



LUND UNIVERSITY

Department of sociology

INVESTIGATING THE SOCIAL

A study of the trade union Kommunal's investigations into temporary and precarious employment

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**Abstract**

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The major trade unions in Sweden have departments of investigation that gather information and write reports on issues relating to their members. This thesis is an examination of how one such trade union, Kommunal, has investigated the issue of temporary and precarious employment over the last several years. Reports and interviews with the authors of reports are described from a sociology of science or actor-network theory perspective. This study treats the investigations on the subject of precarious employment as a series of translations that leads to different versions of precarious employment, and that assembles the individual members of the trade union to social groups with interests and qualities. Both the differences and the relative stability of the groups investigated by Kommunal are discussed in this thesis.

Keywords: trade unions, political organisations, political ontology, actor-network theory.

## **Populärvetenskaplig presentation**

Den här masteruppsatsen är en undersökning av hur fackförbundet Kommunal har utrett frågan om tidsbegränsade och otrygga anställningar under de senaste åren. Utgångspunkten är en teoriskola från vetenskapsociologin – aktör-nätverksteori – i vilken man betraktar vetenskapliga forskningsresultat som materiellt existerande resultat av olika interaktioner mellan människor och forskningsobjekt, snarare än abstrakta referenser till en oberoende och objektiv verklighet. I undersökningen analyseras rapporter från Kommunal, tillsammans med intervjuer med rapporternas författare. De beskrivningar som Kommunal gör av otrygga anställningar i de olika rapporterna ses som olika versioner av vad otrygga anställningar är för något. Hur de olika versionerna ser ut beror på olika aktörer som funnits med vid dess skapande, såsom de resurser som rapportförfattarna har haft tillgängliga vid utredningsarbetet, policybeslut i organisationen och tidigare erfarenheter hos rapportförfattarna. Rapporternas beskrivning av gruppen otryggt anställda Kommunalmedlemmar betraktas i den här undersökningen som ett sätt att samla de olika individuella medlemmarna i Kommunal till en social grupp med gemensamma intressen och egenskaper. I uppsatsen beskrivs hur samhällsvetenskapliga metoder används som verktyg för att ge gruppen otryggt anställda Kommunalmedlemmar legitimitet och stabilitet. Detta jämförs med hur den demokratiska gången i Kommunal som organisation ger möjlighet åt Kommunals individuella medlemmar att agera tillsammans som grupp.

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## 1. Introduction

There is a story, told by Bruno Latour, about how sociology of science broke sociology. In this story, sociologists had developed tools for the study of soft things; things they didn't take all that seriously, like consumption or religion. To the sociologists, these things were mere projection surfaces for the interests and social needs of humans. To be a sociologist was to deny these things other properties. And if the people involved with these things objected to the sociologists' explanations, they could be safely ignored as they weren't worth taking seriously anyway. As sociology developed, more and more things were explained. Eventually, the sociologists in their hubris turned their attention to science. Here they encountered a problem. The sociologists had a deep respect for science. When applied to hard, serious things like the laws of physics, the tools of sociology suddenly seemed implausible. Isaac Newton's choice of clothing may well be explained by his habitus, but to use the same explanation for the laws of gravity seemed absurd. And those who witnessed this started to question whether the tools had ever worked as well as the sociologists thought they had (Latour, 1991). This story, a kind of creation myth for the school of thought that this study draws upon, is perhaps needlessly polemical. Nevertheless, it points at an interesting aspect of the sociological study of science. If we believe in science, as most of us do, the study of how science produces the facts of reality easily becomes the study of reality itself. And special tools are required for such an undertaking; tools that are more ontological than theoretical, if such a distinction can be made.

This is not a study of science, but of something else that produces reality. What is examined is a class of linguistic productions that do not come from laboratories and university departments, but – similarly to those in science, social and otherwise – make claims about reality. And these claims are substantiated and legitimated in ways similar to those found at any department of sociology: statistical calculations, in-depth interviews and references to earlier theoretical productions. What I explore in this study is the kind of investigation done by political organisations, and the reports that these investigations result in. More specifically, this is a study of the Swedish trade union Kommunal<sup>1</sup> and how their department of investigations has researched one particular topic, that of precarious and temporary employment, over the last several years. So this is an examination of the production of what one might call if not scientific, then political facts; statements about the world

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<sup>1</sup> The English name of the trade union is the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union, which, though descriptive, is a bit cumbersome. The formal Swedish name is Svenska Kommunalarbetsförbundet, but I will use Kommunal in accordance with the trade union's own communication. Similarly, Swedish names for organisations and institutions will be used throughout the text.

that are part of an understanding of how society works and that are used in op-eds, in election debates and at coffee break discussions. But I also examine the production, or performance, of social reality, or of a social reality. If we consider what we understand as social reality as a complex of statements that are necessarily produced (as they have to come from somewhere), the difference between the production of statements about the social and the production of the social itself is dissolved. The kind of investigations done at Kommunal, and at other political organisations, are the production of such statements.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the investigations done at Kommunal has led to the reports they have published on the subject, and to find an understanding of what the investigations are. In a broader sense, this study is motivated by an interest in how political organisations produce the social reality they act in. Two preliminary research questions can be given here:

1. How does the description of precariousness develop in Kommunal's reports on temporary and precarious employment?

and,

2. How does Kommunal describe social groups as stable entities in reports?

These rather vague questions serve as placeholders until the end of chapter 2, in which the theoretical or ontological perspective of this thesis is described. After this perspective has been established, the questions can be elaborated and specified.

### *Outline of this text*

The chapter following this introduction, chapter 2, is a presentation of the theory and literature that the rest of this study is based on, most of which is normally placed within the actor-network theory tradition. The third chapter presents the material that has been gathered in the its production, and of how I have analysed it; that is, of the methodology of the study. Chapters 4 and 5 are structured around research question 1 and 2 respectively. The main part of chapter 4 is a chronologically ordered account of Kommunal's investigations into temporary and precarious employment, interspersed with descriptions of Kommunal's reports. While the discussion in chapter 5 also builds on this account, it does so in a somewhat less direct way than chapter 4. Chapter 6 is a reflection on this thesis, and an attempt to answer three questions that I've asked myself during its writing. Chapter 7, the final chapter, is a summary and conclusion of the study.

## 2. Theory and literature: Establishing an ontological perspective

As mentioned in the introduction, the majority of the studies that this thesis draws on are usually placed under the actor-network theory umbrella. While actor-network theory is normally presented in textbooks as a coherent school of thought, there has been some apprehension towards defining the term within the field (Law, 1999; Latour, 2005). Even giving the name *actor-network theory* to the various texts that are considered to belong to the tradition has been problematised, both because of the specific words actor, network and theory (Latour, 1999a),<sup>2</sup> and – more crucially – because the act of naming itself is an act of stagnation-inducing essentialisation that goes against the purpose of what the authors within the tradition have tried to achieve (Law, 1999). As a consequence, there is a scarcity of clear presentations of what the different works within the tradition have in common.<sup>3</sup>

The first purpose of this chapter is to attempt to remedy this, though this can only partially be done, for two reasons. Firstly, the account of actor-network theory below is limited to works that are of relevance to the present study. While these include enough of the central works within the tradition to give a more or less coherent picture, it's far from comprehensive. Secondly, in accordance with the concepts of translation and enactment introduced below, this description is at best a version of actor-network theory: one of many versions that, like all others, is necessarily unfaithful to its source. This is, as John Law puts it (1999), a story about actor-network theory, though it may be a useful story in that it describes the theoretical vantage point that this study is made from. This is the second purpose of this chapter: to present the central literature that this study draws upon. The works that are included in this chapter represent the central ontology of this thesis, but it's not a comprehensive list of everything that has gone into it. Literature that is less important to the reading of this thesis in its entirety will be presented throughout the text.

The starting point of my actor-network theory story is the early writings of Bruno Latour and Michel Callon: two writers that are often called the originators of the school (e.g. Law, 2009). Through this historical account, I hope to make clear both their common understanding of the social and social science, and what they wrote in response to, i.e. what their perspectives – and the perspective of this text – is not. After a description of the origins of the school, a few other works from actor-network theory and elsewhere are introduced, as well as a brief discussion on some

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<sup>2</sup> Though it seems questionable that Bruno Latour would have found any other name less objectionable.

<sup>3</sup> Although there is plausible theoretical justification for this obscurity, it's difficult to wholly resist a more cynical interpretation: through making sure that whoever wants to understand actor-network theory has to read and reread several books on the topic to piece together a coherent picture of the school, the price of admission is sufficiently high that most potential critics can be kept out.

central differences and similarities between what is studied in this thesis and in the works it draws upon. A note on the language in this study follows. At the end of the chapter, the research questions are elaborated and specified.

