authentically themselves comparing to the outside public world in which they are more controlled

(Costas & Grey, 2016). It can be a safety net for members to openly discuss and deal with personal issues and chaos that may otherwise be difficult or frustrated to settle by one alone. In this sense, secrecy not only allows (partial) control over selection and revelation of privacy, but also nurtures an access to emotional therapy for its participants. Hence, being therapeutic, secrecy nourishes intimacy and the sense of like-mindedness as an emotional bond within a group, strengthening the identification of the in-group members as well as the compartmentalization itself from out-group others. This in-group connection gives the group itself “the stamp of something ‘special’, in an honorific sense” (Simmel, 1950: 365).

A Social Establishment of ‘Truth’ and Value

The illustration above echoes to what Simmel (1950) identifies as the particular powerful effect of being party to, or excluded from, secret knowledge. The effect is not just about the sense of social exclusivity, as a hallmark of secret knowledge is the mystique that entails a propensity for it to be considered as ‘more true’ or ‘more real’ than other types of knowledge. Also, secrecy “grows the typical error according to which everything mysterious is important and essential” (Simmel, 1950: 333). This might be contributed by the concealment itself: if the thing being kept concealed were not important or special, why would it be intentionally hidden? It produces the ambiguity toward the thing concealed of whether it is indeed more real or more important. Such uncertainty in turn enhances the mystique of and influences the attitudes toward the secret knowledge. Secrecy in this way can be viewed as an establishment of and a movement between ambiguity and clarity. Moreover, the accessibility of secret knowledge can also affect one’s evaluation of its worth in a sense that when accessing hidden knowledge requires hard and painful work yet revives one’s status, one treats such knowledge with overvaluing awe (Luhmann, 1989).

In this sense secret knowledge has a particular epistemological and ontological status. As one of the positioning quotes of this chapter, Simmel (1950: 330) remarks “the secret offers, so to speak, the possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world”. In her anthropological study on practitioners of different forms of magic, Luhmann (1989) raises the questions of what makes the practitioners to construct a double-world: “some say that they leave their analytic minds behind them when they step into the circle, that they may question magical tenets while in their working world, but within the magic

circle, they believe” (1989: 141). Her study shows that secrecy removes social barriers by keeping the belief from public confrontation and social embarrassment, and thus creates opportunities for the belief to grow. Such secrecy demands a ‘let’s pretend’ position (Luhmann, 1989: 142), implying that it is not only being inside the second world, but also the *straddle* of living between two worlds that makes practitioners feel the secrets are too potent to be revealed and elevates their deference toward magic. In this way, magic as the hidden knowledge is confirmed and fortified as a thing of value.

Occupying a particular position of ‘truth’ and value, secrecy shapes a particular construction of reality. Nonetheless, different members or cliques of insiders within a group might not share the same construction or perception of reality. This might be the case when newcomers who were outsiders of secrecy now find the secret knowledge is of less worth comparing to when it was unknown, and that it was the concealment and unknown itself elevated the value of the concealed information. Another possible cause might be elements of self-deception included in such secrecy, shaping the relational understanding of how newcomers see existing insiders. With the incongruity between inside and outside, perception and realization, consequently, as Keane (2008: 109) points out, “the realization of the deception may lead to disillusionment, which may then result in a loss of trust...leads to heightened uncertainty about future behaviour...weakens the social bond”. Hence, secrecy establishes ‘truth’ and value through social interactions and relations, and can provoke breaking such relations.

Features such as the social formation of the ‘specialness’ feeling and the social establishment of ‘truth’ and value constitute the social organization of secrecy. Therefore, secrecy is imbued with social comparison and differentiation which creates organization through a hidden epistemic architecture, building walls and rooms in organizations with accompanying doors, corridors and windows through which secrets may pass (Costas & Grey, 2016). This may sometimes be a literal architecture (e.g. delimited access to research laboratories in an innovative firm) or it may be a metaphorical architecture (e.g. delimited access to gossip networks). Physical arrangements of organization space based on authorized access such as levels of security clearance (e.g. Gusterson, 1998) can produce a literal architecture of internal partitions, creating physical boundaries that segregate different knowledge generation processes and restrict the access of certain secret knowledge (Costas & Grey, 2016). The high walls

of separation are built both between insiders and outsiders, and amongst insiders. The level of access to secret information that insiders can obtain is limited and may not be identical, thus it is difficult for insiders to put sliced information together for a bigger picture as the jigsaw nature of secrecy.

1.1.2. Formal Secrecy and Informal Secrecy

Costas & Grey (2014, 2016) identify two different types of secrecy in organizations – formal organizational secrecy and informal organizational secrecy as two different ways of boundary drawing.

Formal organizational secrecy is defined as the secrecy that is officially sanctioned and organized by prescriptive rules and laws such as trade secrecy (e.g. Hannah, 2005, 2007; Katila, et al., 2008) and pay secrecy (e.g. Colella, et al., 2007). For example, breaching a trade secret is a violation of trade secret law (Friedman, et al., 1991), which might align with the law of contract and the law of property (Bone, 1998). In industries where value is inserted in knowledge generation and creation, formal secrecy is a reliable organizational mechanism to protect the important and emerging intellectual property (Horn, 2011). Maintaining formal secrecy allows leaders more freedom to pursue riskier strategies that might initially seem unpalatable to stakeholders (Dufresne & Offstein, 2008). The protection of formal confidential information is often inserted as codes in professional ethics, acting as a part of organizational norms (Costas & Grey, 2016) and loyalty (Gusterson, 1998; Keane, 2008).

The organizational practice of information and compartmentalization is built on a need-to-know mentality as “no one person knows too much” (Dufresne & Offstein, 2008: 103). The boundary between insiders and outsiders is explicitly drawn. With the example of military intelligence, Dufresne & Offstein (2008: 103) points out that “a single individual can compromise secrets of national security significance”, thus the need-to-know basis of formal secrecy serves as the principle of security that keeps the full picture of information unattainable. Nonetheless, Costas & Grey (2016: 81) argue such principle is itself a paradox: “how is it known whether there is a need to know? Unless you already know something, you don’t know whether you need to know it, but if you already know it, but don’t need to know it, then it is impossible to cease to know it”. Hence, the rule for security with rational-legal character is less rational than it appears to be, and consequently confusion such as who needs to know can result in informal violation of the rule and revelation of the secrecy.

Notwithstanding that, the need-to-know basis constitutes beyond the awareness of one being a valuable organizational member – it establishes an affirmational identity as “one who *needs to know*” (Dufresne & Offstein, 2008: 104, emphasis added). This particular way that categorizes both information and people structures social space and recognition at work. A good example in this regard is Gusterson’s (1998) ethnographic study on Lawrence Livermore nuclear weapons laboratory:

“Without a green badge, a scientist is not a full adult member of the laboratory. One official said life at the laboratory without a green badge was like being ‘in a leper colony’. Scientists without green badges cannot visit their green-badged colleagues in their offices, unless chaperoned. They often hear their green-badged colleagues say, ‘We can’t talk about that in front of so-and-so. He’s not Q-cleared’” (1998: 71).

To see classified information, scientists need Q-clearance with a green badge as an official certified ‘need to know’ (Gusterson, 1998: 69). The green badge is not simply a symbol of authorized access. It is also a remark of social situating of identity and membership. In this sense, the practice of secrecy is a symbolic process with not just military, but also social functions and consequences, which “has a role to play in the construction of a particular social order within the laboratory and a particular relationship between laboratory scientists and the outside world” (Gusterson, 1998: 80).

Informal organizational secrecy is regarded as the secrecy that is unofficially operated and maintained by social norms, and the intentional concealment of information occurs in an unwritten manner without being hinging on formal rules or laws (Costas & Grey, 2014, 2016). It can be understood metaphorically as invisible doors in organizations, the doors could be in different shapes and sizes (Costas & Grey, 2016). Even when a door is constructed into a certain shape, it would continually change and be sculpted into another model as people go in or out from an informal secrecy circle in which the situation and social structure are constantly changing. Therefore, informal secrecy has audience and contexts with “logics of making and unmaking particular to these contexts” (Hardon & Posel, 2012: S3). The ‘logics’ are constituted by and constitutes the complexity of variegated rendition of social relations surrounded informal secrecy such as membership, allowing different ways of selecting, presenting, interpreting and identifying ‘us’. It

points to what Costas & Grey (2016: 93) refer as the spectrum of informal secrecy that at one end informal secrecy can be of casual nature where membership is not carefully selected, and sharing and breaking secrets can occur at a high rate. A primary example they refer to is confidential gossip.

Informal secrecy requires and can be a vehicle for socialization. Its casual feature as the carelessness of membership selection is seeded by the criteria of specific personal and social preferences such as belonging to the same social club, and wives of members have to dress in a certain way. It is thus a social practice with fluid, variegated and contextual relationships. Therefore, informal secrecy is able to form, maintain, and/or split of cliques and networks between and within the units of an organization that may come across the formal organizational structure (Parker, 2000). For the exploration of networking and social capital in an organization, it is essential to be part of a 'right network' which can provide an individual with first-hand information about upcoming projects and career opportunities (Costas & Grey, 2016), benefiting the individual's formal and informal organizational life. The participation of a network requires a certain level of trust to sustain the membership, regarding an on-going social evaluation of individual trustworthiness towards withholding and circulating information appropriately. The everyday dynamics of secrecy can be understood in a way that "what we reveal and what we withhold are sites of negotiation, integral to the ways in which we inhabit the social world" (Hardon & Posel, 2012: S4).

The creation and the maintenance of informal secrecy could be conducted via ritualistic practices such as participating certain social activities or events and forming promises by repetitively taking an oath (Costas & Grey, 2016). For example, servants of a wealthy and powerful family pledge never publish confidential memoirs. Ritualism could be seen as the informal rule, procedure, and even the standard to tie oneself to a social group, and to construct a particular consciousness through a sense of rights and duties. In this sense, rituals of informal secrecy in general are similar to the particular ones in secret society – "by means the ritual form, the particular purpose of secret society is enlarged to the point of being a closed unit, a whole, both sociological and subjective" (Simmel, 1950: 360). Through the symbolism of ritualistic practices, individuals' membership and belongingness are built around their togetherness of the group as a unity. However, such social dependency and distinctiveness brought by ritualism simultaneously generate

emotional and moral dilemmas of the very existence as well as the preservation of informal secrecy such as “anxiousness with which it is guarded as a secret” (Simmel, 1950: 359). It contributes to the vulnerabilities of informal secrecy, which will be discussed in the following section.

1.1.3. Vulnerabilities of Informal Secrecy

Among all the things of this world, information is the hardest to guard, since it can be stolen without removing it.

– Erving Goffman (1970: 78-79)

Previous sections illustrate the attractiveness of secrecy as one attains the otherwise unattainable and knows the otherwise unknowable. Such attractiveness implies both individual and collective vulnerabilities that generate pressure and necessities of strong bonds (e.g. Courpasson & Younes, 2018). Paradoxically, the trust and attachment develop along with an urge to reveal “there is a secret in contexts...even as the content of the secret needs to be hidden to be of value” (Marx & Muschert, 2009: 224, emphasis added). When informal secrecy brings social differentiation, it simultaneously requires the differentiation to be maintained since a low level of differentiation is difficult for insiders to keep a distance from both the boundary to outsiders and “seductive temptation [of breaking] through barriers by gossip or confession” (Simmel, 1950: 466). Therefore, when secrecy is created to serve certain purposes and to protect vulnerabilities, it is itself vulnerable. Revelation might be unintentional as insiders could be overburdened with guilt and isolation, and attempt to connect with others outside of a secrecy circle (Costas & Grey, 2016). The more concealed a secrecy process is, the more sensational insiders will get towards being recognized for their superiority as an insider by outsiders, and the more tempting the revelation would be. It is the ability and potential for future disclosure that contributes and sustains the power insiders have over others.

The revelation of informal secrecy variably depends on the degree of how restricted the secrecy is, which relates to the contexts and the nature of relations embedded (Costas & Grey, 2016). A secrecy that is informally constructed can easily build up different subgroups within the insiders’ circle with non-linear and multi-directional interpersonal relationship. It generates difficulties to identify whom ‘we’ are across and in between boundaries of sub-groups. The revelation of informal secrecy to inappropriate others is not only relating to the unwritten record of membership, but also rooting in the difficulty and challenge of drawing a clear line towards membership as defining precisely who is and who is not a member, especially for the subgroups within a social group. Furthermore, “all relations which people have to one another are based on their knowing

something about one another” (Simmel, 1950: 307), and “by words and by mere existence” (Simmel, 1950: 307), one reveals itself to others (Simmel, 1950). However, it is not necessary for images for being things, and for words for being feelings (Goffman, 1959). The knowledge and understanding one has towards the other is constructed based on one’s past experience and perception of a social situation. One might misinterpret, or the other might mislead one, to build the social recognition one has towards the other as a member of one’s social group. Hence, informal secrecy may be revealed to inappropriate others before they are recognized as inappropriate.

Without being formally recorded and set surrounded by legal protection, informal secrecy could be considered as carrying a thinner shield that prevents the disclosure of confidential information than formal secrecy. However, formal regulations and legal protections do not accommodate formal secrecy with absolute security. For example, Hannah (2005) notes in her study on factors that influence employee’s decisions about whether or not to protect organizational trade secrets that,

“...it seems likely that in many organizations, managers’ perceptions of what types of information are and are not trade secrets will not match their employees’ perceptions. And if employees’ opinions about what types of information are not trade secrets do not match those of their managers, employees’ actions with regard to those secrets may deviate from what their managers would like.” (2005: 82)

Besides the difference in understanding, maintaining formal secrecy is hindered by compelling financial incentives, which can be exemplified by Apple’s product information leaks. Despite the protection of confidentiality agreements and of Global Security team that employs undisclosed number of investigators who previously worked at U.S. intelligence community such as National Security Agency and FBI, its latest operating system inserted with details of the new Apple Watch and the new iPhone’s hardware specifications was leaked to Apple blogs (e.g. MacRumors) four days prior to Apple’s product launch event for the newest iPhone in September 2017. This is one of the many cases of information leaks of Apple. One channel of such detrimental leaks occurred in its manufacturing factories in China, in which the base wage of workers can be as low as 213USD a month without overtime (China Labour Watch, 2016). One

genuine part stolen from the factories can be worth months of salary. What the examples imply is that above and beyond the formal protections of formal secrecy is the unforeseeable complexity of networks that are radiated from 'need to know' members and come across various 'need to know less' or 'need not to know' others. Such development of networks is difficult to be regulated by rules and brings challenges for legal protections as it contributes to an increasing anonymity of members who involve in the known.

In this sense, informal secrecy can be seen as equipping the insider with a higher degree of social protection, and the cost of breaching informal secrecy could be the insider's social position in a particular social network. Individual social position firmly links to a personal image that is relevant to personal trustworthiness, reputation, norms, responsibility, etc., and is utilized by individuals to present themselves to others and by others to evaluate an individual. The revelation of informal secrecy could lead the insider to be socially excluded from his/her network, contributing to a negative personal image that can potentially affect his/her relationship with others in the organization, the credibility and authority of his/her formal role, and the quality of his/her organizational life. Informal sanctions of disclosing informal secrecy are consequences of an informally and socially normative climate, and create a context for stronger disapproval towards such behaviour that breaks social norms. Nonetheless, lack of a formal sanctioning authority may be seen as less legitimate in conjunction with an immoral purpose underlying the secrecy. Hence, informal sanctions might accumulate the unethical perception of informal secrecy.

Secrecy, especially informal secrecy, might be undesirable in some situations, but it is not necessarily unethical and should not consider the revelation of secrecy as undoubtedly ethical. For example, organizations might consider the necessity of not to disclose different employees' compensation (Anand & Rosen, 2008). Nonetheless, secrecy, especially formal secrecy with intentionally concealed information contributes to the opacity or camouflage of processes and actions taken towards the information. The rise of openness as a political and cultural notion in organizations accumulates the destructive connotations of secrecy. The lack of public scrutiny increases the insecurity and possibility of intended and/or unintended unethical behaviour and consequences (e.g. Anand & Rosen, 2008). The 'ethicality' of secrecy is worth considering without taking

the presumption that secrecy is unethical by nature. Moreover, the revelation of secrecy might divulge something that should not be exposed to inappropriate others as the exposure might bring hidden dangers for insiders and those who were supposed to stay unknown of the ‘something’. As Bok (1982) emphasizes,

Secrets stolen and offered as gifts, arousing longing, fear, and anger, bringing benefit or misery – the myth of Pandora’s Box unfolds interweaving layers of secrecy and revelation. It is one of the many tales of calamities befalling those who uncover what is concealed and thereby release dangerous forces that should have been left in darkness and silence (1982: 4).

Overall, the preservation of secrecy, especially informal secrecy, is fluidly unstable, as Simmel (1950: 348) marks that “the temptations of betrayal are so manifold; the road from discretion to indiscretion is in many cases so continuous, that the unconditional trust in discretion involves an incomparable preponderance of the subjective factor”. Ways and reasons of revelation indicate that informal secrecy may intersect with other spheres of organizational life such as politicking, power, and identity, and point to its intertwinement with formal secrecy. Secrecy thereby can be understood generally as *organizational* processes: “secrecy and organization are structurally linked, but the contemporary dominance of organizations has made secrecy into an epistemological condition for all of us, not an occasional choice for some to wear robes and chant in darkened rooms” (Parker, 2016: 111). It serves as an organizing principle for different formal and informal groups in organizations.

1.2. The Constitutive Nature of Communication in Organizations

The previous section on secrecy implies that secrecy and communication are not antonymous as they are both about different ways of selectively sharing and concealing knowledge. Secret knowledge is transmitted and maintained through communicative interaction. Secrecy, “is characterized by the way communication is controlled rather than by the contents of message” (Bellman, 1981: 2). Through citing Luhmann (1997: 105) that “Whoever is silent may still speak. But those who have spoken about something can no longer be silent about it”, Horn (2011: 108) stresses that “secrecy guarantees viable possibilities, not least the possibility of communication itself”.

Human beings are communicating and organizing creatures in a sense that we describe ourselves largely through communicative connections and various group memberships (Mumby, 2013; see also Putnam, et al., 2009). Contribution to communication theory can be traced in diverse disciplines such as engineering, literature, mathematics, psychology and sociology (Craig, 1999). Communication as a phenomenon has been developed from emphasizing the form of people speaking and listening to include nonverbal, textual, mediated, and virtual forms of interaction (Ashcraft, et al., 2009). The role of communication in organizations evolves along with the interaction between individual actors and social institutions across time (Weick, 1979, 1987). The multidisciplinary origins and the ongoing development of understandings of communication hint at the long debate amongst communication scholars of “what communication is” (Axley, 1984: 431). It brings confusion and controversy of understanding and conceptualizing communication in organizations, particularly regarding meanings and implications of communicative constitution of organization.

Rather than regarding communication as a linear process occurring between two parties for information conveying, this thesis considers communication as a non-linear social process, and a connection carrying relations and creating meanings and understandings to the social system (e.g. Alvesson, 1996). Communication occurs in various social systems and settings that are inserted with incidental events and unpredictable social interaction. It is difficult to keep a piece of information the same way as it was told the first time throughout a communication process. Different contexts and situations

contribute to diverse ways of communicating, and concurrently it enables interlocutors to comprehend communication content and current social environment differently.

Aiming to illustrate connections amongst communication, communicative constitution of organization (CCO) and the conceptualization of confidential gossip, this section is structured into three parts: Section 1.2.1 illustrates a major movement of understanding communication from a transmission view to a constitutive view that is adopted by the thesis. Extending the constitutive view, section 1.2.2 presents an overview of the three main schools of CCO and their common ground in which this thesis locates and emphasizes that communication organizes and has material consequences. Processes of communicative constitution inevitably involve dimensions of distortion and ambiguity, which is discussed in section 1.2.3. Additionally, section 1.2.2 and 1.2.3 utilize the terms ‘information sender(s)’ and ‘recipient(s)’ to illustrate the different but interrelated social roles without implying a transmission view of communication or any sorts of mechanistic relations in the social processes.

1.2.1. From ‘Communication within Organizations’ to ‘Communication Constitutes Organizations’

Various studies map different relationships within communication processes as ‘how communication is constituted’, and between communication and organization. For example, some studies concentrated on analyzing individual communication vertically as superior-subordinate (e.g. Jablin, 1979), horizontally with one’s peers, or diagonally as violations of the chain of command in organizations (Wilson, 1992). Furthermore, certain philosophical positions (e.g. Habermas, 1987; Fisher, 1987; Alvesson, 1996) and national culture (e.g. Powers, 2002; Sun, 2002) are utilized to construct comprehension of communication and for localizing ways of communicating. Moreover, ranging from micro-oriented to macro-oriented levels including individual, dyad, work-group and organization (Farace & MacDonald, 1974), different units of analysis are employed such as job involvement (e.g. Orpen, 1997), job satisfaction (e.g. Muchinsky, 1977; Orpen, 1997), leadership (e.g. Stogdill & Coons, 1957), organizational climate (e.g. Muchinsky, 1977) and organizational culture (e.g. Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1982). The confusion and ambiguity of understanding communication do not imply the necessity of

generating a universal comprehension. Although communication theory has not yet emerged as a coherent field, the diverse and multidimensional communication theories contribute to “a wealth of knowledge” (Koschmann 2010: 432) that is “relevant to a common practical lifeworld in which communication is already a richly meaningful term” (Craig, 1999: 120).

A prevailing view of understanding communication is the container model (Axley, 1984) with a transmission aspect of communication process. Axley (1984) builds on Reddy’s (1979) conduit metaphor for language and agrees that language is its own metalanguage as the English language is frequently used to talk about communication. Communication transfers emotions, meaning, thoughts, and so forth from one person to another in a pipeline manner as a “Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver” (Windahl, et al., 2009: 12) process. This linear model, as Axley (1984: 433) argues, “minimizes the perceived importance of unintentional meaning” as well as “the perceived need for redundancy [of communication]” in the sense that “once the communicator finds the right words to accomplish the transfer, then the fidelity between intended meaning and received meaning becomes almost guaranteed, even routine. All the listener or reader needs to do is extract or unpack the thoughts from the words” (1984: 433). In this way, communication serves its primary concern: effectiveness of organizations, which is maintained by the right information being communicated to the right people at the right time.

Through this lens, communication is considered as existing and flowing *within* organizations, and organization is therefore seen as a *container* that exists separately from communication. Communication as a conduit of sorts expresses an already formed reality, rather than being itself a reality or playing an active role in its generation (Ashcraft, et al., 2009). Whilst effective communication is indeed important in organizations, such transmission view oversimplifies the complexities of communicative interaction as a way of organizing organizational life. Communication process is “historically and culturally rooted and reflexive” (Craig, 1999: 125), and should be comprehended in a broader cultural and intellectual context. Participants might interpret the same piece of information in a different and unintended way based on what is said, what is not said, and perhaps more importantly *how* it is said. Consequently, even with the ‘right’ words, sending and unpacking thoughts may inevitably involve ambiguity,

distortion, imagination and misunderstanding. Thereby, communication process is embedded with selective revelation and concealment of sharing, and with governable and ungovernable aspects of understanding. It is “a fundamental asymmetry” (Goffman, 1959: 18) that constitutes what Simmel (1950) emphasizes as the opacity of human interaction. Moreover, understanding communication as solely information conveying is inadequate, as communication can reveal and influence “everyday thinking and practices” (Craig, 1999: 125). Notwithstanding that, here is not to argue that such functionalist model is valueless at the time, “only that it is a partial truth – one way of understanding communication” (Ashcraft, et al., 2009: 5). My point here is that this informational approach with the mechanistic notion of communication is insufficient to understand confidential gossip as a social practice in organizations.

This thesis, therefore, focuses instead on the constitutive properties of communication as another dominant view that considers the same interaction differently. In the early 1980s, shaped by the ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy and social sciences, organizational communication was repositioned as partaking in the constitution of organizations rather than being one of the effects (Ashcraft, et al., 2009; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015). Shifting from functionalism to interpretivism, the constitutive perspective presents a new mode of explanation to contexts and interactional processes of social issues, such as “who participates in what ways in the social processes that construct personal identities, the social order, and codes of communication” (Craig, 1999: 126), which are taken for granted as fixed frameworks by the traditional informational view of communication. Communication, therefore, is a dynamic process of social negotiation of meaning and interpretations constructed upon particular contexts and settings. The bidirectional and interactive processes of communication as *both* ‘talking to’ and ‘talking back’ can produce, shape, reproduce and reshape social recognition of and behaviour in organizations. Norms and moral criteria carried in communication create a specific kind of context of social rules concerning both what should and should not be communicated, to whom, by whom and in what ways. In this sense, communication “not merely *expresses* but also *creates* social realities” (Ashcraft, et al., 2009: 9, emphases added) in organizations. Through transferring semantic and hidden meaning, involving encoding and decoding practices and embracing consequences that could be visible, invisible, intentional and/or unintentional, communication in organizations could be treated as “a political and material act” (Ashcraft, et al., 2009: 15).

Such a formative role of communication emphasized by the constitutive view shifts the understanding of organizations from being reified objects and ‘containers’ whose existence is separated from and taken-for-granted for communication, to being an accumulative process that is constituted by communication through ongoing interactive processes of “creation, maintenance, deconstruction, and/or transformation of meaning, which are *axial* – not *peripheral* – to organizational existence and organizing phenomena” (Ashcraft, et al., 2009: 22, own emphasis added). The point here is that the constitutive view of communication to organizations opens doors for inquiries and investigations of organizational realities, rather than perceiving them as given. Communication hence serves as a “distinct mode of explanation” (Sotirin, 2014: 30; see also Koschmann, 2010) and “a way of thinking about organizations” (Sotirin, 2014: 30), rather than being trivialized as simply representing and reflecting organizations as any sorts of physical structures. Nevertheless, taking on the social construction of reality, the constitutive view does not directly answer the question: what is communication? Instead, it implies that communication can be constituted in many ways (e.g. Putnam, et al., 2009; Deetz & Eger, 2014), contributing to diverse reflections derived from different theoretical and analytical origins and traditions on *how* communication constitutes organizations, which will be illustrated and discussed in the following section.

1.2.2. The Three Main Schools and Their Common Ground

“Inspired by definitions of organizations rooted in social interactions and coordinated behaviours” (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015: 376), the ‘interpretive turn’ sets the stage for the theoretical movement commonly known as *communicative constitution of organizations* (CCO) which the baseline assumption is that “communication is the key process for the emergence, perpetuation, and transformation of organizations” (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017: 367). With the diverse understanding of the constitutive nature of communication in organizations, Boivin, et al.’s (2017) thorough literature review and analysis on CCO research from 2000 to 2015 concludes that CCO research constitutes *itself* as an area of inquiry and gives it “a legitimate identity of its own” (Kuhn, 2005: 621-622, cited in Boivin, et al., 2017).

The CCO perspective is a heterogeneous theoretical endeavour (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014) developing ongoing debates on the primary question of influence and possibility: “how does communication constitute the realities of organizational life?” (Ashcraft, et al., 2009: 5). The debates are mainly driven by three schools with *explicit* claims including the Montréal School approach forged by the work of James R. Taylor, the four-flow model approach led by Robert D. McPhee and his colleagues, and the social system theory approach rooted in Niklas Luhmann’s sociology of organizations, along with scholarship beyond the three schools, such as works in the tradition of critical theory represented by Stanley Deetz and Dennis Mumby and in the tradition of cognitive linguistics represented by Joep Cornelissen and his colleagues (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). The three schools agree on the fundamental assumption that communication constitutes social realities in organizations, and yet differ in their understanding of its organizing properties (Brummans, et al., 2014).

Drawing on the constitutive view of communication in organizations, this thesis is positioned on the common ground shared amongst the three schools, which constitutes and is constituted by their different characteristics and understandings of communication, organization and the relations between them. This section is therefore structured into four parts including general illustrations, rather than full encapsulations, of the three schools in terms of their positions in communication, organizations and communication-organization relations before reaching the commonalities of their stances.

The Montréal School Approach

With continental influences of Derrida, Greimas, Latour and Ricoeur and following the American pragmatist tradition, the Montréal School concentrates on conversations, narratives, texts, speech, and other linguistics forms to investigate their organizing properties as the basics of communication's constitutive force (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). With a 'relational epistemology', the investigation consists of human and non-human interaction where objects "act on us as much as we act on them" (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014: 288). A key theme foregrounded by the Montréal School is the *co-orientation* process as a basic unit of organization, which "occurs as people 'turn in' to one another as they engage in coordinated activity; as they do so, actors draw upon (and are simultaneously drawn upon by) the multiplicity of agents and figures that participate in organizing" (Cooren, et al., 2011: 1155).

In general, drawing upon speech act theory with the significance of performative and constitutive functions of utterance (e.g. Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), the Montréal School considers communication as "the recursive articulation of interaction and discourse" (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017: 372) which Taylor & Van Every (2000) refer to as text and conversation. Conceived as "the string of language" (Taylor & Van Every, 2000: 37), text emerges in various verbal, non-verbal and written forms (Cooren & Taylor, 1997: 226) that materialize meaning-making. Conversation as situated interaction can enact and potentially transform as well as be stabilized and grounded by texts (McPhee & Zaig, 2009). Through meaning making text is capable of transcending the local to "form metatexts of a collective 'we'" (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015: 378) that speaks and acts on behalf of the organizations. In this way, organizations come into existence through texts that define their status of being and acting, for example, 'our university will hold our place amongst the world's top 200 universities'. Organization is, therefore "*accomplished* (or real-ized) and experienced in conversation, *identified* and *described* through text" (Ashcraft, et al., 2009: 20, emphases added).

To further this point, Brummans, et al. (2014: 176-181) cast organization as a dynamic of four translations. Translation involves flows from more than one position to another (Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Brummans, et al., 2014), indicating a transactional understanding of organizational communication. Firstly, organization is considered as "a

network of practices and conversations” (Brummans, et al., 2014: 177), which involve a transactional dimension of complementary practices of two or more agents focusing on shared object(s) and creating a sense of obligations and expectations (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). The agents involved are not only human (e.g. Cooren, 2004), as transactions “allow for the possibility of many orders of actant, some individual, some collective or corporate, some human, some nonhuman. The organization is an effect of the ‘organizing’, not its progenitor” (Cooren & Taylor, 1997: 237, cited in Brummans, et al., 2014). Secondly, organization is considered as “mapping collective experience through distanciation” (Brummans, et al., 2014: 179), which points to the transporting of organizations through space and time (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015) by mapping of (past) situated practices into a representational voice as a collective unity (e.g. Robichaud, et al., 2004). Thirdly, organization is considered as “authoring the organization and its purposes through textualization” (Brummans, et al., 2014: 179). In this sense, texts not only are extracted from local practices, but also enable dissemination of organizational goals to both its members and other population that constructs a larger society (Brummans, et al., 2014). Fourthly, organization is considered as “presentation and presentification” (Brummans, et al., 2014: 180) that a collectively presentational force can represent itself as a macro-actor to others and to its own members (Taylor & Cooren, 1997; Taylor & Van Every, 2011).

The four translations indicate that defining organization lies in the name of collectives “as if [they are] speaking with one voice or acting in unison at some point” (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014: 292). In this sense, the constitutive role of communication not only is a sensemaking process that creates a context to understand organizational situations, but also generates possibilities to transform a collection of individuals into a collective actor (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017) that represents the organization. In this way, various kinds of speech acts that are capable of generating and sustaining collective endeavour can be seen as *organizational*. The work of the Montréal School is therefore commended as “grounding a theory of organization in a theory of communication” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999: 13), posing challenges to the mechanistic positivist approach to organizational communication as well as to the social constructionist and critical approaches that privileges human actors over nonhuman actors (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999).

The Four-Flow Model Approach

Grounded in the tradition of Giddens's structuration theory, McPhee & Zaug (2000/2009) propose a theoretical framework that first coined the term 'communicative constitutive of organizations', and argue that organizational phenomena are constituted through the relatedness of four specific types of communication 'flows' or interaction process (McPhee & Zaug, 2009):

The first flow, membership negotiation, occurs especially during member recruitment and socialization that establish, maintain and/or transform relationships that members have with each other (McPhee & Zaug, 2009), involving negotiation of various boundaries through introduction, instruction, dismissive reactions and storytelling (McPhee & Iverson, 2009, in Brummans, 2014). The process of creating and maintaining boundaries forms a representative voice of 'we', such as 'welcome to our team'. It is the reference members make, "however indirectly, to the organization" (McPhee & Iverson, 2009: 66) that stays central to the constitution of this flow, constituting "the organization as relevant to its individual members" (McPhee, et al., 2014: 80). A local interaction is therefore regarded as standing in for member-organization negotiation (McPhee & Iverson, 2009).

The second flow, self-structuring, does not directly concern work, but rather "the internal relations, norms, and social entities that are the skeleton for connection, flexing, and shaping of work processes" (McPhee & Zaug, 2009: 36). Self-structuring interaction enables groups of people to create collective, rather than centralized, coherence that speaks on behalf of them as an organization (McPhee & Iverson, 2009). For example, organizational members produce and reproduce multiple orientations that form their practices and relationships (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002). Whilst such reflexive communication process is not free from discrepancy and ambiguity, it is the coherence that stays central to the constitution of this flow, enabling "the organization as a system takes control of and influence itself...to set a persistent routine procedure for response [of problems]" (McPhee & Zaug, 2009: 37).

The third flow, activity coordination, represents nonroutine, contextual and interdependent contingencies that membership negotiation and self-structuring must adapt (McPhee, et al., 2014). It links the organization to interdependent interaction and

activities that are established and maintained through members' mutual knowledge and common ground of each other in order to contribute to or fit with the work of others (McPhee & Zaug, 2009). Yet this flow opens up coordination to disorganization, resistance and wrongdoing (McPhee, et al., 2014) such as the case of Enron where the coordinating control maintained a climate of secrecy for collective practices towards audit fraud. In both cases, organizations are seen as a cooperative system (e.g. Barnard, 1938) in which integration of interactions stays central to the constitution of this flow.

The fourth flow, institutional positioning, concerns communication outside the organization and in a larger context of social system and institutional environment (McPhee, et al., 2014). Interaction of this sort serves as an impression generator and management, which negotiates an image of the organization as a viable and legitimate partner to other organizations and stakeholders, such as customers and suppliers (McPhee & Zaug, 2009). Hence, it is the capacity to negotiate inclusion, meaning "identity establishment and development and maintenance of a 'place' in the...larger social system" (McPhee & Zaug, 2009: 40), that stays central to the constitution of this flow. Yet such interaction contributes to institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) as all direct and indirect processes of communication create conditions for future communicative relations (McPhee & Zaug, 2009; MCPhee, et al., 2014).

Whilst the Montréal School is criticized for being "both rather abstract and...presented in a vocabulary unfamiliar to many" (Kuhn, 2008: 1232) as well as "too narrow to account for communication's multifaceted relationship to organization" (Bisel, 2010: 126) from McPhee and Zaug's perspective, this model presents a clearer image of the constitution of organization through structured relations amongst the four flows that intersect, enable and constrain one another. In this sense, communication is comprehended as a process of "*symbolic transtruction*, where...the intermediation of each of four basic dimensions of action" (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014: 291, emphasis added), which "produce and reproduce the social structures that come to have an existence as an organization" (Cooren, et al., 2011: 1155).

The Social System Theory Approach

The work of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann has been a prominent theoretical tradition in the German-speaking social sciences (Seidl & Becker, 2005), and was

inspired by the notion of *autopoiesis* that was initially coined by Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela to answer the question: What distinguishes the living from the non-living? (Seidl, 2004: 2). Their answer was that living systems reproduce themselves through their own elements as autopoietic systems, such as a plant reproduce cells by its own cells (Seidl, 2004). Luhmann applies this notion in developing social systems theory with a particular point of departure that all social systems use communication as a specific mode of reproduction (Luhmann, 1986). Communication thus constitutes social systems by “[producing] the very elements they consist of, in a self-referential way” (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017: 374) through interconnected communicative events (Schoeneborn, 2011). The social system theory approach, therefore, aims at understanding the organization “as a holistic processual entity” (Schoeneborn, 2011: 683).

In contrast to the Montréal School and the Four-Flow Model both conceptualizing communication as a sort of action (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014), Luhmann (1995) conceives communication as a three-part selection process: *information*, being already a selection, points to ‘what’ is chosen as communication; *utterance* points to ‘how’ and ‘why’ it is uttered, as what is uttered is already a selection; and *understanding* points to the distinction between information and utterance as “*what* is communicated must be distinguished from *how* and *why* it is communicated” (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014: 290, emphases added), which essentially influence how the communication is understood. Such selectivity, as Luhmann (1995: 140) remarks, “attracts further communication: it recruits communications that direct themselves to aspects that selectivity has excluded”. Communication hence is considered as a pure social phenomenon that emerges through interaction between individuals (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014).

More importantly, Luhmann understands organizations as meso-level social systems that emerge, reproduce and perpetuate through a specific sort of communication, namely decision communications (e.g. Luhmann, 1995). “If communications do not concern decisions, they merely constitute interactions, the social system’s micro level” (Brummans, et al., 2014: 185). Moreover, Luhmann (1995) highlights that decisions ground organizations in the paradox of undecidability of decisions. Schoeneborn (2011) explains such paradox using Luhmann’s notion of ‘contingency’ in its philosophical definition, meaning the fact of being without having to be so, as opposed to necessity

and impossibility. Decisions can be identified as decisions only when they are inherently contingent and “the rejected alternatives are also communicated” (Luhmann, 2000: 64, translated and cited in Schoeneborn, 2011), rather than being “an ordinary communication, which only communicates a specific content that has been selected (e.g. ‘I love you’)” (Seidl, 2005a: 39, cited in Schoeneborn, 2011).

To counter the paralysis of undecidability, the paradox of decisions needs to be ‘deparadoxified’, such as shifting such undecidability to the selection of a decision rule (Seidl, 2004) by reducing the number of potential options as open contingency to a limited amount of choices as fixed contingency (Andersen, 2003), transforming the undecidability into decidability (Schoeneborn, 2011). In this way, organizations are not only seen as interrelated events of decision communications. More specifically, organizations are “ongoing processes of transforming open contingency to fixed contingency” (Schoeneborn, 2011: 676) as a way of executing selections through decisions. Communication thereby constitutes organization through its inherent logic. The existence and perpetuation of organizations are “formed by communication as communication systems, [and] regulated in which direction and how far communication can go without becoming tiresome” (Luhmann, 1995: 164).

Nonetheless, the social system theory approach can be criticized for falling into a reductionist track by reducing the constitution of organization to decision communications since certain sorts of interaction are intentionally prevented from being interpreted as decisional at any organizational levels. In fact, as Seidl (2005b: 149) notes, “it is particularly the non-decision communication that is typical for (organizational) interactions”, as even formal meetings are conducted mostly with non-decision communication. Notwithstanding that, autopoietic systems with operative closure do not imply a closed system without contact with their environment. Decisions are influenced by wider interaction (e.g. Seidl, 2004; Blaschke, et al., 2012), and generate “a kind of ‘foreign matter’ to the interaction...Often no decisions at all are made in such interactions” (Seidl, 2005b: 149). In this sense, decision communications are not secluded from sorts of non-decisional interactions. Thus, operative closure draws a boundary of organizations from their environment and other social systems, rather than serving as isolation. Furthermore, a note of Mumby (2013) can be taken as a response to the reductionist criticism:

“Since the complexity of the world is so overwhelming, we can lead meaningful lives only if we are able to reduce the level of complexity we experience. Viewing organizations as self-reproducing autopoietics systems that construct the world communicatively is a way to explain the mechanisms of complexity reduction” (2013: 127).

Common Ground of the Three Schools

The three CCO approaches depict how organization as a ‘whole’ comes into existence in different ways through different organizing properties of communication. The Montréal School emphasizes that various forms of speech acts can give rise to organization by forming a collective voice. The Four-Flow Model proposes four communicative interaction processes constituting organization collectively. The social system theory approach considers organization as a self-referential social system of interrelated decision communication events where one decision serves as a decision premise for subsequent decisions. The three schools mark differently regarding “what makes communication ‘organizational’” (Taylor & Cooren, 1997: 409) and “how communication constitutes organizations” (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017: 380) as detail reflection of communication-organization relation. Yet the difference points to a fundamental consensus of the relation as “the [ongoing] coproduction of organization and communication” (Cooren & Taylor, 1997: 220).

Organization and communication in this sense are “mutually constituted in an attributive relationship” (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014: 305, see also Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). Organization is an emergent and ever-fluctuating network of interlocking communication processes, rather than merely a container of communication (Luhmann, 1995; Taylor & Van Every, 2000; McPhee & Zaug, 2009; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). In this way, organization is not a given predecessor of communication. Rather, it is constituted by communication as a processual and precarious entity. As Taylor & Cooren (1997: 429, emphases added) mark, “it is the character of all social organization that its existence be both *conditional on communication* and *a frame within which the latter occurs*”. Communication, therefore, reconstitutes organization for “another next first time” (Garfinkel, 2002: 182).

Furthermore, the coproduction relation points to the co-construction nature of communication, underlining the inherently performative and relational characters of communication (Cooren, et al., 2011; Schoeneborn, et al., 2014). The three CCO approaches indicate that collective action is intertwined with sense making to the extent that “‘doing things with words’ is unavoidable because organizing implies making sense of the situation, roles, tasks, goals, and orientations” (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017: 370). The sense-making process is constituted by the performative character of communication that is “as much the product of the agent that/who is deemed performing it as the product of the people who attend and interpret/respond to such performance” (Cooren, et al., 2011: 1152). As mentioned in section 1.1.1 ‘secrecy as a social construction’, opacity is inevitable in human interaction (Simmel, 1950). Such process of sense making therefore inescapably involves inference, deduction and imagination as a process of “observing the unobserved observer” (Goffman, 1959: 19), involving continually encoding, decoding, diagnosing and (re)negotiating meaning. This relational dimension of communication marks meaning as emergent and temporally situated establishments, giving rise to ambiguity, indeterminacy and aporias of meaning that are unlikely to stay isomorphic in its original intentions (Cooren, et al., 2011). This will be further discussed in the next section.

From the perspective developed here, the common ground of the three schools is itself an essential voice to the question “does talk really matter” (Brenneis, 1978: 159). Talk is not cheap – it matters to organizations and organizational life. The common ground implies that by not solely or primarily being an informational process, communication plays a role in the socialization of organizational members. Continuous flows of communication, especially informal communication and the informality of informal communication, trigger governable and ungovernable social interaction, impinge on interpersonal and group identities and relations, influence processes of (re)interpreting individual understanding of organizational life, and stimulate (re)construction of individual realities in and of organizations. In this sense, communication organizes and has material consequences. Through processes of co-constitution between organization and communication, communication is understood as a political and symbolic act.

1.2.3. The Distortion and Ambiguity of Communication in Organizations

As noted in the previous section, communication forms not only shared understanding amongst participants, but also ambiguity and indeterminacy of meaning. It raises two questions: does the *shared* understanding mean an equal level of comprehension of conveyed information and the social situation underneath it? If the answer to the first question is no, then would it influence the constitutive nature of communication in organizations?

Through asking “how communication is possible at all” (1981: 123), Luhmann (1981: 123-124) notes misunderstanding as a normative state of communication and distinguishes three improbabilities of communication: firstly, mutual understanding, as meaning can only be understood in context, and context for individuals are rooted in their memory supplies; secondly, reaching people more than the immediately present in a given situation, as rules and attention of communication obtaining in that context can no longer be imposed throughout the extension of space and time; thirdly, success that if even a communication is understood well, its participants might not accept the selective content as a premise of their own behaviour for joining further selections and for reinforcing the selectivity in the process. With a more holistic view, Alvesson (1996) argues that endless or better discussion could not counteract contradictory and irrational characters of fundamental social structures, or real differences in preferences and interests. Communication, therefore “involves acting in certain ways and drawing attention to particular characteristics of self, world, and others” (Mumby, 1989: 303). Consequently, “the accompaniments sounds of voice, tone, gesture, facial expression...are sources of both obfuscation and clarification” (Simmel, 1950: 354). No absolute consensus can be achieved, even in relatively rational conversations. The spoken and unspoken words are the locus of interpretation and clarity, and thus of misinterpretation and distortion because of it.

To take a closer look, Forester (1983: 75) identifies two types of distortions: firstly, inevitable distortion including cognitive limits such as idiosyncratic personal traits, and division of labour such as information inequalities derived from legitimated hierarchical positions; and secondly, socially unnecessary distortions including interpersonal manipulation such as interpersonal deception, and structural legitimation such as

ideological rationalization of class or power structure. It indicates that there might be systematic sources of distortion, but distortions of communication would not be systematic, regulated or anticipated. The point here is not simply the more-or-less information one lets others know. Rather, it is the content of communication, both social and informational sorts, that is “more or less *clear*” (Simmel, 1950: 354, own emphasis added) to the recipients. What is revealed through communication is not only information itself as it is coloured by communication participants. Information senders consider not only what to say, but also how the information *and* the senders would be understood. As a phenomenon of ‘uncertainty absorption’ (March & Simon, 1958: 165), they may communicate inferences drawn from particular information rather than the information per se. Information recipients perceive communication content, its influence and implications in ways derived from their consciously and/or unconsciously psychological predisposition (e.g. O’Reilly III, 1978). Hence, the constitutive processes of communication in organizations here both enable and limit distortions, and are both a platform and effect of social relations shaped by distortions with multiplicity of possible interpretations and shifting levels of clarity, as “the irony of communication...that it can separate at the same time that it connects” (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010: 160).

Distortions of communication can be produced by and produce ambiguity to the understanding of the communication (e.g. Eisenberg, 1984; Huckfeldt, et al., 1998). As genres of communication, confidential gossip might intentionally leave room for ambiguity. Such room could be used implicitly to activate and utilize the role of social and informational selection in socialization for conveying, distorting, puzzling and/or limiting the meaning generated from communication. In this and many other cases such as political campaigns and diplomatic negotiations, “the intentional creation of ambiguity or vagueness [in communication] is necessary, accepted, expected as normal” (Johannesen, et al., 2008: 106). Yet ambiguity is not inherently undesirable as it can be used as a strategy for better sense making and goal actualization. At individual level, ambiguity, especially strategic ambiguity, could be seen as a communicative competence embraced with individual intentions. Ambiguity allows individuals to modify the original information in preferred ways and to guide certain ways of comprehension towards the information. At group level, ambiguity lets communication participants fill in the meaning that they believe is appropriate, which enables communication to generate perceived similarity between senders and recipients (Eisenberg, 1984). Rather than

solely being destructive, ambiguity can effectively generate a shared sphere of understanding, and facilitate bonding processes between interlocutors. At organization level, ambiguity can be used strategically to foster flexibility and creativity towards the existence of multiple standpoints in organizations (Eisenberg, 1984), enhancing managerial efficacy.

Therefore, distortion and ambiguity that constitute both improbabilities and continuation of communication are simultaneously possibilities for formations of organizations. It contributes to the ongoing reinstatement of asymmetry of communication processes and sets the stage for a type of social and informational game – “a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery” (Goffman, 1959: 20). Being a process of socialization and partaking in the (re)construction of social realities in organizations, distortions and ambiguity of communication and its influence on different levels of organizational life should be considered critically, along with potential ethical implications (e.g. Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997; Johannesen, et al., 2008). As Ashcraft, et al. (2009) draw on Deetz (1992) and note:

If communication creates and maintains organization, it is also the nexus where systems are contested and dismantled (2009: 7).

1.3. The Constitutive Nature of Gossip in Organizations

[The] importance [of the role towards gossip in a community] is indicated by the fact that every single day, and for a large part of each day, most of us are engaged in gossiping.

– Max Gluckman (1963: 308)

Gossip is a ubiquitous genre of communication in organizations and an under-researched facet of organizational life. According to studies such as Dunbar, et al. (1997) and Emler (1994), gossip is involved in two-thirds of conversations time. Gossip arises and flourishes within various types of social network and has been considered as a form of social glue (Burt & Knez, 1996; Grosser, et al., 2010; Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011). Nevertheless, it has been seen as a parasite in organizations as it constantly involves informal evaluation that might come across the daily operation of formal structures in organizations. The inserted process of personal information sharing may convey untruth or undesirable information and consequently disgrace the gossip target, constructing the taken-for-granted image of gossip as malicious and immoral. Despite that, gossip can act as a sense-making process for individuals of the current social environment and the understanding of self, for groups of collective values and norms, and for organizations of internal interpersonal dynamics. The importance of gossip as a genre of informal communication is embedded in its socialization process and interpersonal interaction.

Gossip and confidential gossip are interrelated concepts with a certain level of similarity. This section as a whole aims to bring forward the constitutive nature of general gossip as a genre of informal communication in organizations, and is structured into two subsections: subsection 1.3.1 presents a review of the research on gossip to provide a general understanding of gossip and its essential characters and relational structures; Drawing on such structural conditions, subsection 1.3.2 uses the vocabulary ‘functions’ without taking a functionalism stance to demonstrate the functionalities of gossip in order to reveal its interactional dynamics at individual, group and organizational levels, which could be seen as how gossip works and potential effects of gossip in organizations. Putting the two subsections together is an attempt to provide a relatively firm ground for a social and informational explanation and understanding of general gossip as the third basis for confidential gossip conceptualization.

1.3.1. What Is Gossip?

As a ubiquitous genre of communication and a societal phenomenon, gossip pervades organizational processes (Waddington, 2012), across hierarchical levels of society (Fine & Rosnow, 1978), and through human life (van Iterson, et al., 2011). For instance, conversations discussing colleagues in their absence are rarely limited to the mere relating of facts without embellishing opinions and commentary from the communication parties (e.g. Wert & Salovey, 2004). Nevertheless, being an “intrinsic process within organizations” (Noon & Delbridge, 1993: 35), gossip has not received adequate serious attention from organization theorists in the sense that gossip as a topic is under-researched (Noon & Delbridge, 1993; van Iterson & Clegg, 2008; Waddington, 2012), even though it has been identified by Gluckman (1963: 307) as being “among the most important societal and cultural phenomena we are called upon to analyze”.

Gossip has been apprehended differently within inter-related disciplines such as social anthropology, social psychology, sociology, industrial sociology, management studies and organization studies, and by different researchers within the same discipline (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). Research on gossip is conducted mainly through theoretical analysis with a relatively smaller proportion of empirical studies. The literature on gossip focuses on two main analytical perspectives – functional perspective and informational perspective. Functional perspective refers to the focus of characters of individual and/or social function of gossip such as power circulation and social alignments in a community. Informational perspective relates to the features of gossip that “should be constructed from the data collected about the lines of communication and the flow of information [of various kinds] in the community” (Paine, 1967: 283). The units of analysis are predominantly concentrated on social interaction, specifically socially communicative interaction, at individual, group and organizational levels. Overall, research on gossip draws attention to it as a social process and a socialization tool, emphasizing the connection between gossip and communication, a feature of gossip as an inserted social comparison mechanism amongst participants, and the importance of gossip in establishing and directing social interaction. However, generating a watertight definition of gossip is difficult because gossip relates to various forms of organizational discourses

such as rumour, stories and chitchat and is an ephemeral activity that is difficult to capture as it is created (van Iterson, et al., 2011). Despite that, as Waddington (2012: 8) stresses, "...for gossip to mean anything, it cannot mean everything".

Defining Gossip

The origin of *gossip* derived from Old English *godsibb*, the combination of 'God' and *sibb* meaning 'a relative', which literally means 'a person related to one in God'. In Middle English, the sense evolved as 'a close friend, a person with whom one gossips'. A common working definition of gossip could be summarized as "informal communication...as the channels of communication are selected by the individual as alternative to the available official or open ones" (Paine, 1967: 293, see also Bok, 1982; Michelson & Mouly, 2000), which is linked to "informal communication network" (Noon & Delbridge, 1993: 23) and "informal structures of organizations" (1993: 24). It is engaged and developed by at least two people, "may be spoken (most common), written (less common), or visual" (van Iterson, et al., 2011: 377, see also Taylor, 1994), and is often but by no means always involves "positive or negative evaluation of someone who is not present" (Eder & Enke, 1991: 496, see also Fine & Rosnow, 1978; Nevo, et al., 1993; Taylor, 1994; Foster, 2004) as well as of issues or things (Waddington, 2012: 25). The absence of the evaluated third party can be either physical or symbolic. For example, children are often taken as the subject for dinner talk amongst family or friends who are physically present but symbolically absent (Blum-Kulka, 2014). Moreover, for a team consisting of members from different ethnic backgrounds, those who speak the same native language might gossip about current teamwork situation or other team members whilst other team members are physically present but cannot understand the language.

The diversity of definitions encompasses a key shared understanding of gossip as being evaluative. Yet this 'evaluative element' of gossip is not sufficiently explained. Part of the scholarship refers it as talking about the absent third party in positive or negative, good or bad ways. However, here is to argue that it is often but not inherently the case for gossip, and that such meaning of 'evaluation' should be reconsidered. Although the linguistic 'colour' of talks can be a way to apprehend the phenomena, the meaning of 'evaluation' should be located at the selection processes of topics, rather than (merely) in its content. Because not all information will be shared within a social group of gossip,

and the state of the social circle and its existing relationships shape ‘what should be talked about’. In the process of making such decision, participants need to evaluate, for example, whether it is appropriate to mention a specific topic within a group, whether others are going to be interested in that topic, and/or “is he or she on my side when I tell the gossip” (van Iterson, et al., 2011: 380). Under the same rationale, choosing particular people to talk to is also a selection and evaluation process, contributing to (re)formation of a gossip circle and (re)actualization of social relations. Given particular topics and participants of gossip, positive or negative evaluation through talking is a secondary effect. In this way, gossip is inherently normative, which norms as ‘ways of doing’ regulate and are regulated through sorts of evaluation throughout socialization processes. Therefore, by extending the understanding of ‘evaluation’, gossip has been (re)conceptualized as essentially evaluative in terms of evaluating ‘whether to say it’ and managing ‘how to say it’, rather than (solely) the ‘it’ that is said being evaluative, although the latter is frequently the case.

This extension of understanding is important as it responds to part of the difficulty social scientists have in converging definitions of gossip. As Hannerz (1967: 36) remarks, “The same information may be gossip or non-gossip depending on who gives it to whom; the communication that Mrs A’s child is illegitimate is not gossip if it is occurring between two social workers acting in that capacity, whilst it is gossip if Mrs A’s neighbours talk about it.” Therefore, it is not merely the content, but more importantly the context in which gossip emerges that plays the essential role of gossip identification and definition. In the context of the Mrs A example, it is particularly the “relational configurations of those who disseminate it, perceive, and are affected by it” (Bergmann, 1993: 48) which enables us to determine whether it is gossip. Contexts of gossip are, thus, themselves products of accumulated communication, memories and relations, sedimented into patterns of interpretations and presuppositions that “are employed to understand all events in the world, not just matters of gossip” (Stewart & Strathern, 2004: 30). In this sense, gossiping is meta-communication that communicates about communication (Hannerz, 1967; Rosnow & Fine, 1976).

As part of the relational configurations, Bergmann (1993: 49-55) stresses three structural conditions that constitute the emergence of gossip, including the absence of the gossip subject, acquaintanceship between the gossip subject and the gossipers, and privacy of a

target to be the gossip subject. However, existing acquaintanceship between the gossip subject and the gossipers may not be a necessary condition, since it does not prevent relevant gossip from occurring. Bergmann's (1993) concept of acquaintanceship is built on Simmel's (1950: 320) definition of 'mutual acquaintance' as reciprocal contact that one can identify others through previous experience with the lack of really intimate relations and actual insights. In a situation that A gossips about A's acquaintance with B and B gossips about it to C, it is not necessary or always possible for B and C to know the acquaintance in advance *so that* the gossip would emerge. For instance, it is often gossiped that products on infomercials could be unreliable to purchase by using examples such as so-and-so's misadventure of infomercial shopping whilst the recipients may or may not know the so-and-so. Individuals can learn about the adventures and misadventures of others via gossiping without knowing who the others are (Baumeister, et al., 2004), as long as the information is rich enough to construct the excitement of circulation. Notwithstanding that, it is noted that although the person cannot always be identified as 'who he/she is' prior to gossiping, his/her experience and personal characteristics can be constructed and identified as 'what he/she is like' throughout the process of gossip.