*Origins: Actor network theory 1990*

The story of actor-network theory, or this story of actor-network theory, starts with another paradigm in sociology of science: the sociology of scientific knowledge of the Edinburgh Strong Programme. Starting from Thomas Kuhn's (1970) – and before him Ludwik Fleck's (1981 [1935]) – description of scientific facts as necessarily situated, the Strong Programme set out to understand scientific knowledge as a result of the culture of its production. The truth or falsehood of a statement was in Kuhn's view of science put in relation to the paradigm of the statement's production. Based on this insight, the Strong Programme formulated a principle of symmetry between true and false scientific results – or, rather, successful and unsuccessful scientific results – in the study of science and posited that all scientific theories and results should be analysed in terms of causation (Bloor, 1976). The Strong Programme was to a large extent a reaction against the epistemological view that only false scientific beliefs could be understood sociologically (or psychologically), and that true scientific beliefs were directly caused by the natural phenomena that scientists study; that is, that scientific knowledge is a true reflection of reality, except when the scientist's perception is clouded by bias or social factors. The early works of Latour and Callon were explicitly informed by the Strong Programme, and built on its challenges to traditional epistemological conceptualisations of science.<sup>4</sup>

Latour applied his interpretation of the Strong Programme in an ethnographic study of the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California. His study focused on the day-to-day work in the laboratory, and he analysed the construction of facts as a gradual change in the quality of some statements made by scientists, from subjective idea to objective facts. As statements became accepted as facts, the social circumstances of their production (such as judgements on the character of assistants or other researchers, or the political and financial resources required for their production) were cleansed from accounts of the research. Statements were divided into two parts: one part speech act and one part objective reality that the speech act reflects (Latour & Woolgar, 1986). Scientists achieved this objective quality to their statements by making them sufficiently difficult to challenge by proponents of conflicting statements. By allying themselves with heterogeneous actors such as

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<sup>4</sup> Despite a polemic exchange between Latour and David Bloor in the 1990s (Bloor, 1999; Latour, 1999b).



scientific theories (often black-boxed into expensive pieces of laboratory equipment), bioengineering companies, government organisations, and theories from other scientific fields, scientists engaged in a scientific controversy gradually increased the price of contradicting their statements. In order to fight a scientist that has enrolled advanced laboratory equipment and well-established theories from other disciplines to their side, excessive amounts of funding has to be procured in order to get access to more advanced equipment and find allies. Funding is gained by enrolling political or industrial allies that in turn need to be convinced that the challenger's interests are in alignment with their own. If the scientists succeeded in making a statement too costly to plausibly contradict, the statement was accepted as an objective fact rather than a subjective idea (Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Latour, 1987).

A key to this analysis – and to the subsequent works presented here – is to refuse the division between referent and reference, or signifier and signified, and treat scientific statements as existing in their own right rather than as reflections of something else. In this way, rather than separating the (less real) discursive or symbolic reality from the (more real) material world, everything in the analysis is treated as equally real. The construction of a separate discursive reference from the objective referent is seen as a process that the scientists engage in rather than as something to be taken as a given by the sociologist of science. This is rather similar to the ontological implications of J.L. Austin's speech act theory, in which the evaluative criteria of statements is whether or not they are successful in their contexts rather than truth or correspondence to something that exists "out there" (Austin, 1975).

In parallel with the early work of Bruno Latour, a sociology of translation was formulated for the study of science by Michel Callon (1986).<sup>5</sup> In Callon's famous article on the cultivation of scallops in St. Brieuc Bay, to translate is to displace and "to express in one's own language what others say and want, why they act in the way they do and how they associate with each other" (Callon, 1986, p. 18–19). That is, to transport an actor to another context and to transform them in alignment with one's own interests. In Callon's terminology, both scallops and fishermen were transported from the bay of a fishing village in Brittany to a conference hall in Brest by way of translation into statistical values by a group of three marine biologists. Through this transformation, the scallops and the fishermen were able to function as actors far from where they had their physical presence, but at the price of being spoken for by the three scientists; the scallops and fishermen were thus enrolled in the scientists' pursuit of making themselves an obligatory passage point for

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<sup>5</sup> *Sociologie de la traduction*, or sociology of translation, is still a French synonym to actor-network theory.

anyone who wanted to engage with the cultivation of scallops in the bay. While the scientists functioned as spokespersons for the fishermen and the scallops, the respective groups had, in turn, a subset of scallops that acted as spokespersons for their species (by engaging in experiments where a certain number of scallops were seen as representative of the scallops in general), and a subset of fishermen that acted as spokespersons for their colleagues (through being democratically elected by their union to speak for them as a group). In the end, these spokespersons proved to be unreliable when the successful results of the scientists' experiments turned out to be impossible to replicate on a larger scale, and when a group of fishermen destroyed the experiment despite their representatives' promises. An important point of the terminology of translation is that it symmetrically describes how actors that are traditionally placed in either the natural or the social worlds interact.

In a sense, the concept of translation takes the place that is normally held by reference in a more commonsensical understanding of science. Graphs and text in a scientific article are not unrelated to the material objects studied in the process of producing the article, but the relation is not one of reference but of translation. What this means is that the text and the graphs are what the objects are in the context of the article (or in the wider context of a scientific debate in journals and at conferences), that is, they are the objects' mode of existence in that context. This differs from an understanding based on reference in that the graphs and text are no less real, nor more abstract, than the material objects themselves. As the objects that were translated, they exist locally, though they have the ability to be widely spread through networks of journals and other scientific activity. The concept of translation is, however, broader than that of linguistic reference, as is shown by its application to the democratic representation of fishermen. It is intentionally widely encompassing as its purpose is to describe a kind of move that is done in different settings normally considered to obey different sets of rules, in order to enable the study of the relation between nature and society in science and technology.

Between these two cases, the central points of an early version of actor-network theory can be distinguished, more specifically the version that is described by John Law as "actor network theory 1990" (sic) and that is usually presented in textbooks (Law, 2009). This is, in my understanding, the version of actor-network theory that has been the most frequent target of criticism, perhaps most famously voiced by Olga Amsterdamska in her scathing (and well-written) review of Latour's book *Science in Action* (Amsterdamska, 1990). Apart from – somewhat justifiedly – accusing Latour of verbal fireworks, she argued that Latour's Machiavellian conceptualisation of science as an ongoing

war where might makes right denies science its rightful claims to truth with problematic implications for the kinds of claims that can be made in social science, including actor-network theory.<sup>6</sup> If Latour is right, she contends, the only goal of social science “is to tell inconsistent, false, and incoherent stories about nothing in particular” (Amsterdamska, 1990, p. 503).<sup>7</sup> The purpose of these severe restrictions on social science is to avoid engaging in the kind of struggle for power that Latour describes scientists as involved in. This is, of course, impossible; the language of enrolment and translation is sufficiently vague to be applied to anything. The reason for this is that it is something like an ontology rather than a theory: a language for describing things, rather than substantive claims about how they work. It’s also – which is largely what Amsterdamska found problematic – not a claim on the absolute truth of science, but rather something like situated knowledge. This phrase, as it is used by Donna Haraway, refers to knowledge that is dependent on a particular perspective though it may be translated to other perspectives (Haraway, 1988).

Some ontological points of “actor network theory 1990” can be extracted from the early works of Latour and Callon. These have informed later works in actor-network theory and will be used in this study as well. One such point is symmetry, not just between successful and unsuccessful scientific claims as in the Edinburgh programme, but between beings that are considered to belong to the natural and the social realm. This symmetry can also be described as a form of agnosticism: the researcher strives to be agnostic when it comes to the question of what actors are relevant, and of what different categories the actors belong to. When studying the production of scientific facts at one specific laboratory mouse brains, political organisations, technological companies and statistical methods all turned out to be relevant actors. In the scientists’ own account of what happened, some of the actors were removed: the actors that were seen as belonging to the social or political realms were dismissed as irrelevant to the process of science and cleansed from the account, thus creating a difference between nature and society (Latour & Woolgar, 1986). Such divisions of actors into categories are seen as an effect of what the actors do rather than as an a priori filter of analysis for the sociologist (Latour, 1993). While the post-humanist (or ahumanist) rejection of a foundational division into human actors and natural objects is probably the most well-

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<sup>6</sup> See Harman (2014) for a discussion on the influence of Machiavelli and Hobbes in Latour’s writings.

<sup>7</sup> It’s interesting that she brought in immoral practices connected to science (Soviet oppression of Lysenko’s opponents and racist biology as justification of South African Apartheid) as an argument for transcendent scientific truth. “If we can’t have transcendent truth in science”, she seems to have said, “how could we have transcendent moral standards?”, the argument being that Latour’s reasoning must be rejected because its consequences are morally unacceptable. Though this is a potentially troubling aspect of any kind of relativism, an aphorism attributed to the physicist Richard Feynman is an apt response: “I would rather have questions that can’t be answered than answers that can’t be questioned”.

known feature of actor-network theory, the same goes for any a priori division of actors such as those into abstract/concrete, value/fact, or ideal/material. Categorisation of actors is performative similarly to how feminist theories of sex and gender have described gender as performative: categories are an outcome of the processes at work in a given situation, rather than the underlying cause of them (Butler, 1990). Performativity, however, should not be interpreted in a way where intentionality becomes the prime cause of action: actors too are effects rather than causes (Law, 2009). This leads us to the question of what an actor is.

An actor, in the actor-network theory paradigm, is anything that has an effect – that is, anything that acts – and to have an effect is to exist. This view of what it means to exist is similar to that of pragmatism.<sup>8</sup> Thus, a medical diagnosis, a building, and a person are all equally existing actors, though they may exist in relation to different actors. Importantly, they are not bound to any respective realms of existence but may connect freely with each other. As an actor has no prior or transcendent existence outside of the effect it has on other actors, and since that effect defines what the actor is, the actor is a consequence of action rather than the cause of it. Although an actor is that which acts, it is always made to act by other actors, or “the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming against it” (Latour, 2005, p. 46).

The “network” part of actor-network theory should not be confused with the structure pole of the agent/structure-dichotomy (Latour, 1999a). Network does not refer to anything that exists, or even to an aggregate of actors, but is rather a mode of relation between actors, or a way of describing the relations between actors. In Latour’s words, the concept of network is “*an indicator of the quality of a text about the topics at hand*” (Latour, 2005, p. 129, italics in original). To write a good actor-network theory account is to trace a network of actors, in a way that enables every actor to do something to the situation it is in and that describes every movement in the network as a translation (Latour, 2005).

Another central ontological standpoint is a refusal of abstract universality: everything that exists exists somewhere, including scientific facts. As Latour argues, it’s no more surprising that a fact of nature is true both in Paris and Los Angeles than that he can buy the same kind of camembert at a supermarket in both cities: both scientific facts and camembert are transported along networks that are at every point local (Latour, 1988). The idea that seemingly universal things are local at every

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<sup>8</sup> Specifically to the avoidance of what John Dewey calls “the philosophical fallacy”, namely the categorisation of the more stable aspects of lived experience as real and the more ephemeral as unreal. Latour has frequently stated that reality is that which resists (e.g. Latour & Woolgar, 1986), and in an actor-network theory perspective that which resists is able to do so because of its connections rather than because of its correspondence to (the idea of a) material reality.

point is well illustrated in South African artist William Kentridge's installation *The Refusal of Time* (2017). The piece depicts anti-colonial revolts against colonial powers' attempts to build a global network of universalised timekeeping at the turn of the century. Though the idea of rebelling against time seems somewhat quixotic from a present-day perspective, three things are made clear by exploring resistance to its invention. Firstly, however natural the global universality of time may seem, it came into existence as the consequence of human (and non-human) action. Secondly, though universal time may seem too abstract to be damaged by, for instance, a bomb, it was at the time of its early days clear that it consisted of concrete local points such as clocks and telegraph wires, and that it was thus open to attack locally. Thirdly, timekeeping may seem technical today, but in the decades around the year 1900 it was a political matter because the purpose of universalising it was to increase the strength and reach of colonial powers.<sup>9</sup>

Things that seem to move across the world without effort, such as scientific facts or time, are shown to depend on networks of human and non-human actors that are at every point local, much like the camembert cheese network. Through this theoretical move, a kind of monism is achieved: instead of dividing the world into different realities, such as in certain kinds of post-positivism<sup>10</sup>, things that seem to be of different qualities such as being more or less abstract, discursive, social or material can be understood as existing on the same level of reality and are thus allowed to interact with each other. And the seemingly irreconcilable difference between the ideal and the material fades away (Latour, 2007).

Latour and Callon formulated the ontological foundations that other writers in actor-network theory have built on. The studies following their lead have not all had the same shape as theirs, however, as should be clear from the studies presented later in this chapter. Contrary to what a reader who takes the "actor network theory 1990" version as the prototypical definition of actor-network theory might expect, my study is not a story tracing the skilful formation of networks and alliances in the vein of Callon's marine biologists and Latour's Louis Pasteur (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1988). It does, however, take the concepts of translation and enrolment as a useful understanding for what goes on at Kommunal's department of investigation, and the ontological foundations of the Latour and Callon's early work are used to understand what is studied throughout the present study. Statements in the reports are treated as translations rather than reference; the various categories of

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<sup>9</sup> This may seem to reflect the themes of science studies over the last thirty years surprisingly well, so it should be noted that the artist credits historian of science Peter Galison as a conversation partner in the creation of the piece.

<sup>10</sup> See Fleetwood (2005) for an example of this in critical realism.

actors are a result of their interactions rather than a priori essential qualities; and whatever seemingly abstract claims made in the reports are considered as materially real as the authors of the reports.

*Developments: Modes of ordering and practical ontology*

Apart from the works from the beginning of actor-network theory's development, three more texts from the tradition will be central to this study: a discussion on ontology (or perhaps on methodology, as the lines between such genres tend to blur in this literature) and two empirical studies. The first is a discussion on group-formation from Latour's *Reassembling the Social* (2005), the other two are John Law's examination of laboratory managers (1994) and Annemarie Mol's work on ontologies and enactment in medical practice (1999; 2003).

In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour presented what he called four sources of uncertainty: four different questions about society and social studies, and suggestions on how to approach them. One of those sources of uncertainty concerned the existence or nature of groups.<sup>11</sup> Our experience of the social world, Latour argued, tells us that there is a constant drawing and redrawing of what groups we or other actors belong to, and that there are simultaneous contradictory groups that attempt to enrol actors in any given situation. Despite this, social scientists tend to start their analysis with certain groups that they consider foundational to the situation they're studying – gender, class, ethnicity, profession, subculture – and dismiss other groups as irrelevant or artificial. In order to stay true to our experience of the world, we ought to study how groups are formed rather than presuppose their existence. The work normally done by sociologists – the definition and privileging of different groups – is also done by the actors themselves, and this is what ought to be studied by the actor-network theorist (Latour, 2005). This insight will be starting point of the second research question of the study, which is answered in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

The second text is John Law's study of managers in a large scientific laboratory (1994). Law found that managers worked according to four different modes of ordering, or logics: they were sometimes entrepreneurs, sometimes bureaucrats, sometimes vocational scientists, and sometimes charismatic visionaries. Each mode of ordering extended to include people and objects, and each mode included different evaluations of actors and of ways of acting. The specific contents of the different modes of ordering are not in themselves relevant to this analysis, though something similar

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<sup>11</sup> The other sources of uncertainty: who or what is acting; the agency of objects; the nature of facts; and what social science is (Latour, 2005).

to the ideal types Law describes the modes of ordering as could probably be found at Kommunal. Instead, the way Law conceptualises them will be useful in answering the second research question. A mode of ordering, in Law's story, is not something that exists independently of their description, nor is it something that doesn't exist. Instead, he sees them as "recurring patterns embodied within, witnessed by, generated in and reproduced as part of the ordering of human and non-human relations" (Law, 1994, p. 83); patterns that can be usefully imputed from the laboratory he has studied. They're not an order that exists in the laboratory, but a way that the laboratory is ordered by the different actors at the site. No representation of these patterns of ordering – including his own – can cover every possible aspect of them or define them exhaustively, as there's no limit on how they could be performed or what uses they could be put to (Law, 1994). Law has later described the modes of ordering as Foucauldian mini-discourses that provide stability to the organisation (Law, 2009). Something like Law's modes of ordering are used in this study to understand some aspects of what goes on at Kommunal's department of investigations.

The third text is Annemarie Mol's discussion on ontology in medical practice. Mol's argument is that reality is neither passively observed by an objective expert from the position of nowhere, as is implied by a positivist (or post-positivist) epistemology or ontology, nor perspectival in the sense that a single reality is viewed from multiple, mutually exclusive standpoints. But neither is it the case that alternatives to a dominant reality once existed but have been discarded along the way, as is implied by early Latour's conceptualisation of scientific controversies.<sup>12</sup> Instead, reality itself is multiple: as it is always local, there are multiple local points at which the same object may exist in different ways (Mol, 1999). Mol's preferred term for this is enactment: an object is enacted, rather than observed or constructed. This choice of term resonates with an ambition to de-centre the textual or discursive. How actors describe the world may not say everything about what world they live in and ontology may be found in their practices as well as in their own accounts. Mol called this approach praxiography, and employed it in her study of how arteriosclerosis of the legs was enacted at a Dutch hospital. She found that the disease was quite different depending on at which local point one chooses to study it: vascular surgeons enact the disease as calcification of arteries, internists as a process connected to lifestyle, hematologists as a tendency of certain components of the blood to bind to the artery walls, and physiotherapists as a walking impairment. None of the different

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<sup>12</sup> Especially by Latour's metaphor of the Janus face of science used in *Science in Action: a view on science where the past is constructivist, and the future realist*. This, Latour argued, is the perspective held by scientists themselves since ongoing scientific controversies are open to different outcomes while the victors of closed controversies are equated with the objective world (Latour, 1987).

enactments are more foundational than the others; in some cases different explicit definitions of the disease even mutually use criteria from other enactments in a mutual and circular way. While these different realities of the disease are multiple, they are not separate, and a complex of translations makes it possible for the different specialists to treat the disease as the same object despite ontological differences between localities. The guiding phrase for this view of reality is that it is “less than many, more than one” (Mol, 2003). This phrase and the concept of enactment will be used both in the exploration of the reports that relate to the first research question of this thesis in chapter 4, and in answering the second research question in chapter 5.

*Outside of actor-network theory: Orders of worth and situated knowledge*

Contemporarily with the formulation of a sociology of translation, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot undertook a study of orders of worth. Through analysing different manuals and texts used in French business organisations, they found six different systems according to which the value or worth of objects and humans were assigned (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). One of these – the civic world, the system of worth associated with democratic organisations – will be used as a point of comparison with the investigations in chapter 5 of this thesis, and will be presented further in that chapter.<sup>13</sup>

A text from feminist science studies will be used to understand the kind of claims made by me in this thesis: the already mentioned concept of situated knowledge as it is used by Donna Haraway. Her writings are not generally considered to belong to the actor-network theory tradition, but the basic premises of the following discussion are similar to – and draw upon – works of Latour and Callon. Haraway explored how feminist science studies can navigate between the Scylla of universally valid knowledge and the Charybdis of total relativism. Both depend on what she dubs the god trick, that is, an imagined ability to see everything from the position of nowhere. The alternative she proposes is situated knowledge: knowledge that exists from a particular perspective that is the result of various translations. That the knowledge is situated should not be taken to mean that it’s subjective, both because there is no stable and given subject to hold the subjective position,

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<sup>13</sup> Boltanski and Thévenot’s debt to Latour and Callon is clear from the introduction to their book, and an interesting comparison between Boltanski’s sociology of critical capabilities and Latour’s actor-network theory was made by Guggenheim and Potthast (2011), in which they found that the two programmes are “symmetrical twins” that have developed in tandem with mutual benefit from their several interactions. Though Latour and Boltanski both can be described as new pragmatists and have a shared scepticism of critical theory (Boltanski, 2011; Latour, 2005), they seem to work from markedly different ontologies in that Boltanski presupposes the existence of a world external to whatever contingent sense we make of it (“the world” and “reality” in his terminology, Boltanski, 2011).



and because the results in turn can be translated to different contexts. In alignment with the studies presented here, she argued that a necessary part of such a situated knowledge is to consider the object of study as an agent or actor in the production of knowledge, and often an unpredictable one with its own sense of humour (Haraway, 1988). Haraway's concept of the god trick, while useful for disillusioning us of an idealised conceptualisation of science, is less relevant when it comes to the reports that are studied in this thesis. The reason for this is that the reports are already clearly situated: they are written and published by a political organisation that is understood to represent certain groups with political and social interests. It does, however, serve well as an image of what is to be avoided in this study, and as a way to make clear what kinds of claims I make (and don't make) in this text.