Gossip, therefore, is processual as it emerges, circulates and reemerges in social and historical tensions and circumstances, and is simultaneously coloured by such tensions and circumstances. This implies the "interpretative ambiguity" (Stewart & Strathern, 2004: 30) as the ambivalence of gossip. Possibilities of positive and negative influences of gossip can co-exist and might be mutually implicated as a 'positive' influence for someone can be 'negative' for others (Stewart & Strathern, 2004). It is particularly the case during an organizational crisis and change as it generates a 'stay alert' mode and tension and may cause organizational members to read more meaning into the people, things or events being discussed and evaluated.

Rumour as a Genre of Gossip

The broad definition of gossip triggers debates towards the relation between gossip and its related concepts such as rumour. Although gossip and rumour are not identical without differences (e.g. Noon & Delbridge, 1993; Michelson & Mouly, 2000; Michelson & Mouly, 2004; van Iterson, et al., 2011), it is difficult to draw a clear line between them. For instance, Difonzo, et al. (1994) summarize a distinction between gossip and rumour

as:

[Rumours] are speculations that arise to fill knowledge gaps or discrepancies. This function differentiates rumour from gossip, which is meant primarily to entertain or convey mores. Gossip is a tasty hors d'oeuvre savoured at a cocktail party; rumour is a morsel hungrily eaten amid an information famine (1994: 52).

One of the three main differences listed in Michelson & Mouly (2004, see also Michelson & Mouly, 2000) between gossip and rumour is that rumour is “unsubstantiated information” (2004: 193), whilst gossip is based on “some presumption of ‘factuality’” (2004: 193). It seems that gossip and rumour can be located on a continuum of factuality. Yet such distinction raises a question: can we (always) tell whether certain information is true or even to what extent it is true? The presumption of factuality about both rumour and gossip may be derived from sources of information, which can be both information sender(s)¹ personal reputation, credibility and relationship with information recipient(s), and information recipient(s)¹ past experience. It is possible that both/neither rumour and/nor gossip is based on any ‘presumption of factuality’. This argument does not imply that there is no difference between the two; rather, it suggests that “sometimes it is impossible to separate rumour from gossip” (Rosnow, 1988: 14). Therefore, Michelson & Mouly (2004: 190) “choose to use them as synonyms” for the purpose of study. Instead of separating the concepts, Waddington & Fletcher (2005: 379) suggest “rumour is spread via the activity of gossiping, and can be seen as subset of the content of gossip”. Being aligned with the suggestion, this thesis perceives rumour as a genre or an aspect of gossip, and empirical studies on rumour are considered as a part of the empirical studies on gossip.

As a shared characteristic with rumour, conceptualizing gossip as informal communication and personal information sharing contributes to the conventional consideration of gossip as somehow ‘malicious’, ‘ignoble’ or ‘conspiracy’ (e.g. Le

¹ As illustrated previously in section 1.2, the terms ‘information sender(s)’ and ‘recipient(s)’ are used to show the different but interrelated social roles without implying a transmission view of communication or any sorts of mechanistic relations in the social processes.

Gallienne, 1912; Fine & Rosnow, 1978; Dunbar, 2004; Gholipour, et al., 2011). As the Victorian novelist George Eliot notes, “gossip is a sort of smoke that comes from the dirty tobacco-pipes of those who diffuse it; it proves nothing but the bad taste of the smoker” (Rosnow & Fine, 1976: 85). The informality contributes gossip as a covert practice with mystique social domains around explanations of the misfortune. Such uncertainty and the badly defined morality of gossip draws the connections and accusations of gossip as witchcraft (e.g. Gluckman, 1968; Stewart & Strathern, 2004). Moreover, Walker & Struzyk (1998) use content analysis to investigate gossip heard by college students and find that 68% of it was intended to slander the gossip targets and only 2% was intended to praise the gossipees. Different spheres of psychological responses indicate that “bad events elicit stronger responses than good ones” (Baumeister, et al., 2004: 113) and gossip thus could be another illustration of the principle that “people are more interested in hearing and telling bad things about others than good things” (2004: 114). The formulaic reflection of gossip acts as a negative stimulus can lead to productivity reduction, employee demoralization, and/or even mistrust of management in organizations (e.g. Esposito & Rosnow, 1993; Akanda & Odewale, 1994; DiFonzo, et al., 1994; Baker & Jones, 1996). Such a “less-than-positive” (2012: 1) reputation (Waddington, 2012) is reflected not only through research outcomes, but also by the very way a study is presented. As Adkins (2002: 228) remarks,

“Indeed, even those who deal with the meat of the public/private crossover in their analysis are unwilling to mark it as gossip (I suspect because of these kinds of pejorative implications). Latour and Woolgar’s Laboratory Life, which as I demonstrated earlier illustrates the kind of everyday mixing of personal and impersonal analysis as part and parcel of science, begins by observing that ‘this book is free of the kind of gossip [and] innuendo often seen in other studies or commentaries’ (1986: 12).”

Gossip as a Gendered Identity Construction

The (derogatory) image of gossip is often linked with the social lives of women. “Gossip is news in a red silk dress” (Spacks, 1985: xi) which definition was contained on a newspaper clipping that “a red silk dress: a slattern’s dress, making the news tawdry, claiming false seductiveness? Or an assertively feminine garment focusing attention on details that might otherwise go unnoticed?” (Spacks, 1985: xi). The common myth of

regarding gossip as women talk might be traced back to the Elizabethan period when births were generally at home and men were not allowed to attend (Rysman, 1977: 177). In a small community, a home delivery was a gathering of women, which gave the word 'gossip' a female cast such as "one who runs about tattling like women at a lying [birth]" (Rysman, 1977: 177). Gradually, "the association of gossip with women has become a part of so many figures of speech, anecdotes, proverbs and caricatures" (Bergmann, 1993: 59). It is also contributed by the inconsistent application of gossip that "a man who talks too much is often called 'an old woman', a phrase that manages to blame womankind for the man's verbosity" (Rysman, 1977: 179; see also Bergmann, 1993). Yet the myth is not empirically substantial, for instance, Levin & Arluke (1985) observed conversations of 196 college students and obtained statistical result that "71% of the women's conversation, compared with 64% of the men's conversation, were spent on gossip" (1985: 281). Therefore, "gossip is by no means the sole province of women" (Bergmann, 1993: 60; see also Pilkington, 1998; Johansson, 2008).

Nonetheless, we cannot deny the relations between gender and gossip as an essential part of the socially constructed understanding of gossip. Gossip is a genre of gender-sensitive communication, and can be, albeit not always, a feminine form of communication. For example, "bitching", as Sotirin & Gottfried (1999) define, is a sub-category of gossip and "can express women's privatized (personal, specific) anger" (1999: 58). In a female-identified organization, members consider bitching as inevitably bound to 'femaleness' with gendered-divisive themes (Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996). Hence, rather than seeing men and women gossip differently as an outcome of gender difference, here is to argue that different performance of gossip, such as resources and ways of practices, can be used to establish gender differentiation. As Sotirin (2000) shows that identifies strategic functions of bitching as 'talk with' and 'talk against', the political and interactional features of bitching generate shared pleasure as a way for feminine connectedness (see also Jones, 1980; Brown, 1994; Johnson & Aries, 1998).

In this sense, although gossip is not necessarily gender specific, it constitutes gendered identity construction. As Sotirin & Gottfried (1999) note, bitching reaffirms the normative roles and standards of feminine gentility, whilst testing the collaboratively acknowledged limits of living with them. Female members of an informal circle are shaped as how to consider self and behave like a woman *here*. Bitching provides a

medium for information sharing that might contribute to ‘consciousness-raising’ (Jones, 1980) such as reflections on class and gender inequalities in the constitution of secretarial identity, generating political possibilities for workplace resistance (see also Sotirin, 2000). Furthermore, bitching enacts emancipatory impulses, “unsettling the assurances of the ideal secretarial identity and introducing alternative identities constituted around emotionality and knowledge work” (Sotirin & Gottfried, 1999: 74). In this way, bitching, as a subset of gossip, is a cooperative element and competitive function (Guendouzi, 2001), which connects relevant individuals and forms meaning and rules of gendered identity formation, maintenance, resistance and reformation.

From the perspective developed here, gossip is regarded as a pervasive phenomenon, and yet an under-researched practice in organizations. Gossip is informal and evaluative communication developed by at least two parties about the absent third party, issues or things. Gossip is innocent in a sense that gossip per se “*designates* the content of a communication...[and] a communicative process” (Bergmann, 1993: 45, emphasis added), which does not *inevitably* bring defamatory influence. It is the participants of gossip who generate and shape the communicative process contribute to possible and potential constructive or destructive consequences. In this sense, gossip requires contexts for it to perform and to be understood. Taking a closer look on the contexts, this thesis rejects the essentialist understanding of gossip as a way of talking and knowing that is distinct to women as women, and yet recognizes gossip is gender-sensitive and constitutive of gendered identity construction in organizations. The informational and social understanding of gossip points to gossip as not only a means to establish, distribute and assemble information, but also a social resource, a socialization process and a social product in organizational life, which will be further discussed in the following section.

1.3.2. How Does Gossip Work: Functionalities of Gossip

This section uses the vocabulary ‘functions’ to present functionalities of gossip as an illustration of how gossip works in organizations, rather than demonstrate them as reasons for gossip’s existence. Without taking a functionalist perspective, the purpose of this section is to reveal that gossip constitutes organizations through interaction and socialization at individual, group and organizational levels. It also provides a relatively comprehensive explanation of *why* gossip should not be rigidly understood and constructed as ‘must-be’ malicious (e.g. Le Gallienne, 1912; Hom & Haidt, 2001) or “tend-to-be” (Wert & Salovey, 2004: 122) negative.

As illustrated in the preceding section, gossip is constituted as part and parcel of a social contract, implying that gossip, being a social process, is a phenomenon of both individuals and groups (e.g. Gluckman, 1968); in other words, one cannot gossip about oneself or on one’s own. Paine’s (1967: 280) idea that “it is the individual and not the community that gossips” could be criticized, as without paying attention to sets of group and organizational relations, communication solely at individual level is inadequate to understand how gossip works in organizations, and self-interests alone is “insufficient to account for gossip” (Gluckman, 1968: 29). Hence, as shown in Table 1, functions of gossip can be categorized into three levels of interaction. That is to say, the place of individuals within the group, or the group within the organization, or the meaning of the organization itself may all be at stake.

This is partly because gossip allows social comparison including what Suls & Wheeler (2000) and Smith (2000) identify as comparing with someone similar, with someone ‘worse’ as a downward comparison, and with someone ‘better’ as an upward comparison (see also Wert & Salovey, 2004). It is embedded in the studies that gossip is conceived as “an evaluation [which] is a comparison of sorts” (Wert & Salovey, 2004: 123). This can trigger public embarrassment and have detrimental effects on self-esteem (e.g. Suls, 1977; Fine & Rosnow, 1978; Wert & Salovey, 2004). Therefore, gossip may be “the only reasonable and nonpainful way to obtain needed comparison information” (Suls, 1977: 166). However, whilst Wert & Salovey (2004) suggest that “all gossips involve social comparison” (2004: 122), it can certainly be argued that, in fact, not all gossip is derived from or leads to social comparison. For example, people engage in gossiping because of

the entertainment and even euphoria of the social closeness generated by sharing (and perhaps evaluating) personal information about someone they are familiar with or even someone they do not know, such as a celebrity. Moreover, as Noon & Delbridge (1993) specify, gossip may have many purposes other than evaluation and social comparison such as gathering hard-to-get information (e.g. Rosnow & Fine, 1976), forming social relationships and gaining influence within them (e.g. Paine, 1967; Emler, 1994; Dunbar, 1996; Doyle, 2000), or simply entertainment (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Ben-Ze'ev, 1994; de Sousa, 1994; van Iterson, et al., 2011).

More specifically, social comparison is a means for social reality testing (Festinger, 1954) and consequently, at individual level, gossip serves as a device for self-evaluation (e.g. Rosnow, 1977; Suls, 1977). By comparing with similar others, individuals comprehend 'how things are done around here' with information being transferred as gossip (e.g. Baumeister, et al., 2004; Wert & Salovey, 2004; Grosser, et al., 2010). Thus "one can compare others' reactions to events with one's own reaction to help make sense of things or to vet a position on an issue" (Sabini & Silver, 1982, in Wert & Salovey, 2004: 124). Gossip is a way to learn and to teach appropriate ways of behaving within a particular social setting (e.g. Gluckman, 1968; Wert & Salovey, 2004). In this way, the comparison validates one's ability and assists self-esteem maintenance (e.g. Radlow & Berger, 1959; Abrahams, 1970; Rosnow, 1977; Wert & Salovey, 2004), which may further prevent an eruption of emotional threats produced by the differentiation of being inferior to others. By comparing with someone 'worse', individuals perceive themselves as advanced and superior, and generate self-satisfaction and self-enhancement with feelings of pride and contempt (e.g. Wert & Salovey, 2004; Grosser, et al., 2010). By comparing with someone 'better', the awareness of being inferior can motivate individuals to learn lessons from the successful others (e.g. Suls, 1977; Wert & Salovey, 2004), which in return may induce competition, jealousy, resentment and aggressiveness as "household gossips against household for advantage; brother slanders brother for land" (Haviland, 1977: 191).

At group level, gossip is both a condition and consequence of groups, and simultaneously the construction and development of groups is a condition and consequence of gossip. Gossip can constitute the sensemaking of particular social groups and of selves as 'we' distinguish 'ourselves' from 'them' by constructing solidarity via identity, norms,

behaviour and sanction. Stories are ‘transported’ by gossip to shape groups, as CCO implies. Simultaneously, it creates a history for the members in relation to one another (Gluckman, 1963), making sense of the past, present and (potential) future of the group. The information exchange processes of gossip transmit group norms, values and moral principles (e.g. Gluckman, 1963; Paine, 1967; Gluckman, 1968; Abrahams, 1970; Suls, 1977; van Itersson, et al., 2011; Wilson, et al., 2000; Wert & Salovey, 2004). This in turn contributes to establishing the group’s social boundaries (e.g. Hannerz, 1967; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Rosnow & Foster, 2005), constructing the awareness that “...‘we’ do not gossip with any ‘they’ but among ourselves only” (Paine, 1967: 282), implying potential sanctions for members’ anti-normative behaviour (e.g. Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011), and establishing social control (e.g. Gluckman, 1963; Merry, 1997; Wilson, et al., 2000; van Itersson, et al., 2011). The attributive role of gossip in social control “is near to that which has been recognized for wizardry” (Paine, 1967: 278), implying the asymmetry of knowledge and power as “such circles are not in themselves composed of individuals who are mutually equal” (Stewart & Strathern, 2004: 33). This might generate moral violation and guilt (Yerkovich, 1977). Nonetheless, gossip provides group members with an outlet for emotional release (e.g. Gluckman, 1963; Foster, 2004; Wert & Salovey, 2004; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005; van Itersson, et al., 2011); for instance, a group of front-line employees venting their anger and frustration with managers via gossiping. In these ways, gossip serves the unity and perpetuation of a group, whereas when the group starts to fail in its objectives, gossip can speed up its process of disintegration (Gluckman, 1963). Furthermore, through downward or upward social comparisons, differences between in-group members and out-group individuals are reinforced and enable multiple viewpoints to emerge, fermenting group polarization. Emerging ideas produced particularly by upward social comparisons can consequently establish new expectations and criteria of what a leader should be (e.g. Wert & Salovey, 2004).

At organization level, gossip with social comparison can conduct workplace evaluation, such as quality of leadership and of work, in a relatively less embarrassing and painless way (e.g. Gluckman, 1963). Moreover, emotion that is generated by and motivates social comparison with someone similar, worst and better can constitute better comprehension and clarification of a given situation. In a collective sense, gossip could diagnose future threats for both managers and the development of an organization (e.g. Rosnow, 1977;

Wert & Salovey, 2004) as it can be seen as a reflection of “the problem behind the problem” (Waddington, 2016: 810). As Wert & Salovey (2004) suggest,

“Gossip stemming from anxiety and uncertainty seems especially likely in relationships in which one person is dependent on the other, and the dependent person has little information about the character, intentions, or loyalties of the person on whom she or he is dependent. Because much is at stake, the worst-case scenario is important to apprehend. Thus, gossip that is negative is of greater utility and more in demand because it may be diagnostic of future threat. For this reason, especially aloof persons with power might expect a fair amount of gossip and conjecture about themselves” (2004: 132).

Besides social comparison, gossip constitutes organizations through its roles and functions of influence and entertainment. Gossip could be explored and exploited for influence, which is understood by Rosnow (1977: 159) as “a manipulative tool with which A attempts to gain an advantage over B, or over C by persuading B to revise his opinions of C”. It is the means an individual employs to have an impact on others’ behaviour, awareness and reflection of something or someone else. At individual level, gossip assists individuals verbally or nonverbally who clamour for group value as it enables individuals to forward their own interests (Paine, 1967; Gluckman, 1968). This process is simultaneously a management or even manipulation of the impression that others attain of oneself (e.g. Suls, 1977) as well as of the third party (e.g. van Iterson, et al., 2011).

At group level, influence generates connections between morality and group unity, implying the group-interests have been brought closer to the moral order of a group. Moral order produces sanctions on individuals for ‘under-concerning’ group interests, and manipulations for homogenizing self-interests, especially the ones conflict with group norms, for group purposes (e.g. Paine, 1967). The interaction dynamics here is dyadic, meaning not only individuals can deploy group values for achieving self-interests, but also groups can manipulate self-interests for reaching group values. In this way, as Feinberg, et al. (2012: 1016) suggest, “groups can monitor their members and deter antisocial behaviour, leading to the proliferation of cooperation and collective action” (see also Emler, 1994; Dunbar, 2004; Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011). Such

cooperation can be fostered through partner selection (Feinberg, et al., 2014) influenced by the social relation that “the more selfishly individuals had behaved in a previous round, the more negative their reputation would be, resulting in a greater chance that their upcoming-round partners would ostracize them” (Feinberg, et al., 2014: 661).

At organization level, scaling up from group interests, influence can “convey valuable information about the rules and boundaries of the culture” (Grosser, et al., 2010: 185), providing sources for employees to better apprehend workplace behaviour such as how to act and why to act throughout “all periods of the workday” (van Iterson, et al., 2011: 382). In this sense, gossip acts as a medium for cultural learning (e.g. Baumeister, et al., 2004; Grosser, et al., 2010; van Iterson, et al., 2011) and reinforcement (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 1982). In the learning process, gossipers, as storytellers, can embellish past feats of a particular individual and ‘spiff up’ his/her newest accomplishments, flourishing the process of hero-making (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). On the other hand, the same rationale can be utilized to “de-Stalinize” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982: 92) a hero. The hero-making and hero-destroying processes influence existing informal power structures, which can push changes on formal power structures (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Kurland & Pelled, 2000; van Iterson, et al., 2011). Therefore, gossip can shape organizational climate of work and socialization. It is the ‘cement’ (Waddington & Fletcher, 2005) of “inner-circle closeness” (Rosnow & Foster, 2005: 1) that glues organizational members together, whilst it can over-emphasize differences between individuals and groups, drifting members apart and leading organizations to disintegration. Overall, at individual, group and organizational levels, the role of gossip as influence with information sharing and interactive processes is a powerful catalyst and social instrument that can either avoid or exacerbate conflicts, either shorten or expand social distance, and either encourage or hinder social relations.

Besides social comparison and influence, gossip can serve for pleasure and entertainment across the three levels of interaction, generating excitement via accessing and evaluating what is perceived as unknown information for information recipients. It brings enjoyment as a relaxing process (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Ben-Ze’ev, 1994; de Sousa, 1994; Foster, 2004; van Iterson, et al., 2011). Yet such process might create resistance amongst participants and call for justice for the gossip subject.

Throughout this section, in the indicated and many other ways, a loud voice has been given to gossip as a “nontrivial trivial” (van Iterson, et al., 2011: 382) in organizational life. Despite its taken-for-granted image as inconsequential and morally dubious, gossip is a potentially important part of organizational work – the work of making or constituting organization.

Table 1. Functionalities of Gossip

		Individual Level	Group Level	Organization Level
Social Comparison	Compare with similar others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensemaking of a social environment (Wert & Salovey, 2004) • Seek for appropriate ways of behaving (e.g. Gluckman, 1968; Wert & Salovey, 2004) • Self-esteem maintenance (e.g. Radlow & Berger, 1959; Abrahams, 1970; Rosnow, 1977; Wert & Salovey, 2004) • Reassurance of the validation of one's opinions or abilities (e.g. Wert & Salovey, 2004) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmission and maintenance of group norms, values, and moral principles (e.g. Gluckman, 1963; Paine, 1967; Gluckman, 1968; Abrahams, 1970; Suls, 1977; van Iterson, et al., 2011; Wilson, et al., 2000; Wert & Salovey, 2004). • Maintenance of group social boundaries (e.g. Gluckman, 1963; Hannerz, 1967; Suls, 1977; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Rosnow & Foster, 2005) • Reach consensus behaviour (e.g. Suls, 1977; Trice & Beyer, 1993) • Develop a groupthink mindset (e.g. Wilson, et al., 2000; Wert & Salovey, 2004; Rosnow & Foster, 2006) • Establish and maintain social control (e.g. Gluckman, 1963; Merry, 1997; Wilson, et al., 2000; van Iterson, et al., 2011) • Maintenance the unity of a group (e.g. Gluckman, 1963) • An expression and release of emotion (e.g. Gluckman, 1963; Foster, 2004; Wert & Salovey, 2004; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005; van Iterson, et al., 2011) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less painful workplace evaluation (e.g. Gluckman, 1963) • Diagnose future threats for organizations (e.g. Rosnow, 1977; Wert & Salovey, 2004; Waddington, 2016).
	Downward social comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-satisfaction (e.g. Wert & Salovey, 2004; Grosser, et al., 2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce the recognition a social identity • Develop group polarization 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-enhancement (e.g. Wert & Salovey, 2004; Grosser, et al., 2010) 		
	Upward social comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-improvement (e.g. Suls, 1977; Wert & Salovey, 2004) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce the recognition a social identity • Develop group polarization • Develop criteria towards the question of leadership (e.g. Wert & Salovey, 2004) 	
Not social comparison	Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct and/or reconstruct the image of a third party (e.g. van Iterson, et al., 2011) • Forward self-interest (Paine, 1967; Gluckman, 1968) • Manipulation of self-impression (e.g. Suls, 1977) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipulation of group-interests • Encourage social relationships (e.g. Paine, 1967; Emler, 1994; Dunbar, 1996; Doyle, 2000) • Develop interpersonal closeness (e.g. Rosnow, 1977; Bosson, et al., 2006; van Iterson, et al., 2011), and “inner-circleness” (Rosnow & Foster, 2005) • Cooperation (Feinberg, et al., 2012; see also Emler, 1994; Dunbar, 2004; Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011) • Selection of group partners (Feinberg, et al., 2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture learning (e.g. Ayim, 1994; Grosser, et al., 2010) • Culture reinforcement (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 1982) • Hero-making (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 1982) • Construct and reconstruct both formal and informal power structures (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Kurland & Pelled, 2000)
	Entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyment and amusement (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Ben-Ze’ev, 1994; de Sousa, 1994; van Iterson, et al., 2011) 		

1.4. The Constitutive Nature of Confidential Gossip in Organizations

Following the previous three headline claims of the constitution of organizations, confidential gossip, as an intersection of secrecy, communication and gossip, might be in some way constitutive of organizations. The aim of this section is, therefore, to bring the concept of confidential gossip into the centre of discussion in order to lift the veil of its constitutive nature in organizations. Built on the preceding discussions made in this chapter, this section will firstly conceptualize confidential gossip through its distinction from general gossip as well as its connections with secrecy, communication and gossip. This section then will move on to discuss the implications of confidentiality as the essential characteristic of the constitutive nature of confidential gossip in organizations.

1.4.1. From the Three Headline Claims to Confidential Gossip

Moving from secrecy constitution of organizations, communicative constitution of organizations and gossip constitution of organizations, there are several interlocking issues. As communication constitutes social realities in organizations and plays a role in socialization, so does gossip, as a specific form of communication, contribute to the constitution of organizations through social comparison, influence and entertainment. Implicit within some of the studies of gossip is a hint of the confidential gossip (e.g. Gluckman, 1963; Bergmann, 1993; Stewart & Strathern, 2004) which Costas & Grey (2016: 93) give as an example of informal secrecy. When, for example, Paine (1967: 282) notes that we gossip “among ourselves only” it is pointing to the idea that gossip is sometimes, and possibly often, seen as something to be shared with some (us) but concealed from others (them). It connects to Simmel’s (1950: 330) distinction between a revealed ‘first’ and a concealed ‘second’ world, and associates with the core of organizational secrecy emphasized by Costas & Grey (2016: 10) that “[Secrecy] is about the drawing of boundaries”. These connections distinct confidential gossip from general gossip, particularly from the sorts that “everyone knows” (Adkins, 2002: 222). As Costas & Grey (2014) remark,

“[Informal secrecy, such as confidential gossip sharing] overlaps [with gossip] to the extent that individuals engaging in gossip can seek to keep this secretive

and that gossip sharing involves boundary creation – of the ‘in’ and ‘out’ crowds – and therefore ‘plays a vital role in group formation, regulation and perpetuation’ (Noon & Delbridge, 1993: 32). However, informal secrecy differs from gossip, as what defines much gossip is informal communication rather than concealment” (2014: 1434).

Therefore, confidential gossip differs from general gossip in terms of different positions in a nest of concealment. The inner the nest, the more concealed gossip can be. The choice of ‘nest’ as the metaphor of illustration is made for two reasons: firstly, as an analogy to nests that are built differently by different birds in different geographical situations, a nest of concealment is a locally and endogenously constructed, contextually shaped, continually organized, social achievement. It implies that as similar to gossip with diversified and ambiguous definitions, confidential gossip is defined by social practices built upon it, which cannot be identified solely based on any fixed definitions. This points to the second reason that confidential gossip is embedded in wider interactions. On one hand, it implies that any types of static diagrams will not be able to represent the fluidity embedded in confidential gossip. For example, tables that compare and contrast gossip and confidential gossip draw clear divisions between the not only interrelated, but also interwoven concepts. A continuum might symbolize a linear movement of socialization and concealment between confidential gossip and gossip, raising the question ‘how confidential is confidential gossip?’, which is difficult, if not impossible, to answer through measuring distances to the two ends of the continuum. On the other hand, the theoretical distinction is required to be drawn between confidential gossip and gossip for both understanding confidential gossip as a concept and phenomenon at work, and exploring it empirically as a topic of inquiry.

Levels of concealment influence and are influenced by choices and uses of media that shape both communication processes and their impact. Confidential gossip is mainly circulated through different forms of private channels such as vis-à-vis socialization and electronic communication like texts and emails. Its distinction of concealment is likely to be signalled within organizational interaction by some kind of verbal (e.g. ‘keep this between us’ or ‘within these four walls’) and nonverbal (e.g. subtle facial expressions) cues, marking it as in some way and to some extent different from general gossip; or by ensuring that the interaction takes place away from the workspace or within a private

area. The confidentiality and sensitivity of confidential gossip are therefore maintained by an appropriate level of privacy embraced in informal communication.

Such secrecy might be particularly relevant to the evaluative form of organizational gossip, containing as they do the possibility of embarrassment or conflict. Participants, especially producers of confidential gossip, “manage topics – topics which have meaning to them” (Fine, 1986: 406). It requires the consideration of ‘what *should* be talked about’, rather than solely ‘what can be talked about’. Such management can be achieved through ambiguity that facilitates the indirectness of communication (e.g. Hallett, et al., 2009) and implicitly conceals certain meaning in order to leave room for further adjustment of evaluation and communication trajectory. Distortion can also play a role that colours the conveyed knowledge in the way that it should be understood, rather than how it can be understood. In this sense, confidential gossip might relate to various kinds of organizational politicking, such as the planning of controversial or unpopular decisions or changes. It could be seen as a by-product generated through inter-departmental differentiation, hierarchical conflicts, and power struggles in informal and formal arena in organizations, which simultaneously supports organizational daily operations. Such social process is a case that “when we form our utterances from a perspective of reason, value, the consideration of the understanding of others, we conceal from other our internal actuality” (Bergmann, 1993: 53). Hence, underneath such evaluation and selectivity of communicative interaction is the tension of (re)selection between revelation and concealment.

Identification of confidential gossip membership is formed through the combination of inclusions with social relevance and exclusions with social differentiation. Recognition and acquisition of relevant knowledge is a catalyst that helps a bystander become privy to the inner circle of confidential gossip. The selection of insiders is a procedure of forming an amorphous and intermediary web that is intentionally structured with gaps for segmentation of social recognition, interaction and actions. To pick up the sense of ‘should-ness’ illustrated earlier, the awareness of ‘us’ is generated and differentiated from ‘them’ through constructing perceptions of not only what to do, but also what *not* to do. It in turn strengthens the insider identity and regulates individual behaviour in a confidential gossip circle. Such in-group relations could cut across or be a reflection of formal organizational structure (Costas & Grey, 2014), thus insiders are not necessarily

from the same department (Parker, 2000). Confidential gossip might take place horizontally across different departments or vertically through different hierarchical layers. Confidential gossip thus incorporates not only individuals as nodes of a social network, but also formal and informal relationships as ties that link the different nodes. Hence, it is a social process that “in terms of conditions and consequences...is not a linear cause-and-effect relationship but an ongoing, iterative and dynamic relationship” (Costas & Grey, 2014: 1424).

Besides social exclusivity, secrecy as a social formation of ‘truth’ and value, which was also discussed in section 1.1.1, indicates the particular epistemological and ontological status of secret knowledge as being ‘more true’ or ‘more real’ than other kinds of knowledge. Distinctions between insiders and outsiders with the ‘known-versus-unknown’ comparison generate hints of “I know something you don’t know” (Moore, 1962: 74). Confidential gossip thus may come into play as the search for “the ‘truth’ behind the ‘truth’” (Stewart & Strathern, 2004: 38) in organizational life. For example, as noted in the introduction to the thesis, a new organizational member might very well feel that the things s/he is told in the course of a formal induction process are all very well and good, but the things that s/he is told through confidential gossip by a co-worker are what s/he ‘really’ needs to know or is the ‘real truth’ about how things are ‘done around here’. In this way, even though confidential gossip may be perceived as more invasive or destructive than gossip, people accept or perhaps even encourage it as it can act as a sort of check on or ‘triangulation’ of what is ‘on paper’, exploring “what has been going on behind our back” (Dunbar, 2004: 103) in order to comprehend more than what they see. Similarly to the case of group identities, knowledge about what ‘we’ are or do and what ‘they’ are and do that is imparted as a secret is more likely to be taken as the reality and therefore more likely to have an especially strong impact upon group (and individual) identity construction.

Hence confidential gossip is not just ‘gossip plus confidentiality’ if it is considered not just to be a form of gossip but also a form of secrecy. This means that the various things that gossip ‘does’ in organizations are likely to be inflected differently and perhaps heightened when confidentiality is added to the mix. The reasons are located at the particularly powerful effects of secrecy as a social formation of specialness and a social establishment of ‘truth’ and value, which is produced through relevant ones being party

to, and concurrently the others being excluded from, secret knowledge. As Gluckman (1963: 315) articulates, “the more exclusive a social group is, the more will its member indulge in gossip about one another, and the more persistently will they repeat the same gossip again and again and again without getting bored”. In line with this view, Carl Carmer explains in *Stars Fell on Alabama* (2000: 12), “the constant social chatter dealing in personalities at first annoys and bores the stranger. Gradually, however, as he picks up the threads of the relationships through which it sometimes seems that the entire state is bound into one family, he becomes not only tolerant but an eager participant”. If in some general way being an insider to organizational gossip helps people to feel important and to understand and make sense of organizational norms, then this will be magnified when the gossip in question is signalled as being to some degree secret. Therefore, this specific sort of combination of secrecy and gossip might be expected to have even more ‘nontrivial’ effects than general gossip, and consequently even more potentially powerful impacts on the constitution of organizations.

In this sense, confidential gossip is more than a communication genre being generated and sustained within an organizational container. Going back to the CCO claims that communication is constitutive of organizations, the specific sort of communication of concealed knowledge has a particular status in such a constitution. Using a wider perspective, confidential gossip, being similar to gossip, is a relational and reflexive communicative procedure through the individual engagement of sense making and knowing (Waddington, 2012). Confidential gossip in organizations is not only a means of knowledge exchange with semantic understanding, but also a way to reconstruct organizational members’ social recognition, perception and awareness of organizational life. The collaborative production of confidential gossip through its participants shapes individual construction processes of social realities at work, influences desires and motivations of individuals and groups, and affects power structures in both preferred and unintentional ways that in turn ‘breeds’ the confidential gossip predominantly. Confidential gossip could be seen as a ploy for insiders to achieve individual- and/or group-interests. Processes of constructing, maintaining and breaching confidential gossip may not be identical across organizations, and hence are engaged by and embedded with certain specialness and uniqueness of an organization. In this way, by partaking in confidential gossip, participants reinforce their recognition of organizational existence.

From the perspective developed here, as an intersection of secrecy, communication and gossip, confidential gossip enables participants to manage communication topics and trajectories, influences (individual and) group identification, regulates group behaviour, and reconstructs social realities of organizations. Confidential gossip with its situational embeddedness in local social settings concerns ongoing social processes in which secrecy is initiated, sustained and enforced through social interaction, and in return shapes social interaction. As Bergmann (1992: 53) draws on Simmel (1950) and emphasizes, when we gossip about others who are known to us, we are interacting with the structural feature of social relations that presuppose a measure of ignorance and reciprocal secrecy. Thus, a working definition of confidential gossip is that it is a genre of informal communication which selectively circulates intentionally and informally concealed knowledge within a particular social network. It is shared amongst selected members of the network who are both privy and relevant to the circulated knowledge and have shared interests. At the heart of confidential gossip lies social relations that are the cause and consequence of confidential gossip. At the centre of its constitution of organizations lies its processes and influence as a metaphorical crayon that draws and redraws a map of socialization and social relations at work. Because of such social embeddedness and fluidity, a “situated analysis of a particular organizational setting” (Grey, 2012: 10) is necessary to study confidential gossip empirically.

1.4.2. The Confidentiality of Confidential Gossip: Coherence and Tensions

Building upon the preceding section, confidentiality, as the characteristic that differentiates confidential gossip from general gossip, plays an essential role in social processes of confidential gossip and consequently its constitution of organizations. This section furthers this claim by focusing on the confidentiality of confidential gossip as a condition and consequence for not only making bonds, but also breaking such bonds. As illustrated previously, the confidentiality of confidential gossip stimulates formations of social relations through the powerful effects of secrecy. Concurrently, such formations are built alongside possibilities of deformation as confidential gossip being a seabed of concealment also cultivates intentional and unintentional revelation. As Simmel (1950: 346) stresses, “what is known always offers points of attack for further penetration...secrets do not remain guarded forever”.

Metaphorically, confidentiality in organizations is like steak marinated with blue cheese – it is not visible on the surface, but it is able to change the flavour of the steak. We cannot see confidentiality in the similar rationale as Parker (2016) argues we cannot see organizations in a sense that “we see people, uniforms, organization charts, buildings with neon signs. It is easy enough to make the mistake of assuming that what is visible to us *is* an organization, rather than fragments, hints and suggestions. Because an organization is never visible, and much evidence of it is deliberately kept secret from us” (2016: 111, emphasis added). Confidentiality is not visible – what we perceive is the indications and clues that reflect its existence. Like the flavour of blue cheese permeating the steak, the ubiquity of confidentiality penetrates through layers of interpersonal relationships and organizational hierarchies.

Confidentiality is embedded with “the boundaries surrounding shared secrets and to the process of guarding these boundaries” (Bok, 1982: 119). It encompasses two aspects: concealment and protection of both confidential information, and their insider identity, which are largely influenced by both physical and social environment. Conversations in public space that is accessible to many others entail different dynamics than in controlled areas which outsiders cannot access. The concealment of knowledge considers and encompasses not only the kind of matters that should be kept secret, but also the degree of confidentiality that should be established and maintained. The intentionality of

information concealment does not imply the action is always pre-planned as a conspiracy; rather, it can be accidental and developed based on particular conditions of a certain social environment (Costas & Grey, 2014). However, when participants of confidential gossip use confidentiality as a shield as well as a weapon of socialization, their actions could be intentional and manipulative. Furthermore, the concealment of identity as an insider requires that one understands self as not ‘who I am’, but ‘who I am *not*’, emphasizing both ‘what I should do’ and ‘what I should *not* do’, reinforcing a coherent and meaningful awareness about the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. However, as the jigsaw nature of secrecy, being an insider does not equip one with all the keys to each invisible door. Thus, an inside comprehension of certain confidential gossip can only construct a partial story. As underlined in the movie *Capitan America 2*, “nobody spills the secrets, because nobody knows them all”.

The understanding of ‘should *not* do’ illuminates that beyond the appeal of feeling aristocratic and social satisfaction for being in the know, the sense of boundaries is sustained and negotiated by the fear of being able to know and consequently of being known. The fear of being able to know points to an unsettling concern and uncertainty about what such learning entails and implies. Involvement in certain confidential gossip may evoke the feeling of being enforced, as if being dragged into a guilty secret and entangled in its protection. Despite participants being able to manage topics of conversation, they are not in complete control of the circulation and development of confidential gossip the influence of which might outrun its intended effects. If particular secret knowledge is destructive making its concealment a wrongdoing, participants who do not take part in generating such knowledge and yet are in the know might stay silent. The silence may bring self-condemnation and insecurity regarding whether and when such confidentiality will be breached to inappropriate others. The accumulation of anxiety and moral pressure might direct the decision of concealment toward formal or informal whistleblowing.

Instead of being prompt and sudden, such process may be heated gradually as in a pressurized slow cooker. A prime example is the case of Weinstein allegations and the Me Too movement. In the reports and investigations on The New York Times (2017) and The New Yorker (2017), for more than two decades, Harvey Weinstein, a giant of his industry and thanked at Oscar annual awards ceremonies more than anyone else in

film history, has been dogged by various gossip about sexual harassments. Over the years, personal and sensitive stories of Weinstein and young actresses with details such as ‘business’ meetings in hotel rooms, bathrobes and massage requests have emerged and been acknowledged within certain circles. An actress wrote and directed her real-life incident in a movie with a scene of a hotel room that portrays Weinstein’s behaviour. “‘People would ask *me* about *him* because of the scene in the movie,’ she said. Some recounted similar details to her” (The New Yorker, 2017, emphases added). Similar experiences with vulnerabilities and resentment connect different individuals and circles. Gradually such stories that were known in the inner circles have turned into an open secret in Hollywood. Many of the stories never come out to the public until now. Once in the public arena, the floodgates opened, many women coming forward with accusations of sexual assault and even rape. The New Yorker (2017) reported, “it’s likely that women have recently felt increasingly emboldened to talk about their experiences because of the way the world has changed regarding issues of sex and power. These disclosures [about Weinstein] follow in the wake of stories alleging sexual misconduct by public figures, including Bill O’Reilly, Roger Ailes, Bill Cosby, and Donald Trump”. The change of wider social and political contexts lightens the concern of some, yet not all, related actresses for being “crushed” (The New Yorker, 2017) by revealing such encounters to inappropriate others (e.g. journalists).

Whilst insiders can access certain knowledge when entering the presence of others, they simultaneously bring possessed information into the social circle. Insiders are interested in listening to, communicating and knowing relevant information, and may concurrently be concerned about being listened to, communicated and known by other group members. A confidential gossip circle here is not necessarily harmoniously unified. The ideology of unity is ever a seabed of generating conflicts and struggles between the ideally harmonized way of unity and the practical difficulties of accomplishing it (e.g. Gluckman, 1968). In the case of confidential gossip, the sensitivity and confidentiality that create and maintain group coherence also generate emotional tensions amongst insiders. In this way, confidential gossip circles, similar to other secretive groups, are “emotionally tightly knit...In part this is the direct result of the cost of betrayal” (Luhrmann, 1989: 160). With the power to produce social anxiety and to reinforce asymmetric relations, such emotional tensions and connections can turn into emotional ‘kidnapping’ and exploitation where covert violence is being practised, socially and

psychologically, toward insiders instead of outsiders. In such circumstance, withdrawing one's involvement and engagement in a confidential gossip group can be difficult, as 'we know *something* about you'. It is particularly in such a limbo-like situation that covert violence and its impact can be deepened. Therefore, social concession and compromise would be made in exchange for further concealment of what is known *about* the known in the group. Confidential gossip in this sense is not only as "diving...that appears and disappears, then reappears at intervals of time" (Stewart & Strathern, 2004: 170-171), but also as 'snowballing'. Alternatively, the emotional exploitation can be practised as a proactive instrument for violent confrontation and intervention that creates opposition to the socially powerful in the group. In both cases, confidentiality can be considered as the source of chaos in confidential gossip, and generates social distance, rather than solely intimacy. Notwithstanding that, "being gossiped about is as much a sign of belonging to the neighbourly network as being gossiped with" (Bott, 2001: 67), being targeted and discussed in a confidential gossip circle indicates one's involvement in a social relation.

From the discussion developed here, the construction and maintenance of confidentiality around and through confidential gossip are built alongside with the growing possibility of breaching it. It is important to understand such dynamics, as hiding itself "invites probes, and boundaries and prohibitions incite to transgression" (Bok, 1982: 32) and "uncovering, revealing, exposing, are likely to matter in a context in which hiding has social value" (Parker, 2016: 102). Essentially, confidentiality brings boundary (re)drawing – not only where to draw, but also how to draw. Instead of being fixed or static, the boundary is continuously negotiated and may be modified under different circumstances at different times. In this sense, confidentiality cultivates group norms and rules concerning *who* and *what* should be shared with, rather than whether to share. Therefore, for confidential gossip, what lies at the centre of boundaries drawing is not or not only the secret knowledge, but also the right to tell. Confidentiality thus is a meaningful social facet in the processes and practices of gossip, which structures, reforms and sustains social relations as a constitutive sphere of organizational life. As Costas & Grey (2016: 10) stress, "secrecy is both seductive and exciting, dismaying and frightening – something that is both a part of our everyday lives and yet also somehow extraordinary". It is inadequate to comprehend and interpret confidential gossip by simply deciphering the concealed information – it requires certain understanding and involvement of social relations within a specific social network in a given setting.

1.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter follows the logic of four headline claims based on the conceptual map of confidential gossip. Building upon the constitutive nature of secrecy, communication and gossip, this chapter puts forward the theoretical argument that confidential gossip constitutes organizations in some ways.

The Constitutive Nature of Secrecy in Organizations

Secrecy is not solely an informational process – it is also a social process with intentional concealment. A secret is valuable concerning not only the concealed content per se, but also the very fact that it is concealed and kept unknown from outsiders. Secrecy, therefore, constitutes organizations through creating compartmentation and drawing boundaries, which is constituted by and constitutes by two powerful effects of secrecy. Firstly, as a social formation of specialness, secrecy produces superiority and self-belongingness, and nurtures the construction of a tightly knit group for emotional therapy. Secondly, as a social establishment of ‘truth’ and value, secrecy with hidden knowledge entails a particular epistemological and ontological status as ‘more true’ or ‘more real’ than other sorts of knowledge. It shapes the particular construction of realities through strengthening social relations, and yet can be considered as self-deception that breaks such relations. The powerful effects emphasize that secrecy is imbued with social differentiation, which creates organization through a hidden epistemic architecture where boundaries are drawn in two general ways including formal and informal secrecy (Costas & Grey, 2016). Informal secrecy forms and is formed by informal groups through socialization. Nonetheless, social differentiation generated by informal secrecy brings temptation of breaching secrets, which can be produced by the eagerness of insider’s superiority recognition and/or emotional overburden. An informal secret can be revealed to either outsiders or the wrong type of insiders. Despite that, it is not necessary to consider secrecy, especially informal secrecy, as unethical, or the revelation of secrecy as undoubtedly ethical. It is essential to understand informal secrecy in a bigger picture as it is intertwined with other spheres of organizational life.

The Constitutive Nature of Communication in Organizations

This thesis rejects the transmission and mechanistic view of communication as a linear model and of organizations as a container that exists separately from communication, as

such a perspective is insufficient to understand confidential gossip as a social process in organizations. Instead, this thesis follows the constitutive properties of communication focusing on the formative role of communication in organizations. It opens doors for inquiries about organizational realities, rather than seeing them as given. As CCO perspective is a heterogeneous theoretical endeavour, this thesis is positioned on the common ground shared amongst the three main schools of thoughts: the Montréal School approach, the Four-Flow Model approach and the social system theory approach. Fundamentally, communication-organization relation is rooted in the ongoing coproduction of organization and communication (Cooren & Taylor, 1997) as mutual constitution. Organization, as an emergent network of interlocking communication processes, is continuously constituted by communication as a processual entity. Such coproduction points to the performative and relational characters of communication, which processes involve inference, deduction and imagination. Communication with renegotiations of meaning plays a role in socialization as it impinges on individual and group relations and identities as a political, symbolic and material act. Whilst the spoken and unspoken words are the locus of sense making and clarity, they are simultaneously the centre of distortion and ambiguity with multiplicity of possible (mis)interpretations. Ambiguity is not inherently undesirable as they can be used as a strategy for better sense making and goal actualization at individual, group and organizational levels. However, they are not always desirable and potential ethical implications should be considered. As a fluid social process, communication organizes and has material consequences. It constitutes to organizations by (re)constructing individual realities of organizational life, making sense of organizational environment in interactional situations, and making organizations what they are.

The Constitutive Nature of Gossip in Organizations

As a genre of informal communication, gossip locates is at the centre of the social life of many people, and could be seen as the most casual conversations concerning matters of social importance (Dunbar, 1996; McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). Historically, gossip has been viewed, understood and defined by dwelling on its improper and immoral aspects. Despite that, with greater appreciation towards its significance and constructive aspects, gossip is not merely an impediment to organizing, rather, it is a way and a process of organizing. This thesis considers gossip neutrally and perceives it being either negative or positive, meaning that it will not always be or has to be negative or positive.

Gossip is a universal activity, but it does not have a universal comprehension or definition. A common working definition can be summarized based on the research on gossip as: gossip is informal evaluative communication, and is engaged and developed by at least two people via forms of speaking, writing or visual communication about things, issues or the life of the third parties who are physically or symbolically absent. The definition of gossip is embedded with its relational configurations, such as the structural conditions of gossip. This thesis draws on two of the structural conditions discussed by Bergmann (1993) of a person being targeted as the gossip subject – absence and privacy. Acquaintanceship is important but not a necessary condition, because gossip can occur with or without gossip producers and/or gossip recipients being familiar with gossip subject(s). Notwithstanding that, gossip occurs only when its participants obtain acquaintanceship or friendship. Hence, social relevance is the fundamental feature of participation and emergence of gossip, which affects the ways gossip flows and further construction of gossip chains.

How gossip works in organizations can be reflected by the functionalities of gossip through interaction at individual, group and organizational levels, and mainly serve three purposes: firstly, social comparison including comparison with similar others, downward social comparison, and upward social comparison; secondly, influence; and thirdly, entertainment (see Table 1). Such influences of circulation demonstrate that gossip is not trivial in organizational life, and the importance of comprehending gossip dynamics. Without taking a functionalist stance, analyzing the functions can reveal the interaction processes of gossip and gain a better understanding of both gossip with its circulation and development and confidential gossip as a form of gossip.

The Constitutive Nature of Confidential Gossip in Organizations

The interlocking issues amongst the constitutive nature of secrecy, communication and gossip distinguish confidential gossip from general gossip regarding their different positions in a nest of concealment. Levels of concealment influence and are influenced by the types and uses of media. Whilst gossip is conducted through both public and private media, confidential gossip is circulated mainly in different private channels. Particularly in terms of vis-à-vis interaction, the distinction of concealment is likely to be indicated through certain verbal and nonverbal cues. Therefore, the confidentiality of

confidential gossip is maintained through a certain level of privacy inserted in and required through informal communication.

Participants in confidential gossip can manage topics of conversation through ambiguity and distortion, which facilitates the indirectness of communication and leaves room for evaluation and adjustment as to how certain knowledge should be understood. Confidential gossip in this way may relate to organizational politicking. Such social processes of confidential gossip with evaluation and selectivity involves the tension of (re)selection between revelation and concealment. The sense of ‘what should be talked about’ that implies not only what to do, but also what not to do differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, and strengthens the insider identity by regulating insider behaviour that maintains such social differentiation. In this way, confidential gossip connects individuals in social networks with dynamic relationships that may cut across formal structures at work. Besides social exclusivity, identification of confidential gossip membership and the distinction between insiders and outsiders encompasses the particular epistemological and ontological status of secret knowledge that produces hints of “I know something you don’t know” (Moore, 1962: 74). Confidential gossip in this sense may be considered as the ‘real truth’ about how things are ‘done around here’.

Therefore, at the heart of confidential gossip lie social relations that are the cause and consequence of confidential gossip. Confidential gossip is not just ‘gossip plus confidentiality’. The particular powerful effects of secrecy as a social formation of specialness and a social establishment of value and ‘truth’ indicate that being inside the circle of organizational gossip can make people feel special and make sense of norms and rules; this may be magnified when the gossip is to some degree secret. Therefore, the particular combination of communication and secrecy may have more influential effects than gossip in general. Going back to the claims of CCO that communication is constitutive of organizations, this specific type of communication of concealed knowledge has a particular status in such constitution, which centrally draws on the processes and influence of confidential gossip as a metaphorical crayon that paints and repaints a map of organizational relations at work.

In this way, organization is not a container in which practices of confidential gossip occur, and confidential gossip is not merely a means for knowledge exchange. It is a

collaboratively produced process of constructing individual social recognition and perception of organizational life, and of shaping social realities at work. Such process is not identical across different organizations as it is embedded with the certain uniqueness of an organization. Hence through confidential gossip, individual recognition of the organizational existence is reinforced.

The processes and nontrivial impact of confidential gossip lead to a closer look at its central character of confidentiality as a seabed for coherence and tensions. Whilst confidentiality stimulates formations of social relations, such formations are built alongside possibilities of deformations with the breach of confidentiality. The sense of what to do and what *not* to do is generated from the understanding of who I am and who I am *not*, and is sustained and negotiated through the fear of being able to know and of being known. Being able to know can bring guilt and moral burden, particularly when the secret knowledge is destructive. The sense of anxiety and moral pressure may direct processes of concealment gradually towards whistleblowing and leaking. Moreover, by being able to know, insiders also bring their possessed knowledge into the circle, which might lead to emotional exploitation and practices of covert violence, as ‘we know *something* about you that you don’t want outsiders to know’. In this sense confidentiality is a source of chaos of confidential gossip that generates social distance rather than merely intimacy within a group. Hence what lies at the centre of social relations around confidential gossip and its understanding is not or not only the secret knowledge itself, but the right to tell.

Therefore, studying confidential gossip requires understanding and involvement of social relations in particular settings, which shapes the use of method for the empirical study. The following chapter will illustrate the choice of method in detail towards the empirical investigation of the constitution of confidential gossip at work.

Chapter 2

Toward an Ethnographic Approach to Confidential Gossip

Gossip is therefore an inherently difficult topic to research, fraught with complex conceptual challenges and contradictions, and resistant to paradigmatic summing up. (Kathryn Waddington, Using Diaries to Explore the Characteristics of Work-Related Gossip: Methodological considerations from exploratory multimethod research, 2005a: 222)

Although the quotidian experiences of people working in organizations may, to some, hardly seem exciting, for organizational ethnographers much of the intriguing ‘mystery’ of organizational life is hidden in the ordinary exchanges of ordinary people on an ordinary sort of day...The ‘ordinariness’ often prevents us from seeing it: we tend to have a blind spot for what is usual, ordinary, routine...Ethnographers hold that an appreciation of the extraordinary-in-the-ordinary may help to understand the ambiguities and obscurities of social life. (Sierk Ybema, Dvora Yanow, Harry Wels & Frans Kamsteeg, Studying Everyday Organizational Life, 2009: 1-2)

Fieldwork, as all who have engaged in it will testify, is an intensely personal and subjective process, and there are probably at least as many “methods” as there are fieldworkers. (Gideon Kunda, Engineering Culture, 2006: 237)

Chapter 1 settled the basic tone of confidential gossip as ongoing social processes through selection and management of utterances, and construction and reconstruction of social relations. It is not narrowly considered as informal information, and is influential in shaping or even rebuilding (part of) social organization such as power structures and social networks at work. The phenomenon and practices of confidential gossip can be understood through exploring meanings and processes of related forms of social interaction, for example, other verbal and/or non-verbal ways of informal communication. The basic tone emphasizes an interpretive comprehension of confidential gossip as a kind of social action embedded in interpersonal interaction and socio-cultural systems. Therefore, the approach I adopt in this thesis is broadly interpretative.

Empirical studies on gossip are mainly conducted by seven methodological techniques, including archive studies, diary studies, experimental research, interview studies, on-line research, participant observation and questionnaire studies. Due to the broadly interpretative approach applied in the research design, methods utilized in the studies on positivist stance, such as experiments and questionnaire studies, would not be used in this research conduct, even though the findings of such studies may be relevant to this thesis. Moreover, this thesis aims to understand the constitutive nature of confidential gossip in organizations, particularly through here-and-now processes of endogenously produced interactive dynamics, hence, archive studies is not appropriate to apply. Instead, this thesis adopts ethnographic participant observation for the empirical exploration. The methodological difficulty is therefore to capture the ephemeral phenomenon and elusive practice of confidential gossip, and to encapsulate its fluid development and circulation in a given social context.

Building upon the preceding chapter of the theoretical arguments as ‘what is confidential gossip and its constitutive nature’, this chapter aims to illustrate and discuss the empirical study on confidential gossip. In particular, locating at the intersections of the three quotes, this chapter will explain why I adopted an ethnographic participant observation approach for this study and how this study of a media company named Quinza was designed and conducted. Therefore this chapter is constructed into four parts: firstly, by dividing the research techniques deployed by the extant empirical studies on gossip into two parts, the part of possible methods will be illustrated following by my preferred

method. Secondly, the studies applied participant observation will be analyzed from perspectives of participation and action, time, space and invisibility. Thirdly, reflecting upon the existing studies, the empirical design of this study of confidential gossip will be illustrated and justified. Fourthly, ethical consideration for such research conduct will be discussed.

2.1. Possible Methods for Studying Gossip

Research on gossip is by definition methodologically challenging. Although gossip is omnipresent in everyday life indicated by the anthropological studies, the limited explicit analysis on gossip reflects the difficulties of gossip studies (Merry, 1997). Empirical studies on gossip are primarily ethnographic focused and mainly conducted in the domains of anthropology, sociology and psychology with certain attention paid by gender and sociolinguistics studies, and is relatively absent in communication where research on rumour comprised a relatively large share of. As Kniffin & Wilson (2005: 279) remark, “the wide variation in opinion and action concerning gossip reflects more than traditional, discipline-specific biases of methodological collectivism, which is common to anthropology, and methodological individualism, which is common to psychology”. Broadly speaking, an anthropological perspective considers the value and importance of gossip as a socio-cultural phenomenon. A sociological perspective regards gossip as a form of socialization and narration, also a way of meaning construction. An evolutionary psychology perspective points to the evolving function of gossip that facilitates bonding of large social groups. Part of the empirical studies draws on a functionalist perspective considering gossip as a form of monitoring and criticism device on normative rules maintenance. It is penetrated into organizational research as information transmission and power construction (Noon & Delbridge, 1993), as discouragement of solidarity (e.g. Tebbutt & Marchington, 1997; Percival, 2000), as counterproductive poisons towards the accomplishment of organizational goals (Baker & Jones, 1996), and as a form of individual and collective resistance by undermining managers (Roscigno & Hodson, 2004) or empowering employees towards opinions expression and exchange at work (Hallett, et al., 2009).