#### *Relationship to this project: Differences and similarities*

How does the literature in this chapter relate to my own study? The subtitle of the first work presented above, Latour and Woolgar's *Laboratory Life* (1986), is "The Construction of Scientific Facts",<sup>14</sup> and the majority of the studies in this chapter concern either scientific facts themselves or the circumstances of their production. What I study in this thesis is somewhat different from the production of scientific knowledge. To apply the ontology and theory from science and technology studies to situations outside of science is not particularly novel; studies with a sociology of science pedigree have explored as wide-ranging topics as improvisational music (Borgo, 2016), the passing of law (Latour, 2009), political theory (Harman, 2014) and even ethics (Callon and Rabeharisoa, 2004). This is unsurprising: a central theme in sociology of science since the 1980s has been that the boundaries between science and the rest of society are crossed so frequently by scientists and others that the distinction between science and everything else is fuzzy or provisional at best. The object of this study is something both similar and dissimilar to scientific facts, namely what may tentatively be called ideological or political facts, and the production thereof. While these are claims about reality, they do not come from a scientific context and their creation is explicitly politically motivated.

Something should be said of the differences and similarities between scientific facts and what is studied here. Especially early works in actor-network theory study scientific statements as though there is an expected trajectory towards consensus on the facticity of statements, a trajectory that

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<sup>14</sup> The first edition of the book had the subtitle "The Social Construction of Scientific Facts". The word social was dropped in the second edition and onwards.

may or may not be followed to completion. Whether or not this assumption holds for science, it is certainly not true in the field of politics. On the contrary, a fundamental characteristic of the political is – as political theorist Chantal Mouffe has argued – that it is agonistic at its core; that is, that it pertains to irreconcilable differences in how we understand the world (Mouffe, 2005).<sup>15</sup> This is a clear difference between what we can expect will happen to the statements produced in the story of this thesis and those produced in, for example, a scientific laboratory.

The place where the material gathered in this study comes from – Kommunal’s department of investigations – is, however, an example of what Latour calls a “centre of calculation” (Latour, 2005); that is, the centre of a star-shaped configuration of translations that gathers different objects together to create a structure of reality. In this way, it is similar to social science research departments, especially since the operations done to gather different things are similar: surveys, statistical calculations and summaries of social science literature to name a few. With this in mind, to apply perspectives gathered from sociology of science to the trade union investigations doesn’t seem too far-fetched.

### *Two notes on language*

As the reader may have noticed, I have used the word actor to describe those that act, rather than the word sometimes preferred by writers under the actor-network theory umbrella, actant. The argument for using the word actant is mainly that the word actor has connotations to human agency and intentionality as the source of action. While the word actant may flag that “something else is going on here and you should try to figure out what”, I trust that the reader will understand that the concept of actorship in this study has little to do with human agency, and that the actor is the one that acts but not necessarily the cause of action.

There are various terms that denote what I here call actor-network theory. “Actant-rhizome ontology” has (somewhat ironically) been suggested in order to underline the Deleuzian aspects of

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<sup>15</sup> The common ground between the theories of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and actor-network theory is an interesting avenue of exploration that will not be pursued in this study. Shared characteristics are an ontological commitment to anti-essentialism and semiotics, a refusal of the separation between reference and referent, and a methodological aversion to a priori assumptions; differences of note are Laclau and Mouffe’s incorporation of substantive theory from psychoanalysis in their works, and the priority Laclau and Mouffe gives to the linguistic (though their position should not be taken to be that of ignoring the material; rather, they have argued that the discursive has a “material character” [Laclau and Mouffe, 2014, p 94] and that the material is by necessity discursively mediated in a way that dissolves the dichotomy between the ideal and material).

actor-network theory,<sup>16</sup> and to get away from the problematic word theory (Latour, 1999a); developments made after some point in the '90s are sometimes called "post-ANT" (Gad & Bruun Jensen, 2010); and "material semiotics" have been suggested as a more inclusive term to denote all who study the interconnections between signs, material objects and other heterogeneous actors, which could include Foucault (1979) and Haraway (1988) as well as the actor-network theory of Latour and Callon (Law, 2009). All of these are quite simply called actor-network theory in this thesis.

### *Research questions*

The purpose of this study is not to test a hypothesis, and the questions formulated under this heading should be interpreted as guiding questions in the reading of this text rather than questions that I intended to answer when I first started collecting material for this study. The purpose at the beginning of this project was exploratory: equipped with a conceptualisation of the world and ideas about how to do social science, I set out to see if there was an interesting way to understand what goes on at a site that seemed relevant to some rather vague questions I had about how political ideologies work and how political organisations produce social or political reality.

As mentioned above, chapter 4 provides the answer to the first question, and chapter 5 to the second one. The first question is: how does the enactment of precarious employment develop in the reports, from the first report in 2011 to the latest report in 2016? The way of answering this question is an exploration of the way reports are written at Kommunal's department of investigations, in general and in the specific cases of the reports included in this study. A subquestion is how different actors involved in the creation of the report relate to the different enactments. The question is motivated by the relative instability of the reality presented in the reports; that is, it considers the reality that the reports construct as changing over time.

Conversely, the second question rests on the relative stability of the reports, specifically the relative stability of temporarily or precariously employed Kommunal members as a group. Following Latour's discussion on group formation in *Reassembling the Social* (Latour, 2005), the construction of social groups is treated as a problem that actors face. The work done in Kommunal's investigations is seen as a way of assembling the group they write about, rather than as the

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<sup>16</sup> Notable of these are the focus on process and immanence, and the concept of actor-network has been compared to the Deleuzian concept of assemblage (Law, 2009). Graham Harman argues that it is a mistake to lump Latour (and Whitehead) together with Deleuze (and Bergson) as "process philosophy", however, as there are fundamental and irreconcilable differences between the different philosophers in the extent objects are relational in their respective philosophies (2014).

production of facts about a pre-existing social aggregate. The second question is: how does Kommunal assemble groups with relatively stable qualities and interests? The answer, which I might as well give away now, is partly through the investigations studied in this thesis. The answer is elaborated in chapter 5, and compared with another way of assembling stable groups in the trade union: that of democratic participation in the organisation. The interactions between these two different ways of group formation is also explored, and through this an understanding of some curious features of the investigative work done at Kommunal is provided.

### **3. The production of this text: Materials and methodologies**

The questions that first motivated this study concerned the place of knowledge about society in what is normally called ideology.<sup>17</sup> I had a suspicion that the way we conceptualise systems of political belief is mistaken in that it assigns too much importance to the normative statements we take for true, and too little to the positive statements. Or rather, that we divide ideology into normative values and positive facts in a way that treats the values as foundational and the facts as contingent consequences of the values, which I believe is an unrealistically idealised version of how they interact. I wanted to study the place of ideas about how society works in ideology without treating values and knowledge differently a priori. That this was an impossibly broad and rather vague research interest was obvious from the beginning, and the subject of the study has changed along the way. Still, with this general interest in mind, I made the decision to exploratively study a site that knowledge about society acts in or passes through, to see if there was anything interesting to say about the topic. Departments of investigation at political organisations seemed like a good place to start.

Having decided that I wanted to study production of facts or knowledge in the political realm and reports produced by a political organisation, the choice fell on the trade union Kommunal's investigations of precarious employment. The material of this study consists of reports published by Kommunal on the subject and interviews with the authors of these reports. A few reasons could be given for why this was a methodologically reasonable choice of material. Kommunal is the largest trade union in Sweden, and as part of the Swedish labour movement with historical and present-day ties to the Social Democratic Party, it's both comparatively politically influential and an explicitly political organisation. Their investigations into precarious employment started in 2011, and the limited number of reports on the subject makes a comprehensive inquiry into their investigations possible.

These considerations are a poor description of how the actual choice was made. At first, I set out to do an ethnographic study of investigations made by political actors. After asking and being denied access to several potential sites of participatory observation, I asked the head of one of these sites – Kommunal's department of investigations – for recommendations on reports that she found interesting. She gave me a short list of reports that had been successfully publicised in the last few years, including the latest report on precarious employment. I set out to study this particular report

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<sup>17</sup> I'll leave this ambiguous word undefined for two reasons: firstly, it's inconsequential to the rest of this study, and secondly, a study of ideology (whatever it is) within the ontology of this paper should strive to leave the defining of the term to the actors.

more closely (unfortunately, despite rather meticulous note-taking on my progress, I failed to write down why I found this report more interesting than the others at the time). After struggling with the report for some time, and after a disheartening meeting with my supervisors, I decided that I would have more to say if I were to study the investigations as a process rather than if the results of one report were treated as static. Once I had decided to study the reports as a development over time, I also needed a way to fill in the chronological gaps between the reports. Consequently, I set out to interview the authors. Fortunately, all authors replied to my emails and agreed to the interviews.

The methodological choices I made were often dependent on the material available. If no earlier reports on precarious employment had been produced by Kommunal, for instance, or if the authors had been unable or unwilling to be interviewed, I would have had to abandon either my object of study or my method. The choice of material was equally affected by the method as well as by other more contingent factors; for a long part of the process, it seemed unclear if I should limit the interviews to authors of the reports examined, or if I should treat the department of investigations as a site that I should learn as much as possible from through interviews with various employees. Ultimately, the choice fell on the authors, partly because it was easier to motivate their relevance, and partly because I felt that the other route would risk being little more than a poor substitute for ethnography.

Details on the development of the study like these may seem irrelevant, and presenting them here somewhat self-absorbed. I see two reasons for including them, however. Firstly, cleaning up the description of the research process is part of what Latour and Woolgar describe as the splitting of different things that went into research into scientifically relevant and irrelevant causes (1986), and is how the god trick of a falsely objective point of observation is created (Haraway, 1988). Secondly, studying the details of the production of knowledge is the purpose of this text. It seems unfair – and ontologically inconsistent – to treat Kommunal's reports as the result of human activity, and my own analysis as materialised out of thin air (with a neat list of methodological motivations for the choices made). This relates to a broader ambition in this text: throughout this text, questions about the process of academic writing are kept at the forefront. While some of the reflections on writing may seem obvious to anyone who has written a text of this genre, it is a way of addressing the question of what we choose to show our audience and what we prefer to keep backstage.

### Methodological considerations

The selected primary material comes from two different sources: four reports published by the trade union Kommunal (see Table 1), and interviews with the authors of the same reports. Supplementary material includes documents

connected to reports and other sources used to verify statements from the interviews or find additional information.

A list of supplementary sources is found in Appendix A. The main part of chapter 4 follows a chronological structure where a description of the process of investigation based on selections from the interviews

are broken up by descriptions of the reports. The parts of the chapter that are based on the interviews and secondary sources, and the descriptions of the reports are formatted differently.

	<b>Always on Standby</b>	<b>Temp for Life?</b>	<b>Is This Okay?</b>	<b>Status: Precarious</b>
Year of publication	2011	2013	2014	2016
Swedish title	Ständigt standby	Visstid på livstid?	Är det här okej?	Status: Prekär
Number of pages	25	29	23	58
Same author as other reports	No	Same as <i>Is This Okay?</i>	Same as <i>Temp for Life?</i>	No

The descriptions of the reports will be indicated by an indentation and set in another typeface, like this sentence and the one following it. They will also be bordered by solid lines that look like this:

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The purpose of this is to alert the reader to a change in both the subject matter and the methodology behind what is written. Unless otherwise specified, all claims about the process of writing reports made between the description of reports are based on the interviews with the authors of reports. Everything written with an indent is based on the coding and analysis of the reports.

All reports that directly and primarily concern temporary employment and that were the result of original investigative work are included in the analysis. Despite similarities in subject matter, I have excluded two reports from this study: one short summary of the other reports on temporary employment for easy dissemination of numbers and talking points, and one report on the different rates of temporary employment between private and public employers. I coded the selected reports

in two different rounds. In the first round, the texts were assigned simple, descriptive codes. In the second round, the many specific codes were collapsed into five broader codes. The purpose of coding was to gain a manageable overview of the text. Tables with summaries of the reports following the five broad codes and descriptions of the codes can be found in Appendix B. Although I went back and forth between the tables and the reports themselves when writing up their descriptions, these tables will hopefully provide some insight into my process of analysis. The reports are publicly available on Kommunal's website at the time of this text's writing (except the first one, *Always on Standby*, which can be requested from the trade union) and full interview transcripts will be made available by me at request.

Each report had a single author. The three authors that had written all reports included in this study were interviewed; two of them at the Kommunal head office and one of them at her new workplace at a different trade union. Since I was interested in events related to the production of specific reports when interviewing their respective authors, the topic was somewhat different in each interview. Because of this, the interviews were mainly unstructured, though I had a few questions prepared that I asked all of the authors. These questions concerned their personal background and how they understood a few aspects of the work at the department of investigation. The interviews were conducted in Swedish and each was about an hour long. All quotes from the interviews, quotes from other Swedish sources, and the titles of reports are translated by me.

That the author of a text has no transcendent meaning to offer has been clear for half a century or so (Barthes, 1967; Foucault, 1998). The purpose of interviewing the authors of these particular reports was not to find out how they understand precariousness or temporary employment – or how they interpret their own reports – but rather to learn more about the circumstances of the production of the texts. What I wanted to gather from the interviews was enough information to piece together a coherent story about the writing of the reports included in this study. The inspiration was Annemarie Mol's treatment of interviews as auto-ethnography (Mol, 2003). In this way, the methodological relationship between the interviews and this text could be likened to that of narrative research in historical disciplines, with the same issues of representation and interpretation being of relevance. Feminist folk life researcher Katherine Borland described the interpretative process in narrative research interviews as happening on two levels simultaneously: both as “a dynamic interaction between the thinking subject and the narrated event (her own life experience) and between the thinking subject and the narrative event (her ‘assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence’)” (Borland, 2003, p. 522). Both of these



interactions are necessary parts of meaning-construction in a narrative interview (and I would argue that any linguistic presentation contains both interactions, at least with a wide enough definition of the term narrative event). In a further step, the interviewer constructs a second-level narrative from the interview that is given physical form in the shape of a text and presented to another audience. In this step conflicts may arise between the meaning constructed by the researcher and that by the narrator (Borland, 2003). Following Borland's suggestion, I offered the interviewees to read this text before its publication in order to give them a chance to contest my interpretations.

As this study rests on interviews with different thinking subjects about overlapping events, there is also a risk of conflicting narratives between the different sources. As the concept of unproblematic veracity or truth is foreclosed from the ontological position of this study, it's insufficient to state that I want my account to be true. What I can say, however, is that I want this text to be usable by others, and one prerequisite for that is that the basic facts represented in this text about Kommunal won't be contested by the reader. To this end, I have taken the (rather simple) measure of verifying central events that were represented in the interviews with written sources when available or with other persons who were present at the time. These are part of the supplementary material of the study found in Appendix A. Although the process of writing up an account of how the reports were written from the interviews consists of me interpreting the author's recollections of what happened, I hope to produce an account that is intersubjectively correct to those present at the time of the events described.

Following the methodology of Latour and Woolgar in *Laboratory Life* (1986), I have attempted to maintain what the authors call an "anthropological strangeness" in constructing an account of how reports are produced at the trade union; that is, I have tried to describe it as a practice I am unfamiliar with. There were two challenges to this approach, connected to two positions of familiarity or knowledge I could have made the study from: that of a social scientist and that of a politically interested Swedish citizen.

To avoid the first position, that of a social scientist, means to withhold methodological judgement on the reports analysed. Whether or not the sociologist of science can say something about the contents of science or should restrict themselves to its contexts has been an ongoing debate within the field since its early days.<sup>18</sup> A sensible position when it comes to

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<sup>18</sup> Three notable positions, very briefly. Robert Merton: the sociologist should limit themselves to social factors, such as norms governing science (Merton, 1973); David Bloor: the sociologist can explain scientific results as socially caused (Bloor, 1976); Bruno Latour: the sociologist is unequipped to enter the game of science as a contestator but can understand what scientists do from another perspective (Latour, 1987).

neuroendocrinology or medicine seems to be to leave judgement on the quality of science to those who have the ability to mobilise the proper resources required to challenge a scientific claim. What I have studied in this text, however, is fairly similar to the social science that I am trained in. At the department of investigations, things are gathered and translated into words and numbers on paper in order to say something about social reality, with techniques similar to those found at any university faculty of social sciences; statistics and analysis of in-depth interviews are found in the reports analysed in this study (no doubt brought to the setting through the social science university education the investigators have gone through). Thus, if I were to treat the reports as social science, I would have some ability to evaluate what they do according to some more or less generally accepted methodological principles. Still, despite the similarities, the authors and reports are not playing a game of social science but involved in a different kind of game altogether; the author of a report neither expects nor necessarily wants a report to be published in a peer-reviewed journal of social research. To pass judgement on whether or not the reports are good social science – to bring them out of their context into my own – would be a category mistake.

As to the second position, it might be enough to state that I am not judging if the results of Kommunal's investigations into temporary employment are true or reasonable, nor do I wish to discredit the reports by exploring the relationship between the investigations and the results thereof. To show that the facts of a political actor can be explained with reference to their ideology and interests, or to specific circumstances in the fact production, is a normal part of political debate. The implication of this kind of argument is that one's own facts are a natural consequence of the state of reality. Such arguments were made both by the authors of the reports when discussing a politically opposed organisation in interviews, and by a representative of the central employer's organisation *Svenskt Näringsliv* in a seminar connected to one of the reports (Kommunal, 2016b). My assumption, however, is that any and all statements about social reality are constructed.

The insight from sociology of science is that reality never speaks on its own; it always takes various (necessarily interested) translations to make it speak. And this, of course, goes for this study too: that the purpose of this study is not normative does not mean that the study is objective in the view-from-nowhere sense of the word. This text is written from my own perspective though I hope that the reader can share it for the time it takes to read these pages at least.

#### **4. The first question: The development of reports**

This chapter is the part of this thesis that follows the primary empirical material included in the study the closest. The intention is to answer the question of how the investigations into precarious and temporary employment at Kommunal have developed over time, and the related question on how the enactment of the precariousness differs between reports. The main part of the chapter is an account of how reports are written at Kommunal and of the four reports included in this study. Although the question may be partially answered through this account, a summary and reflection will conclude the chapter, in order to extract a clear answer from the account.

Kommunal, the organisation where the reports in this study were written, is a trade union that mainly represents blue-collar employees in Swedish municipal government. This includes many different occupational groups, such as bus drivers and cleaners, but the two largest groups organised by Kommunal are nursing aides and childcarers. Kommunal is the largest trade union in Sweden, and a member of LO, the central organisation of blue-collar trade unions. LO – together with the Swedish Social Democratic Party – is one of the two major parts of the Swedish labour movement.

The reports described in the account below are all about temporary employment, and about the related term precarious employment. See Appendix C for a brief presentation of Swedish labour law relating to temporary employment.

##### *Kommunal's investigations into temporary employment*

LO has conducted social and economic analysis that have had a profound effect on Swedish politics since the Second World War. LO:s major member unions, including Kommunal, also have their own departments of investigation. Kommunal – the largest trade union in Sweden – shifted the focus of their investigations around the year of 2010. Before that, the main purpose of investigations was to collect information for internal use, e.g. as material for policy decisions and in collective bargaining with employers. Around 2010, the investigations became more oriented towards public political debate, and the department started to produce a new kind of output: shorter reports meant to be spread outside of the organisation, with the purpose of affecting public opinion.<sup>19</sup> The hiring of the author of the first report was, in her own understanding, part of this shift, and she was intended to write public reports.