Regarding archive studies on gossip, Besnier’s (1993) study utilized Nukulaelae islanders’ letters as less formal sources of documents and human products to provide primary empirical evidence that would otherwise not be available for the interpretation and exploration of affective-involvement. It is not a direct research on gossip, and yet characteristics of gossip emerged from this linguistic genre of communication through expressing information and emotion on letters. Therefore, archive studies, as inspired by Besnier (1993), can be considered as a research method and a source of research conduct on studying gossip. Sources of documents, such as the Nukulaelae letters, are not only

the content of empirical evidence, but also provide guidelines assisting researchers to build up a big picture to understand the topic studied, to peel the layers of stories constructed by language and of meanings constructed by the stories, and to reach implications generated from and behind the story. Attention is paid to both what is written on documents, and how it is written at social and cognitive levels.

Diary method can be argued as providing “a solution to the problems of researching the often private, unseen and unheard worlds of gossip in organizations” (Waddington, 2005a: 221). Waddington (2005a) utilized a structured diary record (see Figure 2) with an additional writing detail required of work-related gossip which participants were asked to record as soon as they can, at least once a day for the purpose of record accuracy. Practices of diary method can collect empirical evidence in participants’ nature life contexts such as the workplace, and phenomena and processes like gossip can be accessed in their natural settings in opposition to laboratory setting (Ohly, et al., 2010). Through recording daily or even several times a day, diary method provides a platform for participants to express thoughts, feelings and understandings towards certain events in their own words, and for researchers to reach the situational comprehension of the events and experiences by apprehending and analyzing the gathered information. Diary method can be the eyes and ears for researchers to see the unseen and to hear the unheard,

Record sheet

Date..... Time..... am/pm Length of time of incident approx..... minutes
 No of people involved.....Females/.....Males

Where the incident took place:
 Nature of your interpersonal relationship with the person(s) involved (please circle):
 Work relationship only/friends atwork/friends outside of work/partner/family member/other-please specify

I disclosed	very little	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	a great deal
Others disclosed	very little	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	a great deal
Social integration	I didn't feel part of the group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I felt part of the group
Quality	unpleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	very pleasant
Initiation	I initiated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	others initiated

What did you gossip about?
 How did you feel at the time the above took place?

Figure 2. Sample Diary Record Sheet (Waddington, 2005a: 226)

enabling researchers to explore gossip in richer and more in-depth detail. However, one could suspect whether such method can actually generate a contextual understanding of the unseen and unheard without involving in the context in any way. It could also be highly challenging for such method to not be the subject of report inaccuracy of self-assessment. Therefore, diary method as a single method is insufficient (Waddington, 2005a), and “eclectic, multimethod research designs are necessary in order to manage the challenges associated with capturing and preserving the elusive nature of gossip” (Waddington, 2005a: 221).

Several empirical studies on gossip have been conducted innovatively using experimental research design, “all relying on hypothetical vignettes” (Foster, 2004: 92). The studies are principally psychological including evolutionary psychology (e.g. McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002; McAndrew, et al., 2007; Piazza & Bering, 2008) and social psychology (e.g. Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011), mainly concerning individual behaviour as response or engagement toward gossip under specific situations of self-serving or group-serving. Subjects of the studies were told that they were participating in “information processing study” (Cole & Scrivener, 2013: 254) based on a decision that “not to label the task as ‘gossip’” (Cole & Scrivener, 2013: 256) in order to avoid social undesirability effect. Experimental research on gossip can be constructed by setting certain imaginary scenarios based on particular hypotheses (e.g. Wilson, et al., 2000). Alternatively, instead of being designed by researchers, experimental research can enable participants to construct gossip scenarios (e.g. Cole & Scrivener, 2013). Furthermore, experimental research can also be conducted via game design with role-plays that often put individuals into social dilemma situations (e.g. Piazza & Bering, 2008; Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Feinberg, et al., 2012; Feinberg, et al., 2014). Experimental research design studies gossip as a relational phenomenon with particular focuses on fabricated contexts, and through triggering, gathering and examining reactions of participants as relevant human behaviour. Nevertheless, differences between experimental behaviour and real-life behaviour, and between short-term decision and long-term response inevitably exist. Notwithstanding that, experimental research can support researchers to effectively test hypotheses and collect responding data.

Interview is one of the most frequent-used methods in empirical studies on gossip (e.g. Johnson & Aries, 1998; Glinert, et al., 2003; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005), including

structured interviews (e.g. De Gouveia, et al., 2005) and semi-structured interviews (e.g. Waddington & Fletcher, 2005; Mills, 2010); face-to-face interviews (e.g. Johnson & Aries, 1998; Glinert, et al., 2003; Hafen, 2004) and telephone interviews (e.g. Hafen, 2004; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005). The interview studies on gossip explored the definition and typology of gossip through researching parameters (e.g. De Gouveia, et al., 2005), functions as the serving purposes of gossip (e.g. Hafen, 2004), and effects of gossip (e.g. Waddington & Flecher, 2005; Mills, 2010). In particular, De Gouveia, et al. (2005) apply structured interviews, and aim to explore how people understand the phenomenon of gossip in the workplace and to develop a definition and parameters of the concept 'gossip'. The interviews utilized in the study captured some layers of interviewee' understanding of gossip in everyday life. Yet for studying gossip as a fluid social phenomenon and without the interactive flexibility of switching interview questions or directions that *flow with* and *emerge throughout* interview processes, such layers of understanding captured are insufficient to support what De Gouveia, et al. (2005: 58) expect as to "arrive at the perspectives of how participants create meaning within the realm of gossip".

Despite that, interview studies offer a clear focus on studying gossip through selecting particular groups of participants. For example, Hafen (2004) study on different purposes served by different types of gossip in organizations by selecting six managers, six professionals, four board members, three general members, two secretaries, two technicians from three different companies, and five faculty, two staff members, and one administrator from a college, exploring different gossip as "the voice from organization's underbelly" (2004: 238). Hence, interviews enable researchers to explore answers by gathering, comprehending and analyzing spheres of reality constructed by interviewees by experiencing particular situations. Nonetheless, Johnson & Aries (1998: 222) rely on "account by women about the centrality of talk in their friendships rather than on direct behaviour observation". The discrepancy between what one says in interviews and what one actually does contributes to possible intentional and/or unintentional misdirection of the researchers' comprehension constructed during interviews, of further adjustment of interview questions and processes, and of data analysis processes. Therefore, "it is important to consider the risks of over-relying on interview accounts when making specific claims of how people 'really' think or experience their work" (Costas & Kärreman, 2015: 6, see also Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). It is essential to reflect on the

extent to which interviews can be managed as it can create unforeseen side-effects (Costas & Kärreman, 2015).

Considering on-line research, Harrington & Bielby (1995) focus on the electronically mediated conversation on “BBS [electronic bulletin boards] gossip about the entertainment industry, in particular, celebrities and television series” (1995: 610) in order to explore how impersonal trust generated by non-traditional information transmission mode and how the social context modifies gossip. The BBS messages, as “observable ways” (Harrington & Bielby, 1995: 607), offer recorded conversations with ways of constructing communication through words, punctuations and sentence structures as information transmission and emotion expression, and act as a medium for researchers to perceive and to analyze the meaning beyond the written messages. On-line research, with levels of anonymity, enables researchers to consider both explicit and implicit interactional specifics and to explore the interaction dynamics demonstrated and/or hidden in conversations.

Questionnaire studies on gossip explore what gossip is (e.g. Jaeger, et al., 1994), why people gossip (e.g. Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012), and what possible relationship between gossip and other variables, such as probable functions such as cultural learning (e.g. Baumeister, et al., 2004), and its underlying relationship ties such as friendship (e.g. Ellwardt, et al., 2012) and workflow ties (e.g. Grosser, et al., 2010), can be. Participants of the questionnaire studies are often predominantly or even exclusively female (e.g. Jaeger, et al., 1994). Questionnaires are designed into three main types, including explanation of self-behaviour (e.g. Grosser, et al., 2010), evaluation of familiar someone or particular situations in the past (e.g. Jaeger, et al., 1994; Baumeister, et al., 2004), and assessment of hypothetical situations (e.g. Blumberg, 1972). Even though the term ‘gossip’ was not mentioned in Blumberg (1972), the study utilized the conceptual characteristics of gossip to explore how communication flows (Blumberg, 1972: 158). Questionnaire studies provide researchers with a specific focus on particular aspects of gossip. However, not only the response rate of questionnaires and the representativeness of the chosen participants need to be considered, but also the possible loss of the reciprocal gossip relations should be concerned.

Empirical studies on gossip are illustrated with reference to study confidential gossip empirically. The methods illustrated above are different perspectives and possible ways of studying gossip, but not preferred in this thesis to study the constitutive nature of confidential gossip with situated social processes and power practice in organizations. Ethnography with participant observation provides a unique way of involving, observing, explaining and understanding everyday life in an endogenously produced setting, which can enable me to reveal the contextual and social dynamics circulating between front stage and back stage, and to collect empirical evidence that would not otherwise be possible to gather. It is chosen as the preferred method for this empirical study, which will be further discussed in the following sections.

2.2. Ethnography as a Method for Studying Gossip: My Preferred Method

As C. Wright Mills (1959) indicates in *The Sociological Imagination*, the issue in question “is to grasp what is going on in the world” (1959: 7, cited in Czarniawska, 2014). As the plan is considerably ambitious, his followers, Erving Goffman and Herbert Blumer, delimit research scopes to particular times and spaces by simply asking, “what is going on here” (Czarniawska, 2014: 2). The specification of time and space can generate better focus on particular phenomena, specifically in terms of certain kinds of behaviour and culture, which can be tied together by ethnography. In this sense, we are all born to be ethnographers through interpretations of life – we recognize who our parents are and who ourselves are; we learn what to do and what not to do. This section will consider existing ethnographic studies on gossip as what is tied together through residing oneself at the heart of social life, and ethnography in general as the knot itself.

2.2.1. Ethnography and Participant Observation in General

The unbearable slowness of ethnography – from ‘getting in’ to ‘getting out’ to ‘writing it up’ – is an enduring feature of work. The question both Tony [Watson] and I ask is why the devil would anyone put himself or herself in such a woeful situation voluntarily?

– John Van Maanen (2011a: 220; see also Watson, 2011: 204)

Ethnography concerns to understand and to write about the human (‘graphy’) as a ‘cultural being’ (‘ethno’) (Watson, 2011: 206). It is initially practiced by anthropologists with an ‘armchair mode’ of cultural investigation by remaining at home and reading about exotic places and peoples with the critical support of pen pals, or it was carried out based on a stiffing practice of interviewing (Van Maanen, 2011b: 15-16). The turn on personal experience that altered emphasis from what people said to what they did is credited in Britain to Bronislaw Malinowski and in America to Franz Boas (Van Maanen, 2011b: 16). Yet the term ‘ethnography’ is ambiguous as “[it] is not clearly defined in common usage...and there is some disagreement about what count and do not count as examples of it” (Hammersley, 1990: 1). Every field situation is different, and being in the right place at the right times and taking right notes in relationships require skills and

practices (Sarsby, 1984). Therefore, this thesis draws on a stance and understanding of Van Maanen (2011b: 35) that,

“I do not regard fieldwork as the simple observation, description, or explanatory technique that radiates from the older, objective, laws-and-causes view of human behaviour...I regard the relation between the knower and the known to be a most problematic one and anything but independent in cultural studies. This is a phenomenological war whoop declaring that there is no way of seeing, hearing, or representing the world of others that is absolutely, universally valid or correct. Ethnographies of any sort are always subject to multiple interpretations. They are never beyond controversy or debate”.

Moving from tribal and urban fascination, organizations with its complexity, uncertainty and confusion gives rise to organizational ethnography, particularly during the path-breaking Hawthorne studies where William Lloyd Warner intrigued by the insights of informal social organization and “fathered industrial or organizational anthropology” (Baba, 2006: 87, cited in Garsten & Nyqvist, 2013). As Ybema, et al (2009: 1) remark, “although the quotidian experiences of people working in organizations may, to some, hardly seem exciting, for organizational ethnographers must of the intriguing ‘mystery’ of organizational life is hidden in the ordinary exchanges of ordinary people on an ordinary sort of day...The ‘ordinariness’ often prevents us from seeing it: we tend to have a blind spot for what is usual, ordinary, routine”. Here, as they stress, “is where organizational ethnography makes its contribution” (Ybema, et al., 2009: 1).

It brings the particularities and ‘irrationalities’ of off-the-stage life (Goffman, 1959) to the fore by giving a view to the variability of forms of organizing, multiplicity of social relations that constitute the forms, diverse connectivity that ties the relations in particular ways, rules that are developed to maintain the connectivity, and sanctions that are introduced to prevent the maintenance from being hindered. This view and processes enable ethnographers to enquire their own sense making processes, and construct the uniqueness of an organization and of specific ways of living the organizational life as (part of) the ‘lived realities’ in and of the organization. These processes and ways of construction require a heightened self-awareness as a reflectivity of the ways in which characteristics of settings, events and actors may shape the knowledge claims researchers

advanced regarding their topics of study as their ‘positionality’ (Ybema, et al., 2009: 9). Such ethnographies, therefore, have the potential to make explicit “the tacitly known and/or concealed dimensions of meaning-making” (Ybema, et al., 2009: 7) and consequently to reveal the hidden sense of the ‘lived realities’.

Moreover, Watson (2011) argues that the much-used notion of lived experience (or lived realities) is taken for granted. I agree strongly with Watson (2011: 208) that “we are not dealing with any notion of absolute, final, or foundational truths”, “even to the truth about [our] own perceptions and feelings” (Hammersley, 1992: 192). However, although we are not free from culture, prevailing discourse and habits of thinking (Van Maanen, 2011a), accepting and reflecting upon such limitations barely imply that we should not make an effort to understand and grasp perspectives of others in and on the world(s) s/he inhabits (Van Maanen, 2011a). Therefore, moving from lived realities to ‘lived realities’ indicates that our understanding and grasp may be uncertain and tentative, but it is an attempt and a process of “coming to terms with the meanings others make use of in their everyday or work-a-day lives” (Van Maanen, 2011a: 227). It requires me, as the fieldworker, to focus on actions and utterances as expressions of social settings that give rise to such actions and utterances, which can be seen as a way of understanding ‘how things work’ in the field. It is an effort to at least “*try to (gulp) ‘get inside their heads’*” (Van Maanen, 2011a: 227, own emphasis added), since it is hardly possible to obtain a magic key that allows a tour inside the Eden.

Furthermore, the specialities of organizational ethnography bring particular challenges related to boundaries that organizations are urged to establish and maintain for ethnographers of studying organizations. For example, in order to maintain certain knowledge and resources as secrecy, right to access will be negotiated with and authorized by organizations, forming certain formal membership and ways of socialization inside and outside the membership circle. With the change of key resources, such protection is prone to be restructured, contributing to possible re-establishment of forms of interaction in organizations. The establish–maintain–re-establish process of boundary generates perplexity and difficulty for ethnographers to accommodate. Additionally, as Garsten & Nyqvist (2013) note, informants or interlocutors are often well-educated and high-skilled professionals who can “challenge or engage the skills of

the ethnographer in ways that differ from the conventional perception of what it is like to ‘engage with the locals’” (2013: 2).

As a key characteristic of ethnographic studies, observation is the prevalent method of empirical evidence collection. There are two common types of observation – participant observation, and non-participant observation such as shadowing (e.g. Czarniawska, 2007) and stationary observation. In participant observation, researchers fully involved with the participants in the social setting (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Collis & Hussey, 2009). In non-participant observation, researchers observe and record what goes on without being involved (Collis & Hussey, 2009). However, it is highly difficult to achieve full involvement or detachment. Regarding participant observation, ‘go native’ can provide rich and better understanding of the phenomenon. It is argued how native observers can be because of the constant tension between being a complete insider and a complete outsider. Despite that, as the adage ‘fish cannot see the water they swim in’, not going native can provide observers with an outsider lens to keep a relatively high level of reflexive sensitivity towards the empirical evidence they collected. As Czarniawska (2014: 5) notes, “one has to step back in order to observe”. Regarding non-participant observation, it is questioned how outsiders observers can be, meaning that we might not be able to entirely detach ourselves from participants and research sites after an intensive stay with possible emotional involvement.

Hence, I draw on Gold (1958) that insider-or-outsider roles of ethnographers should be placed on a continuum (see Figure 3 and Table 2), and note that although the four roles are explicitly positioned by Gold (1958), it does not imply a static character of the roles. Instead, they might sway between levels of involvement and detachment, which is contributed by the uncertainty and unpredictability of fieldwork. Rather than solely involvement or detachment, it is important whether ethnographers can be ‘inbetweeners’ to a certain extent that help them to capture both the phenomena of interests derived from being relative outsiders, and the subtle meanings and implications beyond the phenomena and derived from being relative insiders. Therefore, with the fierce debate of what is and what is not participant observation, participant observation can be considered “when observers are doing the same things as the people (or some people) they are observing” (Czarniawska, 2014: 44). My role as an ethnographic fieldworker needs to be considered regarding the degree of involvement along with other essential factors such as

characteristics of the researcher, research ethics, research length, research purpose and right to access.

Figure 3. Gold (1958)'s Classification of Participant Observer Roles²

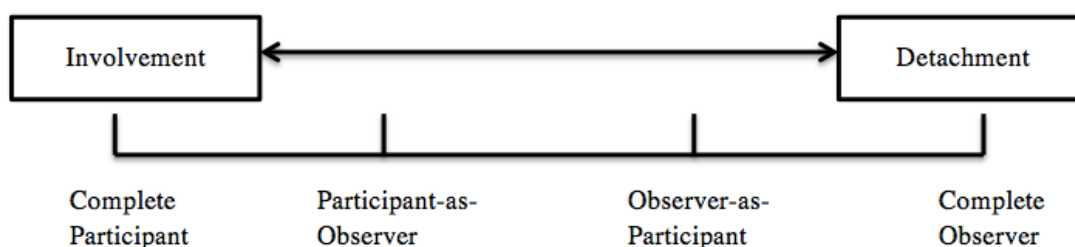


Table 2. Definitions of Different Participant Observer Roles³

Classification	Definition	Covert/Overt
Complete Participant	“The true identity and purpose of the complete participant in field research are not known to those whom he observes” (Gold, 1958: 219).	A covert role, containing the risks of exposure and research failure
Participant-as-Observer	“Although basically similar to complete participant...differs significantly in that both field worker and informants are aware that theirs is a field relationship” (Gold, 1958: 220).	An overt role
Observer-as-Participant	It is used by studies involving one-visit interviews with formal observation during the interviews.	An overt role with less risks of ‘going native’ but higher probability of being misled by informants
Complete Observer	“The complete observer role entirely removes a field worker from social interaction with informants. Here a field worker attempts to observe people in ways which make it unnecessary for them to take him into account, for they do not know he is observing them or that, in some sense, they are serving as his informants” (Gold, 1958: 221).	An overt role, possibly containing lower levels of trust between observer and observant comparing to the other three classifications

² Source: Bryman & Bell (2011: 437)

³ Source: Gold (1958)

Besides the roles of ethnographers, desirable ways of conducting modern studies in an anthropological mode, such as length of fieldwork and ways of observation, has been debated along with the growth of contemporary ethnographies (Czarniawska, 2014). “Some researchers...urge a return to traditional work ethnography” (Czarniawska, 2014: 6), for example, Bate (1997) has excoriated some ethnographic work as ‘jet plane ethnography’ in which fieldwork is a matter of flying visits and “a journey into the organizational bush is often little more than a safe and closely chaperoned form of anthropological tourism” (1997: 1150). Despite that, different lengths of intensive participant observation including the sort of a prolonged period may encounter similar problems, which can be referred to as the problems of participation, of time, of space and of invisibility (Czarniawska, 2007; 2014).

Regarding problems of participation, firstly, the difficulty of going entirely native implies that there are some unobservable areas in organizations, such as certain power-related dimensions, that observers cannot reach with limited access. Observers might overlook and unintentionally overcomplicate the reasons of the areas being inaccessible (e.g. Prasad & Prasad, 2002), which might be simply caused by observers’ participative mode (Czarniawska, 2014). Secondly, in organizational research, when a researcher becomes an employee or an employee becomes a researcher, it can be difficult for the researcher to cope with both work tasks and observation (Czarniawska, 2014). For instance, Roy (1959) worked as a full-time worker in a factor for two months during his data collection process. The tasks of his employee role as to learn relevant skills and to increase the rate of output led him to pay little attention to his fellow operatives. Therefore, a balance between role-demands and self-demands needs to be reached (Gold, 1958).

Regarding problems of time, Czarniawska (2014) outlines science anthropologist Sharon Traweek’s (1992) demonstration that the first fieldwork should be a minimum of one year, and although subsequent trips can be three months, they should be achieved every three or four years. However, fieldworkers can only stay however long they are allowed to stay. The length of stay needs to be tailored based on particular research questions and specific research situations. Furthermore, the acceleration of social processes and shortened time horizons of social structures (Brose, 2004) might contribute to the relative flexibility of length for organizational research. Notwithstanding that, it is uncertain

whether jet plane ethnography with flying visits (Bate, 1997) can form close attention and interaction that “appreciate the range of norms, practices, and values, official and unofficial alike, which characterize that research setting” (Watson, 2011: 207) as part of ‘how things work’ in an organization.

Regarding problems of space, modern organizing is operated via “a multitudes of kaleidoscopic movements” (Czarniawska, 2014: 9) in different contexts. Only sitting in one place as the usual observation conduct, such as one room or one corridor, might not be sufficient for capturing the phenomenon of interest. Thus, it problematizes the role of space as the central locus of participant observation, shifting the emphasis from geographical focus to phenomena centred (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Schwegler, 2013). For example, Bronislaw Malinowski went multilocal when he followed the Trobrianders in the early 1900s (e.g. Malinowski, 1927). Notwithstanding that, it is argued that the more contexts being observed do not necessarily mean a better research it will bring. Given the condition that certain research is time and/or access constrained, selection of contexts should be carefully considered.

Regarding problems of invisibility, “not all interactions require a physical presence” (Czarniawska, 2014: 23). For example, e-mail conversation could be an alternative, as it is difficult for traditional ways of observation to capture computer works (Barley & Kunda, 2001). Durkheim (1995), “belonged to the generation of armchair ethnographers” (Schwegler, 2013: 228), interprets data sent to him by his research assistant (Schwegler, 2013).

The four general issues of participant observation can be aspects to understand the extant ethnographic research on gossip and opportunities of research conduct, which will be illustrated in the coming section.

2.2.2. Existing Ethnographic Research on Gossip

Ethnographic studies on gossip have been predominately conducted by anthropologists with a relatively smaller amount conducted by sociologists. Only a few ethnographic studies on gossip focuses on contemporary organizations, and the term ‘organizational anthropology’ or ‘organizational ethnography’ is rarely mentioned. Drawing on the previous four types of problems for participant observation mentioned in Czarniawska (2014), this section will present the existing ethnographic studies through the four aspects, including participation, time spent in the field, space, and invisibility.

Regarding participation, researchers often work as participant observers. The importance of the role is noted by Hannerz (1967: 45) as that “probably there is no other way of acquiring knowledge about gossip”. Being different from many other studies, Colson (1953) acted as both participant observer and non-participant observer, as she used “formal ethnographer-informant relationship with various elderly people...also attempt to observe what was happening and to meet and to talk with as many people from all age groups as possible” (1953: vi). The 21 formal informants were paid with 25 cents an hour (Colson, 1953). Generally speaking, the ways of participation could be summarized as working employees (e.g. Roy, 1958), and staying residents (e.g. Colson, 1953; Loudon, 1961; Hannerz, 1967; Haviland, 1977; Yerkovich, 1977). Studies conducted by staying in the field as residents, particularly those that set up family as household in the village (e.g. Loudon, 1961; Haviland, 1977), have advantages of building up familiarity in the field, constructing closeness with other residents as potential participants, and observing gossip in informal settings with ongoing relationships.

Closeness and familiarity with fields and participants are essential for ethnographic studies, as it is the key to reveal the meanings of what seems like ‘silly’ behaviour and ‘nonsense’ communication. As Roy (1959: 161) remarks that, “as I began to pay closer attention, as I began to develop familiarity with the communication system, the disconnected become connected, the nonsense made sense, the obscure became clear, and the silly actually funny. And, as the content of the interaction took on more and more meaning, the interaction began to reveal structure”. Therefore, certain levels of closeness and familiarity can shorten the social distance between researchers and the researched, between a constructed understanding of research-focused phenomena and of what is

beyond the phenomena, between readers and their understanding of the phenomena, and between readers and researchers as authors of the studies.

Moreover, during the participation processes, some studies primarily focused on linguistic transmission and conversations (e.g. Goodwin, 1980; Mettetal, 1982; Eder & Enke, 1991; Guendouzi, 2001), as verbal conversations represent certain visible and invisible ways of social interaction. Some studies focus on multiple sources outside observation, for example, Loudon (1961: 335) had access to “a wealth of [unpublished] documentary material” (1961: 335), including “diaries, letters, Christmas cards, family bibles, photograph and scrap albums, lists of wedding presents, lists of guests at weddings, christenings and the like, parish registers, court and hospital records, newspaper reports and other published sources” (1961: 350). Multiple sources can supplement both observation and the understanding of the observation.

Regarding time spent in the field, the ethnographic studies can be illustrated in three perspectives. Firstly, research conducted in different disciplines had different lengths of stay. For instance, some of them were conducted within one year (e.g. Roy, 1959; Cox, 1970; Coates, 1998; Percival, 2000; Guendouzi, 2001), between one and two years (e.g. Colson, 1953; Szwed, 1966; Yerkovich, 1977; Gilmore, 1978; Goodwin, 1980; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005; Hallett, et al., 2009), between two and three years (e.g. Loudon, 1961; Besnier, 1989; Eder & Enke, 1991; Tebbutt & Marchington, 1997), or more than three years (e.g. Haviland, 1977). Secondly, within the same discipline, different ethnographers have different lengths of stay. For instance, in the field of anthropology, Szwed (1966) stayed two years in Roman Catholic parish in western Newfoundland, studying the role of alcohol in social systems via exploring gossip as a means of information flow and of informal and formal decision making in the contexts in which drinking occurs. Haviland (1977) stayed at Zinacantan, Mexico “from time to time over the past ten years” (1977: 186) to study Mexican village culture which gossip is used as competition amongst villagers. Thirdly, even though with the same length of stay, not all studies are conducted at the same level of intensity of stay, as some empirical evidence is collected by regular visits, such as visits during lunch periods in a school (Eder & Enke, 1991), or in formal committee meetings of teacher representatives (Hallett, et al., 2009). Therefore, based on the three perspectives illustrated, it could be questioned whether there can be and should be a minimum length and standard ways of stay that

mark a study as ‘qualified’ ethnographic research. It is difficult, if not impossible, to standardize ethnographic research conduct, because not only different disciplines have certain written and unwritten norms towards empirical studies, but also different research have various purposes and constraints and different researchers can be fundamentally dissimilar in terms of personal characters and ways of practice. However, it does not suggest that there should not be any general advice, such as how research *can* be conducted that passes knowledge from the experienced to the newcomers.

Regarding space, the ethnographic studies have focused on four types of sites as the locus of participation and observation through concentrating on multiple locations, on one particular geographic location, on particular space of a location, or on particular setting(s) of a space. By choosing multiple locations for fieldwork, studies (e.g. Percival, 2000) can generate comparative understanding towards the phenomenon of interest. By choosing a single location, studies (e.g. Colson, 1953; Cox, 1970; Haviland, 1977) are not fixed to one space. Colson (1953) walked around in the village, trying to talk and meet more people. By choosing certain space of a location, studies (e.g. Roy, 1959) focus on activities occurred in both formal and informal settings. Roy (1959) observed conversations and interaction amongst colleagues during working hours and breaks like ‘banana times’. By choosing certain setting(s) of a space, studies (e.g. Eder & Enke, 1991; Coates, 1998; Hallett, et al., 2009; Blum-Kulka, 2014) concentrate on details of communication with verbal and non-verbal exchange such as tones and facial expression, and of behaviour in either formal or informal settings. A single setting can be chosen for observation across different locations. For example, Blum-Kulka (2014) observed dinner conversations in ten Israeli and ten Jewish-American middle-class families, and paid specific attention to explore “gossip in the family through the prism of socialization” (2014: 214). Ethnographers explore different geographic and social layers of sites, trying to observe and to understand the life of others as much as possible.

Regarding invisibility, the ethnographic studies have utilized three types of invisibility when ethnographers are non-participant observers and are absent during the occurrence of (certain) empirical evidence. Firstly, non-participant observers utilize electronic devices to record participants in a particular setting. For instance, Pilkington (1998) left the room when taping started in order to create an all-male environment for the social setting. Secondly, non-participant observers ask participants to recurrently be the

recorders of their social interaction in particular settings. As an illustration, parts of the conversations used as empirical evidence by Guendouzi (2001) were recorded by two of the three groups of participants, including teenagers and teachers. Teenage girls audio-taped their own conversations in one of the girls' bedroom. Teachers audio-taped their interactions in the school staff room. The third type of invisibility can be illustrated using Thornborrow & Morris's (2004) study conducted by videotaping a British TV show 'Big Brother' on Channel 4. The corpus comprises "six half-hour edited programmes recorded at random intervals throughout the series...included 24 episodes of gossip talk" (2004: 252). The invisibility of researchers, specifically the first two types, can be understood as having a lower degree of influence on participants' certain social behaviour, lowering the possibility of participants to perform rather than to behave, creating a relatively more natural environment with the reduction of observer effects. Despite that, the influence of recording devices as a representation of the researchers on participants should not be ignored. Besides, such invisibility might cause the loss of opportunity for capturing subtle interaction that can only be understood by being in the same social setting and engaging in the social dynamics and its change. Alternatively, Schwegler (2013) notes the power of strategic absence during the study on New Law of Social Security in Mexican Federal Government when the New Law had already been developed and the opportunity of direct observation was lost. By gathering the retrospective accounts of key meetings from participants, Schwegler realized that "my participants were actually re-creating the debates *through* me. They were not simply relating the past; they were talking to one another through me..." (Schwegler, 2013: 230, emphasis added).

Illustrations above both explicitly and implicitly shed a light on the diverse, inventive and haphazard ways and nature of doing ethnography, which makes ethnography intriguing and attractive. In terms of participation, time, space and invisibility as problems and opportunities of ethnographic studies, there is no magic formula or immutable rule to determine the appropriate amount of sites that one should visit, how to use presence or absence, and in what proportion presence and 'strategic absence' (Schwegler, 2013) should be combined. And it is to the research design of this specific ethnographic study on confidential gossip I now turn.

2.3. Research Design

Moving from the general methodology to this study, in this section I will discuss the particular design of this empirical study on confidential gossip through four parts. Firstly, I will illustrate the reasons for choosing the ethnographic approach through the complexities and challenges of studying confidential gossip. Following the reasons as ‘why’, I will then discuss the ‘how’ as the design of this organizational ethnography through six aspects, including purposes and focus of the study, roles of involvement in the field, ways of involvement in the field, length of involvement in the field, fieldnotes, and the exclusion of interviews. Thirdly, I will illustrate organizational ethnography as a way of writing confidential gossip by adopting a confessional tales. The last part of this section will show the pilot study that indicates the plausibility and practicality of the research design, and points out two tension and difficulties for the full study.

2.3.1. The Complexities and Challenges of Studying Confidential Gossip

Studying confidential gossip involves complexities and challenges above and beyond research on gossip in general. Due to the characteristics of confidential gossip as informal evaluative communication that selectively circulates intentionally and informally concealed knowledge within a particular social network, it is difficult to make certain informal communication and knowledge sharing explicit and observable to the third party – me, as the researcher. Social relations that are constructed and developed within a particular social network containing a certain level of closeness and trust that decides how and/or how much I can be understood by participants in the field. Participants of confidential gossip are selected based on social relevance towards certain knowledge, events and/or social groups, and possibly anticipation of how they will engage with the information. Thus, attaining levels of familiarity posts opportunities and challenges as it can construct and shape degrees of social relevance, and influence my engagement in confidential gossip and meaning making of such engagement for insiders.

Yet as a participant in the field, the sense of ‘real’ identity as a researcher can be a barrier between them and me during processes of socialization and trust construction as they may initially perceive me as who I *really* am before considering who I am *in here*.

Moreover, with the time limit of my PhD study, it is more challenging to construct a preferable level of closeness and trust with participants. Despite that, such familiarity can generate tension for the dual roles of being both an insider and outsider. Therefore, possible deconstruction of the constructed closeness and trust might emerge, such as the suspicion of whether I will be the one who reveals certain confidential knowledge to inappropriate others, including outsiders and the wrong sorts of insiders. This is also contributed by the feature of confidential gossip with negotiated boundaries that increase the difficulty of understanding and maintaining them. Informal secrecy can build up various subgroups within the circle of insiders embedded with subtle differences and confusion of identifying who 'we' really are. Hence, as a form of informal secrecy, the unwritten membership of confidential gossip might have an impact on generating misperceptions towards who I *should* share the information with, contributing to the probability that I might unintentionally become a whistleblower of a social group and may be socially excluded from the networks.

In this thesis, I consider confidential gossip as a socially constructed practice in a way that it does not lend itself to uniform explanations or simply formulaic definitions. Characteristics that distinguish confidential gossip from other ways of speaking "are located not only within the content of the speech itself but also within the social relationships and situations in which they are used" (Yerkovich, 1977: 196). With challenges and characteristics of confidential gossip, I choose organizational ethnography as the methodological design and a curious kind of empirical work for this study for two reasons. Firstly, I cherish organizational ethnography with the practice of participant observation as it can turn me into an insider of a particular site and an observer of specific contexts to explore dimensions of socialization and layers of organizational life. As Edgar Schein notes in relation to his work on secrecy and in-groups, "you had to be a real insider to know" (Schein, 2010: 100).

Secondly, I treasure the capabilities empowered by organizational ethnography as it enables me to "decode, translate, and interpret the behaviours and attached meaning systems of those occupying and creating the social system being studied" (Rosen, 1991: 12) as "perhaps the most telling way – of learning 'how things work' in the equivocal and enigmatic worlds of organizations and management" (Van Maanen, 2011a: 218). I perceive organizational ethnography as a frame of thinking as "a kind of intellectual

paradigm” (Bate, 1977: 1153), a method of empirical evidence collection as “the ‘doing’ of ethnography” (Bate, 1977: 1153), and a way of writing and representation. Organizational ethnography is not a singularity of method – it is a multiplicity of research and integration of different spheres of organizational life, comprising what Van Maanen (2011a; 2011b) indicates as ‘fieldwork’, ‘headwork’ and ‘textwork’.

2.3.2. Organizational Ethnography as a Method of Studying Confidential Gossip

Building on ways of participation, restrictions and virtues of time length, levels of access with degrees of visibility, characteristics of the researcher, and challenges of the topic studied, how we engage in the field is largely shaped by what we want to know. Fieldwork practices are contextually and biographically varied (Van Maanen, 2011a; Watson, 2011). In this section, I will particularly focus on the empirical design of the study by structuring the section into four topics – the purposes and main focuses of this organizational ethnography, the roles I undertook in the field, the ways I engaged with participants as ways of involvement in the field, and fieldnotes taking. As it is often the case where participant observation is bundled with interviews, I will also explain why interviews were not applied in this empirical study.

Purposes and Focus

The research question of this thesis is ‘how confidential gossip constitutes organizations’. As discussed in chapter 1, at the heart of confidential gossip lies organizational relations that are the cause and consequence of confidential gossip, and entails sharing and breaching secrets through making and breaking bonds. The purpose of the ethnography, therefore, was to access and participate in these processes. In order to provide myself as the fieldworker with clearer aims in the field, the research purpose could be narrowed down with possible and specific focuses, including:

- What kinds of things are or construct the subjects of confidential gossip?
- How do participants in confidential gossip circle select other participants?
- How is confidential gossip imparted and negotiated?
- What happens if confidential gossip is revealed or betrayed? What sanctions, if any, are applied?
- Whether and how confidential gossip relates to the operation of power and the construction of individual and group identities?

Therefore, the intention was not only to capture what and how members do as daily practices in an organization, but also to understand why they behave the ways they do. Hence, this study was designed to focus “on the low rather than the high, on the ordinary

rather than on the event” (Rabinow, et al., 2008: 73) in order to experience and apprehend ongoing behaviour and continuously negotiated interrelationships rather than acquiring snapshot-like views of actions.

Following such focus, this study was positioned as informal communication for three pragmatic reasons. Firstly, as illustrated in chapter 1, processes and influence of confidential gossip as a metaphorical crayon of social relations are drawn largely on its social embeddedness and fluidity of practice. It points to the impossibility of devising a study which involves observation of and participation in only confidential gossip. If it was to be found, it would be embedded in wider interactions. Secondly, there was an ethical tension here: ethics dictated that the gatekeeper be aware of what the project was hoping to achieve, but to have made it explicit to the employees that confidential gossip was the focus would almost inevitably have made it impossible for me actually to be included in confidential gossip. Thirdly, in any case, it was unknown at the outset that the study would even yield any material on confidential gossip and, had it not, then the focus of the research would necessarily have had to focus on some other aspect of informal communication.

Furthermore, ethnography in (complex) organizations, as Garsten & Nyqvist (2013: 16) note, “raises the question of the possible, conceivable and reasonable forms of engagement between researchers and researched”. Therefore, alongside the general position of the study, my roles and ways of involvement in the field were considered.

Roles of Involvement in the Field

I undertook the role of an intern in Quinza during the fieldwork. In doing so, I embraced the combination of roles as both a participant observer and an observing participant, and therefore encountered challenges and difficulties of the balance between role-demand

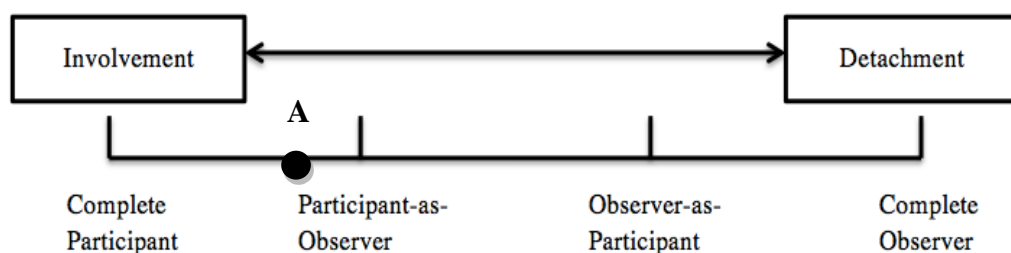


Figure 4. Roles of Involvement in the Field

and self-demand as a participant and observer. Thus, in Figure 4, point A that symbolizes my roles of involvement in the field is located in between ‘participant-as-observer’ and ‘complete participant’ with four implications. Firstly, the position represents a higher level of involvement than detachment, as constructing reciprocal familiarity and trust between researchers and the researched in this fieldwork was perhaps more challenging than in general ethnography: “the researcher has to become part of the in-group, which, specifically for informal secrecy, requires a certain level of trust, established through closeness, mirroring the process of informal secrecy itself” (Costas & Grey, 2016: 152). To study confidential gossip, it was necessary for me to be part of ‘them’ in the informal social circles to access subtle sharing and exchange processes of verbal and/or non-verbal cues and communication that form, maintain and/or cease confidential gossip. Such social formation of relations had no shortcuts, “no ways to ‘learn the ropes’ without being there and banking on the kindness of strangers” (Van Maanen, 2011a: 220) and thus “risks exclusion from privileged activity” (Mitchell, 1993: 51). In this sense, rather than studying an organization, I was studying *in* the organization for locally produced understanding. Concurrently, a certain level of detachment was essential to ensure that “one is close enough to see what is going on, but not so close as to miss the wood for the trees” (Bate, 1997: 1151), as the ‘ordinariness’ of organizational life could blunt my sensitivity toward practices of confidential gossip, especially with its social embeddedness and fluidity in wider interactions. Moreover, point A indicates that I did not prioritize the role of participant over observer or vice versa, since it was difficult, if not impossible, to fix one of the two roles as the prime concern.

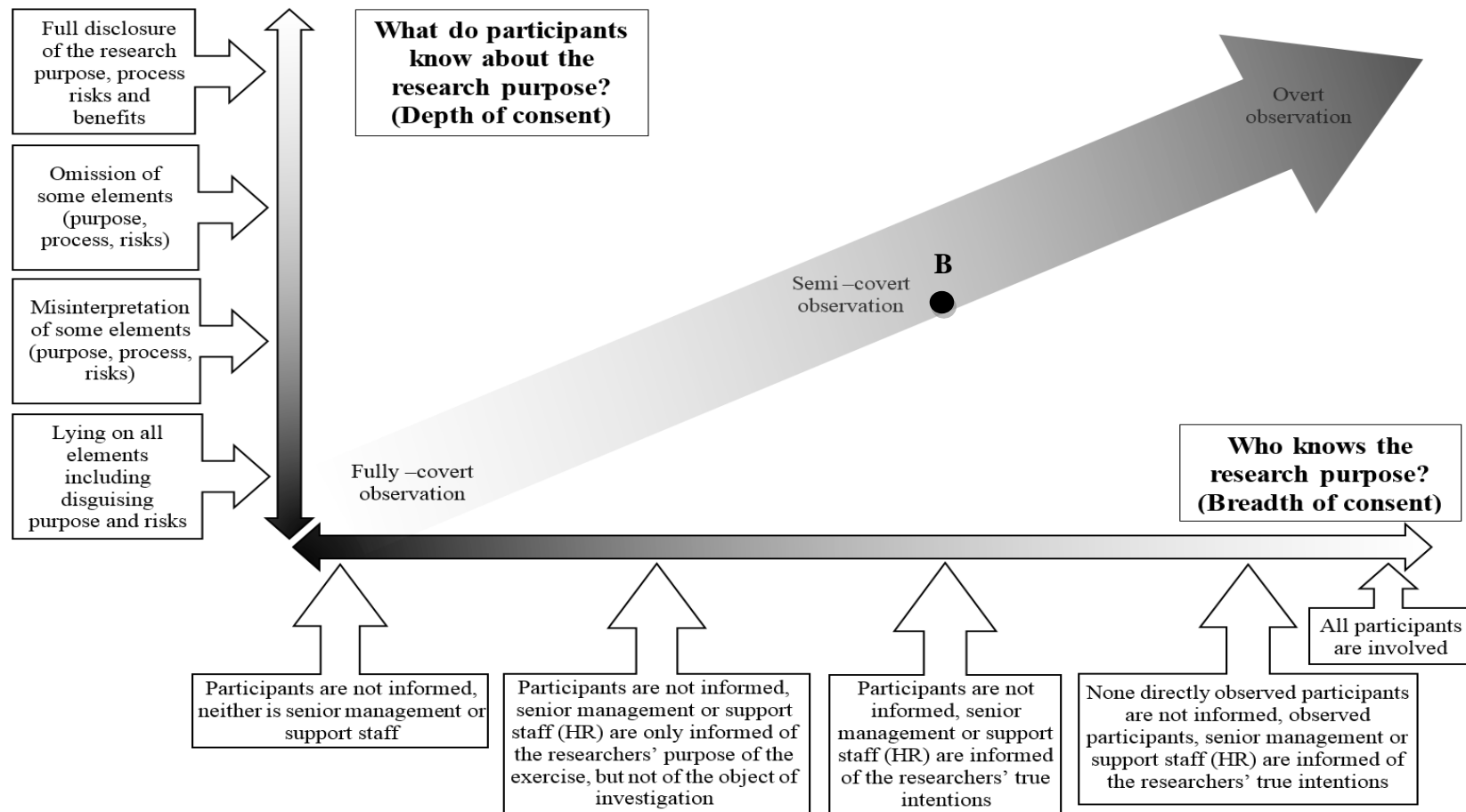
Secondly, point A is not located in the middle of participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant. It is contributed by the perception of balance between different role-demand. ‘Balance’ here does not refer to being half involved and half detached in the field; rather, it points to the compatibility of roles that playing one role does not dismiss the necessity of and the tasks that are required to be completed by the other. The role of fieldwork combining and shifting between participant and observer has been variously described as the ‘marginal native’ or ‘professional stranger’ (Bate, 1997; Van Maanen, 2011a), migrating between inside and outside of an organization in the state of both body and mind, and negotiating and managing the body as a site of representation towards part of the organizational life. Therefore, as the third implication, locating point A on the

continuum hardly refers to a static status or fixed position of involvement and participation in the field.

Fourthly, as shown in Table 2 that ‘complete participant’ refers to participant observers whose true identity and purpose are unknown to the researched (Gold, 1958: 219), whilst ‘participant-as-observer’ points to an overt role where the researched is aware that it is a field relationship (Gold, 1958: 220), point A that is positioned in between this two roles implies aspects of this study were covert due to practical constraints illustrated previously through the three reasons for the general position as informal communication. Being constituted by characteristics of confidential gossip, potential impact the characteristics have on fieldwork, and uncertainty and unpredictability of fieldwork itself, the covert aspects involved ambiguities of research purpose. Yet it did not involve identity deception as “pretending to be someone else” (Roulet, et al., 2017: 11) and consequently preclude the concealment that it was not a field relationship.

Further the roles of involvement positioned in Figure 4, Roulet, et al. (2017: 11) note that “observational studies are rarely fully covert or fully overt but usually situated somewhere between these two roles”. Such complexity constitutes the consideration of observational studies through a continuum between fully covert and overt participant observation (see Figure 5), rather than in a black-and-white matter. Drawing on the two-dimensional continuum in Figure 5 comprising ‘what do participants know about the research purpose’ and ‘who knows the research purpose’, this study is positioned at point B for the reason that whilst I did not make explicit of confidential gossip as part of the general focus of informal communication to participants, I did inform gatekeeper of such omission and my full intentions. Such covert aspect provided access to social groups and practices that might otherwise have remained excluded from me. Furthermore, a fieldwork is unlikely to remain in a fixed position in terms of the two dimensions (Roulet, et al., 2017). The sense of social arrangements was developing with the progression of fieldwork and field relations as some participants might have paid more attention to my participation and observation than others, and probably were becoming more aware and sensitive of what I did.

Figure 5. A Continuum between Fully Covert and Overt Participant Observation⁴



⁴ Source: Roulet, et al. (2017: 12)

Ways of Involvement in the Field

As Rosen (1991) remarks, an ethnographic interpretation of behaviour in general society is differentiated from a description of social relation enacted within the nine-to-five space in a way that the complexity of society is different from the complexity of organizations. More specifically, members of organizations have formal, explicit statuses and roles, which decide how they interact and whom they interact with within the organizational space, and are defined by Spooner (1983: 4, cited in Rosen, 1991) as “everyday social awareness”. Even though Spooner (1983: 5) argues that the longer the interaction time lasts, “the more that general social awareness from the outside everyday work seeps back into organizational relations”, forms of socialization are restricted by time, contexts and social norms of the contexts.

Furthermore, studying informality of organizations, especially informal communication in organizations, needs to pick up social aspects alongside job-related aspects of organizational life to capture the connectedness and reciprocal interaction of things occurring in organizations. As Coffey (1999: 53) notes about her fieldwork with graduate accountants, “away from these spatial and temporal contexts (of office), the relations of fieldwork took on different agendas”. Hence, in order to apprehend the social interaction that might construct and/or maintain confidential gossip, my engagement in the field involved formal working hours and informal intervals during nine-to-five and after-work social gatherings as a way to be attentive to social relations triggered and developed in different types of social contexts.

Length of Involvement in the Field

This study comprises a one-week pilot study and a three-month full study in the winter of 2015-16. Whilst by the standards of classical anthropological ethnography this was a relatively short period that was mandated in part by the fact that I intended to establish whether or not confidential gossip was pervasive in organizations. In other words, the issue was not whether – if one stayed long enough in an organization – one might come across some confidential gossip. It was rather whether people *routinely* engaged in such gossip. That clearly requires being there long enough to form relationships with people, but if after three months little or no confidential gossip had been found then it would have discredited the idea of it being pervasive. Moreover, picking up the problems of time illustrated previously, the relatively short period was also contributed to by the

shortened time horizons of social structures and the accelerations of social processes in organizational life. In fact, just from the pilot study, it became clear that it was possible fairly quickly to find confidential gossip.

Linking this section to the previous section about the ways of involvement in the field, my stay enabled me to take part in the company Christmas party, which will be analyzed in detail in Chapter 5.

Fieldnotes

Because of “the frailties of human memory” (Bryman & Bell, 2011: 444), it was necessary for me to take notes of participation and observation in descriptive writing and to keep them as a diary. The diary contained not only field engagement, but also descriptions of particular settings and contexts, dates and specific times of a day. The meaning of acronyms was kept on a separate note from the diary. Furthermore, as the uncertainty and unpredictability of fieldwork triggered personal feelings and reflections of ‘how things work’ in the field or in some cases even *as* part of ‘how things work’, I included such feelings and reflections in the fieldnotes under the section ‘reflections of the day’. Fieldnotes, therefore, provided me with opportunities to analyze the subtleties that were underemphasized during observation, and for further reflexivity and empirical evidence exploration. Additionally, fieldnotes were taken when it did not affect the ongoing social interaction in any possible way, and were recorded at least once every day to keep it up to date.

The Exclusion of Interviews

Although interviews are often used as part of the research design of ethnography, they were not applied in this study for two considerations and concerns. Firstly, because the participant observation was positioned as general informal communication with a partially covert role, conducting interviews might have triggered counter-effects. For example, as interviews involve mutual interactions, I might have (accidentally) shared some information that revealed certain knowledge that I gathered in the field. The information might have enabled interviewees to form a particular self-reflection that specifies confidential gossip as a focus of the study. Thus, through considering the possible reflections of the participants and the compatibility with the ‘covert’ nature of

the research, the interviews were not applied so as to protect and maintain the general position of informal communication and my partially covert role.

Secondly, I carried certain anxieties and burdens during and after the fieldwork, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. Building upon the first consideration straddling the concerns between sharing too much and sharing too little during interview processes, my strong sense of anxiety and responsibility supported the exclusion of interviews.

As it is not ethnography until it is written (Van Maanen, 2011a), organizational ethnography is also a way of writing confidential gossip, which will be the focus of the next section.

2.3.3. Organizational Ethnography as a Way of Writing Confidential Gossip

Writing organizational ethnography on confidential gossip involves decisions towards not only what to tell, but also how to tell it. The decisions are influenced by whom the author plans to tell it to (Van Maanen, 2011b). As Van Maanen (2011b: 25) indicates, “writing is intended as a communicative act between author and reader...Meanings are not permanently embedded by an author in the text at the moment of creation. They are woven from the symbolic capacity of a piece of writing and the social context of its reception. Most crucial, different categories of readers will display systematic differences in their perceptions and interpretations of the same writing”. Hence, writing organizational ethnography is a journey that authors walk through by holding the hand of (imaginary) readers. Just as fieldwork itself that is an intensely personal and subjective process and consequently “there are probably at least as many ‘methods’ as there are fieldworkers” (Kunda, 2006: 237), there are probably as many subtly different ways of writing fieldworks as there are ‘methods’.

To present the attempt of ‘getting inside their heads’ and re-present ‘how things work’, it requires a balance between participants’ voice in empirical evidence and my voice during evidence representation process. Nevertheless, it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a clear line between what it is and what I perceive as it is. Social constructivism indicates what we understand as ‘what it is’ is constructed through our perception of life experience in reality. Different people consider the real world differently, and the concept of one true understanding of the reality is problematic. There might be differences between the ‘real world’ and our perceptions of it, but it is difficult to identify what the differences are and where to draw a boundary between the actuality and our perceptions of it. Writing ethnographic studies on confidential gossip is therefore an account of neither objectivity nor subjectivity – it is a plural account of intersubjectivity.

Therefore, I adopt a ‘confessional tale’ (Van Maanen, 2011b) of writing that brings in the visibility of the fieldworker through social and personal liaisons built within social groups and upon possible developments of confidential gossip. Such writing sheds a light on the random nature of fieldwork (Van Maanen, 2011b), and presents the embodiedness of fieldworkers as a vehicle of knowledge and a construction of indigenous contexts

generated and shaped throughout the fieldwork. More importantly, the embodiedness reflects the social fabrications of confidential gossip in a sense that the very processes of my participation in groups, both socially and bodily, can be aspects of understanding how a newcomer involves in potential circles of gossip and confidential gossip. In this way, the writing serves to establish a sort of ethnographic credibility that “allows a demonstration of the breadth, depth, indeed the relentlessness, of an ethnographic incisiveness seemingly so powerful that it is applied most scathingly to oneself” (Kunda, 2006: 238). It is similar to the consideration of ‘native points of view’, which is not to be seen as “plums hanging from trees, needing only to be plucked by fieldworkers and passed on to consumers” (Van Maanen, 2011b: 93) and hence subject to social inquiry. Fieldwork, in this sense, is an interpretive act. The writing, therefore, is intended to show not only ‘how things work’, but also ‘how such processes came into being’.

Notwithstanding that, adopting a confessional tale with autobiographical details in the writing does not overshadow the voice of participants, as being confessional does not imply the writing speaks *for* them. It is still a historically situated re-presentation and story re-telling of their organizational life and an interpretation of their interpretations, with a metaphorical camera zooming in and out of my roles and experiences based on their importance as part of the social surrounding or even part of the constitution of confidential gossip.

2.3.4. Pilot Study

The pilot study was a one-week trial research conducted in order to get more understanding of ‘what is actually going on out there’ in an organization as testing the water before actually going in, and of verifying some practicalities for the research design.

The field of the pilot study was a media company in Britain which I have called Quinza. Access negotiation for the study required a high level of careful clarification of terminologies, research strategies and research purposes. In negotiating access with a gatekeeper – a senior manager at Quinza – I explained that informal communication would be the focus and that within it I would be seeing if there were examples of confidential gossip. In this initial negotiation, I also made it clear that any such examples would not be reported to the gatekeeper or to anyone else, and that anything published would rigorously suppress the identity of Quinza. Employees at Quinza were informed, by the gatekeeper, that I would be studying informal communication whilst working as an intern. With the undesirable reputation and gossip and informal secrecy, I repeatedly emphasized that this study did not intend to ‘dig up the dirt’ on Quinza, and stressed the more neutral terminology of ‘informal communication’.

The role of the intern was to assist tasks assigned to different colleagues, rather than assisting any particular person. During the pilot study, this role enabled me to walk around the office and to interact with different colleagues, with a lower possibility of being perceived as ‘peculiar’ or overly socially active than doing so without the role. I did not choose either the observer role or the participant role as my priority, as they were interrelated. Because of the various work tasks, I had opportunities to talk to different colleagues. Although the talk was mainly work-related, it allowed me to build up the familiarity between colleagues and me, and between me and the workplace. My participant role supported and enabled my observer role to observe, and the observer role enhanced my participant role to participate as it shortened the social distance and constructed work relations between me and my colleagues in the office.

This pilot study focused “on the ordinary rather than on the event” (Rabinow, et al., 2008: 73) with various kinds of informal communication and interaction in order to catch

continuous behaviour and dynamic interrelations, because a lack of empirical evidence contributes to confidential gossip so far a theoretically fictional term. Accordingly, with its contextuality that what is seen as confidential gossip in one social context might not be perceived similarly in another context, its 'image' in Quinza was vague at the outset of the study. 'The ordinary' therefore was regarded as the wider interaction in which confidential gossip might reside and be cultivated.

I was gradually getting familiar with colleagues and their work. In the afternoon of my second day, Cathy walked up to me with a smile and invited me to the kitchen for tea and cake; "A little afternoon treat", she said. "Sounds lovely", I smiled and followed her to the kitchen. Three other colleagues were sitting around a table, having cakes and chatting:

Monica: You know, one of my [freelance contributors], last time he came to me bringing a pack of receipts. One of them is even from Cheap Burgers! And he had breakfast there! [in a surprised and mocking tone]⁵

Karen: What? Really? Cheap Burgers?! [implies 'I can't believe this']. People laugh]

Ziyun: [asks Cathy] Do you usually reimburse freelancers?

Cathy: Yes, we reimburse them when we want them to come here for meetings or something else. We will pay for their train and lunch, something like that. It is a nice thing to do, right? But (that guy)⁶ just collect the receipts of every single thing he paid for like a bottle of water or something. Maybe he thinks we should pay for everything since he came all the way here.

Monica: He is such a DICK! [emphasizes]

Beth: Alana just walked by our table and left. Maybe she heard you said her favourite contributor is a dick.

Monica: [surprised and covers her mouth] Really?! No!

Beth: But I saw her smile at our table before she left. So maybe she didn't hear [smiles].

⁵ Note: [...] – additional information/explanation

⁶ Note: (...) – omitted conversation content

Within this extract, several important things can be noted. Firstly, this example shows a number of the features that, as indicated earlier in this and previous chapters, gossip researchers have identified as typical. Most obviously, it is evaluative and concerns someone who is not present. The freelancer is being evaluated negatively by the participants because he eats his breakfast at what (for those talking would be understood as) a rather downmarket outlet, and also because he is in the habit of claiming money back for every little item of expenditure no matter how trivial. So he is described pejoratively, and forcefully, as being ‘a dick’.

Crucially, this is not just an example of gossip but of, specifically, confidential gossip, because the possibility that Alana (who commissions this freelancer’s work) has overheard is clearly seen as problematic. The conversation was one that could be shared within the group, but not beyond it. This matters to the participants because Monica is worried that it might have been overheard, and Beth takes pains to reassure her.

This example indicates the pilot study could collect relevant empirical evidence and suggested that the research design was plausible and practical for the full study. Nonetheless, although the feasibility of the research design was verified, two types of tensions and difficulties occurred during the pilot study are worth noting for the full study.

Firstly, as a newcomer to the office, I was an outsider of the social groups (if not entirely), which generated difficulties of understanding certain content and contexts of social interaction. I got some sense of their conversations, however, when they used some brief but symbolized terms such as ‘that thing’, ‘remember him?’, it was difficult for me to follow the conversations. Moreover, many were between only two colleagues and in very low voices, setting boundaries to prevent others from really hearing.

It generated the second type of tension and difficulty – the tension between the roles of intern and researcher. The roles required me to be attentive to the things happening in the office and around me, and to complete relevant work tasks. Although the result of the pilot study was overall satisfactory, it was not the everyday case. I focused more on the social interaction between colleagues than work tasks on the first day and the second day

morning. With my work tasks increasing, I paid more attention to the job, especially on the last two days before my departure.

On the basis of this pilot project, my access at Quinza for the full study was agreed.

2.4. Ethics of Conduct

As noted earlier through the two-dimensional continuum of covert and overt categorization (see Figure 5), observational studies should be identified in terms of the degree of being covert and the degrees of being overt by situating them along the breadth of participants knowing about the researcher's identity as much as the depth of their knowledge of the research purpose (Roulet, et al., 2017). It implies that ethical consideration of this partially covert study should be context dependent, as "it is in the particular cases of the here and now with participants that ethics are situationally accomplished" (Calvey, 2008: 908). Therefore, the consideration followed neither consequentialist nor deontological arguments, as in some way they imply a relatively static status of evaluation and knowing. Instead, the consideration drew on a 'situated ethics perspective' (Roulet, et al., 2017; see also Calvey, 2008) that pays more attention to ethics "as an ongoing social practice" (Roulet, et al., 2017: 16) and "contingent, dynamic, temporal, occasioned and situated affairs" (Calvey, 2008: 912). Rather than offering a final and absolute answer to what is moral or not, ethics of this empirical investigation with its uncertainty and unpredictability required me to morally justify my choice of participation and observation in an ongoing manner.

Regarding the research conduct of confidential gossip, as Czarniawska (2014: x) notes, "doing research means making moral choices, continuously, and often under time pressure. If there could be but one common maxim, perhaps it can be borrowed from medicine: *Primum non nocere!* (First, do not harm)". Ethnographic research is not risk-free for both the researched and the researchers (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007). The characteristics of confidential gossip, as a genre of informal, evaluative and possibly sensitive communication, challenged and required me to conduct the research within ethical boundaries without triggering the dangers of hidden agendas. In this sense, research ethics not only protected the rights of the researched, but also prevented me as the researcher from some possible and potential personal hazards caused by the research conduct. In this section, I categorize the ethical consideration of the research conduct in two parts, including ethics concerned *prior to* the research conduct and *during* the research conduct.

Ethics concerned prior to the research conduct include informed consent and confidentiality. As illustrated previously about the access negotiation prior to the pilot study, I obtained consent from the organizational gatekeeper through verbal negotiation and email confirmation regarding this research's purpose, why this research was worth undertaking, and how the method for empirical evidence collection was to be applied. Particularly in terms of "considerations of privacy and assurances of anonymity" (Sieber, 1992: 44-63, cited in Davies, 1999), I guaranteed, in the verbal and written agreements, to keep individuals and the organization anonymous in any publications.

Two ethical issues were taken into consideration during the research conduct. Firstly, the design of participant observation with social and informational sensitivity could trigger the issue of privacy invasion. Certain ways of participation and observation could bring a sense of discomfort and invasion to participants, and yet it was difficult for me to identify at the outset which ways were acceptable to particular individuals and groups. In this sense, the research conduct required ethical consideration to be part of self-regulation and reflection intertwined with the development of field relations.

Secondly, insufficient protection of participant's identities, both during and after fieldwork, could have unintentional and possibly undesirable consequences for the researched and the researcher. Accordingly, I used forms of significant disinformation without compromising the findings. For example, I positioned Quinza as a media company which is broadly compatible with and yet specifically different from the business of Quinza. Furthermore, I altered certain specific references in reporting stories. A hypothetical example is that if someone confided about being pregnant, I might change it to 'being confiding about sexuality'. In the alterations, I kept the same emotional texture, such as embarrassing or intimate, as retaining what seemed to be the meaning and substance of the stories when protecting the informants. Pseudonyms were also employed in both fieldnotes and written analysis to avoid situations where these themselves might have become a topic of confidential gossip if (accidentally) read by 'unauthorized' others and circulated around particular individuals and groups. Although anonymity can prevent participants from direct identification, their individuality that is persevered in certain habits might be recognized especially through extensive direct quotes, by those who know them well (Davies, 1999), as a way of "deductive disclosure" (Lee, 1993: 172). Thus, I pay attention not only to anonymity, but also to particular

individual characteristics that might have made participants identifiable. As Lee (1993) indicates, “the ‘texture’ of the data may be changed in some instances through the substitution of personal characteristics” (1993: 181), without altering the substance of the empirical evidence.

2.5. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I followed the logic of firstly illustrating existing empirical studies on gossip with possible methods of studying confidential gossip and my preferred method for this study on confidential gossip. The preferred method then was further elaborated as the research design built upon the challenges and focuses of this particular study, which was justified by the pilot study. Following the design, ethics of research conduct were discussed before reaching the chapter summary.

With the growth of contemporary ethnographies, desirable lengths and better ways of observation have been debated. An extended period of participant observation may produce four problems – problems of participation, of time, of space, and of invisibility, which serve as four ways of understanding existing ethnographic studies on gossip. Existing ethnographic studies on gossip have limited focus on contemporary organizations. Regarding participation, researchers often utilize participant observation, whilst there is also a case where both participant and non-participant observation were applied. The main roles adopted by the researchers can be summarized as working employee and staying resident. During processes of fieldwork, some studies concentrated on linguistic transmission, and some other studies focused on multiple sources outside of observation such as archives. Regarding time, research conducted in different disciplines, different researchers in the same discipline, and different research conducted by the same researcher comprised different lengths of stay. Regarding space, ethnographic studies on gossip applied four types of geographic loci for observation: the focus on multiple locations, on one specific location, on one particular space in a location, or on one certain setting within a space. Regarding invisibility, three forms of invisibility were applied: firstly, non-participant observers left the social setting and recorded it via electronic devices. Secondly, non-participant observers invited participants themselves to record their social interaction. Thirdly, online research used a TV show as the source of empirical evidence. Nevertheless, invisibility of empirical study might lose opportunities of capturing subtle interaction and apprehension that is only accessible by being physically present in particular situations.

My research purpose was to explore how confidential gossip constitutes organizations, which was narrowed down into specific focuses such as:

- What kinds of things are or construct the subjects of confidential gossip?
- How do participants in confidential gossip circle select other participants?
- How is confidential gossip imparted and negotiated?
- What happens if confidential gossip is revealed or betrayed? What sanctions, if any, are applied?
- Whether and how confidential gossip relates to the operation of power and the construction of individual and group identities?

I chose organizational ethnography as the methodological design with participant observation for two reasons. One is the complexities and challenges of studying confidential gossip constituted by the characteristics of confidential gossip. The ephemerality of confidential gossip embedded with social complexity contributes to the challenge for a third party and social outsider to capture subtle processes of informal communication and information sharing within a limited period of time. The challenge required me to be both a relative insider in the field for social participation, and an outsider in order to step back and observe. This points to the second reason as the capabilities empowered by organizational ethnography: it allowed me to be part of, decode, translate and interpret social practices of and around confidential gossip and the contexts that give rise to them and consequently are required for them to be understood.

I positioned this organizational ethnography as informal communication in general, comprising a one-week pilot study and a three-month full study. Whilst in a traditional anthropological sense three months was a relatively short period, the aim was to see whether people *routinely* engaged in gossip. My roles of involvement in the field were chosen on the continuum between ‘participant-as-observer’ and ‘complete participant’. A high level of involvement helped me to be part of ‘them’ to understand social structures and subtle meanings inserted in socialization processes. Concurrently, a level of detachment was important, not to be “so close as to miss the wood for the trees” (Bate, 1997: 1151). I paid attention to interactions during both working hours and after-work social hours in different types of social settings with the intention of picking up off-work aspects of organizational life and to comprehend the connectedness and the reciprocal interaction of things that occurred at work. I kept daily fieldnotes with a ‘reflections of

the day' section. Furthermore, to maintain and to protect the general position of this study and my partially overt role, interviews were not applied.

Organizational ethnography is not only a method of studying confidential gossip, but also a way of writing confidential gossip. It is an account of intersubjectivity. I adopted a confessional tale of writing that brings in the visibility of the fieldworker and the embodiedness of fieldwork. It reflects the social construction of confidential gossip in a way that my social participation throughout the fieldwork could provide aspects of understanding about how a newcomer involves in circles of gossip and confidential gossip. Nonetheless, such writing does not overshadow the voice of participants as the metaphorical camera zooms in and out of my roles and experience based on their importance for social understanding and/or constitution of confidential gossip in the workplace. It is still a historically and socially situated re-representation of aspects of their organizational life.

Based on the research design and conduct, I discussed ethics of conduct of this empirical study on confidential gossip, including ethics concerned prior to the study and during the study. I drew on 'situated ethics perspective' (Roulet, et al., 2017) that considers ethics as an ongoing social practice and required me to justify my choice and action in an ongoing manner throughout the fieldwork. Therefore, besides informed consent and confidentiality agreement prior to the research, the research conduct required ethical consideration to be part of self-regulation and reflection alongside the progression of fieldwork. Under the similar rationale, individual identities of participants need to be protected not only after, but also during fieldwork by employing forms of (significant) misinformation to prevent the fieldnotes from becoming topics of confidential gossip.

Chapter 3

The Double ‘Doubleness’: The Ethnography of Secrecy and the Secrecy of Ethnography

Actually, the ends of the continuum from “secret” [research] to “non-secret” [research] probably do not exist and it is the non-dichotomous part of this continuum which is of most interest. All research is secret in some ways and to some degree...

(Julius A. Roth, Comments on “Secret Observation”, 1962: 283)

My current relation with some colleagues in Department H is just like the nature of secrecy itself – they know part of who I am, but they don’t have a whole picture of it. They know part of what I do, but they don’t know what else I do, and they might not be bothered or able to figure out why I chose to do what I do.

(Fieldnotes)

Trust provides not transcendent but situated access – to some secrets, including some that may be critical to understanding that particular scene – but inevitably not to all secrets.

(Robert M. Emerson, Contemporary Field Research, 1988: 183)

As “an ethnography of ethnography” (Kunda, 2006: 238), this chapter is an exploration and reflection of a series of methodological, emotional and ethical dilemmas that emerged during the fieldwork on confidential gossip and located at the intersections of these three quotes. Given the relative lack of empirical work on secrecy and confidential gossip, the aim is to report back on the methodological challenges involved through first-hand experience, drawing parallels between ethnography as a method and the nature of secrecy. Twisted within this is the fact that this study was an ethnography of specifically secrecy and a specific form of secrecy (i.e. confidential gossip), indicating the ‘doubleness’ of ethnography and secrecy and the ‘doubleness’ of the general and the specific. Ethnography as a method in general involves practices of secrecy. By conducting ethnography in specific ways to research a particular sort of secrecy, this study on confidential gossip involved in specific kinds of secrecy in the field and was secret in certain ways. The inherent nature of doing ethnography and understanding secrecy is a procedure of relational knowing. By the very fact of doing ethnography, I came to develop a sense of understanding of secrecy and particularly informal secrecy.

Ethnography in general is heterogeneous and particular. Social relationships in the field are built variously such as styles and types by different ethnographers with particular focuses and personal characteristics. Traits of a specific relationship essentially determine “what sorts of experiences and hence what kinds of experiential and intuitive insights the fieldworker will gain” (Emerson, 1988b: 176). Ethnographic studies on secrecy and gossip are diversified. As Costas & Grey (2016: 153) indicate, “clearly the way in which concepts of secrecy are brought to bear will vary considerably according to the research context, and a sensitization to self-conduct in specific contexts is necessary”. Hence, as an illustration rather than generalization, this study on confidential gossip is indicative of particular dilemmas of doing ethnography on this topic. With the heterogeneity of ethnography conduct, this chapter offers a discussion of some of the main methodological and practical considerations surrounding my relations in the field. Research on gossip and secrecy is by definition methodologically challenging. Knowledge invokes selection and compartmentalization (Drubig, 2001). Research on confidential gossip involves not only processes of such selection and compartmentalization, but also ‘hidden agendas’ behind the doors of the processes, constituting the bricks and mortar of fieldwork. Instead of establishing any kind of rules for ethnographic research on secrecy and gossip, which will be of “dubious utility for

methodological purposes” (Johnson, 1988: 205), this study can be constructive both theoretically and empirically, specifically based on its difficulties and features that emerged throughout the research conduct.

Two main elements contribute to the motivation of writing this chapter. Firstly, this empirical study on confidential gossip is a joint effort of the researcher and the researched. The field and the roles of the fieldworker are continuously “collaborative interactional achievements” (Pollner & Emerson, 1988: 236), being crafted through personal engagements and interactions amongst and between the researcher and the researched (Coffey, 1999). Field relations are both conditions and consequences of this fieldwork, whose importance should not be underestimated or ignored. They are the veins and blood underneath the skin of empirical materials, involved in the construction and production of “textual representations of a social reality of which we are a part” (Coffey, 1999: 120), providing an intersubjective account to apprehend fieldwork above a literal sense. Secondly, in order to present and to gain a contextual understanding of the study on confidential gossip, there is a need to illustrate the ‘undercover’ nature of the research as a reflexive analysis of the fieldwork process and a substantive parallel of the analysis of the study per se. As Emerson (1988b) notes,

“If data, description, and analysis are products of the modes of participation in a broad sense, then understanding those modes of participation is central to evaluating the substantive and analytic claims of any particular field research project” (1988: 176).

Through considering and exploring the field relations, the others and the private self, “we are able to understand the processes of fieldwork as practical, intellectual and emotional accomplishments” (Coffey, 1999: 1).

Prologue: Welcome to Quinza

This story takes place in a media company I have called Quinza in the winter of 2015-16. Quinza is located in a modern building in a lively part of a city in Britain. To most of its employees, Quinza is recognized as a leading company with high-quality work,

with its commitment to knowledge innovation. It has established a clear division of departments with different responsibilities, such as Marketing, Production and IT, which are organized in different parts of the company based on the space needed for a particular department. I arrive in the lobby of Quinza as my first day of the full study, watching the morning inflow as individuals walk briskly through the revolving door passing the security desk and quickly scanning their cards at flap barrier gates. On the other side of the gates, they frequently glance up as the lifts display floor numbers. Some of them frown upon the numbers, then promptly turn to the stairway and ‘disappear’. A day has begun.

The staff member, in a black suit, working at the security desk looks away from the flat barrier gates, looks up at me and asks: “How can I help?” “Hi, I’ve come to see Victoria”, I smile politely. “Is she expecting you?”, he politely asks and as I answer “Yes”, picks up the internal phone. Victoria, who is the director of Department H, has agreed to take me on board for three months as a free-lance intern in the department. Her assistant, Laura, will be my coordinator during the three months to settle me in. To reach the company reception upstairs, I am given a temporary security pass. A receptionist sitting behind a computer screen smiles and asks the purpose of my visit. “I’m the new intern of Department H”, I smile back. “Have a seat” she says, then she picks up the phone and connects to Laura. Victoria, who has just finished her morning meeting, comes to reception and gives me a second warm welcome after the pilot study conducted in the summer of 2015. She introduces me to Laura before rushing to another meeting.

Laura brings me to the office of Department H on a different floor. This office is very bright with many ceiling lights. At first glance, one would hardly identify differences in status, rank or power. The office is open-plan, with many modern and identical cubicles that are connected and separated into several sections. People are sitting in different sections based on their responsibilities. Walking further inside the department, individual offices for senior managers and meeting rooms are located on the periphery. Each of the rooms is decorated with a glass wall that faces the central space and is frosted horizontally in the middle. One can tell whether a room is occupied without obtaining a clear view of what the occupier(s) are doing. There are printers between or on the edge of different sections. The department kitchen is located at the end of the office, with thank-you letters for charity donations, culture club flyers and forthcoming event leaflets

on a wall. Colleagues who have arrived at the office are tapping away at their computers with Post-it notes and piles of paper on their desks here and there. I am assigned a work laptop and a desk with 5 colleagues sitting around me in Section B.

John, who works in facility and safety, comes to invite me for a facility tour. He swipes his card into an office and speaks publicly, “So here is finance. People sitting outside require money, and people sitting here ‘click’ money”. People laugh, “Yep, that’s exactly what we do”. We walk upstairs to IT to collect my staff swipe card. John turns his head to me and says, “Here is IT service. You see they’re staring at their screens and working. When you have a problem, they would ask you: ‘Did you try turning it off and on again?’”, and we both laugh. Upstairs is also an open-plan office that is bigger than Department H and divided into different sections. Before reaching the open-plan office, there are meeting rooms and independent offices on both sides of the hallway for visiting staff or managers, and for departments with small numbers of staff such as facility and safety. “This might be confusing for you at the moment, but you’ll know your way around”, John says and leads me through the hallway, passing by yet other departments and to the first-aid room. “Here is a room where you can lie down if you have a hangover or feel sick”, he explains. “Hangover? Really?”, I ask curiously. “Yes, it happens”, he smiles. “From drinking too much the night before work, or during work?”, I ask and give him a sly smile. “Let me put it this way, some of them like to do entertainment, like bringing clients out for lunch [pause]. But this is all I can tell you. You’ll figure it out”, he says and laughs.

After the facility tour and another visit to IT for settling work email and password, I hurry to a meeting with a production team. Through brothering Laura and another colleague, I finally find my way to the designated room:

Joan: So we have two new colleagues joining us today. Ziyun, can you introduce yourself?

Ziyun: Yes. Hi, everyone. I am very happy to help if you need me [smiles]. Feel free to tell me if anything does not meet the requirement. You can shout at me [smiles], but maybe bring a chocolate afterwards [Everyone laughs]

Amelia: No one shouts at Quinza [then everyone laughs again]

Shortly after the meeting, I receive an email from Laura to the company mailing list, explaining my reason for being here, the length of my stay and my role in the department. I am 'in' the field: but what have I let myself in for?

3.1. The Worried Ethnographer

“Fieldwork may appear romantic and adventurous from the outside, but on the inside there is a good deal of child-like if not blind wandering about in the field” (Van Maanen, 2011a: 220), therefore fieldwork and its different phases can generate various sources of bewilderment at several levels (e.g. Malinowski, 1967; Wax, 1971; Goffman, 2014). For example, before getting immersed in “a world strange and unknown” (Emerson, 1988a: 12), we will not be able to sense what the field will be like; during the fieldwork, we will not be able to alter what it is like or to recognize what will happen afterwards; and afterwards, we might still wonder how certain things happened. Generally, field and fieldwork of ethnography can produce worries of unfamiliarity, uncertainty and unpredictability, involving doubts at different stages of fieldwork that might turn into anxieties about the ethnographic practice. It is similar to what Wintrob (1969) glosses as the ‘dysadaptation syndrome’, which includes a range of feelings such as frustration, fear, anger and incompetence. My case is in some way different from another way of practice in which fieldwork is completed by established insiders, such as Nels Anderson’s (1923) *The Hobo*. Anderson had grown up “in and on the edge of the hobo world” (Emerson, 1988a: 12). As he reflected,

“I did not descend into the pit, assume a role there, and later ascend to brush off the dust. I was in the process of moving out of the hobo world. To use a hobo expression, preparing the book was a way of ‘getting by’, earning a living while the exit was under way. The role was familiar before the research began” (Anderson, 1923/1961: xiii, cited in Emerson, 1988a).

This section thus focuses on my experience as an ethnography neophyte and unestablished insider in the field, providing an understanding of a continual state of worry during and after the study of confidential gossip as a sphere and a struggle of researching secrecy and gossip.

With the encouraging outcome of the pilot study noted in the preceding chapter, I decided the site of the full study would stay unchanged. Yet the decision did not bring complete confidence. The return brought uncertainties, which are different from selecting a new site. To what extent could the positive outcome of the pilot study be pragmatically

meaningful to the full study? Furthermore, returning to Quinza implied the pilot study was satisfactory and I had collected desirable empirical materials during my involvement with the particular social group. I worried that for some sensitive colleagues, my return might be a trigger for them to think that I had found something ‘interesting’ or ‘useful’ in their organizational life through my intentional and/or unintentional participation. They then might pay more attention to my presence and alter certain social behaviour so as not to be part of my empirical materials. Possibly, on the contrary, they might not be bothered by my return, as having a PhD researcher is not an unusual experience. I knew that, whilst the pilot study experience had shown hopeful signs, it did not necessarily imply any favourable outcome of the full study.

Resting on unanticipated and uncertain progress and outcome, the cluelessness of ‘how things end’ generates a sense of doubt and foreboding mixing with excitement, both during and after fieldwork and the writing-up stage, particularly regarding where I would end up exploring and what I would end up knowing. Would I be able to collect empirical materials, or to collect *enough* empirical materials? But how should I define ‘enough’? How much is enough? Will I be able to identify such ‘enough’ and stop accordingly during the fieldwork? I worried whether the familiarity built with a social group during the pilot study faded away and whether I could involve in new social circle(s) to the extent that I become part of ‘the someone’ to whom a piece of informal communication is exclusively shared. Such concern was further spawned by the combination of external and internal factors.

Every field and fieldwork are different, and the same field at a different time is not identical. From the basic level as office arrangement, the full study was different from the pilot study. The open-plan office of Department H had been rearranged after the pilot study, and the social group that was connected by being seated closely together had been moved around individually. During the full study without the prearranged daily schedule of the pilot study, I realized that the office is quiet as a world surrounded by the sound of keyboard typing. Headphone wearing in some way segments the space designed for openness and communication into sections of individual zones. Victoria and I discussed it on the second day of my stay:

Victoria: This department is generally very quiet. That's why I was surprised that you got a satisfactory result from your pilot study [smiles friendlily].

Ziyun: Yes, the result was nice last time. I remember I was sitting in Section C [smiles].

Victoria: Oh, some of them moved all the way to the back now. The office has been rearranged.

Ziyun: Yes, I noticed.

Victoria: So do you want to move around? Or to other departments? What's the strategy?

Ziyun: [pauses] I am not so sure really.

Indeed, what is my strategy? What should I do next? More importantly, why do I not know any answers to these questions? It was a gap between the realization of field differences and the recognition of what the differences would bring. I recognized my ignorance regarding a foundation of organizational life – people come here primarily to perform their job, not to socialize, although socialization is part of work. With daily tasks, quarterly targets and annual performance reviews, colleagues in Department H had tight schedules following by inter- and intra-department meetings, product proposals, plans of completion, marketing, etc. Walking passed the identical cubicles, their busy PC screens and the various colours of Post-it notes, I wondered: would I drown in such silence? Despite the open-plan office making it easier to meet colleagues, it embraced difficulty of getting to know them. On one hand, it shortened social distance within a social group with the convenience of informal communication and in-time sharing, and consequently tightened the social circle. On the other hand, the tighter a social circle is, the more challenging it can be for an outsider to dive in. As one of the biggest obstacles at the beginning of the fieldwork, I met colleagues in Department H every day but it was difficult to progress a conversation from ‘how are you?’ to anything more informal or personal.

Such concern points to the uneven and unforeseen learning in the field that “rests more on a logic of discovery and happenstance than a logic of verification and plan” (Van Maanen, 2011a: 220), which however overemphasized the role of researcher in my mind that was supposed to be ‘the rescuer’ yet with an unshakeable awareness of its

powerlessness. I was more than eager to seek for any bits of empirical materials, as I wrote on the second day of the fieldwork:

Because, I'm a researcher, not simply an intern here. I won't be satisfied by my day just by completing work tasks of the day. Because my basic focus [here] is the progress of empirical material collection.

With the accumulation of worries about the possibility of empirical material collection providing to be a cul-de-sac, I was turning into, to use a Chinese expression, an 'ant on a hot pan', eagerly trying to find an exit out of the current situation. I became desperate and pushy to gather any possible informal communication that might or might not be empirical materials. My intrusive conversation with Laura on the first Friday in the field will serve as an example:

Ziyun: How are you?

Laura: I'm good. You? How are you getting along?

Ziyun: Good, a bit busy. [smiles and make myself sound that I really need help] Can I ask you a huge favour?

Laura: Yes?

Ziyun: When I was here before, it was for only one week and I didn't really get involved in any circle. If it's possible and you want to, of course, can you email me or tell me in person if you prefer, about anything interesting going on?

Laura: [talks prudently] Can you elaborate a bit more?

Ziyun: Yes. It doesn't need to be positive or negative. Just anything if you think you can tell me about?

Laura: [hesitates] Hmmmm.

Metaphorically, she was not ready to open her door to me, whilst I was pushing at it, generating an odd experience that may not have been easy to forget for Laura. My request, I realized, perhaps made Laura suddenly see me as 'a moving monitor'. This atypical experience was like a splinter inserted in the daily interactions between Laura and myself, and was not entirely removed till the end of the fieldwork. Neither was Laura's wariness.

There were other awkward instances that affected my social relations and further empirical material collection, which can be illustrated by two incidents between Tina and me. We shared certain similarities, as we were both interns with a related background in higher education. She privately revealed that she was on a temporary contract and was looking for long-term or permanent opportunities. The examples are two lunch conversations I had with Tina on different days in the kitchen:

Ziyun: How were your interviews? Did you get it?

Tina: [shakes head and looks disappointed]

Ziyun: You will be fine. You will get one very soon.

Tina: Yes.

Ziyun: Do you have any interviews coming up?

Tina: Yes. Two. One next week, and one the week after next week. When I said I would check my emails, I was actually going to check my personal emails.

Ziyun: Oh, that's great. Which companies?

Tina: One is [whispers] Company A, and the other one is Company C. The next interview is on next Tuesday. I won't come in on Monday next week so I can have a long weekend to prepare. They asked me to choose either Tuesday or Thursday. I think I will be quite tired on Thursday after a week at work. So I chose Tuesday. And I can't really take three days off till Thursday.

Ziyun: True. Good choice. What positions are you going after?

Tina: The one in Company A is assistant [of its Department H]. And for Company C, it's in Department A.

Ziyun: Department A?

Tina: Yes, it's about [specialism].

Ziyun: It's perfect for you! [in an excited tone and smiles]

Tina: Yeah [not excited]. I did an intern at Company C before. I, [looks around and whispers], liked it better there actually. Smaller offices. I was closer to the people in the same office. I could chat and have a laugh with them. It's different (from here). But I heard, the department is making people redundant. So I don't think they will hire new ones.

Ziyun: But you saw the vacancy, right? Maybe they need new people, fresh blood [smiles]

Tina: Maybe. It's weird. I'm not sure.

Ziyun: You like to work in that company. Just give it a try [smiles]

Tina: Yeah. I will.

Ziyun: Good luck! And, keep me posted!

Tina: [smiles but looks at me in a weird way] Ok.

However, in the following week:

Ziyun: So how was your interview?

Tina: Can we not talk about my interview PLEASE! [emphasizes in a strongly annoyed tone]. You ask me about my interviews every time! [in an unpleasant tone and unpleasantly looks at me]

Ziyun: [smiles] Sure, sorry.

...

[Then Tina's colleague Janine who I suppose works in the same team as Tina walks into the kitchen and is getting water from the water cooler]

Tina: Hey Janine!

Janine: Hi! How was your interview?

Tina: [stands up and walks to hug Janine] I screwed up the first question! They asked me why I choose [this specialism]. I knew they will ask that and I prepared! But I just couldn't say it! I don't know why! I was thinking 'what the heck?!'

The first conversation shows the willingness of Tina to tell me that she was looking for jobs elsewhere, even with great details of forthcoming interviews and particularly with the fact that she liked Company C “better” for its socialization and the social atmosphere at work which is “different (from here)” at Quinza. The knowledge is considered confidential for Tina as the breach of it to inappropriate insiders could affect her potential opportunities of contract extension in Quinza and draw a less-than-positive image of her as a disengaged intern. Hence, the sharing of secret knowledge created social connection between us, constructing a circle of ‘us’ with a certain degree of commonality, familiarity and trust, though not as much as I hoped. Nevertheless, the “weird way” that Tina looked at me made me understand that I was impulsive by saying ‘keep me posted’ as Tina did not expect me to say this, which is similar to the social invasion in the second conversation.

The second conversation was in a similar social situation as the first. In the first conversation Tina had lowered her boundary and made the decision to *let* me know about her job hunt; in the second, I had *presumed* a social relationship I did not have – the kind of relationship that Tina had with Janine, and *wanted* to know more about the interview. My question “so how was your interview?” might have put more burden on Tina than on myself, as answering the question can be a form of self-exposition whilst listening to it is a process of witnessing and co-constructing such exposition. In this sense, it was an imbalance of social dynamics, as she had to decide to reveal the unknown, a decision she might have regretted after the first conversation, comparing to my position of wanting to know.

The two conversations point to the difference of my social positions between being included as the known and being excluded from knowing, and of the social positions between Janine and me. Being an insider of a social circle is not a ‘yes or no’ question, but a degree located in the outsider-insider continuum. Like reciprocity, the commonality and familiarity constructed in field relations can occur on both sides. It can empower fieldworkers with the privilege of knowing, and can simultaneously put us “at risk of vulnerability, exploitation and hurt” (Coffey, 1999: 41) for both the researched and the researcher, especially with restrictions regarding how to deal with particular interactional difficulties generated from knowing.

The two incidents indicate the issues of boundary and social differentiation embedded not only between social groups, but also in the same groups under different social situations of organizational life. Researching informal secrecy, therefore, mirrors informal secrecy itself as socially sensitive and relational. As Emerson (1988a) notes,

“...participations in this sense is a form of practice in which the fieldworker’s actions serve as tests of the meanings of others, and hence as ways of coming to understand those meanings” (1988a: 15).

For any ethnographic research, it is not easy to begin the process of empirical material collection, as involving in a field in another culture or in one’s own requires “a process of acquiring a sense of the meanings attributed to objects and events in a given society” (Emerson, 1988a: 15). For ethnographic research on confidential gossip, it can be

especially difficult to recognize empirical materials. As an aspect of the double ‘doubleness’, it is to do with the general and the specific, but also to do with ethnography and secrecy. Firstly, the line between ‘gossip’ and ‘confidential gossip’ in practice can be a rather hazy and porous one, and certainly is socially negotiated and context-specific. Secondly, secrecy is not a unitary phenomenon, as Costas & Grey (2016) specify that,

“...it can take on various shapes and forms...Although in some organizational contexts one form of secrecy might be more prevalent than another, more often than not they coexist and perhaps be even intertwined” (2016: 141).

I needed to allow a reasonable period of time to increase my familiarity with the formal and social environments in order to recognize the social formation at work, such as different social groups, to understand how socialization occurs in particular group(s), to learn how to appropriately involve myself in the group(s), and to “make some sense of what I could observe” (Styles, 1979: 139). In my case, rather than being perceived as an insurmountable obstacle, the quiet office was an opportunity for this fieldwork. Compared to a smaller office with employees carrying out similar or identical responsibilities, the open-plan office increased the diversity of and the segmentation between social groups, generating somewhat dissimilar social rituals. Although the design of office space decides how bodies mobilize which might affect social dynamics and ways of social formation, the use of the space is a product of socialization. Thus, with specific architecture design and social dynamics, ‘the quiet office’ did not bring an end to the fieldwork. Rather, it was a matter of when and where people communicated.

Being worried is not abnormal in ethnographic studies, albeit it may not be necessarily inevitable. As Hammersley & Atkinson (2007: 89) note, “the stress will be particularly great where one is researching a setting from which one cannot escape at the end of each day”. For organizational ethnography, it is not the physical setting that we cannot escape; rather, it is the mental cage into which we can be trapped. From various sources, types and levels of uncertainties in general ethnography to this particular study on confidential gossip, this section notes the continual state of worry that whether I could collect any confidential gossip, along with concerns of the possibility of social interaction and of the social behaviour and unintentional consequences of being worried. The struggling process of being worried indicates the very existence of boundaries and memberships of

secrecy between the researcher and the researched and amongst the researched, creating and being created by internal compartmentalization and association of social relations. It partially constitutes to difficulties, uncertainties and concerns of field relations in not only this study, but also ethnography in general. What is true of ethnography is true of secrecy.

3.2. The Inability to Go Native

“It is virtually impossible for ethnographers to become full members of a community not their own. It scarcely bears mentioning, then, that this was also the case for me.”

– Alice Goffman (2014: 245)

As illustrated in the preceding section, many times I considered myself primarily as a researcher. As general ways of practice, both native and non-native ethnographers carry challenging transition of roles in different ways. For example, it can be difficult for native ethnographers to transit from being friends, colleague, and/or managers to being observers (e.g. Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000), and for non-native ethnographers to transit from being strangers and researchers to being participants, associates, and/or even ‘groupies’ (e.g. Goffman, 2014). Being interwoven with two dependent and conflicting roles, it is argued that neither native nor non-native ethnographers can be full insiders or outsiders. Comparing to native researchers (e.g. Swisher, 1986; Swisher, 1996; Kanuha, 2000; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007), non-native researchers do not encompass historical and social preunderstanding and associations with the researched. For my part, situations like the one below occurred, particularly at the beginning of the fieldwork:

During this meeting, people laugh at one point or another. I never understand why. But what I see is a collaborative image as a team and a sense of ‘we’... During his presentation, Gabriel jokes, “Sitting next to Jay [who is absent from the meeting] is like learning daily lessons and constant revelation”. Everyone laughs except me. Then immediately, I laugh as well.

The interactions reveal that certain things are known as informal knowledge or perhaps public secret, which was intentionally expressed ambiguously in a formal context. The laughter itself is a direct indicator of the shared knowing and the pleasure it engendered. I straddled the two sides of a predicament of understanding: I was not completely baffled by the laughter, whilst I did not fully understand it either. I was physically present at the meeting, whereas I was epistemically absent. As Costas & Grey (2016: 117) remark, “the physical boundaries associated with secrecy go far beyond the simple perimeter between inside and outside”. Studying confidential gossip inside a physical setting ineluctably encounters further exclusion and simultaneously inclusion in social architecture with

internal partitions. This section therefore focuses on the attempts and efforts of inclusions and exclusions that occurred in the field.

3.2.1. The Burden of Openness

There is a fundamental difference between the access to the field and access to “happenings and settings that are of interest” (Emerson, 1988b: 176). As the perimeter of informal secrecy goes further than physical boundaries, it is inadequate to solely obtain physical and formal access to Quinza in order to be ‘in’ any sorts of informal communication. It points to two characteristics of the fieldwork: firstly, learning to “walk in the shoes” (Goffman, 2014: 242) of others as imitation and transformation processes of both intern and researcher roles; and secondly, informal communication, especially confidential gossip, cannot be maintained based on a single-direction of informational and social exchange.

The first characteristic refers to processes of involving in ‘what it is like here’ through being more attentive and sensitive towards the normalization of behaviour in Department H, such as how long lunchtime should be, where to sit in a meeting, how much in advance to arrive for a meeting, and what time is appropriate for a lunch invitation. One of the meeting experiences will serve as an example:

During this and other meetings I have attended, I realized that I should take notes when it is needed or when many other people are taking notes, even if I don't recognize the importance. At the same time, as an intern, I need to STOP taking an unusual number of notes when it is not necessary. Other colleagues in the meeting might think it strange if I kept writing things down. And no one takes notes when people are having informal chitchat during a meeting. For me, it takes time to write down the informal talk. However, for others, it must look as though I am taking notes all the time even if the meeting is not so informative.

The fieldnote implies the entanglement and estrangement of formal and informal access to the context, and of who I was and who I was *there*, by attempting to see myself through their eyes. Normative behaviour was adopted through understanding not only who I was

in Quinza, but more importantly who I was to *them*. This points to the second characteristic of openness: that if I intended to get into *their* organizational life, I should open myself up and let them get into *my* organizational life at Quinza.

Therefore, this was not a ‘fly on the wall’ study. I needed to some degree to open myself to others through participation in certain gossip and revelation of some of my thoughts and feelings. Two lunch conversations on continuing days are used as an example:

[Abbey and I agree to have lunch in the kitchen and I walk in a bit later than her. Debra is there with Abbey and Emily. She is saying something in a very low voice with some hand gestures, Abbey looks worried, and Emily sometimes says “yes I understand”. I walk straight to them and hear Debra saying “it was so embarrassing. I shouldn’t have done that.”]

Ziyun: What happened?

Debra: Oh [turns around and looks at me. Debra looks very serious and nervous]. Nothing, nothing really [shakes head. Then she turns back and looks at Abbey].

Abbey: [frowns and shakes her head a bit then nods, showing that ‘no talking, yes I understand’. I guess Debra’s look was telling Abbey that she doesn’t want Abbey to tell this thing to anyone else. Although I can’t see Debra’s eye expression directly, I do see Abbey’s as a reply to it]

Debra: [looks at me] I have a meeting very soon. So I’m going to go.

Ziyun: Sure. Enjoy.

[Debra walks out of the kitchen]

Ziyun: What happened? [Then Debra suddenly opens the kitchen door and whispers something to Abbey. Abbey nods emphatically].

Abbey: She doesn’t want me to tell [pauses]. She just made a blunder. I’m sure it’s not a big issue.

Ziyun: Ok, hope everything is fine.

The serious and nervous looks show that what is being discussed is sensitive and important. Whereas through verbal and non-verbal means, I am denied my request for access to the discussion. However, the following week I see Debra again and we have a

conversation in which I say various things about some problems I am having with my work:

Debra: You look exhausted!

Ziyun: I am. I'm doing a job for Daniel. Need to search for 224 [emphasizes] sources listed in the Excel, and go through all kinds of websites for relevant details. This is tiring.

Debra: [points at me and laughs, but not laughs at me], Sorry.

Ziyun: It's fine. Real-friend reaction.

Debra: Exactly. 224?! That's a lot!

Ziyun: And he told me it's due next Monday.

Debra: There is some good news on Monday, huh? [says sarcastically and shakes head] Did he tell you he will help you?

Ziyun: Yes. I told him I'm not sure whether I can finish it by Monday. Then he said that he will help me.

Debra: He doesn't want to help you.

Ziyun: No [smiles]

Debra: They always say that for the sake of saying it, but actually they don't want to.

Ziyun: No. I'm like an assistant's assistant [laughs]

Debra: [laughs] They just dump things down to you that they don't want to do.

Ziyun: [nods]

Debra: Remember the fuck-up thing I did last week?

Ziyun: Oh yeah! What happened?

Debra: It was a conference call with one of the journalists. It was supposed to last for ten minutes. Then it was actually an hour long!

Ziyun: An hour?!

Debra: Yeah! I know! Then at the end I thought both sides hung up. So I said, 'It was long, huh? He was just keeping going'. But actually the journalist's side didn't hang up [widens eyes and looks shocked]! So he heard everything!

Ziyun: Oh my god!

Revealing my own work problems generates a sense of trust with Debra, strengthening the social bond and generating attachment between us. It opens a door of involvement allowing a renegotiation and redrawing of the boundary, with me now included.

With my partially covert role as a researcher, 'openness' was both vital but also heavily constrained. Hence, openness here refers to a sense of lowering boundaries, and selecting and sharing information under particular social conditions without intentionally contributing to distortion. In this sense, asymmetric information always exists in researcher-researched relations to various extents, especially of secretly studying secrecy. As written in the fieldnotes:

My current relation with some colleagues in Department H is just like the nature of secrecy itself – they know part of who I am, but they don't have a whole picture of it. They know part of what I do, but they don't know what else I do, and they might not be bothered or able to figure out why I chose to do what I do. Under the same rationale, it is just like what I wrote as an understanding of them – I think they don't know, but I actually have no idea whether they know or to what extent they know.

Hence, it is less a question of whether to open up, rather, it is a consideration of what to open and how.

This asymmetric social negotiation in the field suggests that trust is never absolute in ethnographic research (e.g. Humphreys, 1975; Warren & Rasmussen, 1977; Goffman, 2014). Progressing from outside to closer inside, the construction of familiarity and trust that is sensitively reciprocal between researchers and the researched is a deeper methodological concern. It is particularly the case for gossip- and secrecy-relevant research as studying secrecy through secrecy. Asymmetric information inserted in field relations generates hesitations for participants to perceive observers as trustworthy. As conveying secret knowledge creates possibilities of breaching such knowledge, uncertain risks for participants to share secret knowledge can be penetrated throughout the stay of observers. In this sense, all ethnography is secrecy in some ways and in various degrees. Some individuals trust, some definitely do not, some trust some more than others, and trust some for particular purposes but not for others (Johnson, 1988). In my case, a sense

of trust developed between some colleagues and me is emergent and situational, which could not possibly be articulated by any definitive set of rules.

More specifically, the previous example indicates that trust in a relationship can be simply cultivated by you walking in on someone when s/he is upset and needs any sort of comfort, whilst it can be problematic if your walking in is seen as an intrusion and you are not expected to be part of the private realm. The fluid social relation brings complication, as recognition of such moments is individually specific and contextually dependent. Hence, trust “provides not transcendent but situated access – to some secrets, including some that may be critical to understanding that particular scene – but inevitably not to all secrets” (Emerson, 1988b: 183). Constructing trust in confidential gossip research can be (re)conceptualized as “achieving a different sort of relation than one had before” (Emerson, 1988b: 181). Furthermore, Douglas (1972, cited in Emerson, 1988b) urges fieldwork involvement to be constrained to empathy, which is “to feel with, to see things from the standpoint or perspective of the individual being studied rather than to identify with or act from this standpoint” (1972: 26). However, it is questioned whether empathy alone is sufficient to research secrecy, especially informal secrecy. For this study on confidential gossip, solely feeling or seeing things from a relative insider standpoint does not bring an outsider closer to the inside circle within which confidential knowledge is shared. It is essential for me not only to understand what ‘normal’ means in a particular social setting, but also engage in such meaning generation process and further formations of how to be normal, which builds not only my familiarity with them, but also their familiarity with me.

Notwithstanding that, such openness and its constraints generate a tension as a paradox of letting them get close to me with the hope of getting close to them, and simultaneously getting close to them without them getting too close to me. In this sense, echoing the argument made in the preceding section, ‘The Worried Ethnographer’, researching secrecy reflects secrecy itself as socially sensitive and relational. To further the argument, such reflection is decorated with emergent, situational and fragmented trust as an ongoing negotiation and that might vary throughout the process, which is similar to the jigsaw nature of secrecy. It generates the burden of openness in this study through asymmetric information and social relations, which reflects the burden of participating in secrecy. It is an essential quality for ethnographic research in general, as such relations

and the burden facilitate fieldwork as well as help to “define our experiences and understandings of fieldwork itself” (Coffey, 1999: 42). Therefore, on the one hand, the previous examples are ‘discovered’ through ethnography as a way of understanding confidential gossip at work; on the other hand, the very experiences of listening to and engaging in such conversations (or being included in them or not) tells me experientially what secrecy is like, as does concealing from them the fact that I was researching confidential gossip. As the ‘doubleness’ of ethnography and secrecy and the ‘doubleness’ of the general and the specific reveals, what is true of secrecy is true of ethnography, which will be further illustrated in the following section through the burden of hiding.

3.2.2. The Burden of Hiding

Throughout the study, I lived with the tension of seeking to enter the ‘secret’ world of confidential gossip, requiring openness, and of holding as secret the full nature of the study, requiring concealment. It served to develop a habitual behaviour of mine in the field – hiding. I tried hard to hide who I thought I actually was by not initiating conversations related to my PhD or to my research in particular, avoiding such topics by changing the subject – the commute to work, workload, weekend plans and family situations – with possible re-emergence of the previous gossip. Simultaneously, I tried to conceal who I was *not* by hiding my clumsiness as an intern by not only undertaking but also joking about work tasks.

An example of ‘hiding’ relates to where and how I kept my fieldnotes. It occurred at my work desk, in the kitchen, in an empty meeting room on the periphery of Quinza, stairway, and even in the restroom. I stopped making notes in the restroom ever after Ross asked me, “are you ok?”. I switched from pencil-and-paper to iPad when I realized that nearly everyone used electronic devices and hardly hand-wrote anything. Yet not all electronic devices were prevailing during working hours, for example, constantly texting on phone was inappropriate. Later, I switched from iPad to work email, which was one of the normative ways of communication, and consequently, writing emails on the work laptop was a camouflage for fieldnotes taking. The keeping of fieldnotes was regulated and shaped by unwritten formal rules and social norms when I entered the office and involved in particular social groups. There was no pattern to how often or how long I stayed in a particular location, and sometimes I was, to use a Chinese expression, a ‘mouse on the street’, running from one place to another to avoid any possible revelation of what I was doing. As written in my fieldnotes,

I wasn't invited to this team's Secret Santa. It was such coincidence – I went to the kitchen because I wanted to type some notes there. I don't really fancy typing notes at my desk as people walking around sometimes look to see what other people are doing. I feel so conscious and worried that they might see what I am doing and accidentally read what I am writing. I don't want to constantly remind them of who I am via knowing what exactly I am doing. I don't want them to be

concerned about who I am. But I can't tell them that – what if I am perceived as a potential betrayer of a group?

There are cases in which fieldnotes are taken openly in front of informants. For instance, in *On the Run*, Alice Goffman writes about her fieldnote taking situation after some important informants became her roommates:

“I was also able to take notes as events and conversations took place, often transcribing them on my laptop in real time as they were going on around me. This meant, too, that Chuck, Mike and other young men could read over my shoulder as I was typing these field notes, correcting something I'd written or commenting on what I was writing about... Very occasionally someone would say, “Don't write this down” or “I'm going to say some shit right now, and I don't want it to go in the book”. In this cases, I took careful heed and did as people requested” (2014: 240-241).

In this sense, the methodological decision of whether to be open or to conceal has a similar dynamic to that of secrecy itself. Studying secrecy needs to be attentive to the social rules and disciplines that maintain it. Both hiding and opening up are ways to follow the rules and to avoid possible sanctions, with context determining which is appropriate. Under the specific social circumstances in the field, the options we have can be very limited (e.g. Horowitz, 1986). However, maybe it was the case that no one ever thought about what I was writing or even noticed I was writing, making the hiding pointless. Despite that, as with secrecy, the power of being able to know is attached to the vulnerabilities of knowing and being known. The involvement in secret knowledge, both theirs and mine, generated a process of internalization of the burden of hiding, and the development of a watchful eye on my behaviour, “even in the absence of actual observation” (Gusterson, 1998: 85) from the research ‘subjects’.

Another example is more extreme. In his ethnography at a nuclear weapon laboratory surrounded by top-secret culture, Gusterson (1998) found that he internalized surveillance which produced a state of paranoia:

“I wondered what the FBI knew about me...they did not need to ask me about my research because they already knew about it; they had trapped my telephone; my roommate was spying on me for them, telling them who I spoke to and breaking into my computer fields when I was out....” (1998: 87).

Therefore, researching secrecy itself has a ‘hidden epistemic architecture’ (Costas & Grey, 2016) constructed by and shaping secret knowledge and those who are around it, including both the researcher and the researched. Researching informal secrecy is itself a case of secrecy with various sorts of concealment, both social and informational. Of course, researching secrecy is not the only case that carries the burden of hiding. As Douglas (1976) notes,

“The investigative paradigm is based on the assumption that profound conflicts of interest, values, feelings and actions pervade social life. It is taken for granted that many of the people one deals with, perhaps all people to some extent, have good reason to hide from others what they are doing...” (1976: 55).

For ethnography in general, so long as there exists a difference between observers and observed, the gathering of empirical materials will inevitably involve some hidden aspects even if one is an openly declared observer (Roth, 1962). Observers never tell the observed ‘everything’, as observers might not know everything they are looking for; yet even if they do know, the knowledge of what an observer is specifically interested in could influence the behaviour of participants (Roth, 1962). The observed never tell observers ‘everything’ either, as a way to limit the involvement of and to create a detachment to observers towards particular facets of the researched life. Selections and decisions of concealment are emergent and situational throughout fieldworks, which could not possibly be articulated by any definite set of rules. Hence, as with secrecy, ethnography generates and is generated not only by social and informational asymmetry, but also by the imbalance of power positions produced throughout the ongoing asymmetric negotiation.

3.3. In Between Openness and Hiding: The Half-Opened Doors

It is a romantic illusion to assume an unconditional access and openness between researchers and the researched, even though Goode (1999) states that emotional and physical intimacy is not improbable (see also Palson & Palson, 1972; Styles, 1979; Fine, 1993; Wade, 1993; Blackwood, 1995). Being constituted by factors like constrained openness and the burden of hiding, the doors that guarded the boundaries of a social group, different levels of social relationships, and types and depth of knowledge sharing, were never fully opened throughout my fieldwork. As an example of being between knowing and unknown, at the end of my fieldwork, Ross said to me, “So now we are your case studies”, and Laura asked, “Did you collect enough data during your stay here?”. At a very basic level, they were to some degree conscious of what I was doing, without a clearer and broader picture of it. As surprised as I was to hear what they said, I could not say anything except ‘thank you’ and tell them how much I enjoyed my stay. Therefore, every access to the doors was socially negotiated and relationally situated, and “hence inevitably partial” (Emerson, 1988b: 183).

However, some questions are raised here: regarding colleagues with whom I was unfamiliar or even unacquainted, why did they open a door for me? Why did they gossip or even confidentially gossip within my earshot? Why did they not hide? Levels of familiarity and trust might not be the only contribution to the overheard and the participation of informal evaluative communication. It could be my harmlessness (as a lowly, temporary intern) in the sense that I would not, and more importantly, could not jeopardize their reputation, credibility, career or quality of organizational life. I was a three-month intern with a clear date of departure. This might have provided a sort of relief to participants regardless of what I observed or participated in, as ‘she will leave soon/eventually’. To use the previous Chinese expression differently from hiding, I was able to be a ‘mouse on the street’ to run around indicating my being as an insignificant and harmless background of the conversations. In the early stages, my newcomer identity meant a lack of familiarity to colleagues and relevant work issues, hence an inability to comprehensively understand their communication. This meant I was non-threatening but, also, a prime candidate to have things ‘explained’ to me.

Although harmlessness allowed me to be a communication background, it contributed to my irrelevancy in certain topics or sorts of communication. Colleagues did not avoid me for such conversations, whilst they did not talk to me either for the same reason. In this sense, harmlessness can make a purposive conversation purposeless. Furthermore, with the accumulation of understanding of Department H and of individuals, I became less harmless. The same group of colleagues who ignored my existence in the early stages of fieldwork would lower their voices or whisper when I was around, especially during the last two weeks of fieldwork. There was an intangible perimeter leading to the intermission of sharing once I approached too near the border of a social group. My membership of certain social groups also eliminated my feature as a 'neutral' and comfortable background of communication. With the repetition of daily operations, the concept of time became vague as they could not remember precisely how long I had been there and how much time was left before my departure. I was becoming an expected part of the scene. Thus, in some strange way, the early period as an almost complete outsider was more productive for the observation of insider gossip than was the later period when I was more of an insider.

On the other hand, researching confidential gossip involves possession of secret knowledge about/of others, and exchange of secret knowledge about/of oneself. This indicates the inadequacy of remaining 'socially marginal' (Emerson, 1988b; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) in the field, as social marginality might not be able to support such possession and exchange. Yet, not all secret knowledge of others will be possessed, nor all secret knowledge of oneself will be exchanged. It is not only the case for research on secrecy, but also ethnography in general. Broadening from this specific study on confidential gossip to general ethnography, it is essential both to recognize doors of a hidden epistemic architecture that are difficult, if not impossible, to be completely opened, and to perceive the extent of which doors are or can be opened. The latter can be highly challenging, as the hidden epistemic architecture of a (researched and researchable) life changes dynamically through time and space, and is embedded with complex meanings in various forms. Between and through half-open doors, ethnography engages in hidden aspects of the researched. In this way, ethnography is under the veil of secrecy.

3.4. Chapter Summary: The Confused Ethnographer

Throughout this chapter, fieldwork is considered as “personal, emotional and identity work” (Coffey, 1999: 1). As a participant observer, I was participating and comprehending organization life of others, and recurrently experiencing and making sense of my own in which I was not fully or solely part. The dual identity of participant observer is embedded with a “problematic balance, a dialectic” (Thorne, 1988: 216) between involving in and researching the same world, implying the complexities of self in the field.

Rather than characterizing myself as ‘living simultaneously in two worlds’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 89), it is more genuine to note that I was living in the limbo between and as a connection of two worlds. Whilst lines can be drawn between native and non-native researchers, the distinction between insiders and outsiders is ambiguous (e.g. Emerson, 1988b). As Wolff (1976: 77) indicates, “I am not full man who is studying, and it is not fully man I am studying”. Quinza, especially Department H, was a field of social relations in which old identities were not peeled away and new identities were being created. Hence, rather than a single status, I had “a status set” (Merton, 1972: 22) inserted with roles that are “always relative, cross cut by other differences and often situational and contingent” (DeVault, 1996: 35, cited in Mercer, 2007). Rather than being “deselfed” (Gusterson, 1998: 81), it was a process of intentional and unintentional internalization and transformation, generating tensions and connections between roles and contributing to the (re)construction and confusion of a situated self.

Such situatedness is therefore located and revealed in the complexities of field relations. Walking in half-opened doors in between openness and hiding, and between knowing and not knowing both from me to the colleagues, and from the colleagues to me, is embedded with emotional involvement. Hence, as indicated through the awkward incidents between Tina and me about her job search outside Quinza and her later response to my question “So how was your interview?” as “Can we not talk about my interview PLEASE”, being excluded as being perceived as not trustworthy can generate emotional struggles and confusion. The exclusion might have been caused by Tina being well aware that I was more than an intern and that the conversation might have been written down as a case of the study. It was also possible that the sense of intrusion was reinforced when

the interview did not go well. Whatever the reason, the inclusion was forcibly transformed into exclusion, generating confusion and an unsettling sense of bond breaking.

Furthermore, with a vague and shifting boundary between being a researcher and a colleague, between being an incomplete outsider and incomplete insider, another sort of emotional and ethical tension emerged recurrently in the course of the fieldwork:

After the Christmas party, I feel awkward about writing down some private conversations I had with colleagues, and guilty about treating those conversations as part of my empirical evidence. It's like my researcher role is betraying my intern role. Is it right for me to do that? But, is it right for me not to do that? If I was not the real me, were they the real them?