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<sup>19</sup> Though the reasons for this shift is left unexplained in this study, that it took place was confirmed by the head of the department of that time.

While the department of investigations may be charged with researching specific issues as material for trade union congress decisions, the idea to write specific reports is normally first formulated by one of the investigators at the department. The first report in this study, however – *Always on Standby* from 2011 – was requested by another department at the trade union head office. The request was made by the department of employment agreements for the 2012 collective bargaining, in which the issue of temporary employment was to be a priority. This marks the start of Kommunal's writing of the kind of report on temporary employment studied in this thesis.

When talking about the process of writing a report, one of the interviewed authors described choosing a target audience as a central part of the early process. An imagined audience of the report guides its writing: a report may for example be intended for use by members, by union representatives, or by mass media. *Always on Standby* was intended to affect public opinion. The objective of the report was in the words of its author to “dispel the myths that we [at Kommunal] think that right-wing politicians and employers use” (interviews), wherein temporary employment is described as a way to enter the labour market for the unemployed. In contrast with this perceived myth, the department wanted to show how temporary employment affects the individual, to show for how long individuals stay in temporary employment, and to supplement the statistics already available from Statistics Sweden (SCB), the Swedish government statistics organisation.

After choosing a target audience, another early step in writing a report described in the interviews is to see what statistics and other resources are available at the trade union, and make a plan for how to connect different data to the topic. Although the author of a report can get help from colleagues at the office, writing a report is an individual task and the author has great freedom in what to include and how to design the report. For *Always on Standby*, Kommunal's wage and membership statistics were used, as well as a statistical method called survival analysis that one of the statisticians at the office was familiar with. This method was applied to the membership statistics. Apart from data that was already present at the department of investigations, the author commissioned a survey of Kommunal members from an independent contractor for use in the report.

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### **Always on Standby (2011)**

There are a few structural features that are shared between the reports analysed in this study. They all start with a cover page with a title and a descriptive subtitle. The name of

the author of the report is given in the first few pages. An introduction that describes the subject and contents of the report and – in all reports except the first one – a conclusion that summarises the results along with some normative remarks are other shared features. And all reports end with a list of political demands and suggestions with the weight of the trade union as an organisation behind them under the heading “Kommunal’s demands”.

In the first report, *Always on Standby* from 2011, the term precarious employment that will come to be successively more central in later reports is not explicitly defined, and only used once. Still, the subject is temporary employment and the group examined are temporarily employed members of Kommunal. There is a reason for including this report in an analysis of Kommunal’s investigations into precarious employment: the report is similar to the following report, *Temp for Life?* (2013), in terms of the material and methodology employed, and *Temp for Life?* explicitly concerns precarious employment. If the object of the present text is how Kommunal interacts with precarious employment in their investigations, *Always on Standby* can be seen as a pre-stage to said investigations. Or, alternatively, one could make the judgement that this first report is about the same subject as the others though different words are used to describe it.

*Always on Standby* gathers statistics from four different sources: 1, the trade union’s wage statistics for its sector; 2, the labour force survey of Statistic Sweden (the governmental statistics organisation); 3, a survey commissioned by the union of its temporarily employed members; 4, and the union’s membership data from 1994–2010. Following Michel Callon’s article on scallops, these statistical materials would in a language of translation be described as representing two different moves in the research process. First, a number of respondents (a sample) are designated representatives for a larger group (a population), then the larger group is spoken for by the author of the report, that is, they are displaced into the context of the report and what they are and what they want is expressed in the language of the author of the report, and aligned with the author’s interests. If this description seems somewhat cynical, one should remember that the process is no different from how scientists make the objects of the natural world speak (Callon, 1986). Four different groups are in this way brought into the study: 1, all who work in Kommunal’s sector for whom the union has access to information about their wages (members and non-members); 2, a group of people interviewed by Statistics Sweden about their employment, taken to be representative of Swedish citizens aged 15 to 74; 3, a group of Kommunal members who have replied to a survey on temporary employment, taken to be representative of all temporarily

employed Kommunal members; and 4, all Kommunal members who were temporarily employed for some period of time between 1994 and 2010 (and members of the union for long enough for longitudinal analysis to be possible).

There are other things present in the report. Legal acts are introduced as both context and comparison with the conditions for temporary employees. And earlier reports from Kommunal are included as well. These, of course, could be opened up in turn and be shown to gather things more or less similar to this report – statistical populations, working conditions, laws – but in *Always on Standby*, the things that have been assembled in order to reach the conclusions of the earlier reports are ignored, and the results of the investigation are presented as disconnected from the investigative process leading up to them. At least in the limited context of the investigative department of the trade union Kommunal, the findings of earlier reports gain some of the quality of objectivity after their publication.

The report describes temporary employment as increasing over time compared to other kinds of employment: both in the general Swedish labour force in absolute numbers, and in Kommunal's sector as a percentage. Temporarily employed members of the union are presented in terms of age, gender and whether or not they are born outside of Europe: the average age is 35 years, and women and those born outside of Europe are shown to be temporarily employed in greater numbers than others. Occupations with a greater percentage of women are described as having more temporary employment, and a negative correlation between wages and percentage of women in an occupation are shown. Temporary employment lasts for several years on average, according to the report, and this is compared to a perceived myth that temporary employment generally is for short periods of time as a way of entering to the labour market. Temporary employment is also shown to correlate with lower wages, and to lead to difficulties in planning working hours in a way that interferes with family and social life. There is also a difference in workplace benefits, for example, permanent employees had access to workplace training to a greater extent than temporary employees. These disadvantages to the temporarily employed are compared to the Swedish legal act on discrimination against part-time and temporary employees, and implied to be the consequence of unlawful discrimination by employers.

A few things should be noted about how the report is written. There is a clear assumption throughout the report that temporary employment is disadvantageous to the employees, e.g. “Temporary employment is not only a youth problem” (p. 7, when describing the age of the temporarily employed). That is, temporary employment is framed as a problem. In this way, employees in the Kommunal sector are enacted as

having an interest in permanent employment. They are, of course, implicitly assumed to have other interests in the report – having high wages, for instance – but the assumption of permanent employment as desirable is of note. One of the political questions regarding temporary employment is whether or not temporary employment is detrimental to employees: Svenskt Näringsliv, the central Swedish employer’s organisation, frequently presents temporary employment as beneficial to employees, and often freely chosen (e.g. Sahlén, 2017). That temporary employment is a negative is of course implicit in the terms precarious and safe employment too, though these words are sparingly used in this report.

Unlike the following reports, *Always on Standby* does not end with a concluding summary of the report. As in the others, however, it has a list of political suggestions by Kommunal at the very end. In this report, they are the following: the law on discrimination against temporary employees must be followed; temporary employment should have a shorter legal time limit than they have; and action should be taken against unjust wage differences between men and women.

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The list of political demands at the end of the reports is somewhat different from the rest of the text. If, as Foucault has argued, the author is a function of the text (Foucault, 1998), the locus of this function in a report is shared by Kommunal as an organisation and the individual author. When the report is sent to news media, for instance, the author of the report often serves to represent the text in interviews and op-ed pieces, and is thus made responsible for the text as an individual researcher (though as one affiliated with the organisation). The political demands at the end of a report, however, are clearly signed by the organisation (as indicated by the heading, “Kommunal’s demands”), with no room allowed for an individual subjective position of the writer of the report. In practice, the demands are chosen by the author when writing the report, but the demands have to be either existing political demands priorly decided by the trade union congress, or brought to the board of directors for approval before publication.

With a report written meant to affect public opinion such as this one, three steps are normally taken to communicate its result after publication: a public seminar is held at the trade union head office, the report is sent to mass media outlets, and editorials are prepared. Panelists on the seminar normally include the author, high-ranking politicians, representatives of politically opposed organisations such as employer’s organisations, and scholars. When it comes to spreading the report

in news media, there are different alternatives, some of which are considered more successful than others by the authors at the department. The best outcome of the report’s publication, according to the authors interviewed, is if a national media outlet reports on the contents of the report as news; in this case the media outlet is normally given exclusive access to the report prior to its release. The second best is to get an opinion piece in connection to the report published in one of the major national newspapers. If these fail, the author goes down the list of media outlets sorted by reach or attractiveness until they find one that will publish something in connection with the report. A template for op-eds that can be adjusted for local conditions – with regional or local statistics if available, for instance – can also be prepared, to make it easier for local union representatives and functionaries to publish opinion pieces in local media. Table 2 shows the number of news reports and opinion pieces in connection to each of the reports examined in this study, to give some indication of their media impact.

<b>Kommunal report</b>	<b>News reports</b>	<b>Op-eds and editorials</b>
Always on Standby	6	12
Temp for Life?	3	2
Is This Okay?	8	3
Status: Precarious	10	33
Number of news reports and opinion pieces directly referring to each of the Kommunal reports in the year of its publication and the following year. Op-eds and editorials include duplicates of the same text sent to different local media outlets.		

After the publication of *Always on Standby*, its author started investigating other subjects she had prior expertise in, and another investigator was given the task of writing the next report. The author of the second report, *Temp for Life?*, was newly employed and, since it was mainly supposed to be an update on the first report, she was charged by the head of the department with writing the report as a relatively simple first assignment. Although the author was tasked with writing an update, a notable new resource was available: a survey of 10 000 trade union members that was commissioned for another project but had questions of relevance for the subject matter of this report. This survey was commissioned for a project investigating differences between privately and publicly owned services, and as part of producing the report the author spent time using a statistics computer program looking at different correlations between variables in order to see if any of them were relevant for the report.