It is the fear that by the very fact of writing down private conversations, I move from a colleague or in some cases a friend to “being a betrayer of confidence” (Weeks, 2004: 29). Twisted within it is the guilt of treating the colleagues and friends as informants, as Weeks (2004: 29, emphasis added) notes “the word *informant* is an unfortunate one for the people I came to know in the Bank”. Particularly, with the topic of this thesis emphasizing an unpopular aspect of Quinza, it is likely that I am considered by some as a betrayer. This sense of guilt brought long-lasting bafflement during and after the fieldwork concerning a relational self, which is not about ‘who I am’. Instead, it is ‘who I am to them’ as well as ‘who are they to me’ that is constituted by and constitutes the struggles of knowing and being known. The constant sway between field roles and relations generates social distance which sometimes is much shortened, and closeness which sometimes is even further away. As a scientist noted in Gusterson’s (1998: 89) study, “secret information is part of your being. It’s not something you put down and it’s gone”. The knowledge I gained through the field engagement not only changed me, but also became part of me.

Moreover, the established familiarity ‘enabled’ me to have a romantic illusion that I was actually one of them. Take a change of desk as an example. Laura emailed me asking whether I could move to another desk, and I said ‘no problem’. A week later:

I arrive the office in the morning and am surprised to see someone is moving to my desk, and my things are being brought from my desk to another one. I knew I was assigned to a new desk, but I was never told when and why. Whilst I feel more and more involved in the office and amongst my colleagues, this makes me feel left out. I understand the colleague at my desk is a new intern, a real one, to the department. Am I still just someone from outside of the office doing research here? Am I in or out, looking in from outside or looking out from inside?

The person I thought I was does not, or not completely, match who I actually was, contributing to the mystification of a perceptual understanding of self, and to the apprehension that fieldworkers and their selves are more than just being or providing ‘the major research instrument’ (Emerson, 1988b) of fieldwork.

The enduring confusion of the perceptual understanding of self has four reflections and implications. Firstly, researching confidential gossip is both specifically secrecy and a type of involvement in a specific sort of secrecy. As Costas & Grey (2016: 142) indicate, “[Secrecy] is a phenomenon that can produce strong reactions: from the painful sense of betrayal to the alluring feelings of specialness...and superiority to the burdens of guilt and responsibility”. This study that involved in secret knowledge was surrounded by the forceful reactions with a sense of belongingness charged by levels of duty. Emotional involvement such as guilt reflects a duality inserted in secrecy as a reproduction of relations that, not only trust enables the movement of secret knowledge, but also a bond of trust is created by sharing such knowledge. Emotional bonding and involvement is a necessity and reinforcement of secrecy.

It is also the case for other ethnographic studies that involve in similar situations. As El-Or (1992) remarks, although “intimate relationships between researcher and informants, blur the subject-object connection they actually maintain” (1992: 71), she can never be true friends with her main informant Hanna because the intimacy, which was both developed and limited, both real and illusionary, was fundamentally a work relationship. Moreover, Goode (1999: 314) notes that “I also left out certain details for fear those partners would feel that I had betrayed them, even though their identities were disguised”. Therefore, beyond research confidentiality, ethnography is embedded with knowledge that should not be (completely) revealed to inappropriate outsiders, such as

readers, generating responsibilities and emotional burdens of knowing and being morally accountable as the known. These responsibilities and burdens can be seen as exactly analogous to those created within the practice of confidential gossip. In this sense, the practices of secrecy entailed by ethnography can interact with and illuminate the practices of secrecy studied by ethnography.

Secondly, it reflects that “whilst the distinction between the stranger and the native was relatively clear-cut, the distinction between the outsider and the insider is not quite so obvious” (Mercer, 2007: 3; see also Emerson, 1988b). Features such as interrelated yet conflicting identities of researchers, shared time and place of research, co-existed yet imbalanced power relationships between researchers and the researched, and even variously possible topics of communication indicate that “the boundaries between the two are both ‘permeable’ (Merton, 1972: 37) and ‘highly unstable’ (Mullings, 1999: 338)” (Mercer, 2007: 4). It constructs rejections to the insider/outsider dichotomy and provides dimensions to the insider/outsider continuum (Mercer, 2007). However, rather than considering “we are all ‘multiple insiders and outsiders’” (Deutsch, 1981: 174, cited in Mercer, 2007), I see myself as an inbetween located at different positions on different dimensions of the continuum, being neither a complete insider nor an outsider in any of the dimensions. In this way, a perceptual understanding of self is not static. Rather, it is multidimensional, situational and relational. It is constructed and reconstructed not only in front and back stages, but also in between the two stages.

Thirdly, it indicates that ‘fly on the wall’ and remaining socially marginal methods are not sufficient to research secrecy. It is not only constituted by the social dynamics of secrecy circles that does not sustain informational and social exchange in a single direction. Also, engaging in the fragility, intensity and complexities of field relations is a way to not lose sight of “the romantic qualities of conducting fieldwork and writing about our experiences. This does not imply that fieldwork is blurry, less than serious or not real” (Coffey, 1999: 113). It is a response to “the passion, anxiety and long-standing attachments that make fieldwork simultaneously transparent and mysterious” (Coffey, 1999: 113), and thus the very process of researching secrecy through ethnography is a way of understanding and experiencing secrecy. Yet such involvement might not be entirely constructive as the practice of secrecy might be “encoded in daily routines in ways that soon become to be taken for granted” (Gusterson, 1997: 70). It links to the

fourth reflection that emotional and ethical dilemmas that emerge through such complexities imply ongoing ethical concerns, which researchers should be attentive to.

Of course, much of the dilemma illustrated in this chapter is well-known to ethnographers. But my point is that there is something over and above the ‘normal’ dilemmas of ethnography when the focus of the study is itself the practices of secrecy. It is this which gives the ethnographic study of secrecy its double character. Therefore, it is not *just another* illustration of fieldwork and its dilemmas, for two reasons. Firstly, it helps us better to appreciate and reflect upon those dilemmas: secrecy research explains why the secrets that ethnographers must keep are so burdensome. In a sense, undertaking this ethnography was in and of itself a way of experiencing what it is like to have to keep secrets, even as it sought to enter into the secrets of others. In this way, instead of merely acknowledging the dilemmas, the double ‘doubleness’ itself denotes that the dilemmas are epistemologically constructive in understanding and analyzing fieldwork.

Secondly, it demonstrates how secrecy, especially informal secrecy, arises out of a set of contextually specific roles and relationships; in this case, those of ethnography. In ethnography, it is routinely the case that researchers and the researched are unable to have a whole picture of each other. Since the social actions of researchers are prone to rules and constraints of disclosure, all researchers keep secrets (Mitchell, 1993). Therefore, as Mitchell (1993: 54) notes, “secrecy in research is a risky but necessary business ... Looking inward, researchers face the greatest dangers, the dangers of self-doubt and questioned identity. Secrecy, always present, is also always double-edged”.

One might pose this double-edged secrecy in another way. During the Quinza study, I sought to participate in the confidential gossip of the company’s employees, without them knowing that this was what I was doing. What I could never know was what confidential gossip they might be exchanging about me. Even as I secretly studied their secrets, they may have been secretly studying me.

Chapter 4

Making Confidential Gossip ‘Boundarious’

Generally, organization theory more often falls into the trap of social determinism – usually simply by ignoring the influence of the physical environment and failing to study it – than that of physical determinism, though both are equally errors of oversimplification.

(Anne-Laure Fayard & John Weeks, Photocopiers and Water-coolers: The affordances of informal interaction, 2007: 626)

People everywhere organize a significant part of their social interaction around the formation, transformation, activation, and suppression of social boundaries. It happens at the small scale of interpersonal dialogue, at the medium scale of rivalry within organizations, and at the large scale of genocide. Us-them boundaries matter.

(Charles Tilly, Social Boundary Mechanisms, 2004: 213)

[Secrecy] is about the drawing of boundaries – boundaries around knowledge, yes, but also boundaries between knowers...secrecy is about realm of the hidden and the arcane, but this realm can exist only if a boundary is drawn...

(Jana Costas & Christopher Grey, Secrecy at Work, 2016: 10)

What emerges through the theoretical conceptualization, empirical design and emotion and ethical dilemmas is a sense of differentiation with connectedness of insiders and separation between insiders and outsiders. It points to invisible markers of boundaries in and of social relations that influence the establishment, continuation and discontinuation of confidential gossip. Locating at the intersection of the three quotes, this chapter takes a closer look at markers of boundaries and their formation processes as how boundaries are drawn around and within confidential gossip. The aim is to constitute the understanding of the role of confidential gossip in organizational life through understanding how it is marked as such. This chapter is therefore structured into four parts followed by a chapter summary: firstly, it discusses certain difficulties of identifying confidential gossip from other types of interaction, marking the ambiguity and complexities of creating boundaries. Secondly, it emphasizes the boundaries as both social and physical constructs by focusing on the physicality of boundaries including architectural qualities of space and body gestures. Formations of the physical constructs cannot be fixed or rehearsed, pointing to the third section of the negotiation of boundaries. Fourthly, drawing on the underlying argument of negotiation as emotional and value consistency, the sense of ‘are we on the same side’ brings forward the enactment of boundaries.

4.1. The Fuzzy Boundary of Confidential Gossip

As illustrated in chapter 1, there are several interlocking issues between confidential gossip and gossip, marking confidential gossip being similar and recurrently different from gossip in general. Waddington’s (2012) use of metaphors interwoven throughout the book *Gossip and Organizations* indicates the complexity of gossip in organization. Gossip “does not always fit neatly into conceptual categories. It is equivocal, ambiguous, slippery, and highly resistant to paradigmatic summing up. This creates a tension between the disparate nature of gossip and the need for conceptual clarity in research and theorizing” (Waddington, 2012: 9). This point is furthered through the empirical design in chapter 2 and the empirical examples in chapter 3, especially by the social embeddedness of confidential gossip in wider interactions, and shows the interactional sway between general gossip and confidential gossip and between other genres of communication and confidential gossip. Hence similarly to gossip, confidential gossip

constitutes and is constituted by the ambiguity of practical identification and *summa*. For instance, informal evaluative conversations are engaged intermittently in formal meetings in Quinza with the absence of the target discussed. A related example is Joan's team meeting for a developing podcast series:

Amelia: They [the particular group of freelancers] said they want feedback.

Joan: What kind of feedback?

Gabriel: We've discussed details with them. Besides [leans forward and speaks in a semi-joking tone], do they really want feedback? They probably just said it for the sake of saying it. They don't know what they want.

[Other team members look at Gabriel with a knowing smile]

The leaning forward and the change of tone expresses a subtle way of engagement in the informal digression of the meeting in which other team members involved through a knowing smile that marks the shared understanding of what was being said. Throughout the process, I was left not knowing of the *actual* meaning of the conversation that goes beyond the content. In such a situation, the switching between, and the interweaving of formal and informal realms, generates the sensitivity of the evaluation and sense of boundary within which the evaluation can be made, apprehended and spread. Thus, confidential gossip can be developed or terminated in the crossover between private and public realms and between sharing and revelation. It is also because "people willingly offer up personal ideas for public examination, people willingly take public information into private space" (Adkins, 2002: 228; see also Michelson, et al., 2010). In this sense, no rules or settings can be established as how or where confidential gossip takes place. Informal and formal genres of communication, which do not exist simply side by side but are mutually constituted, might slip into various practices of confidential gossip with different degrees of secrecy.

Therefore, the line between 'gossip' and 'confidential gossip' in practice is a hazy and porous one, and certainly will be socially negotiated and context-specific. It triggers an essential question of its identification: where is the confidentiality?, linking to the next question, to whom should it be confidential? In the preceding chapter, my 'harmless outsider' identity was considered constructive because of the incapability of comprehending what was said or conducting anything based on it. Yet it was getting less

constructive with my increasing involvement in certain social groups. Hence, the boundary of confidentiality is not only drawn between insiders and outsiders. More importantly, it distinguishes sorts of insiders, particularly the sort of inappropriate insiders as “outsider insiders” (Costas & Grey, 2016: 97) from others. In this way, by establishing the sense of appropriateness regarding ‘to whom it should be confidential’, confidentiality is created at the very moment of deciding who to share and who not to share, of sharing with ‘insider insiders’, and of (accidental) revelation to ‘wrong’ sorts of others.

Such invisible yet visible, spoken yet unspoken formation of social relations constructs accessible yet inaccessible boundaries, which are not always clear to insiders. In this sense, confidential gossip is a paradoxical marker of the existence of secrecy as well as the transgression upon secrecy. Sharing can turn into revelation without being realized during interaction processes. Just as the conversation I had with a pharmacist Sarina at the end of a day of fieldwork. Sitting in a vaccination room, Sarina was putting on rubber gloves, picking a swab from a box and rubbing it in on my left upper arm before tearing open a new single-package needle:

Sarina: So what do you do?

Ziyun: I’m doing my PhD.

Sarina: Oh, nice. On what topic?

Ziyun: Gossip.

Sarina: Interesting! You’re going to love me – I love gossip! I gossip a lot myself.

Wait, do you gossip?

Ziyun: Yes. We all do probably [laughs]

Sarina: I know! But how do you define gossip?

Ziyun: That’s a very good question. Firstly you need another person to talk to, so that makes at least two people to participate. The target is absent. You have one type of gossip that can be just spread around, and another type that is at some level confidential. Confidential gossip is my focus.

Sarina: Yes! That’s exactly what I experienced! I was thinking of leaving this job and getting interviews for a new one. It was supposed to be a secret, but then I told one of my friends, or maybe she was only a colleague. It was a spur of the moment: I was at the counter, happy to see an email about an interview, so I

turned around and told her ‘I got an interview for a new job’. I thought she wouldn’t tell anyone else, because I didn’t want others to know. It’s awkward, right, if everyone knows I’m hoping to leave and I don’t have the new job yet.

Ziyun: Yes, it’s a bit awkward.

Sarina: But it was kind of my fault – she and I weren’t that close. I shouldn’t have told her. I was just so excited to see the email! And she was right next to me. I’m just glad that I didn’t tell her what the job is about. Not even where it will be.

Ziyun: Did you tell her to keep it between you two?

Sarina: I did! I told her clearly – ‘don’t tell anyone’. Then later I got a text from another colleague saying ‘congratulations on your new job’ [shrugs]. I just told them I haven’t decided yet, I might stay.

Ziyun: Will you take the new job if you have a chance?

Sarina: Oh definitely. It’s a really good opportunity – I’ll get advanced trainings for more challenging things. I don’t want to be here doing the same thing for the rest of my life.

What is indicated in Sarina’s experience is a mispositioning of trust in a relationship, as the expected maintenance of confidentiality expressed through “don’t tell anyone” was not delivered. It might be that Sarina’s colleague misunderstood the social norms and the level of secrecy embedded in that piece of information. For example, if Sarina was not close enough to the colleague to share something that should go no further, the social definition of the situation as far as the colleague was concerned might have been that it was reasonable to share the information with someone closer to the colleague herself, as her definition of ‘us’ was different than Sarina’s (i.e. only Sarina and the colleague). In this way, Sarina and the colleague were lodged in the situation that was wrongly defined by both of them. Alternatively, the colleague might have revealed the news of Sarina to an inappropriate other or others on a spur of the moment. Amongst these and other possibilities, the social accountability inserted in the confidential knowledge by Sarina was not perceived as how it was intended to be, transforming the confidential gossip into less confidential or confidential-less gossip.

Besides constituting confidential gossip as a paradoxical marker of both concealment and revelation, the ambiguous boundary around confidential gossip can also serve as a protection of confidential gossip. The slippery socialization switching between

confidential gossip and other genres of communication reorients or even obscures the line of openness, for example, after the colleague revealed the confidential information to an inappropriate third party whose text to Sarina is itself an indication of the revelation, Sarina did not tell the colleague any further information about the new job. Instead, she told them that she might stay whilst, in fact, if she landed on the job, she would leave without a doubt. It was a shift from what to tell to what *not* to tell, which was concealed to the colleagues, at least until the time of our conversation. In this sense, the ambiguous boundary enables one to know to some extent the further circulation of confidential gossip as ‘what is going on behind one’s back’, and gives one both the flexibility and complication of responding. In Serina’s case, throughout this process of boundary turbulence, the boundary was gradually reformed and strengthened, which led to greater clarity.

Confidential gossip generates and is generated amongst the dynamics between “visible and invisible, spoken and unspoken, and present and absent” (May & Mumby, 2005: 280). The fuzzy boundary around and of confidential gossip contributes to its nature of variety and variability of formation in practice, the difficulty and slipperiness of conceptual clarity, and the haziness inserted in researching and understanding confidential gossip. Nonetheless, as gossip in general, such vagueness is “*a feature of, rather than a problem with*” (Waddington, 2012: 14, emphases added) confidential gossip. Being the beauty and the challenge of confidential gossip, the vagueness has a reciprocal impact on individuals upon one another’s actions in one another’s immediate presence as well as absence. It illuminates confidential gossip as a sort of casual informal secrecy that can be transformed into different shapes and sizes of doors as ways of coming into being. Thus, confidential gossip produces and is produced, shapes and is shaped by organizations of social relations, which afford participants opportunities and complexities of creating and recreating ambiguous yet distinctive boundaries of confidential gossip.

4.2. The Physicality of Boundaries

On a rainy Tuesday morning, I am hurrying from public transport to the office and run into Daisy who is about to enter the lobby at Quinza. “Did you see the heels she’s wearing?”, she says with her eyes indicating someone on my left. I look around and back to Daisy, “A bit too high aren’t they?”, I reply and smile. “I can never walk with those, can you?”, she says, shakes her head, and scans her card at the door of Department H. “Not really, without injuring myself or hurting others”, I reply. We both laugh and make our way to the kitchen. Three colleagues are chatting next to the water cooler as we head to the mug cupboard next to the coffee machine. “The mugs with our logo always get picked first”, I say as I am struggling to find one for coffee. “They are popular”, Daisy nods and continues, “Be careful though – some of the mugs are not for general use. One time a colleague sent an email around looking for her mug. She wasn’t happy and said people shouldn’t just assume all the mugs are for everyone. Something about boundaries”. “Difficult to tell which one is for the owner only when they’re all put together here”, I say. Daisy leans towards me and whispers, “I heard she put a sticker on it afterwards”. She laughs. “Making it physical so you don’t take it”, I say and laugh as well.

People gradually leave the kitchen with both a mug of coffee and a glass of water. Victoria walks into the kitchen. Daisy looks at her and then looks at me, “back to work”, she says and walks toward the kitchen door. Victoria goes to the coffee machine. I smile and walk closer to her:

Ziyun: [in a low voice] Can I talk to you for a moment?

Victoria: Sure.

Ziyun: [in an even lower voice] The section I’m sitting in is very quiet. They rarely talk to each other, working very hard, which is a good thing [smiles]. A colleague sitting close by has a cold and been coughing for a couple of days. The colleague sitting across her hasn’t noticed.

Victoria: [speaking equally quietly] Really? Do you want to go somewhere else to talk?

Ziyun: Yes.

[We then leave the kitchen and walk into an office nearby. Victoria locks the door before we start talking again].

As Fayard & Weeks (2007: 619) remark, “The architecture of a space (how accessible it is, how enclosed, how large) influences both the opportunity for interaction and the social obligation for interaction within it”. Victoria’s suggestion that “we go somewhere else to talk” underlines the restriction of the kitchen for not being private enough for the conversation. In the office, her act of locking the door constructs an enclosed space that eliminates external accessibility to the room and consequently rejects the occurrence and opportunity of unexpected interaction from anyone else than ‘us’. In this sense, the act of locking the door itself serves as a social obligation to maintain the confidentiality of what was subsequently being said. What the door locked inside is not only the physical propinquity created through the spatial partition; more importantly, such propinquity produces the comfortableness and flexibility that assists and fosters the willingness to share and develop certain knowledge which goes no further than ‘us’ (i.e. Victoria and me). The locked door along with the three other walls of the room generate acoustic, visual and social isolations, providing a solid surrounding boundary that demonstrates and supports the social construction and coherence of the group, as much as it is conceived and made sense by it.

Furthermore, the spatial and social inclusion for insiders and denial of entrance to outsiders allows ‘us’ to control the boundary, figuratively and literally, through whether we want to open the locked door or not from inside. The sense of control itself generates a secure environment for privacy and concealment needed for the continuation of confidential gossip. The room that is divided into a social and spatial unit indicates both social and spatial qualities and construction of confidential gossip, and is framed by a boundary as both a cause and a consequence of the division (e.g. Frisby & Featherstone, 1997: 141). In this way, the interactions of confidential gossip not only result from, but also constitute the inside and the outside of the boundary, through the boundedness of the space.

Therefore, confidential gossip here is considered as a social practice formed spatially and requires spatial affordance for the continuity of confidentiality. Then, how would boundaries be drawn around confidential gossip in a non-privately-enclosed space?

During my breakfast, two colleagues walk into the kitchen, chatting and standing next to the kitchen door. With more people coming into the kitchen, they stop talking and gradually move to the water cooler that is relatively far away from the door. When people are standing next to a round table preparing breakfast, they move from the water cooler that is next to the round tables to the couch that is the furthest area from the door and tables. I hear their voices getting lower when others come nearer and slightly increase when they walking away.

Because the kitchen is an accessible space in Quinza, interactions are partially enclosed yet partially open for observation. Although the content of this conversation is unknown, its confidentiality is expressed through ways of communication. Acts such as stop talking and moving away show the interruption and discontinuity of the conversation, which subtly sends a message to the interlocutors that this chat should be kept exclusively between them, and recurrently to the others around that this chat is not an invitation for their engagement. The vocal and physical movements are seen as examples of the “secret-sharing moves” assumed by Costas & Grey (2016: 94) to signal that “the information about to be communicated was supposed to be kept” – literally, in this sense – “on the quiet” (2016: 94). The lowering and increasing of voice signify a borderline of the “representational space” (Low, 2003: 12) for secret sharing. The continuous ‘moving away’ creates physical distance as social detachment from people nearby, categorizing and transforming part of the kitchen into a particular type of social space (i.e. secret-sharing interaction). Therefore, while the kitchen in general might be considered as a site of gossip, the ‘move away’ creates a site for particularly confidential gossip.

While this example was observed from some distance across the room, a very similar example was observed from closer up:

I walk into the kitchen and see Kaitlin and Aaron are chatting, standing next to the coffee machine. When other colleagues are walking nearer, they looked at each other in a way that suggests that ‘maybe WE should probably move somewhere else to keep distance socially and physically from THEM’. Actual verbal communication is not necessarily needed to exchange those subtle thoughts.

Closer up of what the preceding example indicates as boundary maintenance was a non-verbal negotiation and formation of an informal agreement. Although the content of this conversation was again unknown, the symbolic dimension of the moves that the participants make has an effect beyond themselves and the conversation content, as it works on the realization of the outsiders who see the moves and signals that they are excluded from knowing.

Simmel (1950: 353) notes “individuals in physical proximity give each other more than the mere content of their words”. For the previous two cases, it is not just a sense of physical proximity. It is the combination and the ongoing negotiation of spatial remoteness *and* closeness within the same space which generates norms both for insiders to maintain the representational space as an informal agreement, and for outsiders “about social distance and interruption that govern polite behaviour, and shared understandings about the behaviour designated as appropriate in the setting” (Fayard & Weeks, 2007: 625). In this way, by the very act of keeping the information concealed from inappropriate others through spatial accessibility (i.e. being in the same room) and social inaccessibility (e.g. in both examples I could have walked nearer to them but I knew I should not), processes of the movements of insiders yield an aura of forbiddance, mysteriousness, specialness and possibly offensiveness to outsiders, which coincides with the mystique of secrecy.

The episodes of confidential gossip that occurred in enclosed and non-enclosed space reflect a discussion by Simmel in ‘Sociology of Space’ rather than in his work on secrecy: “social organization usually requires organization of space as well” (Lechner, 1991: 198; see also Frisby & Featherstone, 1997: 141-146). More specifically, in the case of confidential gossip, architectural qualities shape the use of a space engendering various ways to establish and maintain boundaries that support and sustain confidential gossip. Such boundaries in turn establish and re-establish social meanings of the space. In this sense, a space shapes and is shaped by a particular social construction of confidential gossip through providing social opportunities, obligations and control of its interactions, and retrospectively being experienced and distinguished by regulating and managing such interactions. The physicality of boundaries unveils how the physical environment and spatial conditions act as a context for and an active participant in confidential gossip.

Furthermore, the previous example of Kaitlin and Aaron notes that besides space/place, physical movements and vocal implications, the physicality of boundaries also refers to eye exchange and facial expressions. An example of my attempt to cross the boundary will serve as a more detailed illustration. The full version of this example as ‘Debra’s blunder after a conference call’ was shown earlier (section 3.2.1) as a background and comparison for a connected example that occurred in the following week for the analysis of mutual openness. But here my emphasis is on the beginning of the conversation particularly regarding *how* I was denied access through the eye exchange and facial expression as a process of forming the boundary and/through its physicality:

Ziyun: What happened?

Debra: Oh [turns around and looks at me. Debra looks very serious and nervous]. Nothing, nothing really [shakes head. Then she turns back and looks at Abbey].

Abbey: [frowns and shakes her head a bit then nods, showing that ‘no talking, yes, I understand’. I guess Debra’s look was telling Abbey that she doesn’t want Abbey to tell this thing to anyone else. Although I can’t see Debra’s eye expression directly, I do see Abbey’s as a reply to it]

Debra: [looks at me] I have a meeting very soon. So I’m going to go.

Ziyun: Sure. Enjoy.

I am firstly excluded by Debra’s verbal expression “nothing, nothing really” whereas her facial expression is being serious and nervous. The contradiction between the verbal and the facial expressions not only indicates what is being discussed is sensitive and confidential, but also is itself a paradox to “nothing, nothing really” implying that something did happen. My exclusion is reconfirmed through Debra looking at Abbey and Abbey shaking and then nodding her head, as establishing a sort of ‘informal consent’ of knowing. Through the look Debra gave to Abbey, Abbey understands that she does not have Debra’s permission to reveal the discussed information, and learns what she should do is to keep what was said to herself *and* not to share with me. In this sense, boundary maintenance around confidential gossip is relational as one learns the appropriateness towards what *not* to do by seeing and understanding the non-verbal expressions of others within the same social group. The relational understanding

constructs and reinforces Abbey's position in the secret-sharing situation, and consequently reconstructs her interaction with me around the confidential information. The subtleties of eye exchanges and facial expressions shape the collective structure of interaction, which differentiates and distinguishes relations between the known from relations between the known and the unknown.

Going back through the episodes around and of confidential gossip in this section, the physicality of boundaries indicates types of connections between space and body. Drawing on Witz, et al.'s (1996) proposal of a three-dimensional politics of the body in organizations, the body has a spatial dimension as being physically present and symbolically spaced, a verbal dimension as being talked of and talked about, and a physical dimension as ways of being managed (see also Coffey, 1999: 61). Throughout the examples, the physicality of boundary arises both *in* the physical, vocal and facial expressions of the participants, and *through* the expressions with a symbolic dimension for sensitivity and confidentiality. The body, therefore, categorizes and socializes space. In doing so, the body generates differentiation of 'us' from 'them' through the exchange of bodily signals that modify interactions and (re)construct social atmosphere and dynamics surrounded a particular space, creating a place for specially confidential gossip within a particular group. In this sense, space is not a container of social interactions. Instead, it is part of the social processes and production of interactions around and of confidential gossip. In this way, interactions between space and body are processes of generation, encryption and decryption of social positions, producing inclusion and exclusion, making 'us' meaningful via being "relational and comparative" (Tajfel & Turner, 1985: 16) to 'them'.

The interactions encapsulate not only the spatial and embodied qualities of confidential gossip as both a focus of enquiry and processes of performative act. They also reflect the subtleties of the physicality of boundaries and their formation and reformation, which further marks the difficulties discussed in the preceding section of identifying confidential gossip amongst genres of communication. Moreover, because of the subtleties, construction and maintenance of boundaries around confidential gossip cannot be planned ahead or fixed. The boundaries lie in "the diverse means by which individual members take part in collective structures" (Simmel, 2007: 55), which are never static or absolute. Such interactive and situational dynamics embedded within proximity and

distance, and within exclusivity and multiplicity of social relations illuminate that boundaries of confidential gossip are socially fluid and negotiable, and will be illustrated in the coming section.

4.3. The Negotiation of Boundaries

The physicality of boundaries of confidential gossip notes that the socialization amongst insiders can “decipher the unwritten grammar of conduct” (Merton, 1972: 15) of body and space. ‘Insiders’ is not a fixed status or an absolute position, as ongoing socialization might encompass different sorts of knowledge ranging in between concealment and openness, which are embedded in and engender degrees of social and informational filtration. Rather than being antonyms, ‘open’ and ‘secret’ are relational, as something can be open to some yet secret to others. In this sense, ‘open’ and ‘secret’ are not a dichotomy – they are the two ends of a continuum, indicating strata of a social group and various degrees of being an insider and an outsider. Take an observation in the kitchen on a quiet Thursday afternoon as an example. Anke and Britt seem to be in the middle of a conversation when they walk into the kitchen where I am the only other person. They approach the table with four glass jars: two of them store tea bags, one stores brown sugar, and one stores biscuits such as custard creams and bourbons. Anke is taking a teabag from the teabag jar as Britt checks the biscuit jar that only has some broken pieces left. Their conversation continues:

Anke: She already got so much more than what she asked for.

Britt: Maybe that's why she thinks she can have whatever she wants.

Anke: I mean, it's already CRAZY [emphasizes] that she got the project in the first place. You know she even ... [volume is too low to be heard].

Britt: Really?! You know what, I agree with you about what you said last time.

...

[Then Britt leaves the kitchen. After a little while, another female colleague, Ciska, walks in and goes over to Anke]

Ciska: How's it going?

Anke: So I told Britt about it. She said... [volume is too low to be heard]. What do you think?

The example indicates layers of boundaries within a boundary of confidential gossip. It is the ‘onion feature’ of confidential gossip and secrecy: when one enters a group of confidential gossip by knowing a certain piece of hidden information, one simultaneously enters into the layers of unknown, such as the unknown of who knows, of what is known,

and of who else knows that one knows. Just as peeling off a layer of onion and another layer is already in waiting without showing how many more to come, entering into a circle of confidential gossip does not bring access to all the doors behind the entrance, and neither does it make visible the stratification of boundaries. This onion feature is noted through certain details in the example, such as Britt revealing her *current* evaluation of what Anke said *last time*, as the back-then evaluation may have been hidden or/and different. Moreover, whereas Ciska knows Britt as part of the known and her reaction to what Anke calls a “crazy” situation, Britt may not know that Ciska not only is in the know about the situation, but also knows Britt’s position regarding it. Possibly, Britt might not even know about Ciska socially within the circle and consequently be unaware of what she does not know. Upon this intricate and overlapping network of known and unknown, Britt may be in the most outside circle of the inside, when Anke and Ciska are seen as in a more inner layer of the circle. The positions of Anke and Ciska within the circle are only partially overlapped, as Anke probably has more knowledge of who knows and what is known, yet she is seeking to know more about the unknown thoughts of Ciska.

Swaying between not knowing and knowing is a moving boundary with continuous (attempt at) negotiation and resettlement. Anke lowers the boundary to let Britt know about the “crazy” situation and wants to lower Ciska’s boundary to know where Ciska positions herself along the development of confidential gossip. As Merton (1968: 340) indicates that “group boundaries are not necessarily fixed but are dynamically changing in response to specifiable situational contexts”, circumscriptions around the known are not sharply drawn. Similarly, with gossip in general, “socialization is also a feature of membership negotiation” (Waddington, 2012: 81) around confidential gossip. The boundaries of confidential gossip are sustained through modification that can be constituted by negotiating the social roles of participants to and within a social group. In this sense, the negotiation of boundaries around and of confidential gossip is situationally and historically sensitive.

A boundary can be modified when certain ways of interaction by an outsider are perceived as ‘one of us’ by relevant insiders. As an example, a scene occurred in the office as colleagues gradually left to go to the company Christmas party. When the office is getting quieter, the ladies’ room is getting busier than usual – some female colleagues

are changing clothes and applying makeup. The room has changed from simply just a come-and-go place to a dressing room. In the office, Lydia kindly offers to show me the way to the party. We stand next to Grace's desk waiting for her to leave together.

Lydia: [looks at the colleague sitting next to Grace] Do you know where Grace is?

Colleague: [turns around to us] No. I think she left to go to the loo. But it was like half an hour ago.

Lydia: It has been a while, hasn't it?

Colleague: Maybe the loo is busy, you know [looks at Lydia with implications].

Lydia: [nods] That's true.

[Grace comes back to her desk]

Grace: You can't believe what was going on in there (the loo) [in an impatient tone]. Everyone was either putting on makeup or changing makeup.

Lydia: [smiles and shakes head]

Ziyun: I know [smiles]. I was there an hour ago.

Grace: Yeah, exactly [shows strong agreement]. You know what I meant, right.

Ziyun: Yes [nods].

Lydia: [laughs in a sarcastic way] Must be lots of perfume and deodorants in there. Last time I walked in, I was like 'wow'! [leans back her head to show that the smell was overpowering]

Ziyun: And hairspray.

Lydia: Exactly! All kinds of sprays! I just couldn't be bothered [shrugs].

Grace: Me neither! [lowers voice] Unfortunately I ran into Andrea. She was like putting on another layer! And her perfume! Ugh! [rolls her eyes]

Lydia: Typical Andrea.

Ziyun: Oh no!

Grace: [looks at me and nods as if agreeing with me]

The confidential gossip part here is that it is typical of Andrea to put on too much makeup and overdo perfume. It is embedded and emerges in the surrounding interaction that sets the stage for it and gradually moves from gossip to confidential gossip. The "you know" said by the colleague regarding the crush in the loo signifies a certain understanding of it, possibly that this happens in the restroom on occasions like the Christmas party.

Lydia's reply indicates that the understanding is shared between them. Yet I am left unclear of what the shared knowing of "you know" is. Grace's return, and her impatient tone in saying "you can't believe what was going on in there", indicates her displeasure with the situation. Through saying "I know. I was there", I show my agreement and shared experience with Grace. In this way, with Grace's confirming "you know what I meant, right", Grace and Lydia could consider me as one of the participants in this specific situation. My participant position is furthered by saying "and hairspray" as engaging in the discussion about the strong smell of scent that made Lydia feel "wow" and showing I did not like it either. The sense of me being on the same side as them negotiates and lowers the boundary between them and me, which is followed by the revelation of the typical behaviour of Andrea. From being uncertain of the situation to gradually being clearer and participating in it, the continuous back-and-forth interaction is a moment-to-moment construction of situated understanding and reformation of a 'social self' in this social circle. It is simultaneously a process of reproducing a boundary of both interaction and social relations, forming a level of confidential gossip.

A change of situation may bring changes in ways of interaction, which influence levels of involvement and/or "affect the self- and other-definitions of group membership" (Merton, 1968: 341). A different or strengthened sort of interaction amongst insiders can constitute the reconstruction of the boundary of confidential gossip within a social group. Parts of the two conversations between Ross and me will serve as an example. We are having tea in the kitchen on a Tuesday afternoon:

Ross: Right, I haven't told anyone in the office that I'm going to apply for the project. So can you keep it between us?

Ziyun: Not even Victoria?

Ross: No. I don't want them to have an opinion that I will not be able to do my work anymore. And now I'm just applying, not really got accepted. So I don't want them to know. But I think it (the application) might be fine.

Ziyun: No problem. I won't tell anyone. It's not really my thing to tell. If you want to, you can tell someone. But I won't.

Ross: Yes, exactly.

Two days later in the afternoon kitchen:

Ross: Frances is SUCH A BITCH [in a low voice with emphases]

Ziyun: What happened?!

Ross: She commented on my application report and said I don't have enough experience for this kind of project.

Ziyun: How's that possible?

Ross: Right! She said I don't have enough knowledge about it. And if I got accepted, I can only be a marginal member to start with.

Ziyun: What?! [in a surprised and disagreeing tone]

Ross: Yeah. I'm not going to be a marginal member, especially for this project [in a disapproving tone]! I have enough knowledge for the project – I do similar things here myself! I have experience!

Ziyun: Did you tell her about that?

Ross: I am going to! And she said my report isn't long enough [frown and shaking head].

Ziyun: Length? I didn't think that would be a problem.

Ross: Exactly! She just really tried to pick on all sorts of things!

Ziyun: Gosh, I wish I could say something helpful. But good luck! Based on what you've got, you will be fine.

Ross: I hope so. I should tell her that if it doesn't get pass, then I wouldn't help her with anything anymore!

In the first conversation, by saying “keep it between us”, Ross defines a boundary of the knowledge, which is “between us”. By saying “not even Victoria”, I propose a negotiation of the boundary in which Victoria may be included. Progressing from the first to the second conversation, it indicates a change of the situation from Ross applying for the project with confidence (e.g. “it might be fine”) to him struggling with the possibility of getting a rejection. As Waddington (2012: 58) notes, “the relationship between gossip and emotion appears to be particularly pertinent when ‘knowledge of the facts’ is uncertain”. In the second conversation, the situational change brings frustration and unpredictability to Ross over his application, transforming the confidential knowledge sharing into a “cathartic process” (Waddington, 2012: 63) of emotion. When Ross reveals his feelings and implicitly seeks for support and I provide my understanding and reassurance to him, the interaction then is shaped into not only secret information

sharing, but also emotional interaction. In this way, with the accumulation of sources of confidentiality such as information and emotionality, the interpersonal ties between Ross and me as insiders are becoming more solid, hence the boundary around this specific secret and within the group is tightened regarding our closer social relations, and is strengthened and more regulated regarding the lower probability of my revelation to inappropriate others. Therefore, interaction of confidential gossip constructs its boundary, and in turn the boundary regulates and adjusts ways of interaction as how a piece of confidential gossip develops. This particular way of development serves as a negotiation of social relations, which can reshape the boundary that modifies further circulation of confidential gossip and its underlying negotiation.

Continuing on the change of interaction, an attempt on interaction enhancement within a confidential gossip group can be seen as a negotiation of membership, and relatedly a rearrangement of its boundary. For instance, seeking certain types of information or fishing for further information with different levels of confidentiality can be a sort of interaction enhancement. However, interaction enhancement does not necessarily progress boundary negotiation toward boundary enhancement. Part of the conversation I had with Victoria in a café is an example. Two and half months after my arrival at Quinza, Victoria invites me out for a coffee to see how I am doing in Quinza. Before we go, we discuss that talking in the office is not a good option for two reasons: firstly, it might bring difficulties to my fieldwork if colleagues often see me interacting with Victoria, who is a senior manager, as they may think I will report back to her what I have seen and heard on ‘the shop floor’; secondly, even in an enclosed private office, we were interrupted by the office owner who came back before we could finish the conversation. Hence, for a more free and relaxing environment, we decide to go to a café across the street.

Ziyun: How have you been?

Victoria: So busy. And stupid! But I don't want to talk about me. I want to know more about you. The project is coming to the end soon. How many weeks left?

Three?

Ziyun: Two.

Victoria: I still remember when you just started. So, did you find anything?

Ziyun: Hmmm, I'm not sure. I feel like I'm not getting anywhere, just doing the same thing every day. But it might get better later when I put everything together.

Victoria: Maybe that's true! I want to ask you what you think about your colleagues. Are they friendly, do they ignore you, or anything?

Ziyun: They're friendly. They like to explain what they do when I ask.

Victoria: How's your observation? Did you see anything interesting?

Ziyun: Observation is ok. Had an awkward moment with a colleague [laughs]

Victoria: What is it? [being intrigued] And who is this colleague?

Ziyun: It was ok, nothing really [smiles and pauses]. The Christmas party was fun. Were you there?

As illustrated previously, Victoria and I are in a close group built on certain confidential gossip and the shared understanding of my situation in Quinza. With the progress of fieldwork and the change of social relations at work, our social ties embedded in interaction are shaped by other related relations. By fishing for further and different sorts of information, Victoria seeks to know something unknown through my observation. It is a negotiation to lower the boundary of 'what is it to know' through my selection of 'what is it can be known' by Victoria. Because of her dual roles as an informal insider of the group and formal director of Department H, my evaluative sharing of secret knowledge inevitably takes into account her relation as a superior of the participants of my observation. With both her and my relevant ties outside the social group, I know certain things that I could not reveal to her without being concerned about causing problems for my informants. Thus, the boundary negotiation was restricted by such "quasi-intimacy" (Parker, 2000: 237) and consequently the boundary could not be developed further to enable the "awkward moment" to be shared with Victoria.

Drawing on the difference of perceiving social and formal positions, in another case, the boundary was lowered because letting an outsider know something from inside does not conflict with surrounding social and formal relations:

Tina: I have an interview with the marketing team. Do you know anything about it?

Ziyun: Sorry, I don't really know.

[Then I see Cathy passing by the table]

Ziyun: Hey, Cathy, do you know anything about the marketing team?

Cathy: [looks at Tina, and then looks at me] No, not really. I don't really deal with them much.

Ziyun: Ok. Thanks. [looks at Tina] Sorry.

Tina: It's ok.

On the same day afternoon, I meet Cathy in the hallway:

Cathy: So who was your friend during lunch?

Ziyun: Tina? She just got hired by team W. She has upcoming interviews here and one of them is for the marketing team.

Cathy: Oh! [sounds like she is suddenly awakened] That's WHY [emphasizes] you asked me about it! Oh - so she's a temp!

Ziyun: Yes.

Cathy: I thought she was just there waiting for an interview. That's why I didn't say anything. [whispers] I don't want some CREEPY [emphasizes] people to get all hung up on me. Is she all right by the way?

Ziyun: She's ok.

Cathy: Ok. Then I can have a chat with her later.

The second conversation reflects what happened in the first conversation: Cathy did not want to reveal certain formal information to an outsider (i.e. Tina) who might potentially be a “creepy” person for personal reasons, albeit the information was not a secret in Quinza. This situation changed, because firstly Cathy realizes Tina is a temp and works for team W, which makes Tina ‘formally one of us’; and secondly my answer “she’s ok” gives Cathy an assurance that Tina is not “creepy” and will not “get all hung up” on Cathy. Both Tina’s position as a formal insider and her social impression as not “creepy” create a sense of group and security for Cathy. The change of understanding provides a level of formal and social clearance for Tina to access the particular knowledge. The boundary that excluded Tina is redrawn with Tina now being included as an ‘adopted insider’.

The examples and illustration shown above indicate that social interaction can incrementally constitute boundary adjustment of confidential gossip through the change

of social situations and different perceptions of formal and social roles. What lies underneath the dynamics is processes of negotiation and (re)establishment of judgement and moral criteria as “emotional and value significance” (Tajfel, 1972: 31, cited in Turner, 1982) and its consistency within a group of confidential gossip. This is particularly the case for the groups of three comparing the groups of two, with more engagement in formations of agreement. It might be that the bigger the group size, the more complex the process is, as it brings more diversity of judgement and hence more difficulty in reaching consistency. On the other hand, groups of more than two people have a sense of majority in which peer pressure may be applied to reach consistency. Either way and in either group size, emotional and moral value lies at the heart of boundary negotiation, which is further illustrated in the following example:

Elle: I have a spreadsheet full with details for the trip plan in case she turns into a control freak, which happens every single time!

Laura: Maybe you need to tell her about it.

Elle: I don't NEED [emphasizes] to tell her. It's a trip and I know there should be someone to organize it, like destinations, food and transport. But I don't think she HAS TO [emphasizes] be the one to organize it.

Laura: Maybe just tell her the idea.

Elle: Why? I don't see the point. You know how she is. I think everyone should have fun, not only her. It's not too much to ask, right?

Laura: Ok.

Lisa: You ok with her?

Elle: Yes, I'm fine with her. I just don't want to deal with someone too authoritative for this. Jonny will be on the trip as well. I think I'll just talk to him. He's really quiet. He's really suitable for those authoritative people. When they're blah-blah-blah, he would just like, ok, ok.

Lisa: That's true.

Laura's “maybe just tell her” indicated that she had a second thought of what Elle was doing, triggering both bewilderment and disapproval of Elle as ‘you know why I do this, but you still disagree with me’. Setting a specific tone of judgement and moral criteria can be a way to validate one's behaviour, and to socially negotiate norms and morals in a circle of confidential gossip. Disagreement like Laura's can affect the bridge for social

norms and morals construction as breaching a social contract, shape further selection of 'what should be talked about' in the group, and reform the definition of 'us'. Lacking mutual agreement on informal norms and value, Elle might choose not to talk about the same person with Laura, but only with Lisa, thus forming a group of two. In this way, the negotiation of judgement and moral criteria constitutes to sub-group formation in a circle of confidential gossip.

In this section, the 'onion feature' of confidential gossip has been shown to be not only formed by layers of boundaries within a social circle, but also by modifications of boundaries. For example, when certain ways of interactions by outsiders are perceived as insiders, a situational change alters the social relations amongst insiders, attempts on interaction enactment are made, the social and/or formal positions of an insider or insiders are altered, and a social disagreement emerges. The situations all denote that boundary negotiation is a process of group identity negotiation. As Merriam, et al. (2001: 411) note, "to say that one is an insider raises the question of 'what is it that an insider is insider of?'"'. Answers to that need to be positioned in relation to 'outsiders'. The construction and reconstruction of different roles and positions of insiders and outsiders are embedded in the dynamic interactivity amongst social contexts, asymmetric information and imbalanced social power throughout a knowledge sharing and production process, which generate borders and social accessibilities of knowing. In this sense, the negotiation of boundary around and of confidential gossip provides a relational and situational way of understanding formations and reformations of social relations that connects insiders and interact insiders with outsiders.

4.4. The Enactment of Boundaries

The final example of 'disagreement' in the previous section notes that a process of expressing evaluation on a confidential basis is recurrently a process of seeking an echo of the evaluation. As Gusterson (1998: 80) indicates, "secrecy is a powerful means of making and breaking bonds". It refers to not only the sharing process itself, but also the construction of shared understanding at emotional and moral levels. It produces a sense of 'will we be on the same side' on top of the selection of 'what should be talked about', making certain insiders into an interactive, interconnected and sympathetic 'us', turning sharing into bonding. Such invisible badging of membership marks the security of a group and the enactment of a group boundary.

Forming an 'interconnected us' is a process of social exploration, involving social assessment and selection of insiders and different ways of initiating types of evaluation. Two ambiguous conversations provide an illustration. The first example occurred in the open-planned office of Department H when Rosie was standing next to Daisy's desk and chatting with her. The second example occurred at lunchtime at a table in the kitchen.

Example One

[Aaron walks to Daisy's desk]

Aaron: Hi, do you hear about the thing?

Rosie: What thing?

Daisy: Oh, that thing. Yeah, it was fine.

Example Two

Claire: Can I join you guys? I got a couple of minutes to go before a meeting.

Kaitlin: Sure!

Claire: [looks at Daisy] So do you know?

Daisy: Yes. You know as well?

Claire: Yes. But I couldn't tell you. I'm not sure whether you knew.

Daisy: Yes, I do know.

Claire: So what will happen?

Daisy: hmm [hesitates], I don't know whether it's appropriate to tell.

Claire: [looks at Daisy as she wants to know]

Ziyun: What happened?

Daisy: [looks at Claire] I got a warning from Patrick once. And he just said it shouldn't happen again. Didn't really mention that I would be fired.

Claire: Oh, ok.

Daisy: So probably won't be fired.

Claire: [finishes lunch] Ok, I'm going to the meeting [rolls eyes]

Kaitlin: [smiles] Good luck!

Claire: Kill me!

Kaitlin & Daisy: [smiles]

The exploratory initiations of interaction, including “do you hear” and “so do you know”, are social assessment of the knowns, and are used to search for further shared information that can link different but relevant nodes of information and tie individuals into a group, forming a network of relations (e.g. Blaschke, et al., 2012). It marks the informally informational interaction as construction of a social net of confidential gossip. The intentionality of information concealment is revealed through sentences like “but I couldn't tell you. I'm not sure whether you knew” and “I don't know whether it is appropriate to tell”, whilst what is being concealed is left unknown. Such unconcealed concealment indicates a differentiation of knowing and creates a border for the unknowns as ‘not for you to know’ and for the knowns as ‘not for us to tell’. It forms a sense of ‘in’ and ‘out’ through establishing distinctions between them. Being ‘in’ the circle, people can communicate certain things that are otherwise uncommunicable. Being ‘out’ of the circle, the others cannot understand the things that are being communicated and seem-like understandable. This invisible badging of membership enacts and is itself an enactment of a boundary of the particular secret knowledge. Confidential gossip thus is a cause and an emerging product of socialization.

Nevertheless, the boundary is weakly and imprecisely regulated, as Daisy said that “I got a warning from Patrick once”. It can be considered as a partial revelation of the conversation context that someone might have got or was getting a warning for something that should not have happened. Moreover, Daisy’s surprise, shown by her saying of “you know as well?”, shows that Claire was not expected to know. It denotes the casual nature of confidential gossip as a type of informal secrecy, and the paradoxical relations between sharing and permeability, and between concealment and revelation in

secrecy. As the joke that “whenever a secret is shared it becomes insecure” (Costas & Grey, 2016: 124), the construction of boundary for concealment generates possibilities of revelation as a breach of the boundary.

There are various indirect ways to initiate a sort of evaluation as an implicit scrutinization for ‘whether we are on the same side’, which will be explained through two lunchtime examples that occurred in the kitchen:

Example One

Aaron: I wonder what Ross would do if you fainted. He might just look at you [imitates what Ross would do by looking at Edith with indifference], and then go to find John and ask him to bring first aid.

Edith: Yes, you can’t expect much from him [laughs]

Aaron: Yes. He won’t care much.

Example Two

Jade: She emailed me saying “we are still preparing” at 3 and the event was at 5.

Helen: No! That's pretty stupid [shakes head].

Jade: Yes! And she said things like, can you find this and that. I mean, how can she expect me to do those when the event was about to start?! [rolls eyes]

In the examples, both Aaron and Jade descriptively illustrate particular situations without directly setting a tone for evaluation. In some way it temporarily trivializes and vaguely conceals (part of) the opinions of Aaron and Jade by offering space for others to express their judgements. As “levelling effect” (Bok, 1982: 100), it can avoid a fuller understanding of the evaluation of initiators embedded with moral criteria. Nevertheless, the implicit shades of evaluation inserted in the descriptive illustrations can be understood through the combination of non-verbal expressions, such as shaking head and rolling eyes. The interaction via indirect judgements triggers negotiations of value stance inserted in the evaluation. In both examples, Edith and Helen reply with a revelation of their value stance. The continuous emerging agreements, including Aaron’s agreement with Edith of what she agreed with him by saying “you can’t expect much from him” and similarly Jade agreed with Helen of what she agreed with her by expressing “that’s

pretty stupid”, act as a confirmation of the value stance and a means of maintenance of judgement, sustaining the development of confidential gossip. In this way, the boundary is enacted through the compatibility of value stance and judgement orientation in socialization.

Besides implicit initiations, direct ways of evaluation and judgement are also used within an established confidential gossip group. The following example is the continuation of the project application of Ross illustrated in the previous section. After Frances commented on the application with negative feedback and implied the possibility of rejection, Ross has acted upon the comments by inviting a senior colleague who has relevant experience to write a recommendation letter. Because of the delicate situation, Ross is particularly cautious regarding whether things are heading in a good direction. In a similarly busy and quiet afternoon, Ross runs into me in the kitchen, and the topic of his application re-emerges:

Ross: She (the senior colleague) just emailed me that ‘I have sent it’ [widens eyes and shrugs]. I didn’t get to read it. So I don’t even know whether I should say thank you [laughs slightly]

Ziyun: [laughs and shakes head]

Ross: What if she wrote something bad? So I don’t know whether I should say thank you for that [in a sarcastic tone].

Ziyun: That’s true. Is there a way for you to get to read it?

Ross: I’m not sure, but I will try!

Ziyun: Yes [nods]. And how’s it going with the freelancer you struggled with? The weird one. Did he adopt your feedback?

Ross: He is still crazy and pissed-off. He said he would do it this weekend. And he said ‘you’re just too sensitive about this stuff and don’t understand my jokes’ [imitates the tone of the freelancer]. But it’s NOT [emphasizes] that I’m sensitive, this is what I do. We’ve done lots of projects, and he is not the only freelancer I work with. Those (jokes) are just not right.

Ziyun: Yes, I think he is the one being ‘too sensitive’ [shakes head]. His jokes about genitals are really... [shakes head], he shouldn’t have done that.

Ross: Exactly [shakes head]. His jokes are so sexual and rude! I never write anything like that. I'm willing to drop the project rather than using these in the report.

Compared to the previous two examples of indirectness, with previously built trust and familiarity particularly with a shared stance of evaluation, this conversation between Ross and me is clearer and more direct in expressing opinions and judgements towards the absent third party. Nonetheless, similarly to the two examples, emerging agreements, in both verbal and non-verbal forms, are engendered and interwoven throughout the process of interaction. For instance, by saying “he is the one being ‘too sensitive’” and shaking my head, I agree with Ross about the jokes made by the freelancer are “just not right”. Moreover, by expressing “he shouldn’t have done that”, I further evaluate the jokes not only as an inappropriate piece of work, but also as a question of the freelancer’s professionalism. This stance is both confirmed and reinforced by Ross saying “I never write anything like that” as an indication of his own professionalism that contrasts with the freelancer’s. In this sense, the process of repetitive confirmation, extension and ‘validation’ of the side we both stand on not only brings boundary into existence as a social settlement of the sense of ‘us’ around the confidential gossip. It is itself a manifestation of the boundary.

However, given the fluidity of social relations and the weak regulation of boundaries, the existence and settlement of the boundary may be temporary. An enactment of the boundary can be a basis for the further negotiation that reshapes or reconstructs the initial enactment. Yet this is not to imply a circle of negotiation-enactment-renegotiation-re-enactment as either the uni-directional or the sole dimension of understanding the boundary of confidential gossip. Rather, it points to the multilayered interactive dynamics within enactment and between enactment and negotiation: the enactment of boundaries is not static without negotiation, and the negotiation of boundaries cannot be undertaken without any sort of enactment. What lies underneath the enactment is an ongoing negotiation that reaffirms, refines and revises an agreement, and this enactment is itself the ground of what should be negotiated and agreed upon. In this sense, the boundaries of confidential gossip are processual and recursive as they emerge and re-emerge in the constant interplay between knowing and not knowing, and through the tension of reaching a type of informal agreement regarding what is known.

4.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter explains how the line between confidential gossip and other genres of interaction and within confidential gossip gets drawn by various kinds of markers. By going right inside the process, a range of ways is shown as this happens. Yet understanding the line is not without difficulties, as the social embeddedness of confidential gossip in wider interactions constitutes the challenges of identifying it from other kinds of interaction. No rules or settings can be fixed regarding how or when confidential gossip takes place, as confidential gossip can emerge, submerge and re-emerge in different contexts. Therefore, the line between general gossip and confidential gossip in practice is porous and will be socially negotiable and context-specific. Moreover, as the pharmacist Sarina shared the confidential information of her job interview with a colleague who later revealed it to an inappropriate third party, the boundary that is constructed through the invisible yet visible, spoke yet unspoken formation of social relations is not always clear to insiders. In this sense, confidential gossip is a paradoxical marker of the existence of secrecy and its revelation. Notwithstanding that, the ambiguous boundary can also be a protection of confidential gossip, for example, the sway between confidential gossip and other genres of interaction reserves room for Serina to make her confidential information confidential-less by saying she will stay even if she gets the job. Overall, the fuzzy boundary around and of confidential gossip that constitutes its variety and variability of formation is considered as a feature of confidential gossip.

Boundaries around confidential gossip are analyzed as structures of social relations that are influenced and constituted by physical constructions including architectural qualities and body gestures. Exemplifying through an example of an enclosed space such as the office Victoria and I moved to from the kitchen, and examples of a non-privately-enclosed space such as the communal kitchen, the architectural qualities are understood as providing spatial and social affordance that supports the continuity of confidentiality. The combination and negotiation of remoteness and closeness generate norms for insiders to keep what is being said within the group, and for outsiders to not interrupt and keep social distance as the appropriateness and shared understanding of behaviour in the particular setting. Processes of ‘moving away’ in the kitchen generate a sense of specialness, mysteriousness and probably offensiveness to outsiders, which correspond

to the mystique quality of secrecy. Therefore, drawing on a discussion by Simmel in 'Sociology of Space', the physicality of boundaries reveals how spatial conditions act as a context for and partakes in social processes of confidential gossip. The relational understanding of boundaries is also illustrated through eye exchange and facial expressions as in the case of Debra's blunder after a conference call.

The fuzziness of boundaries and the processes of movements, eye change and facial expressions point to the underlying negotiation of boundaries. A boundary can be modified when certain ways of interaction of an outsider are perceived by insiders as 'one of us', when a situation changes that influences degrees of involvement and self-definition of group membership, when an attempt is made to enhance interaction such as fishing for further information and seeking for different sorts of information, and when social and formal positions are perceived differently. These situations reflect the 'onion feature' of confidential gossip that knowing is a relational status as what one can know is layered with different levels of trust and familiarity. It points to the significance of moral and emotional texture as the heart of boundary negotiation around confidential gossip that affects selections of 'what can be talked about' with particular insiders in a social group. An insider, therefore, is a relative position in relation to what an outsider is outside for.

The moral and emotional texture produces an understanding of 'will we on the same side', which turns sharing into bonding and constitutes an invisible badging of membership that marks the enactment of boundaries around and of confidential gossip. Processes of understanding 'will we on the same side' is a social exploration and assessment, such as the ambiguous conversation between Claire and Daisy with Claire saying, "so do you know" and Daisy replying "You know as well?". It involves various indirect ways of evaluation and implicit scrutinization for 'whether we are on the same side', such as the way Aaron asked, "I wonder what Ross would do" without directly telling what he thought Ross would do. Direct ways of evaluation are also used, which itself is a manifestation of the boundary. Nonetheless, the fluid social relations and weakly regulated boundaries around confidential gossip indicate the enactment of boundaries may be temporary. The temporality implies the multi-layered interactive dynamics within enactment and between enactment and negotiation that underneath the enactment is an ongoing negotiation and constant reconfirmation of emotional and moral

constancy, and the negotiation cannot continue without the basis of enactment as to what should be negotiated.

This chapter stresses the processual character of the boundaries around and of confidential gossip and provides a relational and situational way of understanding formations and reformations of social relations that associate insiders, distinguish insiders from outsiders, and interact insiders with outsiders. As shown in a position quote at the beginning of this chapter, the understanding of boundaries as both physical and social constructs echoes the critique of Fayard & Weeks (2007) on general organizational theory for falling into social determinism by oversimplifying social interactions, especially informal interactions, as being detached from (the influence of) physical environment.

The core of secrecy is “about the drawing of boundaries” (Costas & Grey, 2016: 10) as “secrecy is about realm of the hidden and the arcane, but this realm can exist only if a boundary is drawn” (2016: 10), the analysis of marks and boundaries around confidential gossip is the first and crucial step in understanding its role in organizational life. Without understanding how confidential gossip is marked as such, it cannot be identified at all. Furthermore, the analysis illustrates and reflects the ‘how’ in practice of a core argument made in chapter 1: At the centre of its constitution of organizations lies its processes and influence as a metaphorical crayon that draws and redraws the map of socialization and social relations at work. Therefore, “us-them boundaries matter” (Tilly, 2004: 213) for confidential gossip as a cause and consequence of particular social organizations and particular ways of organizing socialization at work.

Chapter 5

Breaking the Silence: Confidential Gossip as Cultural Practice

...a crucial and recurrent question encountered in the field of organizational communication [is]: How can we describe and analyze the details of interactions while demonstrating that they literally contribute to the constitution of an organization? In other words, how can we bridge the gap that seems to exist between communication, which always appears to be micro and local, and structure, which always appear to be global and macro?

(François Cooren & Gail T. Fairhurst, Dislocation and Stabilization: How to scale up from interactions to organization, 2009: 117)

It is as much through the everyday practices of individuals – their pragmatic strategies, their informal talk, their small daily struggles and resistances – as through the more conventionally defined structures of social reproduction (kinship, ritual, myth) that culture is both perpetuated and transformed. Indeed, in this view, culture is seen as deriving not so much from abstract norms as from negotiated, contested everyday practices

(Charles D. Piot, Secrecy, Ambiguity, and the Everyday in Kabre Culture, 1993: 354)

[Richard] worked at Company M before. They have a very corporate environment. I'm surprised that he is this laid back after all those years working there. He has been 'Quinza-ed'.

(Fieldnote)

The previous chapter analyzed closely the local/micro level of communicative interaction as episodes of interpersonal relationships that construct, span and/or reconstruct boundaries within and between social groups of confidential gossip. Inserted in the conundrum between micro- and macro-oriented analysis is the question of constitution, concerning the ‘scaling up’ (Taylor & Van Every, 2000) of situational interactions as “‘here and now’” (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009: 121) to a bigger picture of “‘there and then’ of structures” (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009: 122; see also Taylor, 1993). Following Taylor and his colleagues’ (1996: 4) proposal that “our theory of communication must be capable of explaining the emergence and sustainability of large, complex organizations”, Cooren & Fairhurst (2009: 117) ask a fundamental, although “hardly new” (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009: 117), question of CCO: “how can we bridge the gap that seems to exist between communication which always appears to be micro and local, and structures, which always appear to be global and macro?” (see also McPhee & Zaugg, 2009). Schoeneborn (2011: 664, emphasis added) also puts forward the central enquiry of CCO that, “what makes communication *organizational*”. Drawing a parallel to CCO, this chapter, based on the previous analysis of boundaries, zooms out to paint a bigger picture of confidential gossip as a cultural practice in the organization.

Boundaries established within and through confidential gossip are not demarcations between known and unknown, but a mode of sensemaking that both situates in and constructs a context of creating and breaking bonds. Membership of confidential gossip is a collective identity emerged through interaction as “how members relate to each other and to their organization” (Taylor, 2009: 154). As examples illustrated in the previous chapter, at some points throughout interaction processes, participants of confidential gossip explicitly and/or implicitly present their moral judgements towards the ‘background themes’ of value underneath topics of discussion. It is an exploration of the judgements of others, and of possible consensus of views in a group. Through confidential gossip as part of the ‘moralities of everyday life’ (Sabini & Silver, 1982), it is a way to identify insiders from ‘outsider insiders’, to generate links that connect nodes of individuals into a net, and to establish credentials as effective participants. The construction of collective understanding is a process of social positioning of members to locate themselves in a group under specific situations. Therefore, being agreed with certain judgements can be a social option as a means for self-positioning and social positioning by other group members within a social group, rather than (solely) a moral

choice. Hence, membership of confidential gossip occurs in a context, and requires a context for it to be understood.

Examples in the earlier chapter also indicate the fragmentary feature of confidential gossip as episodes of communicative interaction occurring at a specific time and in a specific space. The examples tell seemingly trivial and disconnected stories, such as Victoria locking the door before our conversation, Debra using a non-verbal expression to tell Dina to keep me ‘unknown’, and the “typical Andrea” with her layers of makeup. As Waddington (2012: 37) notes, “gossip about an issue, person, or organization can temporarily disappear, but then resurface elsewhere in time and space” (see also Michelson, et al., 2010). What underneath the stories and the storytelling are the non-trivial associations *across* time and space of “emotions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about the experience of work and organizational life” (Michelson, et al., 2010: 373). The stories constitute nests of interconnections of individual organizational lives. Confidential gossip can generate a common perception of a situation as ‘how we *actually* do things around here’. In this sense, as secrecy in general is considered “not as a property of organizations, but as a core characteristic and process of organization itself” (Costas & Grey, 2016: 141), confidential gossip that has an extra twist of being or being believed to be the ‘real stuff’ constitutes a ‘unwritten grammar’ (Merton, 1972: 15; Parker, 2000: 83) within which practices and their meanings can be understood.

Therefore, in general, gossip is considered as “an efficient means of transmitting information about rules, norms, and guidelines for living in a group or culture” (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011: 642) and as “continuous fuel for the organizational culture engine” (van Iterson, et al., 2011: 382), as it is “uniquely cultural, both in terms of the content of the information and in terms of the consequences of the information” (Baumeister, et al., 2004: 115). As a genre of gossip and with the extra twist of being (considered as) ‘more real’, confidential gossip produces ways of identification and climates of interaction, and transcends the ‘here and now’ interactions to interactional rules in a social structure in which an organization is embedded. It can develop particular sorts of ‘systems of coordinated actions’ as an organization defined by March & Simon (1958). Such regularity indicates what to do and what not to do as shaping behaviour of organizational life, and who should and who should not be told as a way to organize ongoing formation and reformation of organizational relations. Hereby, confidential gossip constitutes the

formation of guidelines of living in the organizational life, and is itself inherently a cultural production that constitutes reproductions of the culture.

This chapter will explore this main theme through two aspects of confidential gossip as a cultural practice in Quinza, including confidential gossip as a social embodiment of hierarchy and the organizational construction of time. As Rosen (1985: 33) states, “assumptions, beliefs, and values – the bases of culture – influence action and are ongoingly influenced by action”. It is to clarify and emphasize that this chapter does not intend to construct a theory of culture or cultural analysis. The aim of this chapter is to provide an answer to, or a suggestion of, how confidential gossip constitutes organization in a broader context through cultural aspects such as time and hierarchy that are actively engaged, deeply interwoven and retrospectively reproduced in and through practices of confidential gossip. In turn, it offers a way for confidential gossip to be understood in a bigger picture. By participating in confidential gossip, the unwritten rules get to be communicated, and the appropriate ways of conducting the rules get to be understood and shared. It is processes of revealing, educating, learning and dividing. Confidential gossip, in this sense, partakes in the making of culture in and of Quinza. It generates a ‘real’ sense of ‘what is like in here’, and is generated and shaped by such a sense of reality.

Whilst discussion of concepts and conceptualizations of culture is outside the scale of this thesis (see Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Keesing, 1974; Alvesson & Berg, 1992; Parker, 2000; Alvesson, et al., 2017 for reviews and discussions), it is necessary to explain what I mean by ‘culture’ before moving forward with this chapter. As Weeks (2004: 31) remarks, “not only does culture mean different things to different people, but it also means different things to the same people”. Culture, embedded as it is with its ambiguity and fuzziness, is called “a word for the lazy” (Alvesson, 1993: 3, cited in Weeks, 2004) for being a catchall term that describes and prescribes everything and consequently nothing. Yet the variability and disagreements of culture and understanding culture are what make culture absorbing. Moreover, the lack of a concrete consensus might be necessary for culture to be understandable and useful as not only it emerges in different historical, political and social contexts, but also it is itself an ongoing process of negotiation. As Martin (1992: 152) emphasizes, “[the] absence of consensus does not indicate an absence of culture, but rather the presence of a fragmented culture”. In such

circumstance, this chapter draws on Weeks's (2004: 34, emphasis added) understanding that "to understand the meaning of the word *culture*, we must look at how it is used, not at how it may be defined abstractly".

In the case of Quinza, this chapter follows Parker's (2000) approach of comprehending culture as 'unity and division', 'shared and difference', as "organizational culture is a continually contested process of making claims of difference within and between groups of people who are formally constituted as members of a defined group" (Parker, 2000: 233). To understand confidential gossip as a cultural practice in Quinza, it is important to view culture as an ongoing accomplishment and to attend to its complexity negotiated and constituted through every practice as "to appreciate that 'it' is not a fixed or homogenous 'thing' but is rather multi-layered" (Grey, 2012: 110).

As McPhee & Zaug (2009) note,

"As organizational members engage in communicative practices in certain ways, they are indeed shaping and constituting their organization into a unique formation that is very different than other organizations" (2009: 26).

This chapter, therefore, will begin with a general introduction of Quinza's culture through two social events, before moving into detail illustrations of the two cultural aspects including 'confidential gossip and the organizational construction of hierarchy' and 'confidential gossip and the organizational construction of time'.

5.1. A “Quinza-ed” Practice of Culture

This section will paint a general picture of aspects of Quinza culture through office Secret Santa and the Christmas party outside the office. The social events generate sorts of detachment from work, and therefore a sense of reduction of constraints from ‘being at work’. The events thus are periods of ‘non-work’, associated with leisure and fun, and allow more relaxed interactions and simultaneously revelations of aspects of the culture. The intention is to bring in certain cultural contexts of Quinza and to bring up a general sense of how confidential gossip not only is a part of, but also constitutes, Quinza-ed practices of culture.

As a leading company in the media industry, Quinza commits to high-quality innovative work, and provides an open environment that supports that commitment. Yet such support is interwoven with administrative aspects of management that can trigger confusions of openness and conflicts of conduct in organizational life.

Entering December, some teams in Department H hold Secret Santa events. Different kinds of gifts are put into secret black bags for current concealment and later revelation, making the gifts mysterious and attractive to the unknown. A related topic, therefore, emerged in a lunch conversation:

Ziyun: So what did you get for the Secret Santa thing?

Ryan: I didn't want to get anything personal, especially as she's at a higher level than me. And [lowers voice] she looks nerdy, so I got her a penholder, a normal one. You can't expect much from office Secret Santa.

Ziyun: True.

Ryan: Here (in Quinza) it's more [pauses], you know. You can't really do casual or fun stuff. Otherwise the boss's face would be, 'what have you done?!', and probably regret organizing the Secret Santa. In a company I worked before, I just bought my colleague a small bag of weed [laughs]. What's a better gift than that!

Ryan understands the Secret Santa as an office event in which organizational rules apply (see also Rosen, 1988), hence “you can't really do casual or fun stuff” especially as he is the Secret Santa of his superior. Whilst social events like Secret Santa can offer a more

relaxed atmosphere that encourages interaction, such encouragement is built with constraints. The constraints are transformed into claims of difference both between the power positions of Ryan and his superior and between Quinza and the company he worked for before, and are materialized through the choice of gift – a penholder, “a normal one”. In this sense, rules are made meaningful through the materialization, which in turn makes sense of the constrained freedom and the acceptance of limited action. Organizational culture in this way is illuminated throughout the process of how Ryan accounts for his gift option as a way of comprehending, conveying and penetrating social orders at work.

Following the office Secret Santa, comes Quinza’s annual Christmas party. This year it is in a decent international franchise restaurant whose slogan for Christmas booking is “For the best Christmas party ever”. Next to the entrance, security is checking the invitations for the party. “She is with us”, Lydia says as I do not have a printout of the invitation. Inside, two waiters are taking coats from guests and putting paper bands that are tagged with the numbers of our coat hangers on our wrists. Under dimmed lights, the evening starts with champagne, wine and cocktails on the ground floor with a bar in the centre and tables on the periphery. No dress code was specified, just like in the office people can decide their own styles of workwear from casual outfits such as jeans, check shirts and day dresses to formal outfits such as suits. For many female colleagues, workwear is turned into party dresses with nicely applied night-out makeup. “Eye candy”, Ryan says openly to me. Some male colleagues are in leisure clothing, some prepared outfits for the party ranging from a special pair of shoes, a different jacket to a velvet suit, and some are in suits. “Are they freelancers? The ones in suits. I’ve never seen them before in the office”, I say to Daisy with my eyes indicating a group of three standing next to the bar. Daisy glances through the crowd and says, “No, they’re the managers at the top. They don’t come in often. Even I barely see them.” “What do they normally do?” I ask. “Sales and production. But I’m not sure what exactly they do. It’s a mystery”, Daisy replies and laughs, “When they come in, they’re mostly in suits.”

Dress standard is a social expression and simultaneously a social restriction. Being free from a dress code at work and at the Christmas party avoids what Rosen (1985: 34; see also Rosen, 1988) calls “the main contest for wealth, influence, and power”, bringing a sense of openness and equality amongst disparate groups across the big community of

Quinza, whilst the higher-up male managers are usually in suits. Through expressing impact, authority and power and concurrently being restricted by such expression, “the dress standard is that of the powerful, legitimating their terrain and defining group identity on their ground” (Rosen, 1985: 34). At this party, the dimmed setting enlightens the difference of power.

With darkened lights, dancing, music and alcohol, the Christmas party gives licence for being more open and free about things that are confidential to various degrees.

Ziyun: The newcomer to the J team, do you know him?

Aaron: Oh, the guy with a moustache?!

Ziyun: [laughs] Yes.

Aaron: I would think he’s gay as well.

Ziyun: See! Even you think that, and you are a guy!

Aaron: [laughs] Did you ask him?

Ziyun: Yes [laughs]

Aaron: You just asked him whether he’s gay? [laughs]

Ziyun: No! [strongly denies] That’s rude! I said, I just wondered [laughs]

Aaron: [Laughs]

Ziyun: Are you?

Aaron: No [laughs]

Within Quinza, being gay would probably not be regarded as stigmatic. However, speculating about someone’s sexuality and especially asking them about it openly would not normally be considered appropriate.

With the licence for openness, some of the talk is at least implicitly judgemental:

Ross: [talks to me] I need to watch out for you. There are some weird guys in the company.

Georgina: Yes. There are! [in an emphatic tone]

Ziyun: [surprised] Really? I’ve never met any.

Ross: There are. That’s why we need to watch out for you. Who was that guy?

Ziyun: I don’t want to tell you [laughs]

Ross: [not laughing] Tell me, who is it?

Ziyun: [hesitates] Ok. He's the one standing there [indicates with eyes]

Ross: I see [pauses]. Good, now he's gone.

The subtext here is that “that guy” is a sexual predator – something well-known to Ross and Georgina and by implication more generally within Quinza – and that I am being reluctantly encouraged to participate in the conversation. The other two are being more uninhibited than they would be in a normal work environment, so they are more open about what would normally be confidential. Being a marker of the openness, confidential gossip is practiced as a way of talking about things that may not be directly discussed at work such as sexuality, a different way of talking about things that happen at work such as the possibility of encountering a sexual predator, and even a way to reveal what is covered up at work outside of work:

Ross: So you know how Richard never tells anyone about what he does on holiday? Well, I had one of those catch-up meetings with him. And he told me he always goes to this naturist colony. Imagine, Richard, NUDE [emphasizes and laughs] – flopping around this village or whatever it is! He said, don't tell other people. But I've told everyone! It's just a mind bitch!

Daisy: It's really a funny image! I can't believe it!

Rosie: It's so funny!

...

Ross: Richard is pretty laid back. He doesn't know what happens in the office. One time I needed to EMAIL [emphasizes] him where I was so he knew!

Daisy: He really doesn't know anything. One time I just wanted to see whether he would notice, I put on a video for an hour. Nothing happened. Even I was bored at the end.

Ross: He worked at Company M before. They have a very corporate environment. I'm surprised that he's this laid back after all those years working there. He has been 'Quinza-ed'.

Looking into confidential gossip embedded with tension and connection between knowledge hiding and sharing, people know more than they communicate, and they gain more than they know through communication. Through Ross's and Daisy's stories about

Richard, he emerges as a fuller person who is consistent with Quinza's relaxed and laid back culture as an 'uncorporate environment', compared to Company M that has "a very corporate environment". By the very act of sharing what was not shared in the office and gaining an understanding of individuals in the context of the organization, confidential gossip not only shares stories that can be pleasurable, but also paints parts of a bigger picture of the organizational life in Quinza. Indeed, participants know only part of a story or different stories. Yet putting what they know individually together through practices of confidential gossip gives a fuller understanding, rather than a complete picture, of particular individuals or events at work. During such process, confidential gossip integrates the understanding of a "Quinza-ed" environment and differentiates it from Company M. By constructing a type of identification for being 'us' and not like 'them', confidential gossip constitutes a grammar that makes sense of what the organization 'is', rather than what the organization 'has'. In this way, confidential gossip as a cultural practice is woven through the making and remaking of an organization.

Similarly, the sense of 'we-ness' is also revealed through another illustration of what is unspoken at work outside of work:

Georgina: In our department, we say, lots of decisions happened in bars [winks], not in those formal meetings. Bar works better.

Ziyun: I never noticed! I ran into a departmental meeting and saw ten bottles of champagne. It must be your department [laughs]

Georgina: That must have been a good meeting then [laughs]. You know, not everything speaks out loud. Sometimes, meetings are not only about meetings.

What Georgina reveals about many of her department's decisions being made in bars is something that usually would go no further than the department – something not spoken out loud outside of 'we'.

Rosen (1988) presents the Christmas party as an interesting organizational phenomenon as "the 'party' integrates such as aspects as dress, dance, music, food, alcohol, performance, laughter, sex, and talk into a drama which speaks to those present concerning the nature of their relationship to Schoenman and Associates" (1988: 468). Derived from the Christmas party that contrasts the office context, confidential gossip,

as a mixer, blends together what is work and what is its opposite, and integrates aspects of ‘what is really like at work’ outside of work. Through the lens of confidential gossip, the Christmas party is not only a party. It is also an organizational activity, which can also be illustrated by Ryan’s reaction about Ross.

Ryan: Who is Ross?

Ziyun: [indicates with eyes] He is.

Ryan: He’s one of the big guys. Not sure what to say to him.

Through ‘he is one of the big guys’, confidential gossip makes ‘visible’ the hierarchal relationships constructed at work. By the very process of communicating, meanings of the relationships are made known to me and are reinforced through synthesizing realms of work and leisure and through demonstrating that hierarchical positions are a gap that lengthens social distance even if in a context that is helpful to shorten it, like the Christmas party. Ergo, confidential gossip shows the merger of “the first-order relations” (Rosen, 1988: 468) of the chain of command and “informal second-order relationships of play within an organizational free space” (Rosen, 1988: 468), indicating the interwoven feature between them in organizational life. The remark of hierarchical difference (i.e. “one of the big guys”) creates an internal division that articulates the “local experience of organizational life” (Parker, 2000: 79), and marks a classification of membership by the differentiation of ‘them’ as “the big guys”. In this sense, confidential gossip is locally produced and produces a local understanding that constitutes the organization as “fragmented unities” (Parker, 2000: 3) through contested meanings between the Christmas party ‘is’ a party and the Christmas party ‘should be’ an organizational activity.

Therefore, as gossip, confidential gossip is “a convergence of social interaction, information games, and organizational roles” (van Iterson, et al., 2011: 381). Above and beyond the revelation, confidential gossip provides a space that allows people to communicate and evaluate the difference underneath the shared and the division underneath the unity. When organizational culture is an ongoing process of constructing and negotiating claims of difference of ‘us’ and ‘them’ within and between groups, confidential gossip is a marker of “what kind of difference makes a difference” (Parker,

2000: 3). In the conversation with Ryan, it is the hierarchical position as “one of the big guys” that makes the difference.

5.2. Confidential Gossip and the Organizational Construction of Hierarchy

Progressing through December with holiday around the corner, Department H is getting more festive, for example, a team decorates the desk of a member who hates Christmas with Christmas lights, and a mannequin is dressed in a Christmas hat. With a beeping sound, people are getting email notifications of, or invitations to social events like departmental Christmas lunches and Christmas jumper day. More and more talk around Christmas is emerging in cubicles, hallways and the kitchen. Memories from past years are topics of good laughs and episodes of gossip, and from there, people wonder whether the past will be the present. They also are getting busier as the approaching of Christmas means less time left for a final push of annual tasks. With the same beeping sound, emails counting down the days left for target achievements are constantly reminding them that holiday is yet to come.

Kaitlin: I haven't got many days left. They've GOT [emphasizes] to email the contracts back to me. The number (of unfinished contracts) is too high.

Ziyun: Can you send them a reminder?

Kaitlin: It was not that long ago. We want them to have enough time to read. I just want to tell them, 'excuse me, do you know there's a reply button'. How much time do they need! It always takes forever. They hurry you for contracts. When they do get one, they never send it back to you.

This conversation indicates the pressure reaching annual targets and the tension of task complement generated by the difference between “we want” and “I just want”. It generates different groups of ‘us’ that split ‘we’ and in turn constitute the ‘we’, as illustrated below:

Ryan: The first thing I do when I arrive is to turn on the computer and then browse through emails. I have my phone connected to emails, so I keep emails on track. When I see there isn't any angry email, I feel, yeah, its fine. I can deal with it.

Ziyun: Did you get angry emails?

Ryan: Yes, because my job is the first point of contact for my boss and for some freelancers.

Ziyun: For freelancers as well?

Ryan: Yes. So freelancers will contact me if anything happened. But the thing is, sometimes I don't have control over EVERYTHING [emphasizes]. So it doesn't help even if they get angry with me. For example, a leaflet sample was finished, but the freelancer didn't get enough copies of it. I submitted the request to customer service, but they didn't deliver. So it's customer service's problem. But then the freelancer emailed me saying angrily that she didn't get it. Well, not angry, but in a harsh tone. I emailed customer service about that. But I can't MAKE [emphasizes] customer service send her the copies. It's out of my range. But I can't tell her that! If this kind of things reaches my boss, I can't say to her, look, it's not my problem. I will still be the one who couldn't get the job done. So you get all the blame for something that's not your fault.

For Ryan as “I”, his work encompasses conflicts between “don’t have control over everything” and “get all the blame for something that’s not your fault”. The conflict could not be explained to his manager, but it can be told to me. Not only because I can be more sympathetic with a higher possibility of standing on the same side as him, but also because I am irrelevant and hence have no impact on his situation. Moreover, as Ryan says, his manager is his “boss” who watches over his shoulder and if Ryan does tell her ‘that is not part of my job’ or simply “I can’t” might lead to an image of him lacking commitment and competence. The disabling thought of “I can’t tell her” points to the position difference with imbalanced authority in the chain of command that constructs ‘we’. The hierarchically constructed reality of work is communicated amongst the participants and revealed through confidential gossip. The sense of what not to do as “I can’t say to her” is a connotation and ramification of the power order, and is inserted in his way of doing. Though Ryan’s frustration shown in the confidential gossip, the perception and the experience of the hierarchy are indicated as being embedded in and being parts of the way of living in the organizational life. Besides hierarchy, through identifying the leaflet problem as “customer service’s problem”, the deciphered boundaries of organizational structure is enacted through the process of complaint.

Weeks (2004) comments on his experience of complaints in a British bank he named ‘British Armstrong Bank’ as:

“To be socialized into the Bank’s culture is to come to know not only the way things are done around here but also the way they are complained about. It is to learn not only the official ideology of the organization but also the right and wrong ways to account for it, derogate it, diagnose it, and deprecate it” (2004: 8).

Similarly, in both the case of ‘the Bank’ and of Quinza, complaints serve as a particular way or ‘rule’ of expressing and understanding ‘how things are done here’. The culture of ‘the Bank’ and of Quinza is reflected and understood through staff complaints of right and wrong, along with their thoughts, evaluations and actual conducts of such right and wrong. Confidential gossip here is not only a way of learning rules, but also a sanction towards flaws of the rules and contradictions of the practice. Therefore, confidential gossip educates beyond the official ideology as formal rules. It teaches how to deal with the rules from participants’ past experience as a way of revealing the organizational culture and simultaneously how to live within the culture. It introduces and produces a ‘real’ sense of organizational life in Quinza.

Whilst being considered as “couldn’t get the job done” is an encumbrance, the sense of ‘getting the job done’ is established through clear messages. A lunch conversation will serve as an example:

Aaron: So now I have CC Jacky [Aaron’s manager] a lot in my emails.

Jason: Really? Did she say anything again? And did she think she gets too many emails from you?

Aaron: I don’t know. But I don’t want her to think that I never work on anything! Especially now (in December)! So I just CC her the emails I sent out. Most of them. Just to let her know I’m doing work.

Jason: Yes, just in case

Aaron: Yes. I don’t care whether she gets too many emails from me as long as she gets them.

By copying Jacky “a lot” into his emails, Aaron attempts to inform his manager that he actually works at work, rather than solely being at work. It is triggered by the existing divergence of understanding between Aaron and Jacky regarding whether Aaron does

enough work. The pressure of the conflict contributes to the doing of Aaron for *wanting* to let Jacky know, with the indicated importance of not only getting the job done, but also showing the job is getting done. The use of unspoken tactics within the realm of hierarchy goes beyond the necessity of basic human verbal communication (Rosen, 1985). Email flows here are seen as a representation of work progression, a measurement of job engagement, and a production of a ‘correct’ perception to the manager. Furthermore, the emailing scheme is not only a way of reporting to the manager, but also a monitoring system for the work behaviour of Aaron. By constantly reminding Jacky of his work progress, Aaron also reminds himself of who he is in the context of Quinza and what he should do in order to sustain who he is. It is a process of developing self-disciplinary conduct, although there is ambiguity generated by being at different positions in the chain of command that, whether Aaron wants to or he has to want to copy Jacky in the emails. Hence, confidential gossip here is utilized to communicate a particular message that manifests a specific power structure and the maintenance of the authoritative order. It puts the particular set of hierarchical relations between Aaron and Jacky on display. Whilst this is a case of a subordinate feeling the need to demonstrate a sense of ‘getting the job done’, a similar situation arises as to whether a subordinate feels ‘right’ to have a say when his manager demonstrates ‘getting the job done’:

Ziyun: Let’s say, in a meeting, if your boss is making a bad decision, will you tell her?

Ross: No!

Ziyun: You will stay quiet.

Ross: Of course! I won’t say, ‘you’re such an idiot’ in public. I might think it [laughs], but I won’t say it. Maybe I will drop by her office later and explain. But it’s not easy to say.

Georgina: But here in Quinza, it is a bit different, isn’t it? You can talk more.

Ross: Hmm [pauses], to some extent.

They “can talk more” but “to some extent”, as the constraint is attached to the hierarchal difference, similar to Aaron’s situation where the boss is in a higher position, not lower. The confidential gossip that reveals this knowledge encompasses certain vagueness regarding the meaning of the pause and of Quinza being different “to some extent”. The intangible sense of hierarchy as an unwritten rule is made tangible through expressing

the way of acting as a process of self-regulation that “I might think, but I won’t say”, and through the vagueness of expression that reflects the prudence of maintaining rules and is itself a rule as “you can talk” but only “to some extent”. Whilst the typology of formal and informal organizations is problematic, chapter 1 defines confidential gossip as a genre of informal communication based on its informality of content and ways of socialization. Being under the radar does not mean confidential gossip is isolated from the radar. In the case of confidential gossip in Quinza, rules and norms are not entirely separated from the existing hierarchical structure, and autonomy is developed in a sense of relativity.

So far in this section, confidential gossip serves as a mirror that reflects the meanings of hierarchy as part of the working life. Looking into the mirror, people see who they should be in Quinza. In this sense, confidential gossip also serves as an origami box. Meanings of the metaphor are twofold as the origami box here is referred to as both a handcraft and a magic illusion. As a Japanese handcraft, origami boxes are made out of pieces of paper folded and unfolded into specific shapes. Paper can be made into square boxes with or without dividers, cups, vases, lids, handles, etc. They are usually used as gift boxes or small containers. As a magic illusion, the origami box is inspired by the paper folding. In the original performance, the magician Doug Henning unfolded and extended a box into a size that his female assistant could walk into. Henning then proceeded to fold the box back to its original size whilst reciting a poem:

*"A little box, proved otherwise;
The world at large, made small in size!"*

He next inserted three swords through the box from three sides before unfolding the box to its extended size for the second time. The performance ended with the assistant emerging from the box unharmed wearing a mask and a different outfit.

What the origami box as a handcraft and a magic illusion have in common is that both play a role as a processor that shapes something into something different via folding and unfolding. Throughout the neat and apparently simple process are hidden and anfractuous complications between what is seen and what is not seen.

By re-presenting contexts at work and sharing stories implying ‘what is the right thing to do’ in a particular context, an ‘origami box’ at work is constructed through confidential gossip. Between folding and unfolding in processes of confidential gossip with its hidden social entanglements, messages with experience, ideas and concerns are revealed, understood and perhaps adopted. It is an education process that can gradually turn one into who one should be in a particular environment. Therefore ‘a staff *for* Quinza’ can emerge in and through the origami box constructed in the workplace. What is folded and unfolded here is inherently the organizational culture, and processes of folding and unfolding are making claims of difference between ‘she/he’ and ‘I’ and subsequently ‘them’ and ‘us’. It generates the ‘rightness’ of conduct as the sharing, understanding and reconstruction of culture.

Furthermore, metaphors like ‘mirror’ and ‘origami box’ demonstrate that spheres of the Quinza culture are actively engaged, deeply interwoven and retrospectively reproduced in and through practices of confidential gossip. In this way, confidential gossip constitutes both the apprehension of the special characters of Quinza as ‘what is *really* like in *here*’, and ways of *how* to live with such characters as a practice of culture. Thus, confidential gossip is a part of the ‘hidden epistemic architecture of organizational life’ (Costas & Grey, 2016) both “in structuring the places where secret knowledge is held and shared and in structuring its knowers” (2016: 138). It is an under-the-radar means structured by people and to structure their organizational life in a particular way.

Such structure is not an emotionless process, which will be illustrated through a lunch conversation below:

Erin: Did you hear what he said in the meeting? I can't believe he said that! If he wants us to do it in that way, then why don't we join that team altogether?! [in an angry tone]

Lavinia: Yeah, exactly!

Erin: This just shouldn't be the way! I'm not going to do it! What was he thinking!

Lavinia: [nods]

Confidential gossip acts as “a means of expressing and managing emotion” (Waddington, 2012: 58) that enables Erin to express her vexation at the decision: “I can’t believe he

said that”. The feeling of vexation is a catalyst of confidential gossip that can be seen as a “cathartic process, enabling the release of emotion and...of gaining support and reassurance” (Waddington, 2012: 63). By turning up the volume of what was silent during the meeting, Erin directly indicates her opinion regarding what was said in the meeting as a bad decision by saying “this just shouldn’t be the way”, and her (emotional) resistance to the decision as “I’m not going to do it”. Through the emotional revelation saying what was not said, Erin develops a sense of autonomy outside the meeting as a step out of the constraints of the hierarchical structure. Another lunch conversation will serve as a similar example:

Brenda: [unlocks her phone and shows it to Carly and Holly] Look at this, I got texts at 6:50am, 6:55am, 7am, and more. She asked me to do this, do that, OH MY GOD [emphasizes]! See?! 'IT staff booked at 11:30am', and there's another one like '12:30 to leave'. I mean - I get it, it's a big event. But this is just, TOO MUCH [emphasizes].

Carly: I feel she's just like - bitch, do this.

Holly: She should just chill. So what she's the boss? You're not a puppet.

A norm is developed through generating and sharing a consistent moral criterion that the boss was behaving inappropriately by treating Brenda as a “bitch”. Talking about how they feel regarding the boss indicates a relatively free state they obtain in the circle of confidential gossip. Moreover, Brenda gains a sense of justice of what was not right regardless the hierarchical position difference; as Holly expresses it, “so what she’s the boss?”

Both examples illustrate that whereas confidential gossip can be a mirror and an origami box that is triggered by, reveals and educates the conflicts and rules embedded in the hierarchical structure, it provides free space in which people can talk more about what is not said and develops a sense of autonomy and justice. However, the ‘autonomy’ is relative and not absolute, as the rules and norms developed in and through confidential gossip are not entirely separated from the ones derived from the existing hierarchical structure. They are not two parallel lines, as one can intersect with another. For example, participants that co-construct the free space of confidential gossip work at the same level in the hierarchy. Erin and Lavinia are both assistants that formed a social group. So is

the case of Brenda, Carly and Holly with their social circle. For them to talk about their managers in a directly evaluative and relatively liberal way, the hierarchical relationships are to some extent stripped. Whilst such talk can be considered as them talking with 'their people' at the same position about someone else at a different position, here the hierarchical relationships are to a level reinforced. The sense of both hierarchy and the relative autonomy inserted in organizational relations is brought into being through confidential gossip. In this sense, the 'we-ness' is constructed through the division and the unity of power positions, and through the difference and the shared of boundary construction.

5.3. Confidential Gossip and the Organizational Construction of Time

Upon her first week of arriving at Quinza, Abbey underwent training courses for newcomers. Walking by her desk, I saw a white A3 paperboard with three black lines drawn vertically to separate the paperboard into three sections.

Ziyun: Someone got something new on her desk [smiles].

Abbey: Oh yes! I just went to a training about how to manage your time better at work. The tutor said visualizing work tasks could help you work more efficiently. He showed us an example of this paperboard. Just like this [holds the paperboard]. I used his example and separated the paperboard into 'urgent', 'this month' and 'maybe'. He said we can quickly pick up priorities by looking at the paperboard, rather than wondering what to do.

Ziyun: Looks very organized!

Abbey: Yes! It does look good, doesn't it [smiles]. I feel it's going to be useful, [lowers voice] not that I don't know how to manage my time.

Many others use an Outlook calendar as a virtual white paperboard with a timetable of various deadlines of specific tasks. For example, a meeting schedule of a new product proposal means the proposal needs to be completed before the time of the meeting. Some assistants and their managers share Outlook calendars with each other, although it is not always the case.

The introduction of the white paperboard is symbolic, bringing a Quinza-ed way of time management into newcomers' everyday work. It generates an expectation of newcomers that they will better plan their time at work, as the training tutor said, to "quickly pick up priorities...rather than wondering what to do", and is part of "the process of generating a particular attitude to time" (Coffey, 1994: 946). As Bell (2001: 47) notes, "the meaning of calendrical or clock time only becomes apparent when it is transformed into a social experience". The introduction and the use of the paperboard thus produce a meaning of time by connecting time with the use of it in Quinza. Furthermore, the very existence of the paperboard and the sharing of Outlook calendars generate the visibility of time as "making visible an ideology" (Rosen, 1988: 478), 'displaying' the socially constructed nature of time. Time is brought into social existence through organizational practices that

construct awareness and conduct of time, and is retrospectively formed and reformed by awareness and conduct. This section will explore this theme through confidential gossip as both one of the practices and a connection amongst the practices in the organization.

The centrality of time to organizational life has been explored in sociological and organizational studies (Coffey, 1994). Attention has been drawn to the limitations of considering organizational time as exclusively quantitative and homogenous (Bell, 2001; see also Sorokin & Merton, 1937; Zerubavel, 1979; Burrell, 1992; Whipp, 1994). Changes in thinking about time have implications of our comprehension of work organizations (Bell, 2001). "...The ubiquitousness of the clock and the role of clock-time...have a crucial role in informing our sense of time in organizations and the wider social context" (Anderson-Gough, et al., 2001: 103). Awareness and conduct of time constitute a formation of social processes in organizational life.

Most studies on time and organization focus on the temporal monitoring of shopfloor/manual labour and responses of the latter (Collinson & Collinson, 1997). A growing number of studies address time in connection with managers and work relations, and extends the narrow concentration on speed and schedules of work (e.g. Mintzberg, 1973; Ditton, 1979) to various aspects such as how managers are subject to time-space surveillance (Collinson & Collinson, 1997), how time forms a political and social core in developing professional identity (Anderson-Gough, et al., 2001), and hereby work-family pressures and conflicts (e.g. Collinson, 1998; Thompson, et al., 1999). Anderson-Gough, et al. (2001: 110) illustrate a social ritual of long evening drinks of account trainees that "you were normally up till two or three in the morning in the bar and you'd go to bed at three, get up at six and down to breakfast into the room". This practice reinforces the expectation of accounting professionals as high-energy persons (Anderson-Gough, et al., 2001). An organizational culture of time sacrifice, therefore, has been interpreted as an indicator of employee commitment and career dedication (e.g. Coffey, 1994; Perlow, 1995; Lewis & Taylor, 1996) as a "search for glory" (Collinson & Collinson, 1997: 398). In the case of Quinza, time sacrifice was neither an essential part of its culture, nor a support for career advancement. It has different stories.

5.3.1. An Informal-Rule Setting of Time

The office of Department H has a ‘biological clock’ of its own. It vibrantly wakes up in the morning approximately at 9:20. People trickle into the office with fewer and fewer cubicles left empty. Working hours are a strongly self-regulated aspect of Quinza and its organizational life, even “it’s the end of the year”, as Kaitlin says, “I feel so tired”. It is a feeling that many people share:

Adam: Today feels so long. I can’t wait to go home.

Aaron: Today? This week has been fucking long. I can’t wait to start Christmas.

With the standard hours from 9:30 till 17:30, Quinza also has flexible working time. Employees can choose either schedule that fits their circumstances. Unlike many other companies (e.g. Rosen, 1985; Coffey, 1994; Casey, 1996; Collinson & Collinson, 1997; Anderson-Gough, et al., 2001; Kunda, 2006), working extra-long hours is not necessarily part of the norm and time sacrifice for work is not part of the culture, as long as the job gets done. Nonetheless, staying longer at work is not unusual:

Edith: I came in late today.

Daisy: No one would notice.

Edith: Yes, especially since my boss came in at 10:30. But I need stay for one more hour. No one really keeps records of coming and leaving time, right?

Daisy: No one does that kind of thing right. But, maybe Flora.

Kaitlin: Maybe Flora. She does all sorts of weird things.

Although “no one would notice” and her boss was not present, Edith chooses to compensate her late arrival with a longer stay in the office. The flexibility of working hours is explained by an unwritten rule in the office that you can leave early only when you come in early. The rule here is explained to me through communicating confidential gossip. Although Flora was guessed to be the ‘invigilator’, nobody knows whether anyone records the actual working hours of individuals. Whilst it is rarely the case that someone looks for definite clarification, for example, by asking Flora herself or Victoria as the department director, or by exploring the actual existence of an invigilator by going against the rule of flexibility and constantly arriving late and leaving early. Instead, they

guess and laugh about the possibilities of there being an invigilator. As the possibility is uncertain and carries certain shared understanding amongst the participants, this topic is only mentioned within the group. Confidential gossip here provides a free space for the uncertain guess and generates pleasurable social bonding by reaching a consensus that recording actual working hours is “weird” and that Flora could be a possibility for invigilator as she “does all sorts of weird things”. Through communicating, agreeing and bonding, the unknown and uncertainty itself embedded in confidential gossip is reproduced as an invigilator of the self-regulatory behaviour that follows the rule of flexibility, and hence reinforces the rule.

Whilst the rule seems to be taken for granted as a ‘natural’ part of their organizational life, not everyone leaves early when s/he comes in early:

Daisy: I’m leaving early today. Have a movie plan with my boyfriend! And I came in early, so why not (leave early).

Aaron: One time I came in at 7. I was the first one here. I wanted to leave at 3, but I couldn’t.

Daisy: Why not?! You came in early enough to leave at 3.

Aaron: I know. But you know what I think when I see those people leave at that time. 3 o’clock is usually the busiest time in the office. I don’t want people to see me leaving when they’re working their asses off. It makes me feel like I’m not doing any work! And my boss was still there, so [stops sentence].

Daisy: Well, that’s true. But if anyone asked you, you could just tell them.

Aaron: Who will actually ask...They’ll just think.

Aaron’s concern is not whether he comes in early enough to leave early at 3pm. He is bothered by what it means by leaving early at that particular hour. From Aaron talking about him watching someone leaving at a busy hour, he knows someone might also watch him. Connecting to Collinson & Collinson (1997), a junior male manager was mocked by colleagues for resisting the work patterns expected of managerial-level employees:

“Every evening I get comments like “set your watches everyone, Dean’s leaving” and “we’ll book you in for a half day’s holiday”. It seems someone always draws

attention to the fact. Nobody acknowledges that I am in before everyone else”
(1997: 394).

Although “who will actually ask” indicates that Aaron will not be publicly mocked as Dean was, he might be considered similarly as lazy and lacking commitment at work. As a contrast to Dean going against the work patterns, Aaron decides not to leave as “I don’t want people to see me leaving when they’re working their asses off”. This practice associates the appropriate time of ‘being seen leaving’ with not only professionalism, but also ‘presenteeism’. Time is turned into an “indispensable instrument *of* measurement... [and] a key element *to be* measured” (Young & Schuller, 1988: 12, emphases added, cited in Bell, 2001) as a significant social means of “constructing a positive reputation as loyal, totally committed and productive” (Collinson & Collinson, 1997: 394). Through physical representation, it forms an individual professional identity and simultaneously a shared professionalism in the office. Demonstration of the character is a sign of membership for being competent and professional. The ones that do it differently can be regarded as deviant via, for instance, experiencing disciplinary sarcasm and social distance from other colleagues like Dean, or being named as Aaron called it, “those people”. It establishes that ‘leave early when coming in early’ is an unfinished sentence and is followed by ‘when the time is considered appropriate to leave’ as a hidden norm. In the same afternoon at 4:45pm, Daisy walks out of the office holding her coat and bag as low as they can be next to her leg and puts on the coat in the hallway outside the office. It makes less visible the fact that Daisy is leaving at a time that many colleagues are still working, even though she is ‘qualified’ to leave early.

With all the curiosity towards the rule of time and its conduct, I bring up the general topic of working hours without revealing any of my detail observation during an afternoon chat with Ross in the kitchen. Ross explains:

I think that's a psychological thing. If you want to leave early then you would need to come in early. If you want to leave very early then you would probably tell some people the reason why. Sometimes it's none of their business. It's just in your mind.

Although Aaron notes that leaving early will usually not be directly asked about, there are cases of indirect questioning, for example:

Tina: How come someone can leave early [frowns]? I saw Daisy left early.

Ziyun: Maybe they come in early to finish their work for the day.

*Tina: I finished my work till next week! Does it mean I can leave early as well?!
[shrugs]*

Ziyun: [smiles]

Abbey: [looks at Tina] Better catch up with that.

By asking and questioning why someone can leave early, Tina expresses her disagreement with such behaviour even if someone is qualified to leave. Working hours have a stricter meaning for Tina that, ‘we’ should stay till the clock reaches 17:30 regardless whether one comes in early and/or completed one’s work for today. As Ross illuminates that “it’s in your mind”, Tina developed an instruction of conduct of time that shapes her actions at work, and simultaneously reinforces her awareness of time through this conduct. Contrasted to the example of Edith, Daisy and Kaitlin pondering the possibility of there being an invigilator, confidential gossip here serves to state disagreement of the ‘unregulated’ act of others via evaluation and comparison between different ways of rule conduct. Rather than social bonding, it draws a line between ‘them’, those who leave early, and Tina who does not. The line not only separates groups, but also educates Abbey and me towards the value and rule that we should stay till off-work hour, and toward the social sanction of conducting the rule differently as being gossiped about. The culture around time is reinterpreted, reproduced and re-educated via confidential gossip. Through the re-education, confidential gossip intensifies the fundamental norm shared between the two views and ways of conduct, which is the importance of rule and rule setting of time.

This example also indicates a distinction of the role confidential gossip plays as a practice of culture compared to gossip in general. The role gossip plays in organizational culture is emphasized as that “gossip passes on organizational norms and values” (van Iterson, et al., 2011: 381; see also Baumeister, et al., 2004) and thus “plays a role...indirectly in the maintenance of organizational culture” (2011: 382). It is a feature shared by confidential gossip. Moreover, because of the explicit and/or implicit expectations of

confidentiality and protection of it, confidential gossip provides more free space that enables participants to not only convey values and rules of culture, but also empowers explicit challenge to the rules transmitted. In this way, through sharing, evaluating, educating, debating and re-educating amongst values and views, confidential gossip constitutes a (re)creation of the culture around time.

Notwithstanding that, the regulative behaviour surprises Victoria:

Ziyun: I'm amazed that many of them wouldn't leave early if they didn't come in early. They're highly regulated about it.

Victoria: Really?! They won't leave early?

...

[Then we start a conversation about someone in the office who does not follow this regulation of time]

Victoria: She comes in to do her own work and leaves, regardless of any other things and possibly the regulation you just mentioned. But she comes here to work. So as long as she does her job, the company is ok with it.

By expressing “really?!” and “as long as she does her job, the company is ok with it”, Victoria was surprised by the regulation of time as it is outside the company rules. Senior managers do not know or perhaps even do not care about timekeeping on the condition that the job gets done. In this way, the juniors almost invent the rules and hierarchy by assuming they are being regulated and watched. Therefore, social acts are shaped by organization practices in the architecture of open-plan offices through “the ‘panopticon discourse’ of incessant visibility” (Collinson & Collinson, 1997: 400) of body and time as an element of measurement and to be measured, and through sharing ‘what is not said’ as a panorama presentation of regulation in the organization and of a regulative way of organizing. In the open-plan office, the ‘code of conduct’ around time puts individuals on constant display for everyone else to see and to monitor. In turn, social acts reinforce the meaning of time and reform the ways that people utilize the space in the office. The flexible use of time sets norms that “creates standard of behaviour and exercises a control system that is anchored in measures of time commitments of its practitioners” (Epstein & Seron, 2001: 80). The rules of flexibility become an “omnipresent ‘tutelary eye of the norm’” (Barker, 1993: 432), an integral part of people’s sense of self, and “an interpretive

order of which we are usually unaware” (Bell, 2001: 48) in the organizational life.

Arrival and departure time is one aspect of the flexible working hours in Quinza. Lunchtime is another aspect regulated by the appropriateness of time. On my introduction day, Ross explains that lunchtime is flexible as “you can have lunch any time you want if you’re hungry. Some people have lunch at 11, and some others at 12. Sometimes my lunch lasts from 12 till 3. So you can do lunch whenever suits you the best”. The conduct of lunchtime can be different:

Kaitlin: It’s time to go back to work.

Daisy: Ugh, I don’t want to.

Kaitlin: I know. But [sighs], we have to. Otherwise the lunch will be too long.

The flexibility of working hours categorizes lunchtime into two types: “too long” that passes the “time to go back to work”, and logically it points to the perception of a ‘standard’ length of lunch within the sense of flexibility.

With ‘flexible working hours’ as an office policy, the informal setting of rules generates and explains the conduct of flexibility. As Goffman (1959: 109) indicates,

“...When a performance is given it is usually given in a highly bounded region, to which boundaries with respect to time are often added. The impression and understanding fostered by the performance will tend to saturate the region and time span, so that any individual located in this space-time manifold will be in a position to observe the performance and be guided by the definition of the situation which the performance fosters”.

By participating in confidential gossip, the unwritten rules get to be communicated, and the appropriate way of conducting the rules gets to be understood and shared. Therefore, ‘how I do it’ and ‘how you do it’ are transformed into ‘how we do it here’. In this way, through being part of the main topics of confidential gossip, the unwritten rules serve to educate people as an aspect of ‘what is actually going on here’ in Quinza, to write the norm in the mind of people in the office, and to develop self-governing behaviour at the workplace. Confidential gossip, therefore, plays an essential role in not only fostering an

impression and understanding of the climate at work, but also reinforcing the climate as an integral part of the construction of who people are in the workplace. As Kunda (2006: 11) notes, “it is not just their behaviours and activities that are specified, evaluated, and rewarded or punished. Rather, they are driven by internal commitment...” Rather than being a linear, unitary and independent system, time and the meaning of time are revealed as relational to the organizational life through confidential gossip that constitutes the institutionalization of the awareness of time in the office. Thus, “the clock measures time, and simultaneously creates the hours, minutes and seconds which we consider to exist in reality itself” (Ditton, 1979: 158). The invisible ticks of the clock make distinguishable sounds. Throughout his writing in *Engineering Culture*, Kunda (2006) indicates that culture translates and is shown through translating concerns, ideas and messages into daily activity. Confidential gossip is not only triggered by concerns and opinions, it translates them into daily activities and is shaped by the activities in particular contexts. In this sense, confidential gossip partakes in the making of culture in and about Quinza.

5.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an answer to, or a suggestion of, how confidential gossip and gossip in general can be understood in a broader context of organization by illustrating two particular aspects of culture, including the organizational construction of hierarchy and the organizational construction of time in and through confidential gossip. Confidential gossip offers a free space for participants to communicate their thoughts and opinions about specific things or/and an absent third party. For instance, Flora was guessed to be the invigilator who records actual working hours of staff. Ryan felt frustrated for being blamed for something not his fault, whilst he cannot explain this 'something' to his boss. Aaron copied his manager in most of his emails as an attempt to show her that he does work and to 'shut her up' on that matter. The examples indicate that confidential gossip services to educate participants of right and wrong by exemplifying personal conduct of rules or stories of wrong-doing, generating a 'real' sense of 'what is like in here'. Through communicating rules in confidential gossip, Aaron considered leaving early at a busy hour as inappropriate and unprofessional, and named whoever does that as "those people". This consideration educated Daisy and me that the hidden rule of time for 'leaving early while coming in early' is when the time is appropriate to leave. In this way, through the particular way of socialization, the unwritten rules get to be communicated, and the appropriate ways of conduct get to be understood, shared and reinforced. Hence, "from negotiated, contested everyday practices" (Piot, 1993: 354), confidential gossip arises within an organizational culture and reproduces that culture.

By taking part in the organizational construction of hierarchy and time, confidential gossip constitutes *Quinza* in the sense that episodes of confidential gossip mark and make the organization what it is, and that characters and aspects of *Quinza* are implicated in the processes of confidential gossip. The analysis of confidential gossip as a cultural practice therefore relates back to the micro-macro conundrum of CCO analysis mentioned in the introduction using the case of confidential gossip scaling up from situational interaction to a broader sense of constitution. It indicates that no interaction is completely local, as Cooren & Fairhurst (2009) note:

“Instead, they are what we call, using a neologism, ‘dis-local’, that is, their local achievement is always mobilizing a variety of entities – documents, rules, protocols, architectural elements, machines, technological devices – that dislocate, i.e. “put out of place” (Webster’s New Encyclopaedic Dictionary, p.289) what initially appeared to be “in place,” i.e. local” (2009: 123).

In the case of confidential gossip, it ‘dislocates’ the ‘local’ communication that continuously and subtly reveals, educates, forms, and in some instances challenges and reforms rules of living in organizational life. In this sense, it is “not simply the vehicle through which ideas, values beliefs, etc., are disseminated in a culture, but is rather constitutive of a social actor's culture and meaning system” (Mumby, 1989: 293) that constitutes various ways of organizing.

Many examples of confidential gossip given might be regarded as trivial and insignificant in organizational life, compared to its taken-for-granted image and other kinds of secrecy (e.g. concealing deep dark secrets) which, when revealed, can have tremendous impact on a company that might go as far as taking it to court or even putting it out of business. This chapter is itself an argument to such a view and suggests that organization and organizational life is constructed of and through various sorts of trivialness in different hidden nontrivial ways. Through the process, we come to understand the organization, the people that live in it, and their organizational life. Organization here “is not an ‘it’ but a becoming” (Taylor, 2009: 182).

Concluding Discussion

This thesis has brought forward the concept of confidential gossip by specifically focusing upon gossip as a form of secrecy, which has not been paid particular attention by studies of organizational gossip. The emphasis has been placed on revealing the nontrivial trivialness of confidential gossip at work by exploring the central question: how does confidential gossip constitute organizations? The understanding of its constitution involves exploring other three relevant questions including: what is confidential gossip?; how do we study it?; and how does it operate? Studying and understanding confidential gossip at work, I have argued, is essential for understanding organizations, as it enables us to have a fuller and deeper picture of organizational life, and therefore illuminates confidential gossip and organizational secrecy as essential topics for studying organizations.

Studying confidential gossip has been a complex matter, posing empirical challenges and ethical concerns. On the one hand, “[gossip] is ... an inherently difficult topic to research, fraught with conceptual complexity, challenges and contradictions, and resistant to paradigmatic summing up” (Waddington, 2005b: 222). On the other hand, the study of secrecy of any sort is fraught with difficulties (Greve, et al., 2010; Costas & Grey, 2016: 150-154). Hence, I have suggested that confidential gossip can be studied theoretically and empirically through the lens of its constitutive nature to organizations, specifically to non-secret organizations as explored in this thesis. In order to construct the theoretical notion of confidential gossip, the constitutive nature of secrecy, communication and gossip has been applied in the thesis.