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### **Temp for Life? (2013)**

The second report is written by a different author than the first one, but the contents of the report are fairly similar to the first one. One notable difference is that the phrase “precarious employment” is explicitly defined as temporary employment, and included in the qualifying subtitle of the report (“A report on precarious employment”). Time series from Statistics Sweden’s labour force survey, Kommunal’s wage statistics and membership data are continued from the last report, and data from the two years between the reports are added. The results of a survey of 10 000 Kommunal members in child and elderly care is included. It is somewhat difficult to say what group the 10 000 respondents are taken to represent. Throughout most of the report, the results of the survey are written as describing those who work in child and/or elderly care, e.g. “*In child care, 40% of Kommunal’s female members work part-time...*” (p. 16, my emphasis). But in the abstract and the conclusions, the same results are used in descriptions of the precariously employed in Kommunal’s sector in general, and the political demands at the end of the report are made in relation to all precariously employed members: “This report describes the development of precarious employment in the sectors where Kommunal organises employees” (p. 5). What can be made of this? If I were to emphasise the tables and the descriptions in most of the report, I would describe what the author does as relating to the group “members of Kommunal in child and elderly care”, and it would seem less clear why this report should be relevant to the aims of my study. If I instead were to take the conclusions and abstract as in some way more significant than the table headings and main text of the report, I would describe what they do in relation to the group “precarious employees in Kommunal’s sector”. This is closer to what I attempt to follow, but a critical reader could object that this is not the group they are describing throughout the text. Both of these would be more or less plausible translations of the reports for me to make. Alternatively, I could describe the varying uses of the results as a flaw, as an inconsistency or as an implicit generalisation that should have been explicitly motivated, though this would be to compare the report to an academic standard from a different context from where it was written. Perhaps it is enough to note that they use the results differently in different parts of the report without privileging what they do in either the conclusions or in the rest of the text.

Apart from this, data on gender differences in time use and part-time work from Statistics Sweden are gathered in the report. Again, it is somewhat unclear how this part of the report should be treated. It’s only related to temporary employment in a

roundabout way: time use statistics reflect that women do more unpaid housework than men and as a consequence of this women tend to take a larger portion of the parental leave and stay home with sick children more often, which leads to more temporary employment in female-majority occupations to cover for absences. But although this connection is rather indirect, the fact that the statistics are part of a report on precarious employment connects the two issues.

A lot of the material from the last report is reused in this report; much of the report reads like an update on the issue with more recent data included. There are, however, some differences in how precarious work relates to various interests. Firstly, temporary work is not only related to working conditions for employees in this report, but also to the quality and cost of welfare. Secondly, one of the central results of the report is that it takes several years on average for young temporarily employed workers to get permanent employment, and this finding is connected to a (passive and rather careful) normative statement that “it could be considered to take too long” (p. 23). This carefulness is repeated throughout the report, and the answer to the titular question of the report is (somewhat surprisingly) that the precariously employed “...don’t have to be ‘temps for life’, but it takes time for them to catch up [in terms of wages and work conditions]” (p. 26). The way of giving an answer to how long it takes for the precariously employed to get permanent employment is called survival analysis: a statistical method used in various fields to calculate the expected duration of time until an event happens. With this method, temporary employment is treated as something that affects an employee for a given number of years.

That temporary employment in this report is detrimental to employees but not of critical concern is also reflected in the (comparatively long) list of political demands at the end: only one of the proposals concern legislation in a way that would force employers to reduce temporary employment, four encourage employers to plan recruitment and absences better so that temporary employment can be avoided, one is a call to reduce wage differences between men and women, one states that current laws on discrimination should be followed, and one that public sector employers should keep hiring and training staff in accordance with existing collective agreements.

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Temp for Life was supposed to be released before its publication to *Rapport*, a national news programme on Swedish public service television. Before the broadcast, however, the numbers in the

report were accidentally included in material the chair of the union received for an interview, and *Rapport* was no longer interested in the report once the numbers were public.

After the publication of the report, the same author kept working with temporary employment and wrote another report on the subject the following year. The next report, *Is This Okay?*, were described by its author as being connected to two different projects at Kommunal that took place at the time of its writing. When conducting the investigation that led to the report, the author got to talking with a colleague at the communications department of the trade union. The person at communications was working on a project about working conditions called *Is This Okay?*, that came to give its name to this report. As they realised that their different projects were fairly similar, they coordinated the two projects. The communications project included a web site where Kommunal members could publish testimonies about their working conditions and brochures to be distributed at workplaces. The a link to the web site was included in the report.

The second project with a connection to the report was a broader investigation into the working conditions in elderly care at the department of communications. The same survey used in the last report was used again in this report, but this time only respondents from elderly care was chosen for the analysis, to connect the report to this broader project.

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### **Is This Okay? (2014)**

The third report marks two important changes from the earlier reports: one in how precariousness is enacted, and one in the politics connected to temporary employment. Precarious employment is again explicitly defined, but this time with a subtle difference from before. In the report before this one, precarious employment was defined as temporary employment, and in this report it is defined as either temporary or hourly employment. This does not mean that the prior reports excluded hourly employees. Hourly employment is not formally a distinct category of employment in Swedish labour law, and in the earlier reports hourly employees were included in the category temporary employees. This distinction between hourly employees and other temporary employees is essentially a gradation of precariousness, and is reflected in the graphs and text of the rest of the report.

Apart from a few pages in the beginning of the report that detail the growth of both the number and percentage of temporary employees in recent years, most of the report uses data from the same member survey that was used in parts of the report before this one. In *Is This Okay?*, however, only respondents that work in elderly care was included.

As in *Temp for Life?*, the question of what group is represented in this report is somewhat unclear: although the results are fairly consistently described as pertaining to elderly care workers, the subtitle of the report is “A report on the work conditions of temporary and hourly employees”, without qualification. The results from the survey are divided into three groups: permanent employees, temporary employees and hourly employees. As a result of this distinction, the differences between groups are starker compared to earlier reports: consistently the difference between permanent employees and hourly employees are the largest, with other less precarious temporary employees in the middle. The questions of the survey that are included in the report concern working conditions other than wages, such as access to workplace training, whether or not the employees would prefer to work in the same line of work in three years, and if the employees have split shifts or not. The general picture is of a differentiated precariousness, where hourly employees have more precarious employment with worse working conditions than other temporary employees. Compared with earlier reports where precariousness is treated as dichotomous (either safe or precarious employment), this is a different enactment of precarious employment as graded (more or less precarious employment); that is, a different practical interaction with the precariously employed that imply a different ontology of what precariousness is (Mol, 2003).

How temporary employment is enacted also differs in another way: where temporary employment in the earlier report (and in a different part of this report) was considered a process, a state of employment that eventually leads to permanent employment, it is in this report treated as synchronic – as well as graded – differences between groups. Along with the difference in urgency of the issue in these two enactments, the normative statements in *Is This Okay?* are markedly different from those in the report that came before it. The carefully phrased judgements on the duration of temporary employment are replaced by more strongly worded statements such as, “It is not reasonable that employees can be temporarily employed for such a long period of time” (p.22). And the political demands connected to the reports are calls for legal amendments and new legislation to strengthen employees’ rights, rather than encouragement to employers to follow existing laws and otherwise act differently as in the earlier report. The demands are the following: remove general part time – the form of temporary employment that does not require the employer to motivate temporary employment – from the employment protection act; make publicly funded employers legally bound to give employees the right to full-time work; and legislate against split shifts (with exceptions to the rule open to negotiation in collective bargaining).

A final feature of this report is two references to wider campaigns by Kommunal in connection to the report. Firstly, the front page is marked with “Choose Welfare 2014”, a campaign that Kommunal ran for the Swedish parliament elections 2014. And on the last page a link to a webpage where Kommunal members can share stories about their working conditions is provided. This webpage is part of a campaign on working conditions that Kommunal’s department of communications ran at the time, and that shares its name with this report.

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*Is This Okay?* was released to TV4, a Swedish national broadcasting network. And the report was part of Kommunal’s campaign for the 2014 Swedish general elections. Historically, Kommunal and the other blue-collar trade unions have campaigned for the Social Democratic Party, but for these elections, Kommunal had their own campaign called Choose Welfare. A graphic profile had been developed for this campaign and the report was designed in accordance with that.

One of the new demands in this report, that general temporary employment should be removed from the employment protection act, became a somewhat prioritised political goal of the trade union after the publication of this report. Kommunal’s chair signed an op-ed with the demand in the second largest national newspaper Svenska dagbladet together with two colleagues from other blue-collar trade unions the same year (Niia, Häggström & Nordström, 2014).

The report following this one, *Status: Precarious*, was written by a new author. This author had previously investigated temporary and precarious employment at a trade union for communicators and employees in creative occupations, and temporary employment became part of her portfolio as an investigator at Kommunal. Between *Is This Okay?* and *Status: Precarious*, she wrote another report about differences in temporary employment between public and private employers called *The Price of Flexibility*. It was originally supposed to be a larger project that included the contents of the next report in this study, but they were split into two in order to get results that were more easily communicated. Another plan was also abandoned: the author originally wanted to write a report together with a white-collar trade union to investigate precarious employment as something that crosses traditional class boundaries.

*Status: Precarious* has two important differences from the earlier ones: firstly, it includes references to theoretical and empirical results produced at universities, and secondly, it uses a qualitative methodology with in-depth interviews being what the author considers to be the most

important part of the report. According to the author, this was a novel approach at the department of investigations: quantitative analysis has otherwise been the norm.

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### **Status: Precarious (2016)**

Here, a note on translation is in order. When precarious employment was defined and used in earlier reports, the standard Swedish term was used (*otrygga anställningar*). The title of this report, however, uses a word for precariousness that is less common but shares a root with the term precariat (*prekär*), a term introduced in the report in relation to temporary employment. The term is used in reference to Guy Standing's book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2011). When the concept of precariat is brought in with reference to Guy Standing, it's described as an economically diverse collective of employees with a shared uncertainty about their future employment and income. The precariat is defined in the report as a heterogeneous group that share a feeling of working instrumentally, opportunistically and precariously. Because of these qualities, they have shared political interests that transcend more traditional categories of social class: "A freelance journalist, a temporary employee in childcare, and a telemarketer may have more in common in terms of material conditions and ability to plan their future, than they have with permanent employees in their respective lines of work" (p. 10).