This study of confidential gossip as a sort of secrecy does not intend to expose ‘juicy facts’ or any hidden darkness of Quinza. For communicative interaction to be confidential gossip, it does not have to be dramatic. More importantly, it does not need to be scandalous or thrilling *so that* it is important for organization and studying organization. Some examples given in the thesis contain intriguing stories, whereas what we consider as ‘intriguing’ might just be bits of the ordinary organizational life of participants. Confidential gossip in this sense is an ordinary part yet an extraordinary reflection of our everyday life. As Crewe (2015) notes in her ethnography of MPs at

work, “this [book] has theatre, conflict and secrets at its heart. The secrets are neither scandalous nor even shocking – they are everyday revelations about how our parliament really works, seen through the eyes of its main protagonists: Members of Parliament” (2015: 9). Researching informal secrecy or general secrecy in organizations is to notice the “unnoticed source(s) of beauty” (Parker, 2017: 1002) that many of us, if not everyone, see and experience in our everyday organizational life.

To briefly summarize the general logic and development of this thesis, chapter 1 ‘Conceptualizing Confidential Gossip in Organizations: The Interface of Secrecy, CCO and Gossip’ constructs a theoretical conceptualization regarding ‘what is confidential gossip’ by locating it at the intersection of secrecy, communication and gossip. The conceptualization follows the logic of headline claims that secrecy is constitutive of organizations through generating social relevance and differentiation. Communication is constitutive of organizations by constructing social realities at work and consequently communicating an organization into being. As a genre of informal communication, gossip is constitutive of organizations as being a way of understanding and generating organizational relations. Therefore, as a genre of gossip and secrecy, at the heart of confidential gossip lies organizational relations that are the cause and consequence of confidential gossip, and entails making and breaking bonds. With the understanding of confidential gossip as a fluid social product and process, chapter 2 ‘Toward an Ethnographic Approach to Confidential Gossip’ discusses ‘how do we study confidential gossip’ by reviewing seven main methods applied by extant empirical studies on gossip as possible methods to study confidential gossip. My preferred method, ethnographic participant observation, is chosen based on the complexities and challenges of studying confidential gossip, particularly of studying its part in the constitution of organizations. Referring back to the methodological challenges through first-hand experience, chapter 3 ‘The Double ‘Doubleness’: The Ethnography of Secrecy and the Secrecy of Ethnography’ explores and reflects on a series of ethical and emotional dilemmas that emerged during the ethnographic fieldwork. Chapter 4 ‘Making Confidential Gossip ‘Boundaries’’ brings into focus ‘how does confidential gossip operate’, and discusses how the boundaries around and of confidential gossip are drawn as both physical and social constructs. Scaling up from the local analysis in chapter 4, chapter 5 ‘Confidential Gossip as a Cultural Practice’ discusses confidential gossip in a broader context of organization as a Quinza-ed practice that reflects and partakes in the making of culture.

Following the general logic, a chapter-by-chapter review of the main arguments will be presented and extended with further discussions. In particular, the review and discussion in chapter 1 will be structured into four parts based on the four headline claims.

The Constitutive Nature of Secrecy

The constitutive nature of secrecy lies on its core trait of intentional concealment, which is stressed as the key to understand and conceptualize secrecy (Bok, 1982). The intentionality denotes that secrecy must not be apprehended as merely withholding information. Instead, the central understanding of secrecy locates at the question of ‘withholding it from whom’, and accordingly of ‘disclosing it to whom’. Therefore, secrecy is not an antonym of communication. It makes and shapes organizations by creating ‘compartments’ within which there is shared knowledge and around which there are boundaries so that there are insiders and outsiders of secrecy according to who is in possession of secrets and who is excluded from them. In this sense, Costas & Grey (2014, 2016) argue that secrecy constitutes organizations (see also Parker, 2016). This thesis draws upon their argument and considers that the constitution of secrecy is not solely seen in terms of its informational aspect, but also in terms of the social processes and meanings attached to it.

The significance of the social processes lies on two main features of secrecy: as a social formation of specialness and a social establishment of ‘truth’ and value, which mark boundaries and shape identities. Accessibility difference of concealed knowledge creates “the impressionability of our feelings” (Simmel, 1950: 332), and the separation itself is “the stamp of something ‘special’” (Simmel, 1950: 365). The specialness is generated by a sense of ‘I know something you don’t know’ through both the possession of concealed knowledge and indirect ways of hinting at the concealment of knowledge with the possible presence of inappropriate others. It engenders what Simmel (1950) refers to as the aristocratic nature and socially determined attraction of group formation. With the profound psychological satisfaction generated by selective grouping (Huxley, 2000, in Marx & Muschert, 2009: 225), the statement of superiority and the awareness of self-belongingness construct a social recognition of ‘us’ differentiating from ‘them’. Such differentiation not only distinguishes insiders from outsiders, but also cements the

connection amongst insiders through trust and security produced by the mutuality of shared privacy.

Besides the sense of social exclusivity, the concealment and differentiation around secrecy generate a mystique as the particular epistemological and ontological status of secret knowledge for being 'more true' or 'more real'. Such social establishment of value can be generated by being excluded from certain knowledge, being included in the concealed 'second world' (Simmel, 1950), or through the straddle of living between two worlds. Yet newcomers may find the secret knowledge is of less worth than it seems to be from the outside or understand the sense of 'more real' is a self-deception of insiders. Hence, secrecy establishes 'truth' through social relations, and can provoke breaking those relations.

The social differentiation that builds and is built through the two features of secrecy is not only between insiders and outsiders, but also amongst insiders. Thus, in this thesis, social processes of secrecy have been understood as not a matter of 'black-and-white' for either knowing or not knowing. It involves a continuum regarding what extent one is (not) in the known. Built on this understanding, I have suggested that boundaries of secrecy do not only indicate compartmentalization and membership, they mark the very existence of a group. With the different degrees of knowing, insiders do not have a whole picture of the concealed knowledge, which is the jigsaw nature of secrecy.

Moving from general secrecy to informal secrecy, its membership is selected with the criteria of specific personal and social relevance and preference, which reflects the 'casual' nature of informal secrecy in which the sharing and breaching of secrets is highly possible, and points to informal secrecy as a social practice with fluid and contextual relations and networks that may cut across formal structures at work (Parker, 2000). In this sense, informal secrecy can be a device for social endeavours and manoeuvre (Simmel, 1950), creating a kind of transitional stage between knowing and not knowing, and between being and not being inside the door. In this context, I have emphasized that the constitutive feature of informal secrecy beneath and beyond its trait of intentional concealment is that informal secrecy is a vehicle for socialization, which it requires.

Such a transitional stage indicates the ambiguity of membership as a vulnerability of informal secrecy. Therefore, informal secrecy might be accidentally revealed to inappropriate others before they are recognized as inappropriate. Other triggers such as the sensational feeling of being recognized as an insider (Simmel, 1950), and the burden of being known (Bok, 1982) can be the seduction of revelation. Hence, the construction of informal secrecy builds up the temptation for betrayal and points of attacks for further penetration. Notwithstanding that, I have noted that it does not simply imply that informal secrecy has a thinner shield than formal secrecy which is often bounded in authority and legal protection, as the influence and consequences of social sanction for breaching informal secrecy can be significantly threatening to one's formal and informal organizational life. On the other hand, as illustrated through the example of Apple's product information leaks, the formal protection of formal secrecy might be weakened by the unforeseeable complexity of networks that develops from 'need to know' members and comes across 'need to know less' and/or 'need not to know' others.

Extending the arguments of the constitutive nature of secrecy, lacking official protection as being devoid of formal legitimacy and public scrutiny, being attached with the opacity of knowledge and mystification of power, and signalling potential political conspiracy or authoritarianism, constitutes a frequent association of informal secrecy with ethical denunciation in organizations. It sheds a light on the ethical complexity of informal secrecy, which will be further discussed here. A question is raised: with transparency and openness gradually becoming a vital political and cultural notion prized in organizations, is there any space left for the ethical accountability of informal secrecy in organizations? It is definitely not a simple question and answers will not be straightforward. Secrecy is inherently ethically paradoxical. For example, by drawing lines, secrecy preserves liberty amongst insiders, whilst at the heart of secrecy lies forms of discrimination and intolerance to outsiders (Bok, 1982). Nonetheless, Simmel (1950: 331) indicates the significance of secrecy being a universal sociological form is irrelevant to and above its moral valuations. Hence, before the discussion starts, a key issue to consider is, does ethical consideration matter to informal secrecy and to the study of informal secrecy?

The suggestion given here is yes, it matters. Ethical considerations are inevitably a part of the social processes of informal secrecy, and can shape levels of involvement of participants by influencing the justification of involvement. For instance, unethical

informal secrecy may generate anxiety for certain participants, which consequently can contribute to the formation of whistleblowing. Therefore, the ‘ethicality’ is part of the sense making of “when to reach out” (Bok, 1982: 41) that peels away a layer of boundary of informal secrecy, and on the other hand, of “when to hold back in order not to bruise” (Bok, 1982: 41) that forms another layer of such boundary. In this way, I argue that such ethicality of informal secrecy constitutes what Bok (1982: 40-44) names ‘discretion’, which exercises judgements of secrecy to decide when promises of secrecy or revelation should be accepted or refused. Although discretion can be distorted from the actual nature of a piece of informal secrecy, the ethicality can contribute to a vulnerability or protection of it. In this way, this argument brings ethicality closer to the core of secrecy as boundary drawing and indicates that ethicality matters to informal secrecy as it can evoke boundary reformation.

Linking back to the addressed focus on ethical accountability of informal secrecy, Anand & Rosen (2008) will be taken as a point of departure. They suggest that in order to understand the ethics of maintaining secrets, it is important to understand a dual-set characteristic of it, namely its intentional purpose (i.e. whether it intends or perceived to harm), and its sanctioning authority. As sanctioning authority is more relevant to formal secrecy, here only the characteristic of intentional purpose is considered. As a pervasive case of informal secrecy at work, certain secret knowledge is often used as insider jokes at the expense of someone else, which can be regarded as unethical. However, whilst Anand & Rosen (2008) can be seen as a deontological consideration regarding actions as the centre of moral justification, their view can be questioned from a consequentialist perspective that sees the ultimate basis of moral judgement lies at the consequences. Should informal secrecy still be seen as ethical when its perceived purpose is not to harm, whereas the actual effect is very damaging? As to the case of insider jokes, is it still morally right when such jokes result in psychological injury of the targeted colleagues?

Such puzzle is also deeply inserted in the ethical considerations and accountability of confidential gossip. For instance, examples of confidential gossip, such as Monica judging the freelancer who wanted to be reimbursed of his breakfast at Cheap Burgers as “such a dick”, and Cathy judging Brenda’s boss (who texted Brenda nearly every hour about what to do) as treating Brenda like a “bitch”, paint a picture of ‘what s/he is like’ and consequently can serve as a warning for other participants of the group if and when

they need to work with the freelancer or the manager. Moreover, such warning is also a form of learning that informs the participants not to do the same or treat others 'like that'. In this way, confidential gossip can be considered as being (implicitly) inserted with moral incentive and as a form of moral education. Nonetheless, is it morally right when the professional and/or personal reputation of the target person is negatively shaped via such gossip?

Thus, social processes of informal secrecy and confidential gossip cannot be understood by cutting them down into isolated elements of 'means' and 'ends'. Moreover, it may be difficult to even identify what means and ends are, as the social processes are accumulative through various occasions and therefore not linearly consequential. For confidential gossip, it is neither the case where the ends can justify the means nor vice versa. The ethical consideration of confidential gossip requires it to be seen as a holistic picture, rather than based on a single aspect of its process and/or consequences. Nevertheless, this claim brings a fundamental difficulty regarding whether we are able to have such a holistic picture of confidential gossip, leading to a probability, if not an inevitability, of one-sided or even dubious ethical considerations.

Broadening to secrecy in general, with the seemingly moral opposition between transparency and secrecy, Birchall (2011a) draws on Jacques Derrida's work on 'the secret' and argues that because of the existence and maintenance of secrecy, transparency can avoid the risks "looking less like an agent of democracy and freedom and more like a tool of totalitarianism" (2011a: 12). In this sense, Birchall (2011a: 12) regards secrecy as "a constitutive element of transparency". Therefore, secrecy cannot be replaced by transparency (Parker, 2016), as human relations always encompass hidden aspects. Even in an intimate relationship, one cannot know everything about the other (Simmel, 1950). Moreover, social processes of secrecy indicate that secrecy and transparency mutually exist, as secrecy is kept distant from the unknown when shared amongst the known. Hence, organizationally, transparency and secrecy, especially informal secrecy, are not necessarily morally contradictory, and secrecy should not be considered as ethical unaccountable based on the moral approbation of transparency.

Simmel (1950) describes secrets as "the sociological expression of moral badness" (1950: 331) and particularly notes, "although the secret has no immediate connection

with evil, evil has an immediate connection with secrecy” (1950: 331). I seem to play the devil’s advocate by defending something that in many scenarios dances with evil or is seen itself as evil. My point here is that whilst practices of secrecy and particularly confidential gossip are not usually ethically neutral, we should not begin defining and apprehending them with a moral presumption in either approval or disapproval directions (e.g. Bok, 1982). Although in some cases they do play an important role in practices of organizational wrongdoing, it is not inherently the case. As Bok (1982: 18) notes, “If secrecy were no longer possible, would brute force turn out to be the only means of self-defence and of gaining the upper hand?”

The Constitutive Nature of Communication

Besides the constitutive nature of secrecy, the notion of CCO has been applied as another part of the theoretical construction of confidential gossip. It is important to note that the use of this notion does not imply that this thesis is a communicative perspective of understanding organizations. Through the constitutive nature of communication in organizations, understanding of communication goes beyond the merely linear transmission process of message production and reception, and organization is not a container for communication. As indicated in chapter 1, this understanding is influential and directional for understanding gossip and theorizing confidential gossip as a genre of communication.

This thesis focuses on a general sense of CCO that “communication does not merely *express* but also *creates* social realities” in organizations (Ashcraft, et al., 2009: 4, emphases added). CCO is well established and continuously developed towards a shared understanding that communication constitutes organizations, whereas scholars differ in approaches of understanding and examining its organizing properties (Brummans, et al., 2014; Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). Within this broad terrain, three main theoretical approaches have emerged, including the Montréal School that draws strongly on actor-network theory, the four flows model derived from Giddens’s structuration theory, and Luhmannian social systems theory approach. Notwithstanding significant differences, the three schools share certain common ground in their notions of communication,

organization and organization-communication relations, and it is with this common ground that this thesis is concerned.

The common ground indicates that, by rejecting earlier transmission models of one-to-one communication and linear communicative flows, communication is considered as dynamic and interactive processes (Ashcraft, et al., 2009; McPhee & Zaug, 2009; Cooren, et al., 2011). One significant consequence of this is that communication is not just something done in and/or by organizations. Rather than being a predecessor of communication, organization is a processual entity and is regarded as an emergent and ever-fluctuating network of interlocking communication processes, rather than merely a container of communication (Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Schoeneborn, et al., 2014; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). From this ontological assumption of the communicative constitution of reality, communication is seen as a primary mode of explanation (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014: 307), and partakes in the emergence, perpetuation and transformation of organizations (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). Thus, communication and organization are co-existent and mutually constitutive (Ashcraft, et al., 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009).

Such representation can of course be partial or perhaps even distorted, as communication is inherently asymmetric. As pointed out in this thesis, since no absolute consensus can be achieved in communication, ambiguity of communication is inevitable. Organizationally, ambiguity is not essentially undesirable, as it allows informal modification for more effective communication and leaves room for flexibility and creativity towards the existing standpoints (Eisenberg, 1984). Communication is not only of selective sharing, but also of managing how shared topics are discussed (e.g. Fine, 1986); consequently, it is not only a way of interacting, but also a means of shaping interaction. In this way, deeply embedded in the constitutive nature of communication is a dynamic and complicated chain of creating and recreating the social structure that forms the core of organizing (Putnam & Cheney, 1983) and in turn reconstructs the ongoing communicative interaction. Accordingly, communication in organizations could be treated as a politically symbolic and material act. Thus, this thesis has concurred in Heritage's (1984, in Ashcraft, et al., 2009: 5) suggestion that the realities of an organization are communicated into being.

However, one critique of CCO is whether *all* communication is constitutive of organizations. The Luhmannian approach suggests that only *decision* communication constitutes organizations, and paradoxically decisions constitute a sort of “foreign matter to the interaction...often no decisions at all are made in such interactions” (Seidl, 2005b: 149). Consequently, such interactions, such as “a business meeting ends in bed” (2005b: 149) and “after their coffee break together colleagues make their way back to a meeting” (Seidl, 2005b: 149), are not organizational. Whereas the Luhmannian perspective can be criticized for falling into a reductionist track that equates only decision communications to organization, it does flag up a question in the context of this study: is gossip, which can be corridor chat about a formal meeting ending in bed, a constitutive part of organizations, or just a peripheral interaction in organizations? This is the discussion I now turn.

The Constitutive Nature of Gossip

Moving from the constitutive nature of communication, one of the most basic forms of informal communication in organizations is gossip (e.g. Dunbar, et al., 1997; March & Sevon, 1984). Drawing upon Waddington’s (2012) argument, this thesis has considered and emphasized gossip as a constitutive part of organizations. Pushing forward the central argument of such a consideration, the constitutive nature of gossip locates upon its core feature as a way of understanding and generating organizational relations. The core feature is constructed by the interactional dynamics embedded in gossip, as well as gossip’s embeddedness in socialization processes at work.

Building on the understanding of communication as a nonlinear social process, this thesis has comprehended gossip as a practice of socialization. Given the difficulty of generating a universal comprehension of gossip, the thesis has summarized a working definition that it is informal communication (Paine, 1967; Michelson & Mouly, 2000) engaged and developed by at least two people (Taylor, 1994; van Iterson, et al., 2011), of an absent third party, sorts of events, or speculation (Waddington, 2012). I have noted that the absence is not only physical, it can also be symbolic. For instance, members of an ethnically diverse team who share the same foreign language might gossip about other group members when the members are physically present without understanding what is

being said.

One inherent feature of gossip emphasized by part of the scholarship is being evaluative as talking about the absent third party in positive or negative ways. However, I have argued that it is often but not inherently the case for gossip, and that the meaning of ‘evaluation’ should be reconsidered. The understanding and meaning of ‘evaluation’ should be located in the selection processes of topics, rather than merely in their content. The selection processes involve evaluations of the appropriateness of particular topics such as ‘whether others will be interested in them’ and ‘whether they will understand my side of the story’. The evaluation of topics links to the choice of people to share the topics with, constituting the formation and reformation of a social group. Hence by extending the understanding of ‘evaluation’, gossip has been (re)conceptualized as essentially evaluative in terms of ‘whether to say it’ and managing ‘how to say it’, rather than (solely) the ‘it’ – although this is frequently the case.

This extension of understanding itself indicates a diverse apprehension of gossip that triggers the debate between gossip and its related concepts like rumour. Given the efforts of distinguishing gossip from rumour (e.g. Difonzo, et al., 1994), I have illustrated that no definite boundaries can be set between them (e.g. Rosnow, 1988; Michelson & Mouly, 2004; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005), though it does not imply that the two concepts are identical. Thus, rumour has been regarded as a genre of gossip in this thesis, and consequently empirical studies on rumour have been taken into consideration as a part of empirical studies on gossip. Nevertheless, given the diversity of understanding, it is a common myth to see gossip as women talk, which is also reflected from the participants in empirical studies (e.g. Coates, 1998; Johnson & Aries, 1998; Glinert, et al., 2003). Nonetheless, it does not indicate that males do not gossip (e.g. Levin & Arluke, 1985; Benwell, 2011). Therefore, I have suggested that whilst gossip is not necessarily pertinent to gender, it is a part of gendered identity construction, for example, how to behave like a woman *here* (e.g. Sotirin & Gottfried, 1999), through its embeddedness in socialization processes.

Moreover, the influence of such embeddedness goes beyond its gender sensitivity – more importantly, it contributes to the constitution of gossip in organizations at three levels – individual, group and organizational, as gossip allows social comparison (Wert &

Salovey, 2004), information gathering (Rosnow & Fine, 1976), and influence and entertainment (Paine, 1967). Through social comparison of gossip, individuals can learn appropriate ways of behaving within a specific social setting (e.g. Gluckman, 1968), assist self-esteem maintenance (e.g. Rosnow, 1977), and reassure one's opinions and abilities (e.g. Wert & Salovey, 2004). By participating in gossip, interpersonal relations are encouraged. At a group level, the construction and development of group can be a condition and consequence of gossip. Gossip can constitute the sensemaking of particular social groups and of selves as 'we' distinguish 'ourselves' from 'them' by constructing solidarity via identity, norms, behaviour and sanction (e.g. Gluckman, 1963, 1968; Rosnow & Foster, 2005; Waddington, 2012). Learning appropriate ways and norms of behaving can be bordered to a bigger picture as the rules and boundaries of an organizational culture (e.g. van Iterson, et al., 2011). Therefore, at an organizational level, gossip acts as a medium for culture learning and reinforcement (Grosser, et al., 2010), and as a cement that binds the organization together. Hence, although gossip has a historical malicious reputation and potential negative effects, I have emphasized that we should not make prior assumptions about its moral status, and have suggested gossip is a way of comprehending, establishing and directing social relations at work. In this sense, gossip is not just a trivial social practice in organizations – it expresses certain kinds of social dimensions with social relevance as well as estrangement.

The Constitutive Nature of Confidential Gossip

I have discussed and indicated that just as communication is constitutive of organizations so is gossip, as a specific form of communication, constitutive of organizations in a specific way. Drawing upon the conceptual map demonstrated in chapter 1 of confidential gossip being an intersection with interlocking aspects of secrecy, communication and gossip, I have analytically developed that confidential gossip can be constitutive of organizations.

Built on the social understanding of secrecy, communication and gossip, confidential gossip has been regarded fundamentally as a social process in the thesis, with recognition of the value of information it encompasses. Gossip and confidential gossip share many features, whilst confidential gossip does differ from general gossip in terms of their

different positions in the nest of concealment. Confidential gossip, which circulates solely in the private realm with the intentionality of keeping certain information within a particular group, has a higher level of concealment than general gossip. The confidentiality of confidential gossip thereby generates and is itself an indication of informal badging of membership and boundary (re)drawing.

Members of a confidential gossip circle are selected by personal criteria such as social relevance and shared personal interest, and collectively produce group norms of 'what should be talked about', rather than 'what are the available topics to talk about'; and of 'who should be included', rather than 'who are available to talk to'. It creates a social bracket in which certain behaviour and value principles should be included and interpreted as acceptable or unacceptable, desirable or undesirable. In generating the sense of 'should', it simultaneously builds up recognition for sanctions of revelation. In this way, the construction process of norm forms (self-)identification of 'who we are' through building awareness and regulation of not only what to do, but also what not to do. Therefore, confidential gossip, as an engine of dynamic interactional processes, incorporates individuals into a social network, which can cut across formal and informal relations at work. In this sense, building on the suggestion of confidential gossip being constitutive of organizations, I have argued that at the centre of such constitution is its impact on, and itself being, influenced by social relations, meaning organizational relations are the cause and consequence of confidential gossip.

Furthermore, the identification of insiders is formed not only through inclusivity with group norms and rules construction, but also exclusivity with social differentiation. Drawing on the hallmark of secrecy that entails a particular epistemological and ontological status for being 'more true' or 'more real' than other kinds of knowledge, confidential gossip, as communication of such concealed knowledge, generates a sense of 'I know something *real* that you don't know', rather than merely 'I know something you don't know' (Moore, 1962: 74). In this way, social distinction is both drawn and strengthened between the known and the unknown. If in some general way being an insider to organizational gossip helps people to feel important and to make sense of organizational norms, then this will be magnified when the gossip circle is more closed and the gossip in question is signalled as being to some degree secret. Therefore, my

point here is that confidential gossip, as a specific sort of combination of gossip and secrecy, might be expected to have more ‘nontrivial’ effects than general gossip.

However, as indicated in the previous section on secrecy, confidential gossip, being an example of casual informal secrecy, is easily shared as well as breached. As noted in chapter 1, the construction of confidential gossip is built alongside the possibilities of revelation, such as the thrilling temptation of hinting at the insider identity as known to ‘them’ as unknown, and the exchange of certain information that is otherwise difficult to attain. Hence, I have suggested that membership selection builds an amorphous web that is constructed by and shapes socialization, simultaneously and inevitably with segmentation of social relations as vulnerabilities and possibilities for its reconstruction. Thus, confidentiality of confidential gossip brings boundary drawing and redrawing in ongoing processes of social negotiation and modification, which in turn shapes and regulates interaction. In this sense, throughout making and breaking bonds, confidential gossip is a metaphorical crayon for individuals to draw and redraw the map of organizational relations. Because of such social dynamics of confidential gossip, as I have argued, it is inadequate to understand and interpret confidential gossip by simply decoding the concealed knowledge – it requires apprehension and involvement of social relations of a specific social group in which the knowledge is shared.

Here the understanding of social dynamics of confidential gossip can be furthered by flipping over the comprehension that because we gossip with a level of concealment, we are socially obliged to keep the confidentiality; the confidentiality may *drive* people to gossip. The complex social relations in groups that cut across formal structures at work bring forward a question of how to communicate confidentiality under the radar. Confidential gossip hence is formed as a particular modality to discuss concealed knowledge informally as constructing a fluid social process of knowing. Throughout this process, the confidentiality of certain knowledge is entwined with both the psychological urge (e.g. excitement, thrill) and the sociological construction and belongingness to a group and identity, which seduces individuals to gossip. In this way, the confidentiality is a hint of the emergence of local interactions and of dynamic social formations of collectives. Hence beyond confidential gossip being a cause and consequence of organizational relations is its constitution of a degree of ‘organizationality’ (Dobusch &

Schoeneborn, 2015) with “fluid social arrangements” (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015: 1006) within which identity claims are possible.

Therefore, as I emphasized in the introductory chapter, confidential gossip matters to organizations and to the understanding of organizations. Building upon this emphasis, here is to strengthen and extend the above arguments of the constitutive nature of confidential gossip in organizations through the inherent socialization features of confidential gossip, including social selection and differentiation as well as its interwovenness with other sorts of interaction. What confidential gossip provides is neither entirely frontstage performance with intentional expression towards certain aspects of organizational life, nor completely backstage revelation that unveils others that remain. It is the middle shades-of-grey area that connects front and back stages, enabling participants to take part in the frontstage presentation and simultaneously peek into the backstage, without obtaining a whole picture of it. Confidential gossip can be a by-product of and generate (side) effects on aspects of the organizational daily operation, for example, inter- and intra-departmental differentiation, hierarchical conflicts, and power struggles. Thus, whereas Waddington (2012) considers gossip itself as a constitutive way of organizing, gossip (including confidential gossip) in my arguments is regarded as being constitutive to various ways of organizing.

Studying Confidential Gossip: The Case of Quinza

As I mentioned in the introductory chapter as well as in the introduction to this chapter, studying confidential gossip is by definition methodologically challenging. With the purpose of studying confidential gossip and addressing the particular research question of ‘how does confidential gossip constitute organization’, it is necessary to observe and to participate in it; to become to some degree an insider of it. As such a participant observation ethnographic approach was adopted, a three-month study was undertaken with the field role as a full-time intern in a British media firm named Quinza.

The study was positioned as general informal communication for three pragmatic reasons in terms of the impossibility of observing and participating in solely confidential gossip that is inherently embedded in wider interactions; the ethical tension that an explicit focus

on confidential gossip would inevitably make it impossible for me to be involved in confidential gossip; and the uncertainty of whether any empirical evidence on confidential gossip would be collected. By the standards of classical anthropological ethnography this was a relatively short period. Nonetheless, the issue was whether people *routinely* engaged in such gossip, rather than whether one can come across some confidential gossip if one stays long enough. Furthermore, aspects such as sites of observation, levels of involvement, ways of participation, characteristics of the researched, and individual features and available sources of the researcher influence the length of stay. Along with the mystery of data saturation in ethnography, these elements contribute to the unanswerable riddle of the 'long enough' concept in organizational ethnography.

Here is to add an additional note that by using the specific ethnographic way of empirical exploration, I do not imply that participant observation is the *only* possible way to study confidential gossip. Whilst many empirical studies of gossip have been done by participant or non-participant observation, other methods such as interviews (e.g. Mills, 2010), experiments (e.g. Cole & Scrivener, 2013), questionnaires (e.g. Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012), diary studies (e.g. Waddington, 2005a), archive studies (e.g. Besnier, 1993), and online research (e.g. Harrington & Bielby, 1995) have also been applied. Such variety of methods indicates that one method cannot fit and serve different sorts of purposes and types of researchers within the same area. It is not only the case where gossip and confidential gossip are concerned, but also for the majority of studies, if not all studies, in social science.

The Double 'Doubleness': The Ethnography of Secrecy and the Secrecy of Ethnography

The empirical study points to a series of ethical and emotional dilemmas that report back on the methodological challenges, and reflects parallels between ethnography as a method and the nature of secrecy. The parallels are constructed by the 'doubleness' of ethnography and secrecy as what is true of ethnography is true of secrecy, and the 'doubleness' of the general and the specific as this study was an ethnography of specifically secrecy and a specific form of secrecy. The double 'doubleness' was

explained in four aspects through field relations, pointing to a central claim that ethnography not only engages in secrecy, but also is itself secrecy in different ways and various degrees.

Firstly, the mental struggle of worry and eagerness for empirical evidence collection is derived from and developed in internal compartmentalization and association of social relations in the field. Researching informal secrecy mirrors informal secrecy itself as socially sensitive and relational.

Secondly, neither native nor non-native ethnographers can be full insiders or outsiders. Trust is never absolute in ethnographic research. For instance, I always wanted to hide who I was and who I was not in the field, particularly when taking notes at work. Researching secrecy is itself secrecy as it can be a burden generated by asymmetric information and power positions.

Such asymmetry points to the third aspect of the parallels that the 'doors' guarding the social entrance and openness of boundaries of social groups, different levels of social relationships, and types and depth of knowledge sharing, were never fully opened throughout the fieldwork. Every access was socially negotiated and relationally situated. Between and through half-open doors, ethnography encompasses hidden aspects of the gathering of empirical material and engages in hidden agendas of the researched.

The hidden agendas can trigger and reinforce emotional bonding and involvement such as guilt, which is the fourth aspect. Being involved in a particular sort of secrecy, this study encountered confusion for the perceptual understanding of self and was surrounded by forceful emotional reactions such as the sense of belongingness charged by levels of duty. It is not the only case for research on secrecy, as ethnography is often embedded with certain knowledge that should not be (completely) revealed to inappropriate outsiders.

One can critique that much of these are well known to ethnographers. For example, as Goode (1999: 314) notes, "I also left out certain details for fear those partners would feel that I had betrayed them, even though their identities were disguised". But the point I am making here is that there is something over and above the 'normal' dilemmas of

ethnography when the focus of the study is itself the practices of secrecy. It is this which gives the ethnographic study of secrecy its double character. Therefore, one methodological contribution of the thesis is located at the essential implication of the double ‘doubleness’ that it is not *just another* illustration of fieldwork and its dilemmas, for two reasons. As stated in chapter 3, firstly, it helps us better to appreciate and reflect upon those dilemmas: secrecy research explains why the secrets that ethnographers must keep are so burdensome. In a sense, undertaking this ethnography was in and of itself a way of experiencing what it is like to have to keep secrets, even as it sought to enter into the secrets of others. In this way, instead of merely acknowledging the dilemmas, the double ‘doubleness’ itself denotes that the dilemmas are epistemologically constructive in understanding and analyzing fieldwork. Secondly, it points out the very social construct nature of secrecy research, particularly informal secrecy, that secrecy is an emergent product of fieldwork rather than a deliberately played role (Mitchell, 1993).

Extending the discussion in this chapter, paying substantial attention to such ethical and emotional dilemmas may be considered as a malpractice for being ‘too intimate’ or ‘self-centred’ since the necessity should be “to realize *his* vision of *his* world” (Malinowski, 1961: 25). Nonetheless, Malinowski’s diary published in 1967 with personal feelings and observations is a significant landmark in denoting that doing ethnography is inexorably intertwined with complex relations and construction between self and others (see also Bowen, 1964). Given the inevitability that we engage personally in the field (Coffey, 1999), fieldwork is a collaborative achievement of the researched and the researcher, and field relations are the condition and consequence of fieldwork. Fieldwork, therefore, is “personal, emotional and identity work” (Coffey, 1999: 1), and fieldworkers are not merely a research instrument. In various ways, we inescapably take part in not only understanding, but also constructing, the world we come to re-present. For this ethnography specifically, confidential gossip is collaboratively produced by participants, and in some cases I was one of them. Thus, rather than prioritizing myself and putting myself forward, it was the field relations that were emphasized as a way of understanding the field contexts, and consequently of making sense of confidential gossip that occurred in such contexts.

Furthermore, taking one step further and outside of ethnography, Mitchell (1993) notes that secrecy is never limited to covert research. So long as there exists a difference

between the researcher and the researched, the gathering of empirical materials will inevitably involve some hidden aspects. As Wolff (1976: 77) indicates, “I am not a full man who is studying, and it is not fully man I am studying”. As social actions of researchers are prone to rules and constraints of disclosure, researchers all keep secrets, regardless of whether engaging in fieldwork or not (Mitchell, 1993). We researchers may all be “skilled choreographers of secrecy and disclosure” (Burke, 1997: 173).

Making Confidential Gossip ‘Boundarrious’

The empirical study has indicated that confidential gossip works in an organization through boundary drawing and redrawing. It has brought into focus the significance of boundaries of confidential gossip, and the ways in which the boundaries are drawn. Whilst the conceptual distinction is clear between confidential gossip and gossip, the line between them in practice is a hazy and porous one, and certainly is socially negotiated and context-specific. Empirical materials have reflected that such fuzzy boundary is constituted by critical features of confidential gossip being fragmentary and socially embedded in gossip amongst other types of interaction. The unforeseeable and ephemeral emergence, submergence and re-emergence of confidential gossip is inserted in constant swings between confidential gossip and gossip. This adds difficulties in some cases to identify confidential gossip clearly from the multiplex interaction and fluid relations. Empirical materials of confidential gossip were, hence, presented in conjunction with general gossip and/or other forms of interaction as its social surroundings for a better understanding of the contextuality of confidential gossip.

Boundaries have been analyzed as structures of social relations with forms of markers, generating proximity and spatialization, and being influenced by physical and social construction of a space. For example, corners of the kitchen in department H were frequent venues for enabling and encouraging confidential gossip. Such space was perceived as equipped with ‘social affordance’ (Fayard & Weeks, 2007) and a spatial dimension with physical proximity and visibility. In this sense, this kitchen legitimized informal and casual interaction – as in the example of two colleagues moving around the kitchen when others approached, or a sudden silence, exchanged glances and facial expressions were maintaining the inclusion of a social circle and exclusion of its

outsiders. The expressions are bodily markers of boundaries, implying ‘who *not* to tell’, generating an informal agreement and awareness as a part of the social norms of confidential gossip. Thus, whereas the kitchen in general was a site of gossip, the bodily expressions created a site for specifically confidential gossip. Instead of holding big signs indicating ‘this is confidential’, the markers were embedded in interaction and subtly shifted sorts of interaction into confidential interaction.

Whilst many examples of confidential gossip were engaged through using of a specific space, some were restricted by it. For instance, the conversation Victoria and I had about my observation strategy moved from the kitchen as a semi-enclosed space, to a private office with the door closed. The act of closing the door constructed an enclosed space, a borderline for physical and social detachment from ‘them’, and, reciprocally, propinquity and collective security between ‘us’. Being intertwined with tangible and intangible properties of ‘the body’ and space, boundary construction is not only shaped by architecture and social affordance of a place, but influenced by the interaction between such elements of environment and norms of a confidential gossip group.

Moving from boundary construction, boundary negotiation is a process of group identity negotiation. Whereas boundary construction of confidential gossip marks the formation of a group, such formation is weakly and imprecisely regulated. My analysis has noted that the (re)construction process of different roles and positions for both insiders and outsiders of a group is embedded in the dynamic interactivity of social contexts, asymmetric information and imbalance of social power. Such process is emotionally charged as it not only attaches to features of gossip that can serve as a way of emotional release amongst ‘us’, but also to the tension generated by being ‘us’ that trigger confidential matters be further gossiped about to inappropriate others.

Overall, echoing Fayard & Weeks’s (2007) critique on general organizational theory for falling into social determinism by ignoring the physical environment and consequently being oversimplified, my analysis has shed light on the interrelation and mutual influence between physical space and social processes and experiences of confidential gossip. In particular, the empirical materials have shown that social boundaries of confidential gossip were framed, negotiated, modified, and/or maintained through physical space. Simultaneously, functions, meanings and roles of physical space were created and

transformed through the boundaries. To ‘bring space back in’ (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004) to the understanding of organizational phenomena, the physical environment in Quinza is *not* a container of confidential gossip. Rather, it is both a context *for* and an active participant *in* social formations of confidential gossip.

To further elaborate the discussion in this chapter, this study challenges the longstanding theoretical claim in the sociology of secrecy, going back to Simmel (1950: 332-333), that secrecy is “a purely socially determined attraction” (1950: 332) being “basically independent of the content it guards” (1950: 333), and in relation to organizational secrecy made most strongly by Costas & Grey (2016: 7-8) that the content of secrecy (i.e. secrets themselves) is relatively unimportant to the process of secrecy – even to the point that there may be no secret at all, but still a process of secrecy, for example if someone wants to make themselves look important (e.g. 2016: 153). It is not necessary to know the content of secrecy to study the process of secrecy. For example, we can make inferences regarding what people are whispering about in the corner without knowing what it was. Notwithstanding that, it does not follow that the process is detached from the content. In the Quinza study, at least, wherever any of the markers of confidentiality were found, it always related to information that would in some way be damaging if it were revealed. It is true that in almost every case this was something that might seem quite trivial – I did not find, and was not expecting to find, any ‘dramatic’ secrets being gossiped about – but which in context was important.

Indeed, one possible criticism of this challenge can be that the theoretical claim of the sociology of secrecy only indicates that there ‘may’ be no content. Therefore, the fact that cases of Quinza had content does not necessarily disprove the claim that *sometimes* there is no content, or that sometimes people think another group has a secret when it does not. Building on this criticism, however, I wonder can secrecy actually be ‘no content’ or is it more precise to describe and consider it regarding an inside-outside differentiation that the content is not *as* secretive or special *as* outsiders think. Such differentiation has been experienced in my fieldwork that content of a confidential talk seems more valuable from the outside. Moreover, the core of secrecy, as Costas & Grey (2016: 10) note, lies on boundary drawing around knowledge and between knowers. If secrecy can be no content, then what do the boundaries draw upon? What is it that the boundaries are fundamentally used to conceal and that in the realm of the hidden? And

what are insiders 'in' for? Hence, my point here is that although we are not always able to find out what it is, secrecy does have content. It can be very trivial or about extremely criminal matters, factual or fictitious. Whatever it is, it provides a social context of secrecy, plays a role in organizing social relations, and supports the development of understanding secrecy that goes above and beyond the content itself. Despite that, I am not implying that secrecy is all about content. Rather, I suggest that instead of being irrelevant, content matters to the social understanding and sociological significance of secrecy.

The analysis of markers and boundaries around confidential gossip is the first step in understanding its role in organizational life. However, it is the crucial step, as without understanding how confidential gossip is marked as such, it cannot be identified at all.

Confidential Gossip as a Cultural Practice

Scaling up from the micro and local analysis of episodes of communicative interaction, my analysis reflects confidential gossip as a cultural practice, which constitutes the understanding and (re)creation of organizational culture.

My central proposition is that by participating in confidential gossip, the unwritten rules get to be communicated and generated, and the appropriate way of conducting the rules gets to be understood, shared and internalized, becoming an integral part of participants' sense of self. A specific illustration of this is the hierarchically constructed reality at work, which was illustrated through two metaphors. As a mirror, confidential gossip communicates and reflects the meanings of hierarchy as part of organizational life. Looking into the mirror, people see and are reminded of who they should be in Quinza. For instance, although Ryan complained that he did not have control over everything, he still would not tell his boss that he was blamed for something that was not his fault. Also, when Aaron considered his manager misunderstood him as not doing his work, instead of explaining, he copied her "a lot" into the emails he sent out and "does not care whether she gets too many emails as long as she gets them". The sense of 'what *not* to do' is a connotation and ramification of power order and is part of their ways of doing to maintain who they are. This message, conveyed through confidential gossip, is their understanding

of ‘what is it like here’ as a sphere of the organizational culture they live in. As an origami box, experience, ideas and concerns are unfolded, understood and perhaps adopted as an education process in and through confidential gossip. Confidential gossip and its epistemological influence can gradually transform one into who one should be in a particular environment. In this way, ‘a staff *for* Quinza’ can emerge throughout the education procedure of the ‘right’ things to do. Therefore, what was folded and unfolded are aspects of culture in Quinza, and processes of folding and unfolding constitute the construction and reinforcement of its culture. Metaphors like mirror and origami box indicate that these aspects of culture are actively engaged, deeply interwoven and retrospectively reproduced in and through confidential gossip. Hence, by constituting ‘what it is *really* like here’, confidential gossip is an under-the-radar means structured by participants and to structure their organizational life in a specific way.

Comparing to gossip in general, I have argued that confidential gossip can offer a more open space that enables participants to explicitly challenge the rules conveyed. Confidential gossip is not just a way of learning the rules, but sanctions contradicting rules and their practices, with complaints, evaluations of conduct, and thoughts of right and wrong. In this way, confidential gossip transfers concerns and opinions into daily activities, generates a sense of autonomy and justice, and to some degree rewrites the norms of conduct as a way of recreating the organizational culture. Nevertheless, the sense of autonomy is relative and not absolute, as the norms and rules developed in and through confidential gossip are not entirely detached from the existing hierarchical structure.

Besides the hierarchically constructed reality at work, the organizational construction of time is communicated amongst participants and revealed through confidential gossip. As the example of Edith coming in late and choosing to stay late even if Daisy said “no one would notice”, the unwritten rule of ‘flexible working hours’ was communicated through confidential gossip that you can leave early only when you come in early. The condition for ‘leaving early’ as when the time is appropriate to leave was revealed through Aaron’s evaluation of “those people” who left during the busiest hour in the office. Therefore, through confidential gossip, the meaning of clock time was made apparent by being transformed into social experience. Time was turned into a tool of measurement and an essential element to be measured regarding individual professional identity, and

simultaneously a shared professionalism in the office. Moreover, certain cases of confidential gossip noted that with the senior manager being unknowing of the rules of flexibility, members of staff almost invent the regulations by assuming they are being watched. Hence, sharing ‘what was not said’ through confidential gossip participated in the formation of informal rules of flexibility by creating a standard of collective behaviour, educating participants into an aspect of ‘what is actually going on here’ in Quinza, writing the norm in the minds of the participants, and encouraging self-regulatory behaviour in the workplace. Hence, ‘how you do it’ and ‘how I do it’ were transformed into ‘how *we* do it’. Confidential gossip does not only foster a sort of understanding of the work environment, but also reinforces such understanding as an interpretive order of constructing ‘who *we* are’ in the organizational life. In this sense, as I have suggested, confidential gossip is generated by culture and partakes in the making of culture.

Overall, as a cultural practice, confidential gossip serves as an instrument of education, resistance and sanction of culture. By being in the processes of informal rule setting as an organizational construction of time and being a social embodiment of hierarchy, confidential gossip generates a ‘real’ sense of ‘what it is like here’; and it is generated and shaped by such sense of reality. It brings the organizational relations inserted in it and produced by it into being. In this sense, confidential gossip is constitutive of organization by partaking in the (re)making of culture in and of Quinza. Furthermore, the understanding of confidential gossip as a cultural practice connecting local episodes of communication with a broader scope of structure and culture ties back to the micro-macro conundrum of CCO analysis, which the central enquiry locates as bridging the gap between micro/local communication and macro structure. It provides a suggestion of how confidential gossip can be understood in a broader context of organization.

Thesis Limitations

In this thesis, some flavour of the extraordinariness and complexity of the ordinariness of confidential gossip in organizational life has been given in order to show that while confidential gossip is part of our mundane practices at work and may not be dramatic or juicy, it is both a product of and a constitution of the ways we live in an organization.

Confidential gossip is enmeshed with the ongoing production and reproduction of social relations at work, drawing boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ through physical and social constructs, and in turn brings temporarily enacted boundaries into renegotiation; these act as a form of resistance and complaint of the power difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which, in turn, sets, articulates and educates informal rules and the appropriateness of conduct. The stories around and of confidential gossip, such as Ryan’s choice of a Secret Santa gift, Ross and Daisy’s discussion about how Richard has been Quinza-ed, and Aaron’s not leaving early although he had come in early, put together a fuller yet inevitably partial understanding of the organization I studied and of the people whose organizational life I once took part in.

In seeking to present an account of the exploratory understanding of confidential gossip at work, certain tasks are inadequately achieved; and certain issues are inadequately dealt with or left unexplored. In particular:

Firstly, whilst the fieldwork did yield some desirable empirical materials, I was not able to develop a higher level of intimacy and trust with the participants during the three months of the study. I was relatively close to individuals in some social groups, such as Ross, Ryan, Abbey and Debra, and Daisy and Kaitlin. Yet from time to time I had to keep a certain distance from them to allow and to respect privacy and protection of confidentiality for their private conversations. To address this limitation, that is to provide insights into an inner boundary of a social group that negotiates and is negotiated around confidential gossip, more in-depth ethnographic participant observation in an extended length would be needed to establish a more solid social position within particular social groups.

Secondly, this thesis has inadequately explored the relationships between specific forms and modes of confidential gossip and their influence on organization. For instance, examples of complaints have been analyzed as episodes of confidential gossip, such as Ryan complaining to me about being blamed for something that is not his fault, and Brenda complaining to Carly and Holly about her boss controlling her way of working to launch a big event. The analysis notes that such examples are a way of communicating the hierarchically constructed reality into being, and a sanction of certain ways of practice at work. Yet it has been inadequately addressed that for the examples to be complaints,

they are not only about what happened, but also about what did not happen. It generates an understanding of both how it works here, and how it is hoped to work here. This points to a possible link between complaints as a form of confidential gossip and its potential influence on 'counter culture' (Weeks, 2004). Therefore, an extended exploration of the relationships between forms and modes of confidential gossip and their impact on organization might provide insights into a more holistic apprehension of confidential gossip at work.

Thirdly, one theme that has left relatively unexplored is the gender construction around and of confidential gossip at work. The main reason is that gender-related themes have not emerged as one of the main elements that constitute the central topics of analysis. This may be explained through two aspects of the organizational life at Quinza. As a temporal aspect of Quinza, time sacrifice is neither an essential part of the culture nor does it support career advancement. The visible existence at work outside standard working hours is not necessarily considered as professionalism and career commitment. Hence, gender-specific issues such as maternity leave and household obligation (Collinson & Collinson, 1997) are rather insignificant in the organizational life. The other aspect is the gender composition of the participants and the targets of confidential gossip, which is not dominated by one gender. The two aspects together note that gender does not play an active role in the observed aspects of the organizational life. Whilst my empirical evidence lacks much reference to gender, the relationships between gender and confidential gossip are not understood as trivial. It may be the character of Quinza and/or my observation that have resulted in the lack of related empirical material. As illustrated in chapter 1, the relations between gossip and gender are part of the socially constructed understanding of gossip. The relationships and dynamics between gender and confidential gossip can be explored in an organization where gendered interactional features or gendered domains are more influential, such as the way Sotirin (2000) studies bitching amongst department secretaries as a way to establish feminine connectedness and resistance at work.

With the omissions and shortcomings that this thesis may have, it is hoped that the principal arguments made are now clear. Through processes of confidential gossip constitution of social relations and being constituted by social relations at work, we see who 'we' are through differentiating from who 'they' are; we regulate ways of how to

behave 'here' through the sense of 'should-ness' and appropriateness; we reform the 'we-ness' through internalizing rules of 'how things are *really* done'. Here, the we-ness can be broken down into shades of 'who I am' through a relational perception that from 'them' we see 'us'; amongst 'us', from 'you' I see 'me'. Therefore, the scaling-up analysis and understanding of confidential gossip from groups to organization ultimately is influenced and influences the self-apprehension of 'who I am' and the self-reflection of the organizational world one sees, knows and lives in.

Possible Directions for Future Research

Several possible directions have emerged from this study as inspirations for me to pursue in future research, particularly regarding the phenomenon embedded in and through confidential gossip processes, and confidential gossip in an "unusual workplace" (Collinson, 1999: 582).

Firstly, linking back to the second limitation of the thesis, a possibility for future research is the phenomena within confidential gossip and informal secrecy, such as complaints, humour, jokes and silence. Do they play any role as a practice of confidential gossip and informal secrecy amongst insiders, and between insiders and outsiders? If so, how can the roles be understood? Moreover, it is not just any sorts of complaints, humour and jokes that are concerned. It is the particular types that carry a level of confidentiality and concurrently are a way to communicate such confidentiality. The importance of the phenomena here is: whilst confidential gossip may remain unnoticed by researchers or the confidentiality of certain knowledge might not be addressed directly, it might be revealed through the narratives of jokes and humour as forms and manifestations of confidential gossip. For example, Courpasson & Younes (2018) investigate the links between secrecy and creativity in a project that was cancelled by management, which made a team of scientists decided to go secret. During the empirical investigation, they note:

"Our informants would not directly address the idea of intentional concealment of information. They were more direct in narrating how they invented a story to divert managerial attention, because they regarded us as researchers (although

in social sciences) who could understand and even share this type of trick. A kind of 'occupational trust' could be instilled in a number of instances with our informants, where they described events with humour, presenting the process of secrecy as an example of the jokes that the R&D group was sharing in order to illustrate their playful cohesion in the company" (Courpasson & Younes, 2018: 277).

Although their study does not focus on confidential gossip, it points to a possibility of the constitutive role the phenomenon may play as and through a process of (informal) secrecy.

Secondly, the open-planned offices at Quinza contribute the popular occurrence of confidential gossip in a more private space (e.g. kitchen and private offices) where boundaries are drawn based on the physical settings and as a physical construct. It cultivates a curiosity: how does confidential gossip work in a much more open context with a panorama sense of surveillance and a few private space? Such context may be seen as an "unusual workplace...[that] resembles a total institution...[where] workers' sense of incarceration is recurrent" (Collinson, 1999: 582). An example of such unusual workplace is offshore oil rigs. Employees go to work by helicopters. Food and material supply for the rigs mainly occurs by means of boats. In this sense, the rigs are confined space without easy access to other physical constructions other than themselves. Employees work on a fixed rotation schedule alternating between work and holiday, such as 'two weeks on two weeks off' schedule. On the rigs they work for 12 hours a day with a clear timetable of morning meeting(s), breakfast, lunch, afternoon break and dinner, which to a significant extent lowers the opportunity of people hanging around the kitchen. There are sharing cabins, yet "without locks on cabin doors (for safety purposes) platforms offer few private spaces" (Collinson, 1999: 582). Therefore, within the confined space is a highly transparent life where work and leisure are bundled. Such visibility of self and of individual organizational life can generate particular ways and practices of performing confidential gossip at work. However, one of the major challenges for studying this particular site is assess negotiation, since it will require more financial and personnel resources to send a researcher offshore who does not contribute to any operational progress, comparing to a fieldwork conduct in an office building onshore.

Final Thoughts

Throughout the journey of this research, I often bring up the same question to myself: What am I actually studying? Besides my fascination with the subject, what else does this study mean to me as someone who studies organization studies? Approaching the end of the journey, my reflection or realization upon the question is: above and beyond the theoretical construction and empirical exploration, this research becomes a way of mine to talk, to think, to write, to glimpse aspects of understanding towards organizations that are expansive, intensive and to some extent messy, which makes them enchanting and elusive.

Yet “how do we know that something is an organization” (Parker, 2016: 100) since “we can never see the organization” (2016: 100)? In a large company like Quinza, signs of the organization are not difficult to find, from the nameplate in the lobby, to office door signs, to details as post-it notes and mugs, all wearing the name of ‘Quinza’. As Parker (2016: 100) notes, “but none of these things are the organization”. What I saw was only “fragmentary signs of its presence” (Parker, 2016: 100). The organization hence has been a ‘visible’ invisibility, and what I have attempted is to make some things visible through empirical materials. Throughout the process, aspects of the organization have emerged, and Quinza has been in a process of becoming. In this way, this research allows me to not only see ‘the visible’ that signifies the organization, but also participate in the maze of invisibility. It is the relational ontology inserted in the research that enables me to understand the phenomenon of confidential gossip in relation to Quinza to generate an inevitably partial image of what ‘it’ is.

Overall, this journey as a process of PhD studies is itself a secrecy paradox, meaning it is itself an unknown unknown and simultaneously a process of participating, deciphering, interpreting and knowing the unknown. Figuratively speaking, the process is a four-year trip to a unique and changing maze: when I stand in front of the entrance, I could not have a whole picture of its complications and entanglements in the sense that I do not know what I do not know. Walking inside the maze as participating in the unknown unknown, further roads and turns emerge along the way. What is considered as moving

forward may actually be moving around, and what is seen as moving around can be a way of moving forward. Instead of being fixed or predetermined, the maze reshapes and extends along with the decisions of roads and directions of turns, which constitutes its individual uniqueness. Yet it is not a plain journey of just bluntly participating in walking. Throughout the moving arounds, the maze is produced by and produces excitement, satisfaction, struggles, surprises and doubts. This both shared and unique process points to that one needs to be inside to participate, to decipher, to interpret, and eventually to know.

Finally, above and beyond this journey, the whole thesis puts together is an attempt of mine to offer a lens and angle that is not overly confusing and complicated for one, who is outside the field of organization studies, to understand his/her organizational life. I often hope that if and when my friends who work in accounting, biology, chemistry, city planning, engineering, history, investment, political studies, sales, tax, etc. are bothered to read (part of) this thesis, they can say 'oh yes, I know what you meant' like the conversation I had with the pharmacist Sarina, rather than 'what on earth is that'. Yet some may argue such attempt is a daydream or highly unnecessary. Some may criticize that if even they can understand it, then it is not a proper piece of 'academic' work. On such view, this attempt may be ill-conceived. However this attempt as a pursue of the 'oh yes' moment is important, at least for me, as it lies in my fundamental stance that any forms of organization studies should not be or should try not to be inward-looking.

Bibliography

- Abrahams, R. D. (1970) 'A performance-centred approach to gossip'. *Man*, 5 (2): 290-301.
- Adkins, K. C. (2002) 'The real dirt: Gossip and feminist epistemology'. *Social Epistemology*, 16 (3): 215-232.
- Akanda, A. & Odewale, F. (1994) 'Company rumour: The fact and fiction'. *Employment Bulletin and Industrial Relations Digest*, 10 (3): 1-3.
- Alvesson, M. (1993) *Cultural Perspectives on Organizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Alvesson, M. (1996) *Communication, Power and Organization*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Alvesson, M., & Berg, P. O. (1992) *Corporate Culture and Organizational Symbolism: An overview*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2011) *Qualitative Research and Theory Development: Mystery as method*. London: Sage.
- Alvesson, M., Kärreman, D., & Ybema, S. (2017) Studying Culture in Organizations: Not taking for granted the taken-for-granted. In: Wilkinson, A., Armstrong, S. J., & Lonsbury, M., eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Management*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 103-126.
- Anand, V. & Rosen, C. C. (2008) 'The ethics of organizational secrets'. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17 (2): 97-101.
- Andersen, N. A. (2003) The Undecidability of Decision. In: Hernes, T., & Bakken, T., eds. *Autopoietic Organization Theory: Drawing on Niklas Luhmann's social systems perspective*. Oslo: Copenhagen Business School Press, pp. 235-258.
- Anderson, N. (1923/1961) *The Hobo: The sociology of the homeless man*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Anderson-Gough, F., Grey, C. & Robson, K. (2001) 'Tests of time: Organizational time-reckoning and the making of accountants in two multi-national accounting firms'. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 26 (2): 99-122.

- Ashcraft, K. L. & Pacanowsky, M. E. (1996) 'A woman's worst enemy: Reflections on a narrative of organizational life and female identity'. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 24 (3): 217-239.
- Ashcraft, K. L., Kuhn, T. R. & Cooren, F. (2009) 'Constitutional amendments: "Materializing" organizational communication'. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 3 (1): 1-64.
- Austin, J. L. (1962) *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Axley, S. R. (1984) 'Managerial and organizational communication in terms of the conduit metaphor'. *Academy of Management Review*, 9 (3): 428-437.
- Ayim, M. (1994) Knowledge through the Grapevine: Gossip as inquiry. In: Goodman, R. F., & Ben-Ze'ev, A., eds. *Good Gossip*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, pp. 85-99.
- Baba, M. L. (2006) Anthropology and Business. In: Birx, H. J., ed. *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Baker, J. S. & Jones, M. A. (1996) 'The poison grapevine: How destructive are gossip and rumor in the workplace?'. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 7 (1): 75-86.
- Barker, J. R. (1993) 'Tightening the iron cage: Concertive control in self-managing teams'. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38 (3): 408-437.
- Barley, S. & Kunda, G. (2001) 'Bringing work back in'. *Organization Science*, 12 (1): 76-95.
- Barnard, C. (1938) *The Function of the Executive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bate, S. P. (1997) 'Whatever happened to organizational anthropology? A review of the field of organizational ethnography and anthropological studies'. *Human Relations*, 50 (9): 1147-1175.
- Baumeister, R. F., Zhang, L. & Vohs, K. D. (2004) 'Gossip as cultural learning'. *Review of General Psychology*, 8 (2): 111-121.

- Beersma, B. & Van Kleef, G. A. (2011) 'How the grapevine keeps you in line: Gossip increases contributions to the group'. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 42 (11): 2640-2670.
- Beersma, B. & Van Kleef, G. A. (2012) 'Why people gossip: An empirical analysis of social motives, antecedents, and consequences'. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 42 (11): 2640-2670.
- Bell, E. (2001) 'The social time of organizational payment systems'. *Time & Society*, 10 (1): 45-62.
- Bellman, B. L. (1981) 'The paradox of secrecy'. *Human Studies*, 4 (1): 1-24.
- Bellman, B. L. (1984) *The Language of Secrecy: Symbols and metaphors in Poro ritual*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Benwell, B. (2001) 'Male gossip and language play in the letters pages of men's lifestyle magazines'. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 34 (4): 19-33.
- Ben-Ze'ev, A. (1994) *The Vindication of Gossip*. In: Goodman, R. F., & Ben-Ze'ev, A., eds. *Good Gossip*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, pp. 11-24.
- Berg, J., Dickhaut, J. & McCabe, K. (1995) 'Trust, reciprocity, and social history'. *Games and Economic Behavior*, 10 (1): 122-142.
- Bergmann, J. R. (1993) *Discreet Indiscretions: The social organization of gossip*, translated by Bednarz, J. J. New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Besnier, N. (1989) 'Information withholding as a manipulative and collusive strategy in Nukulaelae gossip'. *Language in Society*, 18 (3): 315-341.
- Besnier, N. (1993) *Literacy and Feelings: The encoding of affect in Nukulaelae letters*. In: Street, B. V., ed. *Cross-cultural Approaches to Literacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 62-86.
- Birchall, C. (2011a) 'Introduction to 'secrecy and transparency': The politics of opacity and openness'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28 (7-8): 7-25.
- Birchall, C. (2011b) 'Transparency, interrupted: Secrets of the left'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28 (7-8): 60-84.

- Bisel, R. S. (2010) 'A communicative ontology of organization? A description, history, and critique of CCO theories for organization science'. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 24 (1): 124-131.
- Blackwood, E. (1995) *Falling in Love with An-other Lesbian: Reflections on identity in fieldwork*. In: Kulick, D., & Willson, M., eds. *Taboo: Sex, identity and erotic subjectivity in anthropological fieldwork*. London: Routledge, pp. 51-75.
- Blakeley, J. A., Ribeiro, V. & Hughes, A. (1996) 'Managing rumor and gossip in operating room settings'. *Seminars in Perioperative Nursing*, 5 (3): 111-118.
- Blaschke, S., Schoeneborn, D. & Seidl, D. (2012) 'Organizations as networks of communication episodes: Turning the network perspective inside out'. *Organization Studies*, 33 (7): 879-906.
- Blumberg, H. H. (1972) 'Communication of interpersonal evaluations'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 23 (2): 157-162.
- Blum-Kulka, S. (2014) *Gossipy Events at Family Dinners: Negotiating sociability, presence and the moral order*. In: Coupland, J., ed. *Small Talk*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 213-240.
- Boivin, G., Brummans, B. H. & Barker, J. R. (2017) 'The institutionalization of CCO scholarship: Trends from 2000 to 2015'. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 31 (3): 331-355.
- Bok, S. (1982) *Secrets: On the ethics of concealment and revelation*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Bone, R. G. (1998) 'A new look at trade secret law: Doctrine in search of justification'. *California Law Review*, 86 (2): 241-313.
- Bosson, J. K., Johnson, A. B., Niederhoffer, K. & Swann, W. B. (2006) 'Interpersonal chemistry through negativity: Bonding by sharing negative attitudes about others'. *Personal Relationships*, 13 (2): 135-150.
- Bott, E. (2001) *Family and Social Network: Roles, norms and external relationships in ordinary urban families*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Bowen, E. S. (1964) *Return to Laughter*. New York, NY: Doubleday and Company.

- Brannick, T. & Coghlan, D. (2007) 'In defense of being "native": The case for insider academic research'. *Organizational Research Methods*, 10 (1): 59-74.
- Brayboy, B. M. & Deyhle, D. (2000) 'Insider-outsider: Researchers in American Indian communities'. *Theory into Practice*, 39 (3): 163-169.
- Brenneis, D. (1978) 'The matter of talk: Political performances in Bhatgaon'. *Language in Society*, 7 (2): 159-170.
- Brison, K. J. (1992) *Just Talk: Gossip, meetings, and power in a Papua New Guinea village*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Brose, H. G. (2004) 'An introduction towards a culture of non-simultaneity?'. *Time & Society*, 13 (1): 5-26.
- Brown, M. E. (1994) *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The pleasure of resistance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brummans, B., Cooren, F., Robichaud, D., & Taylor, J. R. (2014) Approaches in Research on the Communicative Constitution of Organizations. In: Putnam, L. L., & Mumby, D., eds. *Sage Handbook of Organizational Communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 173-194.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011) *Business Research Methods* 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burke, M. (1997) 'Book review: Secrecy and fieldwork by Mitchell, R. G'. *British Journal of Psychology*, 88 (1): 173-176.
- Burrell, G. (1992) Back to the Future: Time and organization. In: Reed, M., & Hughes, M., eds. *Rethinking Organization: New directions in organization theory and analysis*. London: Sage, pp. 165-183.
- Burt, R. S., & Knez, M. (1996) Trust and Third-party Gossip. In: Kramer, R. M., & Tyler, T. R., eds. *Trust in Organizations: Frontiers of theory and research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 68-89.
- Business Insider (2017, March 22) '4 ways to deal with a co-worker who is spreading gossip about you'. Available: <http://uk.businessinsider.com/how-to-deal-with-gossip-at-work-2017-3> (Accessed: 2017, September 12).
- Cai, S. (1984) 'On the origin of the Gelaohui'. *Modern China*, 10 (4): 481-508.

- Calvey, D. (2008) 'The art and politics of covert research: Doing 'situated ethics' in the field'. *Sociology*, 42 (5): 905-918.
- Carmer, C. (2000) *Stars Fell on Alabama*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.
- Casey, C. (1996) 'Corporate transformations: Designer culture, designer employees and 'post-occupational' solidarity'. *Organization*, 3 (3): 317-339.
- Chambers, R. (1869) *The Book of Days: A miscellany of popular antiquities in connection with the calendar, including anecdote, biography & history, curiosities of literature, and oddities of human life and character, volume 1*. Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers.
- China Labour Watch (2016, August 24) 'Apple is the source of mistreatment of Chinese workers'. Available: <http://www.chinalaborwatch.org/report/120> (Accessed: 2017, September 12).
- Coates, J. (1998) *Gossip Revisited: Language in all-female group*. In: Coates, J., ed. *Language and Gender: A reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 226-253.
- Coates, J. (2014) *Small Talk and Subversion: Female speakers backstage*. In: Coupland, J., ed. *Small Talk*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 241-240.
- Coffey, A. J. (1994) "'Timing is everything': Graduate accountants, time and organizational commitment'. *Sociology*, 28 (4): 943-956.
- Coffey, A. J. (1999) *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the representation of identity*. London: Sage.
- Cole, J. M. & Scrivener, H. (2013) 'Short term effects of gossip behavior on self-esteem'. *Current Psychology*, 32 (3): 252-260.
- Colella, A., Paetzold, R. L., Zardkoohi, A. & Wesson, M. J. (2007) 'Exposing pay secrecy'. *Academy of Management Review*, 32 (1): 55-71.
- Collinson, D. L. & Collinson, M. (1997) "'Delaying managers': Time-space surveillance and its gendered effects'. *Organization*, 4 (3): 375-407.
- Collinson, D. L. (1998) "'Shift-ing lives": Work-home pressures in the North Sea oil industry'. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, 35 (3): 301-324.

- Collinson, D. L. (1999) 'Surviving the rigs: Safety and surveillance on North Sea oil installations'. *Organization Studies*, 20 (4): 579-600.
- Collis, J., & Hussey, R. (2009) *Business Research: A practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students* 3rd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Colson, E. (1953) *The Makah Indians: A study of an Indian tribe in modern American society*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cooren, F. & Taylor, J. R. (1997) 'Organization as an effect of mediation: Redefining the link between organization and communication'. *Communication Theory*, 7 (3): 219-260.
- Cooren, F. (2004) 'Textual agency: How texts do things in organizational settings'. *Organization*, 11 (3): 373-393.
- Cooren, F. (2012) 'Communication theory at the center: Ventriloquism and the communicative constitution of reality'. *Journal of Communication*, 62 (1): 1-20.
- Cooren, F., & Fairhurst, G. (2009) *Dislocation and Stabilization: How to scale up from interactions to organization*. In: Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M., eds. *Building Theories of Organization: The constitutive role of communication*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 117-152.
- Cooren, F., Kuhn, T., Cornelissen, J. P. & Clark, T. (2011) 'Communication, organizing and organization: An overview and introduction to the special issue'. *Organization Studies*, 32 (9): 1149-1170.
- Costas, J. & Grey, C. (2014) 'Bringing secrecy into the open: Towards a theorization of the social processes of organizational secrecy'. *Organization Studies*, 35 (10): 1423-1447.
- Costas, J. & Kärreman, D. (2015) 'The bored self in knowledge work'. *Human Relations*, 69 (1): 61-83.
- Costas, J., & Grey, C. (2016) *Secrecy at Work: The hidden architecture of organizational life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Courpasson, D. & Younes, D. (2018) 'Double or quits: Understanding the links between secrecy and creativity in a project development process'. *Organization Studies*, 39 (2-3): 271-295.

- Cox, B. A. (1970) 'What is Hopi gossip about? Information management and Hopi factions'. *Man*, 5 (1): 88-98.
- Craig, R. T. (1999) 'Communication theory as a field'. *Communication Theory*, 9 (2): 119-161.
- Crewe, E. (2015) *The House of Commons: An anthropology of MPs at work*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Crowne, D., & Marlowe, D. (1960) *The Approval Motive: Studies in evaluative dependence*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Curtis, R. & Weir, K. (2016) 'Open secrets'. *Ephemera*, 16 (2): 1-9.
- Czarniawska, B. (2007) *Shadowing, and Other Techniques for Doing Fieldwork in Modern Societies*. Malmö: Liber.
- Czarniawska, B. (2014) *Social Science Research: From field to desk*. London: Sage.
- Davies, C. A. (1999) *Reflexive Ethnography: A guide to researching selves to others*. London: Routledge.
- De Gouveia, C. M., Van Vuuren, L. J. & Crafford, A. (2005) 'Towards a typology of gossip in the workplace'. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 3 (2): 56-68.
- de Sousa, R. (1994) In Praise of Gossip: Indiscretion as a saintly virtue. In: Goodman, R. F., & Ben-Ze'ev, A., eds. *Good Gossip*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, pp. 25-33.
- Deal, T. E., & Kennedy, A. A. (1982) *Corporate Cultures: The rites and rituals of corporate life*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Deetz, S. (1992) *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization: Developments in communication and the politics of everyday life*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Deetz, S. A., & Eger, E. K. (2014) Developing a Metatheoretical Perspective for Organizational Communication Studies. In: Putnam, L. L., & Mumby, D., eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods* 3rd ed. London: Sage, pp. 27-48.

- Derrida, J. (1994) "'To do justice to Freud": The history of madness in the age of psychoanalysis'. *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (2): 227-266.
- Derrida, J., & Ferraris, M. (2001) *A Taste for the Secret*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc.
- Deutsch, C. P. (1981) 'The behavioral scientist: Insider and outsider'. *Journal of Social Issues*, 37 (2): 172-191.
- DeVault, M. L. (1996) 'Talking back to sociology: Distinctive contributions of feminist methodology'. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22 (1): 29-50.
- DiFonzo, N., & Bordia, P. (2007) *Rumor Psychology: Social and organizational approaches*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Difonzo, N., Bordia, P. & Rosnow, R. L. (1994) 'Reining in rumors'. *Organizational Dynamics*, 23 (1): 47-62.
- DiMaggio, P. J. & Powell, W. W. (1983) 'The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields'. *American Sociological Review*, 48 (2): 147-160.
- Ditton, J. (1979) 'Baking time'. *The Sociological Review*, 27 (1): 157-167.
- Dobusch, L. & Schoeneborn, D. (2015) 'Fluidity, identity, and organizationality: The communicative constitution of Anonymity'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 52 (8): 1005-1035.
- Douglas, J. D. (1972) *Research on Deviance*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Douglas, J. D. (1976) *Investigative Social Research: Individual and team field research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Doyle, J. (2000) *New Community or New Slavery: The emotional division of labour*. London: Industrial Society.
- Dufresne, R. L. & Offstein, E. H. (2008) 'On the virtues of secrecy in organizations'. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17 (2): 102-106.
- Dunbar, R. (1996) *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Dunbar, R. (2004) 'Gossip in evolutionary perspective'. *Review of General Psychology*, 8 (2): 231-246.
- Dunbar, R. I., Duncan, N. D. & Marriott, A. (1997) 'Human conversational behavior'. *Human Nature*, 8 (3): 231-246.
- Durkheim, E. (1995) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Eder, D. & Enke, J. L. (1991) 'The structure of gossip: Opportunities and constraints on collective expression among adolescents'. *American Sociological Review*, 56 (4): 494-508.
- Eisenberg, E. M. (1984) 'Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication'. *Communication Monographs*, 51 (3): 227-242.
- Elias, N., & Scotson, J. L. (1994) *The Established and the Outsiders*. London: Sage.
- Ellwardt, L., Steglich, C. & Wittek, R. (2012) 'The co-evolution of gossip and friendship in workplace social networks'. *Social Networks*, 34 (4): 623-633.
- El-Or, T. (1992) 'Do you really know how they make love? The limits on intimacy with ethnographic informants'. *Qualitative Sociology*, 15 (1): 53-72.
- Emerson, R. M. (1988a) Introduction. In: Emerson, R. M., ed. *Contemporary Field Research: A collection of readings*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, pp. 1-16.
- Emerson, R. M. (1988b) Introduction [to Part III]. In: Emerson, R. M., ed. *Contemporary Field Research: A collection of readings*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, pp. 175-190.
- Emler, N. (1994) Gossip, Reputation, and Social Adaptation. In: Goodman, R. F., & Benz-Ze'ev, A., eds. *Good Gossip*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, pp. 117-138.
- Epstein, C. F. & Seron, C. (2001) 'The symbolic meanings of professional time'. *Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance*, 3: 79-94.
- Esposito, J. L. & Rosnow, R. L. (1983) 'Corporate rumors: How they start and how to stop them'. *Management Review*, 72 (4): 44-49.

- Fairhurst, G. T. & Putnam, L. L. (1999) 'Reflections on the organization-communication equivalency question: The contributions of James Taylor and his colleagues'. *The Communication Review*, 3 (1-2): 1-19.
- Fairhurst, G. T. & Putnam, L. L. (2004) 'Organizations as discursive constructions'. *Communication Theory*, 14 (1): 5-26.
- Farace, R. V. & MacDonald, D. (1974) 'New directions in the study of organizational communication'. *Personnel Psychology*, 27 (1): 1-19.
- Fayard, A. L. & Weeks, J. (2007) 'Photocopiers and water-coolers: The affordances of informal interaction'. *Organization Studies*, 28 (5): 605-634.
- Fehr, E. & Gächter, S. (2002) 'Altruistic punishment in humans'. *Nature*, 415 (6868): 137-140.
- Feinberg, M., Willer, R. & Schultz, M. (2014) 'Gossip and ostracism promote cooperation in groups'. *Psychological Science*, 25 (3): 656-664.
- Feinberg, M., Willer, R., Stellar, J. & Keltner, D. (2012) 'The virtues of gossip: Reputational information sharing as prosocial behavior'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102 (5): 1015-1030.
- Festinger, L. (1954) 'A theory of social comparison processes'. *Human Relations*, 7 (2): 117-140.
- Fine, G. A. & Rosnow, R. L. (1978) 'Gossip, gossipers, gossiping'. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 4 (1): 161-168.
- Fine, G. A. (1986) *The Social Organization of Adolescent Gossip: The rhetoric of moral evaluation*. In: Cook-Gumperz, J., Corsaro, W., & Streeck, J., eds. *Children's Worlds and Children's Language*. Berlin: Mouton, pp. 405-423.
- Fine, G. A. (1993) 'Ten lies of ethnography moral dilemmas of field research'. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 22 (3): 267-294.
- Fisher, W. R. (1987) *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a philosophy of reason, value, and action*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Forbes (2013, October 14) 'New managers: 5 ways to stop negative office gossip'. Available: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisaquast/2013/10/14/new-managers-5->

ways-to-stop-negative-office-gossip/#10eb09f1431b (Accessed: 2017, September 12).

- Forester, J. (1993) *Critical Theory, Public Policy, and Planning Practice: Toward a critical pragmatism*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Foster, E. K. (2004) 'Research on gossip: Taxonomy, methods, and future directions'. *Review of General Psychology*, 8 (2): 78-99.
- Foster, E. K., & Rosnow, R. L. (2006) Gossip and Network Relationships. In: Kirkpatrick, D. C., Duck, S., & Foley, M. K., eds. *Relating Difficulty: The process of constructing and managing difficult interaction*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 161-201.
- Friedman, D. D., Landes, W. M. & Posner, R. A. (1991) 'Some economics of trade secret law'. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 5 (1): 61-72.
- Frisby, D., & Featherstone, M. (1997) *Simmel on Culture: Selected writings*. London: Sage.
- Gabriel, Y. (1995) 'The unmanaged organization: Stories, fantasies and subjectivity'. *Organization Studies*, 16 (3): 477-501.
- Garfinkel, H. (2002) *Ethnomethodology's Program: Working out Durkheim's aphorism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Garsten, C., & Nyqvist, A. (2013) Entries: Engaging organizational worlds. In: Garsten, C., & Nyqvist, A., eds. *Organizational Anthropology: Doing ethnography in and among complex organizations*. London: Pluto Press, pp. 1-28.
- Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gholipour, A., Fakheri Kozekanan, S. & Zehtabi, M. (2011) 'Utilizing gossip as a strategy to construct organizational reality'. *Business Strategy Series*, 12 (2): 56-62.
- Giardini, F. & Conte, R. (2012) 'Gossip for social control in natural and artificial societies'. *Simulation*, 88 (1): 18-32.
- Gilmore, D. (1978) 'Varieties of gossip in a Spanish rural community'. *Ethnology*, 17 (1): 89-99.

- Glinert, L., Loewenthal, K. M. & Goldblatt, V. (2003) 'Guarding the tongue: A thematic analysis of gossip control strategies among Orthodox Jewish women in London'. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 24 (6): 513-524.
- Gluckman, M. (1963) 'Papers in honor of Melville J. Herskovits: Gossip and scandal'. *Current Anthropology*, 4 (3): 307-316.
- Gluckman, M. (1968) 'Psychological, sociological and anthropological explanations of witchcraft and gossip: A clarification'. *Man*, 3 (1): 20-34.
- Goffman, A. (2014) *On the Run: Fugitive life in an American city*. New York, NY: Picador.
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Goffman, E. (1970) *Strategic Interaction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Goffman, E. (1981) *Forms of Talk*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gold, R. L. (1958) 'Roles in sociological field observations'. *Social Forces*, 36 (3): 217-223.
- Goode, E. (1999) 'Sex with informants as deviant behavior: An account and commentary'. *Deviant Behavior*, 20 (4): 301-324.
- Goodwin, M. H. (1980) 'He-said-she-said: Formal cultural procedures for the construction of a gossip dispute activity'. *American Ethnologist*, 7 (4): 674-695.
- Greve, H. R., Palmer, D. & Pozner, J. E. (2010) 'Organizations gone wild: The causes, processes and consequences of organizational misconduct'. *Academy of Management Annals*, 4 (1): 53-107.
- Grey, C. (2012) *Decoding Organization: Bletchley park, codebreaking and organization studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grosser, T. J., Lopez-Kidwell, V. & Labianca, G. (2010) 'A social network analysis of positive and negative gossip in organizational life'. *Group & Organization Management*, 35 (2): 177-212.
- Guendouzi, J. (2001) "'You'll think we're always bitching': The functions of cooperativity and competition in women's gossip". *Discourse Studies*, 3 (1): 29-51.

- Gupta, A., & Ferguson, J. (1997) Discipline and Practice: "The field" as site, method, and location in anthropology. In: Gupta, A., & Ferguson, J., eds. *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and grounds of a field science*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 1-47.
- Gusterson, H. (1997) 'Studying up revisited'. *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 20 (1): 114-119.
- Gusterson, H. (1998) *Nuclear Rites: A weapons laboratory at the end of the Cold War*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Habermas, J. (1987) *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hafen, S. (2004) 'Organizational gossip: A revolving door of regulation and resistance'. *Southern Journal of Communication*, 69 (3): 223-240.
- Hallett, T., Harger, B. & Eder, D. (2009) 'Gossip at work: Unsanctioned evaluative talk in formal school meetings'. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38 (5): 584-618.
- Hammersley, M. (1990) *Reading Ethnographic Research: A critical guide*. London: Longman.
- Hammersley, M. (1992) *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* London: Routledge.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007) *Ethnography: Principles in practice* 3rd ed. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Handelman, D. (1973) 'Gossip in encounters: The transmission of information in a bounded social setting'. *Man*, 8 (2): 210-227.
- Hannah, D. R. (2005) 'Should I keep a secret? The effects of trade secret protection procedures on employees' obligations to protect trade secrets'. *Organization Science*, 16 (1): 71-84.
- Hannah, D. R. (2007) 'An examination of the factors that influence whether newcomers protects or share secrets of their former employers'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 44 (4): 465-487.
- Hannerz, U. (1967) 'Gossip, networks and culture in a black American ghetto'. *Ethnos*, 32 (1-4): 35-60.

- Hardon, A. & Posel, D. (2012) 'Secrecy as embodied practice: Beyond the confessional imperative'. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 14 (sup1): S1-S13.
- Harrington, C. L. & Bielby, D. D. (1995) 'Where did you hear that? Technology and the social organization of gossip'. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 36 (3): 607-628.
- Harvard Business Review (2016, November 21) 'What you can do if you have a gossiping boss'. Available: <https://hbr.org/2016/11/what-you-can-do-if-you-have-a-gossiping-boss> (Accessed: 2017, September 12).
- Haviland, J. B. (1977) 'Gossip as competition in Zinacantan'. *Journal of Communication*, 27 (1): 186-191.
- Heritage, J. (1984) *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. New York, NY: Polity.
- Hom, H. & Haidt, J. (2001) 'Psst, did you hear?: Exploring the gossip phenomenon'. Paper presented at the meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, San Antonio, TX.
- Horn, E. (2011) 'Logics of political secrecy'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28 (7-8): 103-122.
- Horowitz, R. (1986) 'Remaining an outsider membership as a threat to research rapport'. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 14 (4): 409-430.
- Huckfeldt, R., Beck, P. A., Dalton, R. J., Levine, J. & Morgan, W. (1998) 'Ambiguity, distorted messages, and nested environmental effects on political communication'. *The Journal of Politics*, 60 (4): 996-1030.
- Humphreys, L. (1975) *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal sex in public places*, enlarged edition. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Huxley, A. (2000) *Complete Essays*, edited with commentary by Baker, R. S. Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee.
- Jablin, F. M. (1979) 'Superior-subordinate communication: The state of the art'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 86 (6): 1201-1222.
- Jaeger, M. E., Skleder, A. A., Rind, B., & Rosnow, R. L. (1994) Gossip, Gossipers, Gossipees. In: Goodman, R. F., & Ben-Ze'ev, A., eds. *Good Gossip*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, pp. 154-168.

- Johannesen, R. L., Valde, K. S., & Whedbee, K. E. (2008) *Ethics in Human Communication* 6th ed. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Johansson, S. (2008) 'Gossip, sport and pretty girls: What does "trivial" journalism mean to tabloid newspaper readers?'. *Journalism Practice*, 2 (3): 402-413.
- Johnson, F. L., & Aries, E. J. (1998) *The Talk of Women Friends*. In: Coates, J., ed. *Language and Gender: A reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 215-225.
- Johnson, J. M. (1988) *Trust and Personal Involvements in Fieldwork*. In: Emerson, R. M., ed. *Contemporary Field Research: A collection of readings*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, pp. 203-215.
- Jones, C. (2008) 'Editor's introduction [to a special essay section on secrecy]'. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17 (2): 95-96.
- Jones, D. (1980) 'Gossip: Notes on women's oral culture'. *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 3 (2): 193-198.
- Kanuha, V. K. (2000) "'Being" native versus "going native": Conducting social work research as an insider'. *Social Work*, 45 (5): 439-447.
- Katila, R., Rosenberger, J. D. & Eisenhardt, K. M. (2008) 'Swimming with sharks: Technology ventures, defense mechanisms and corporate relationships'. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 53 (2): 295-332.
- Keane, C. (2008) 'Don't ask, don't tell: Secrets – their use and abuse in organizations'. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17 (2): 107-110.
- Keesing, R. M. (1974) 'Theories of culture'. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 3 (1): 73-97.
- Kniffin, K. M. & Wilson, D. S. (2005) 'Utilities of gossip across organizational levels'. *Human Nature*, 16 (3): 278-292.
- Knight, P. T. (2002) *Small-Scale Research: Pragmatic inquiry in social science and the caring professions*. London: Sage.
- Kornberger, M. & Clegg, S. R. (2004) 'Bringing space back in: Organizing the generative building'. *Organization Studies*, 25 (7): 1095-1114.
- Koschmann, M. (2010) 'Communication as a distinct mode of explanation makes a difference'. *Communication Monographs*, 77 (4): 431-434.

- Kroeber, A. L., & Kluckhohn, C. (1952) *Culture: A critical review of concepts and definitions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kuhn, T. (2005) 'The institutionalization of Alta in organizational communication studies'. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 18 (4): 618-627.
- Kuhn, T. (2008) 'A communicative theory of the firm: Developing an alternative perspective on intra-organizational power and stakeholder relationships'. *Organization Studies*, 29 (8-9): 1227-1254.
- Kunda, G. (2006) *Engineering Culture: Control and commitment in a high-tech corporation*, revised edition. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Kurland, N. B. & Pelled, L. H. (2000) 'Passing the word: Toward a model of gossip and power in the workplace'. *Academy of Management Review*, 25 (2): 428-438.
- Kuzel, A. J. (1999) *Sampling and Qualitative Inquiry*. In: Crabtree, B. F., & Miller, W. L., eds. *Doing Qualitative Research* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 33-45.
- Latour, B., & Woolgar, S. (1986) *Laboratory Life: The construction of scientific facts*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Le Gallienne, R. (1912) 'The psychology of gossip'. *Munsey's Magazine*, 48: 123-127.
- Lechner, F. J. (1991) 'Simmel on social space'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 8 (3): 195-201.
- Lee, R. M. (1993) *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics*. London: Sage.
- Levin, J. & Arluke, A. (1985) 'An exploratory analysis of sex differences in gossip'. *Sex Roles*, 12 (3): 281-286.
- Lewis, S., & Taylor, K. (1996) *Evaluating the Impact of Family-Friendly Employer Policies: A case study*. In: Lewis, S., & Lewis, J., eds. *The Work Family Challenge: Rethinking employment*. London: Sage, pp. 112-127.
- Longhi, A. (1974) 'Le secret dans les societies'. *Analyse and Prevision*, 18 (4-6): 541-620.
- Loudon, J. B. (1961) 'Kinship and crisis in South Wales'. *British Journal of Sociology*, 12 (4): 333-350.

- Low, S. M. (2003) 'Embodied space(s) anthropological theories of body, space, and culture'. *Space and Culture*, 6 (1): 9-18.
- Luhmann, N. (1981) 'The improbability of communication'. *International Social Science Journal*, 33 (1): 122-132.
- Luhmann, N. (1986) *The Autopoiesis of Social Systems*. In: Geyer, F., & van der Zouwen, J., eds. *Sociocybernetic Paradoxes: Observation, control and evolution of self-steering systems*. London: Sage, pp. 171-192.
- Luhmann, N. (1995) *Social Systems*, translated by Bednarz, J. J. & Baecker, D. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Luhmann, N. (1997) *Geheimnis, Zeit und Ewigkeit*. In: Luhmann, N., & Fuchs, P., eds. *Reden und Schweigen*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, pp. 101-137.
- Luhmann, N. (2000) *Organisation und Entscheidung*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Luhmann, N. (2003) *Organization*. In: Bakken, T., & Hernes, T., eds. *Autopoietic Organization Theory: Drawing on Niklas Luhmann's social systems perspective*. Oslo: Copenhagen Business School Press, pp. 31-52.
- Luhmann, N. (1989) 'The magic of secrecy'. *Ethos*, 17 (2): 131-165.
- Malinowski, B. (1927) *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*. London: Routledge.
- Malinowski, B. (1959) *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages*. In: Ogden, C. K., & Richards, I. A., eds. *The Meaning of Meaning*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and World, pp. 296-336.
- Malinowski, B. (1961) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An account of native enterprise and adventure in the archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge
- Malinowski, B. (1967) *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*. London: Routledge.
- March, J. G. & Sevon, G. (1984) 'Gossip, information and decision-making'. *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations*, 1: 95-107.
- March, J. G., & Simon, H. A. (1958) *Organizations*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Martin, J. (1992) *Cultures in Organizations: Three perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Marx, G., & Muschert, G. (2009) Simmel on Secrecy: A legacy and inheritance for the Sociology of information. In: Rol, C., & Papilloud, C., eds. *Soziologie als möglichkeit: 100 jahre Georg Simmels untersuchungen über die formen der vergesellschaftung*. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 217–233.
- May, S., & Mumby, D. K. (2005) Conclusion: Engaging the future of organizational communication theory and research. In: May, S., & Mumby, D. K., eds. *Engaging Organizational Communication Theory and Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 263-281.
- McAndrew, F. T. & Milenkovic, M. A. (2002) 'Of tabloids and family secrets: The evolutionary psychology of gossip'. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32 (5): 1064-1082.
- McAndrew, F. T., Bell, E. K. & Garcia, C. M. (2007) 'Who do we tell and whom do we tell on? Gossip as a strategy for status enhancement'. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 37 (7): 1562-1577.
- McPhee, R. D. & Zaug, P. (2000) 'The communicative constitution of organizations: A framework for explanation'. *Electronic Journal of Communication*, 10 (1–2). Available: <http://www.cios.org/EJCPUBLIC/010/1/01017.html> (Accessed: 2017, 17 September).
- McPhee, R. D., & Iverson, J. (2009) Agents of Constitution in Comunidad: Constitutive processes of communication in organizations. In: Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M., eds. *Building Theories of Organization: The constitutive role of communication*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 49-87.
- McPhee, R. D., Poole, M. S., & Iverson, J. (2014) Structuration Theory. In: Putnam, L. L., & Mumby, D. K., eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods* 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 75-100.
- McPhee, R., & Zaug, P. (2009) The Communicative Constitution of Organizations: A framework for explanation. In: Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M., eds. *Building Theories of Organization: The constitutive role of communication*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 21-48.

- Meir, E. I. & Barak, A. (1974) 'A simple instrument for measuring vocational interests based on Roe's classification of occupations'. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 4 (1): 33-42.
- Mercer, J. (2007) 'The challenges of insider research in educational institutions: Wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 33 (1): 1-17.
- Merriam, S. B., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M. Y., Kee, Y., Ntseane, G. & Muhamad, M. (2001) 'Power and positionality: Negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures'. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20 (5): 405-416.
- Merry, S. E. (1997) *Rethinking Gossip and Scandal*. In: Klein, D. B., ed. *Reputation: Studies in the voluntary elicitation of good conduct*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, pp. 47-74.
- Merton, R. K. (1968) *Social Theory and Social Structure*, enlarged edition. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Merton, R. K. (1972) 'Insiders and outsiders: A chapter in the sociology of knowledge'. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78 (1): 9-47.
- Mettetal, G. W. (1982) *The Conversations of Female Friends at Three Ages: The importance of fantasy, gossip, and self-disclosure*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. A brief description is available at: <https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/69617> (Accessed: 2015, February 25).
- Michelson, G. & Mouly, S. (2000) 'Rumour and gossip in organisations: A conceptual study'. *Management Decision*, 38 (5): 339-346.
- Michelson, G. & Mouly, S. (2004) 'Do loose lips sink ships? The meaning, antecedents and consequences of rumour and gossip in organisations'. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 9 (3): 189-201.
- Michelson, G., van Iterson, A. & Waddington, K. (2010) 'Gossip in organizations: Contexts, consequences, and controversies'. *Group & Organization Management*, 35 (4): 371-390.
- Mills, C. (2010) 'Experiencing gossip: The foundations for a theory of embedded organizational gossip'. *Group & Organization Management*, 35 (2): 213-240.

- Mills, C. W. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mintzberg, H. (1973) *The Nature of Managerial Work*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Mishra, J. (1990) 'Managing the grapevine'. *Public Personnel Management*, 19 (2): 213-228.
- Mitchell, R. G. (1993) *Secrecy and Fieldwork*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Moore, W. E. (1962) *The Conduct of the Corporation*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Morreall, J. (1994) Gossip and Humor. In: Goodman, R. F., & Ben-Ze'ev, A., eds. *Good Gossip*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, pp. 56-64.
- Muchinsky, P. M. (1977) 'Organizational communication: Relationships to organizational climate and job satisfaction'. *Academy of Management Journal*, 20 (4): 592-607.
- Mullings, B. (1999) 'Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting'. *Geoforum*, 30 (4): 337-350.
- Mumby, D. K. (1989) 'Ideology & the social construction of meaning: A communication perspective'. *Communication Quarterly*, 37 (4): 291-304.
- Mumby, D. K. (2013) *Organizational Communication: A critical approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Murphy, E. & Dingwall, R. (2007) Informed consent, anticipatory regulation and ethnographic practice. *Social Science & Medicine*, 65 (11): 2223-2234.
- Murray, D. H., & Qin, B. (1994) *The Origins of the Tiandihui: The Chinese triads in legend and history*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Nevo, O., Nevo, B., & Derech-Zehavi, A. (1994) The Tendency to Gossip as a Psychological Disposition: Constructing a measure and validating it. In: Goodman, R. F., & Ben-Ze'ev, A., eds. *Good Gossip*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, pp. 180-192.
- Nevo, O., Nevo, B., Zehavi, A. D. & Milton, M. J. (1993) 'Gossip and counselling: The tendency to gossip and its relation to vocational interests'. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 6 (3): 229-238.

- Noon, M. & Delbridge, R. (1993) 'News from behind my hand: Gossip in organizations'. *Organization Studies*, 14 (1): 23-36.
- Ohly, S., Sonnentag, S., Niessen, C. & Zapf, D. (2010) 'Diary studies in organizational research: An introduction and some practical recommendations'. *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, 9 (2): 79-93.
- O'Reilly III, C. A. (1978) 'The intentional distortion of information in organizational communication: A laboratory and field investigation'. *Human Relations*, 31 (2): 173-193.
- Orlikowski, W. J. (2000) 'Using technology and constituting structures: A practice lens for studying technology in organizations'. *Organization Science*, 11 (4): 404-428.
- Orpen, C. (1997) 'The interactive effects of communication quality and job involvement on managerial job satisfaction and work motivation'. *The Journal of Psychology*, 131 (5): 519-522.
- Pacanowsky, M. E. & O'Donnell-Trujillo, N. (1982) 'Communication and organizational cultures'. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 46 (2): 115-130.
- Paine, R. (1967) 'What is gossip about? An alternative hypothesis'. *Man*, 2 (2): 278-285.
- Palson, C. & Palson, R. (1972) 'Swinging in wedlock'. *Society*, 9 (4): 28-37.
- Parker, M. (2000) *Organizational Culture and Identity*. London: Sage.
- Parker, M. (2016) 'Secret societies: Intimations of organization'. *Organization Studies*, 37 (1): 99-113.
- Parker, M. (2017) 'Tower cranes and Organization Studies'. *Organization Studies*, 38 (7): 989-1004.
- Percival, J. (2000) 'Gossip in sheltered housing: Its cultural importance and social implications'. *Ageing and Society*, 20 (3): 303-325.
- Perlow, L. A. (1995) 'Putting the work back into work/family'. *Group & Organization Management*, 20 (2): 227-239.
- Petronio, S. (2002) *Boundaries of Privacy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

- Piazza, J. & Bering, J. M. (2008) 'Concerns about reputation via gossip promote generous allocations in an economic game'. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 29 (3): 172-178.
- Pilkington, J. (1998) 'Don't Try and Make Out That I'm Nice!': The difference strategies women and men use when gossiping. In: Coates, J., ed. *Language and Gender: A reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 254-269.
- Piot, C. D. (1993) 'Secrecy, ambiguity, and the everyday in Kabre culture'. *American Anthropologist*, 95 (2): 353-370.
- Pollner, M., & Emerson, R. M. (1988) *The Dynamics of Inclusion and Distance in Fieldwork Relations*. In: Emerson, R. M., ed. *Contemporary Field Research: A collection of readings*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, pp. 235-252.
- Powers, J. H. (2002) *Chinese Communication Theory and Practice: A tier-based perspective*. In: Jia, W., Lu, X., & Heisey, D. R., eds. *Chinese Communication Theory and Research: Reflections, new frontiers, and new directions*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, pp. 37-64.
- Prasad, P., & Prasad, A. (2002) *Casting the Native Subject: Ethnographic practice and the (re)production of difference*. In: Czarniawska, B., & Heather, H., eds. *Casting the Other: The production and maintenance of inequalities in work organizations*. London: Routledge, pp. 185-204.
- Putnam, L. L. & Fairhurst, G. T. (2015) 'Revisiting "organizations as discursive constructions": 10 years later'. *Communication Theory*, 25 (4): 375-392.
- Putnam, L. L. & Nicotera, A. M. (2010) 'Communicative constitution of organization is a question: Critical issues for addressing it'. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 24 (1): 158-165.
- Putnam, L. L., & Cheney, G. (1983) *A Critical Review of Research Traditions in Organizational Communication*. In: Mander, M., ed. *Communication in Transition: Issues and debates in current research*. New York, NY: Praeger, pp. 206-224.
- Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M. (2009) Preface. In: Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M., eds. *Building Theories of Organization: The constitutive role of communication*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. ix-xi.

- Putnam, L. L., Nicotera, A. M., & McPhee, R. (2009) Introduction: Communication constitutes organization. In: Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M., eds. *Building Theories of Organization: The constitutive role of communication*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 1-20.
- Rabinow, P., Marcus, G. E., Faubion, J. D., & Rees, T. (2008) *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Radlow, R. & Berger, P. (1959) 'Relationship of degree of self-esteem to gossiping behavior'. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 50 (1): 153-155.
- Rampton, B., Karin, T., Janet, M., Richard B., Angela, C. & Vally, L. (2004) 'UK linguistic ethnography: A discussion paper'. Available at: <http://www.lingethnog.org/docs/rampton-et-al-2004-uk-linguistic-ethnography-a-discussion-paper/> (Accessed: 2015, March 16).
- Robichaud, D., Giroux, H. & Taylor, J. R. (2004) 'The metaconversation: The recursive property of language as a key to organizing'. *Academy of Management Review*, 29 (4): 617-634.
- Robinson, J. (2014) *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies, Collected from Good Authorities* 5th ed. Abergele: Wermod & Wermod.
- Roscigno, V. J. & Hodson, R. (2004) 'The organizational and social foundations of worker resistance'. *American Sociological Review*, 69 (1): 14-39.
- Rosen, M. (1985) 'Breakfast at Spiro's: Dramaturgy and dominance'. *Journal of Management*, 11 (2): 31-48.
- Rosen, M. (1988) 'You asked for it: Christmas at the bosses' expense'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25 (5): 463-480.
- Rosen, M. (1991) 'Coming to terms with the field: Understanding and doing organizational ethnography'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 28 (1): 1-24.
- Rosnow, R. L. & Foster, E. K. (2005) 'Rumor and gossip research'. *Psychological Science Agenda*, 19 (4): 1-4.

- Rosnow, R. L. (1977) 'Gossip and marketplace psychology'. *Journal of Communication*, 27 (1): 158-163.
- Rosnow, R. L. (1988) 'Rumor as communication: A contextualist approach'. *Journal of Communication*, 38 (1): 12-28.
- Rosnow, R. L., & Fine, G. A. (1976) *Rumor and Gossip: The social psychology of hearsay*. New York, NY: Elsevier.
- Roth, J. A. (1962) 'Comments on "secret observation"'. *Social Problems*, 9 (3): 283-284.
- Roulet, T. J., Gill, M. J., Stenger, S. & Gill, D. J. (2017) 'Reconsidering the value of covert research: The role of ambiguous consent in participant observation'. *Organizational Research Methods*, 20 (3): 487-517.
- Roy, D. F. (1959) "'Banana Time": Job satisfaction and informal interaction'. *Human Organization*, 18 (4): 158-168.
- Rysman, A. (1977) 'How the "gossip" became a woman'. *Journal of Communication*, 27 (1): 176-180.
- Sabini, J., & Silver, M. (1982) *Moralities of Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sarsby, J. (1984) *The Fieldwork Experience*. In: Ellen, R. F., ed. *Ethnographic Research: A guide to general conduct*. London: Academic Press.
- Schein, E. H. (1985/2010) *Organizational Culture and Leadership* 4th ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Schoeneborn, D. (2011) 'Organization as communication: A Luhmannian perspective'. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 25 (4): 663-689.
- Schoeneborn, D., & Vásquez, C. (2017) *Communication as Constitutive of Organization*. In: Scott, C. R., & Lewis, L. K., eds. *The International Encyclopedia of Organizational Communication*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 367-387.
- Schoeneborn, D., Blaschke, S., Cooren, F., McPhee, R. D., Seidl, D. & Taylor, J. R. (2014) 'The three schools of CCO thinking: Interactive dialogue and systematic comparison'. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 28 (2): 285-316.
- Schwegler, T. A. (2013) *Not Being There: The power of strategic absence in organizational anthropology*. In: Garsten, C., & Nyqvist, A., eds. *Organizational*

- Anthropology: Doing ethnography in and among complex organizations. New York, NY: Pluto Press, pp. 224-240.
- Scott, C. R. (2013) *Anonymous Agencies, Backstreet Businesses, and Covert Collectives: Rethinking organizations in the 21st century*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Scott, C. R. (2015) 'Bringing hidden organizations out of the shadows: Introduction to the special issue'. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 29 (4): 503-511.
- Searle, J. R. (1969) *Speech Acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Seidl, D. (2004) 'Luhmann's theory of autopoietic social systems'. Research paper. Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München-Munich School of Management.
- Seidl, D. (2005a) The Basic Concepts of Luhmann's Theory of Social Systems. In: Seidl, D., & Becker, K. H., eds. *Niklas Luhmann and Organization Studies*. Oslo: Copenhagen Business School Press, pp. 21-53.
- Seidl, D. (2005b) Organization and Interaction. In: Seidl, D., & Becker, K. H., eds. *Niklas Luhmann and Organization Studies*. Oslo: Copenhagen Business School Press, pp. 145-170.
- Seidl, D., & Becker, K. H. (2005) *Niklas Luhmann and Organization Studies*. Oslo: Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Sieber, J. E. (1992) *Planning Ethically Responsible Research: A guide for students and internal review boards*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Siegel, B. & Beals, A. R. (1960) 'Pervasive factionalism'. *American Anthropologist*, 62 (3): 394-417.
- Simmel, G. (1906/1950) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, translated and edited by Wolff, K. H. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Simmel, G. (2007) 'The social boundary', translated by Teucher, U. & Kemple, T. M. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24 (7-8): 53-56.
- Singh, S. (1999) *The Code Book: The secret history of codes and codebreaking*. London: Fourth Estate.

- Smith, R. H. (2000) Assimilative and Contrastive Emotional Reactions to Upward and Downward Social Comparison. In: Suls, J., & Wheeler, L., eds. *Handbook of Social Comparison: Theory and research*. New York, NY: Springer Science and Business Media, pp. 173-200.
- Sorokin, P. A. & Merton, R. K. (1937) 'Social time: A methodological and functional analysis'. *American Journal of Sociology*, 42 (5): 615-629.
- Sotirin, P. & Gottfried, H. (1999) 'The ambivalent dynamics of secretarial bitching: Control, resistance, and the construction of identity'. *Organization*, 6 (1): 57-80.
- Sotirin, P. (2000) 'All they do is bitch bitch bitch: Political and interactional features of women's officetalk'. *Women and Language*, 23 (2): 19-25.
- Sotirin, P. J. (2014) *Theories of Organizational Communication*. In: Putnam, L. L., & Mumby, D., eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods 3rd ed.* London: Sage, pp. 19-26.
- Spacks, P. M. (1985) *Gossip*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Spooner, B. (1983) 'Anthropologists and the people they study, and the significance of anthropology for non-anthropologists'. Unpublished Lecture Notes, University of Pennsylvania.
- Stewart, P. J., & Strathern, A. (2004) *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors and Gossip*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stogdill, R. M., & Coons, A. E. (1957) *Leader Behavior: Its description and measurement*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University.
- Stohl, C. & Stohl, M. (2011) 'Secret agencies: The communicative constitution of a clandestine organization'. *Organization Studies*, 32 (9): 1197-1215.
- Styles, J. (1979) 'Outsider/Insider: Researching gay baths'. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 8 (2): 135-152.
- Suls, J. M. (1977) 'Gossip as social comparison'. *Journal of Communication*, 27 (1): 164-168.
- Suls, J., & Wheeler, L. (2000) A Selective History of Classic and Neo-Social Comparison Theory. In: Suls, J., & Wheeler, L., eds. *Handbook of Social Comparison: Theory and research*. New York, NY: Springer Science and Business Media, pp. 3-19.

- Sun, Z. (2002) Communication Studies in China: State of the art. In: Jia, W., Lu, X., & Heisey, D. R., eds. *Chinese Communication Theory and Research: Reflections, new frontiers, and new directions*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, pp. 3-19.
- Sutton, A. C. (2002) *America's Secret Establishment: An introduction to the order of Skull & Bones*. Walterville, OR: Trine Day.
- Swisher, K. G. (1986) 'Authentic research: An interview on the way to the ponderosa'. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 17 (3): 185-188.
- Swisher, K. G. (1996) 'Why Indian people should be the ones to write about Indian education'. *American Indian Quarterly*, 20 (1): 83-90.
- Szwed, J. F. (1966) 'Gossip, drinking, and social control: Consensus and communication in a Newfoundland parish'. *Ethnology*, 5 (4): 434-441.
- Tajfel, H. (1972) *Social Categorization*, translated from 'La Catégorisation Sociale'. In: Moscovici, S., ed. *Introduction à la Psychologie Sociale*, volume 1. Paris: Larousse, pp. 272-302.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1985) *The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior*. In: Worchel, S., & Austin, W. G., eds. *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, pp. 7-24.
- Tannen, D. (1990) *You Just Don't Understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.
- Taylor, G. (1994) *Gossip as Moral Talk*. In: Goodman, R. F., & Ben-Ze'ev, A., eds. *Good Gossip*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, pp. 34-46.
- Taylor, J. R. & Cooren, F. (1997) 'What makes communication 'organizational'?: How the many voices of a collectivity become the one voice of an organization'. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 27 (4): 409-438.
- Taylor, J. R. (1993) *Rethinking the Theory of Organizational Communication: How to read an organization*. Norwood, NJ : Ablex.
- Taylor, J. R. (2009) *Organizing from the Bottom Up?: Reflection on the constitution of organization in communication*. In: Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M., eds.

Building Theories of Organization: The constitutive role of communication. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 153-186.

Taylor, J. R., & Van Every, E. J. (2000) *The Emergent Organization: Communication as its site and surface*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Taylor, J. R., & Van Every, E. J. (2011) *The Situated Organization: Case studies in the pragmatics of communication research*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Tebbutt, M. & Marchington, M. (1997) 'Look before you speak': Gossip and the insecure workplace'. *Work, Employment & Society*, 11 (4): 713-735.

The New York Times (2017, October 5) 'Harvey Weinstein paid off sexual harassment accusers for decades'. Available: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html> (Accessed: 2017, October 15).

The New Yorker (2017, October 10) 'From aggressive overtures to sexual assault: Harvey Weinstein's accusers tell their stories'. Available: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/from-aggressive-overtures-to-sexual-assault-harvey-weinsteins-accusers-tell-their-stories> (Accessed: 2017, October 15).

Thompson, C. A., Beauvais, L. L. & Lyness, K. S. (1999) 'When work-family benefits are not enough: The influence of work-family culture on benefit utilization, organizational attachment, and work-family conflict'. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 54 (3): 392-415.

Thornborrow, J. & Morris, D. (2004) 'Gossip as strategy: The management of talk about others on reality TV show 'Big Brother''. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 8 (2): 246-271.

Thorne, B. (1988) *Political Activist as Participant Observer: Conflicts of commitment in a study of the draft resistance movement of the 1960s*. In: Emerson, R. M., ed. *Contemporary Field Research: A collection of readings*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, pp. 216-234.

Tilly, C. (2004) 'Social boundary mechanisms'. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 34 (2): 211-236.

- Traweek, S. (1992) *Border Crossings: Narrative strategies in science studies and among physicists in Tsukuba Science City, Japan*. In: Pickering, A., ed. *Science as Practice and Culture*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 429-466.
- Trice, H., & Beyer, J. (1993) *The Cultures of Work Organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Turner, J. C. (1982) *Towards a Cognitive Redefinition of the Social Group*. In: Tajfel, H., ed. *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 15-36.
- Ulmer, R. R. & Sellnow, T. L. (1997) 'Strategic ambiguity and the ethic of significant choice in the tobacco industry's crisis communication'. *Communication Studies*, 48 (3): 215-233.
- van Iterson, A. & Clegg, S. R. (2008) 'The politics of gossip and denial in interorganizational relations'. *Human Relations*, 61 (8): 1117-1137.
- van Iterson, A., Waddington, K., & Michelson, G. (2011) *Breaking the Silence: The role of gossip in organizational culture*. In: Ashkanasy, N. M., Wilderom, C. P. M., & Peterson, M. F., eds. *Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 375-392.
- Van Maanen, J. (2011a) 'Ethnography as work: Some rules of engagement'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48 (1): 218-234.
- Van Maanen, J. (2011b) *Tales of the Field: On writing ethnography* 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Waddington, K. & Fletcher, C. (2005) 'Gossip and emotion in nursing and health care organizations'. *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, 19 (4/5): 378-394.
- Waddington, K. (2005a) 'Using diaries to explore the characteristics of work-related gossip: Methodological considerations from exploratory multimethod research'. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 78 (2): 221-236.
- Waddington, K. (2005b) 'Behind closed doors—the role of gossip in the emotional labour of nursing work'. *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion*, 1 (1): 35-47.

- Waddington, K. (2012) *Gossip and Organizations*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Waddington, K. (2016) 'Rethinking gossip and scandal in healthcare organizations'. *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, 30 (6): 810-817.
- Wade, P. (1993) *Sexuality and Masculinity in Fieldwork among Colombian Blacks*. In: Bell, D., Caplan, P., & Karim, W. J., eds. *Gendered Fields: Women, men and ethnography*. London: Routledge, pp. 199-214.
- Walker, C. J. & Struzyk, D. (1998) 'Evidence for a social conduct moderating function of common gossip'. Paper presented to the International Society for the Study of Close Relationships, Saratoga Springs.
- Warren, C. A. & Rasmussen, P. K. (1977) 'Sex and gender in field research'. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 6 (3): 349-370.
- Watson, T. J. (2011) 'Ethnography, reality, and truth: The vital need for studies of 'how things work' in organizations and management'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48 (1): 202-217.
- Wax, R. H. (1971) *Doing Fieldwork: Warnings and advice*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Weeks, J. (2004) *Unpopular Culture: The ritual of complaint in a British bank*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Weick, K. E. (1969) *The Social Psychology of Organizing*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Weick, K. E. (1979) *The Social Psychology of Organizing* 2nd ed. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Weick, K. E. (1987) *Theorizing about Organizational Communication*. In: Jablin, F. M., Putnam, L. L., Roberts, K. H., & Porter, L. W., eds. *Handbook of Organizational Communication: An interdisciplinary perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 97-129.
- Wert, S. R. & Salovey, P. (2004) 'A social comparison account of gossip'. *Review of General Psychology*, 8 (2): 122-137.
- Whipp, R. (1994) 'A Time to be concerned: A position paper on time and management'. *Time & Society*, 3 (1): 99-116.

- Wilson, D. O. (1992) 'Diagonal communication links within organizations.' *Journal of Business Communication*, 29 (2): 129-143.
- Wilson, D. S., Wilczynski, C., Wells, A., & Weiser, L. (2000) Gossip and Other Aspects of Language as Group-Level Adaptations. In: Heyes, C., & Huber, L., eds. *The Evolution of Cognition*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 347-365.
- Wilson, P. J. (1974) 'Filcher of good names: An enquiry into anthropology and gossip'. *Man*, 9 (1): 93-102.
- Windahl, S., Signitzer, B., & Olsen, J. T. (2009) Conceptual Tools. In: Windahl, S., Signitzer, B., & Olsen, J. T., eds. *Using Communication Theory: An introduction to planned communication*. London: Sage, pp. 11-25.
- Wintrob, R. M. (1969) An Inward Focus: A consideration of psychological stress in fieldwork. In: Henry, F., & Saberwal, S., eds. *Stress and Response in Fieldwork*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, pp. 63-76.
- Witz, A., Halford, S., & Savage, M. (1996) Organized Bodies: Gender, sexuality and embodiment in contemporary organizations. In: Adkins, L., & Merchant, V., eds. *Sexualizing the Social: Power and the organization of sexuality*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 173-190.
- Wolff, K. H. (1976) *Surrender and Catch: Experience and inquiry today*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Yates, J. & Orlikowski, W. (2002) 'Genre systems: Structuring interaction through communicative norms'. *The Journal of Business Communication*, 39 (1): 13-35.
- Ybema, S., Yanow, D, Wels. H., & Kamsteeg, F. (2009) Studying Everyday Organizational Life. In: Ybema, S., Yanow, D, Wels. H., & Kamsteeg, F., eds. *Organizational Ethnography: Studying the complexities of everyday life*. London: Sage, pp. 1-20.
- Yerkovich, S. (1977) 'Gossiping as a way of speaking'. *Journal of Communication*, 27 (1): 192-196.
- Young, M., & Schuller, T. (1988) *The Rhythms of Society*. London: Routledge.
- Zerubavel, E. (1985) *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and calendars in social life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.