While the earlier reports used statistical methods and analyses that with little doubt found their way to the reports through the social science training of their authors, this report makes explicit reference to social science theorists. Apart from Standing, five Swedish social scientists are referred to in the report: four in relation to their academic work, one with reference to a radio interview. Alongside this theoretical description of a united precariat, a gradation of precariousness between different precarious groups formulated by two Swedish researchers is brought in, with temporary employees as the least precarious (the others being undocumented immigrants and unpaid houseworkers who rely on their partner's income). In contrast with earlier reports, temporary employment is not equated with precarious employment. Instead, temporary employment is described as desirable for some workers, mostly those with high employability, with precariousness as a possible consequence for others. And again, different kinds of temporary work are described as more or less precarious, with hourly employment and general temporary employment as the more precarious kinds. Precariousness in this report differs from the other reports in that the concept is both wider (it's related to a social class with shared interests partly outside of Kommunal's membership) and more narrow (it doesn't include all temporarily employed members).

As in the earlier reports, temporary employment is shown to have increased as a share of the total labour force over time, and blue-collar employees are also shown to be temporarily employed to a greater extent than those in white-collar jobs. Being temporarily employed is also correlated to being a woman and to being born outside of Sweden when statistics from the labour market as a whole are presented. When the relationship between gender and temporary work in specific sectors is described, temporary employment is correlated with belonging to the minority group, so that women in male majority occupations and men in female majority occupations are temporarily employed to a greater extent. This nomothetical explanation is backed by their own member statistics when it comes to gender, and also generalised to being born inside or outside of Sweden (though the group that is born outside of Sweden is in minority in all sectors examined). The average age of temporary employees is presented as increasing over time. A survey of whether or not temporarily employed members want permanent employment is presented, with the results that young members in particular are unwillingly temporarily employed.

One of the major differences between this report and earlier reports is that this report includes excerpts from five in-depth interviews with temporarily employed members. The method of selecting the interviewees is described in some detail, as a means of making these members spokespersons for a wider group. Through the process of random selection, the interviewees are given the ability to speak for others in the same position. The interviews are summarised and compared to the definition of precariat taken from Guy Standing (working instrumentally, opportunistically and precariously), and the responses of the interviewees are found to match the definition. Temporary employees are found to be taken advantage of by employers and to suffer from economic and social consequences from precariousness.

The concluding remarks of the report state that female-coded occupations have less employment safety and that temporary employees are in the process of becoming part of a precariat, which is indefensible. There are seven political demands in this report: one of which is the removal of general temporary employment as a legal form of temporary employment; three are concerning generally improved rights for temporary employment; two are about the minimisation of temporary employment in care, school and health services; and one demanding that it should no longer be possible to transfer parental leave days between parents, in order to increase fathers' use of parental leave.

The publication of this report was accompanied by an op-ed signed by the chair of the trade union and the author in DN, the largest national, daily newspaper in Sweden (excluding tabloids and free newspapers). A public seminar was also held by the trade union, to which the chair of LO, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, was invited along with an investigator at a white-collar trade union, a representative of the central employer's organisation Svenskt Näringsliv and a professor in gender studies. And a template for op-eds in local newspapers was prepared. After the publication of this report and *The Price of Flexibility*, the author gained some status as an expert on temporary employment at Kommunal and has frequently been engaged for interviews and writings on the subject. When the interviews were conducted (October 2017), the author was working on a new report about different kinds of employment related to precarious employment. At the time of writing, no new reports on temporary employment have been released.

### *Development of precariousness in the reports*

The question I set out to answer in this chapter was how the enactment of precariousness develops over time in Kommunal's reports, and how this development relates to different actors. A comment of the word development is in order. The word implies a kind of teleological change; in the case of investigations – and in research in general – one could take this as a development towards increased accuracy. Following the ontology of the literature this study draws upon, however, temporary employment as presented in the reports is not a (potentially distorted) reference to something “out there”, but rather what temporary employment is in the context of the reports. So this is not a teleological development towards a more correct representation of the independently existing group precariously employed, but changes within the mode of existence of the group in the reports. Perhaps the word change would have been a better choice of word than development, though this would fail to reflect the circumstance that the different reports build on each other through references to earlier reports.

A central development in the reports in this study concerns the relationship between precariousness and temporary employment. In the first report, *Always on Standby* (2011), the terms precarious and temporary employment are used to refer to the same thing, though only once in the report. In *Temp for Life?* (2013), precarious employment is again used interchangeably with temporary employment though in this report it is given an explicit definition and used throughout the report. In *Is This Okay?* (2014), precarious employment is explicitly defined as being synonymous with different categories of temporary employment, with the implication that there are different degrees of precariousness. And in *Status: Precarious* (2016), the relationship between



temporary employment and precariousness has changed from one of equivalence to overlapping, so that some groups of temporary employment run the risk of being precariously employed. The place of precariousness in the reports shifts too: in the first report, the phrase precarious employment is mentioned once and could have been removed without much impact on the text as a whole, and the last report is structured around a research question that concerns precariousness. Table 3 summarises differences in the use of the term precariousness between reports.

	<b>Always on Standby (2011)</b>	<b>Temp for Life? (2013)</b>	<b>Is This Okay? (2014)</b>	<b>Status: Precarious (2016)</b>
Definition and usage of precariousness	Undefined, used once as synonymous with temporary employment	Explicitly defined as synonymous with temporary employment	Explicitly defined as synonymous with different kinds of temporary employment; graded	Overlapping but not synonymous with temporary employment; graded
Place of precariousness in the report	Inconsequential, used once	Used throughout the report	Used throughout the report	Research question concerns precariousness

Between these four iterations of temporary employment, precariousness develops in two ways: it gradually becomes more complex and more central. Complex in the sense that the definition or operationalisation of the term becomes more nuanced; central in that it is used more frequently and has a more important place in the direction of investigations so that it cannot, for example, be removed without significantly changing the report. Different explanations can be extracted from the account above for this change; for instance, since a new report to some degree picks up the investigation where the prior report left off, a gradual increase in how nuanced the conceptualisation of precariousness makes some intuitive sense. Or, differently phrased, in the putting together of a new report, prior reports, or the contents thereof, are actors that are involved in a mutual enrolment with the new report. Alternatively, something similar to Latour and Woolgar's description of a general increase in the cost to produce new facts as the consequence of a kind of arms race between competing claims or laboratories could be used (Latour & Woolgar, 1986), though it seems a bit unclear where that external pressure to increase complexity of the concept of precariousness would come from in the case of the reports.

Both of these explanations represent an understanding of the development in the concept of precariousness as following a rule, and from them one would expect a continuation of the same trend (i.e. an even more complex and central concept of precariousness in the next report Kommunal releases on temporary employment). This conceptualisation of the development is problematic because it reduces uncertainty by severely limits the number of possible causes to the differences between reports: to a kind of cumulativeness of concept in the first explanation and to a dynamic in a broader field of political fact-production in the explanation borrowed from Latour and Woolgar. Explanations like these imply a kind of predictability; they are easily interpreted as a rule for what forms consecutive reports will take, that can predict the shape of future reports. Such predictability is contradicted by the authors' description of the process of investigation. In the interviews, assembling things into a report seemed like a kind of bricolage of what happens to be available at the office: "it's difficult to know where something comes from, it can be that you talk to a statistician who says, 'we have statistics on this' and it could be interesting" (interviews). This implies a kind of unpredictability as what is available at the department of investigations is open to change, as well as arbitrariness in the sense that the methodological choices made when writing a report do not follow naturally from the object of study.<sup>20</sup>

A different route is to try to find causes for specific changes between reports, rather than structural explanations of the pattern. One such explanation that can be found in the account above is for the inclusion of the concept of precariat in the fourth report, *Status: Precarious* (2016). When asked how the concept found its way into the study, the author had little explanation apart from that she had the concept with her from before, and that she had "an idea for a report and it was pretty grand, it would be about the precariat on the labour market" (interviews). Following Latour's suggestion in *Science in Action* (1987) that we look for non-cognitive causes whenever we would otherwise say that a researcher simply has an idea, we can suggest a somewhat more satisfying explanation. The author of *Status: Precarious* had previously worked at a trade union that organised communicators and artists and had investigated precarious employment in those groups. One of the central points of Guy Standing's concept of precariat – the one that is used in the report – is that it connects occupational groups otherwise considered to belong to different social classes through shared economic and political interests (Standing, 2011). The step from analysing precariousness in

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<sup>20</sup> One of the authors interviewed had a comment to this passage of the text: the place of the political issue that first motivated the report is lost in my interpretation, and the political motivation is more central to the outcome of an investigation than the methodological tools available, at least to that author.

different occupational groups to understanding precariousness as something that exists across traditional class boundaries is small.

It would be a mistake to ignore potential actors outside of the trade union department of investigations, and outside of the primary material of this study. It seems likely that the inclusion of the term precariat could be partially explained with reference to actors outside of the organisation: authors' discussions with friends, or political discussions in newspapers and elsewhere. A media database search on the term "precariat" in Swedish news sources shows a sharp increase in the frequency of media usage of the term during the time the reports were written, which is displayed in Table 4. While this gives very little information on how the term has spread, it indicates that the precariat has lived a life on its own outside of the walls of the department of investigation. If the inclusion of the term is an enrolment of a concept from academic writing to Kommunal's cause, the enrolment is mutual: a study following the concept of precariat as an actor would describe Kommunal's inclusion of the concept in their reports as the precariat enrolling Kommunal. This should give us some pause when it comes to explaining the development of precarious and precariat wholly within the organisational bounds of Kommunal.

<b>Year</b>	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Number of results</b>	5	33	52	122	132	108

An obvious set of actors that influence the writing of reports are those that make up the policy decisions of the trade union: documents, congress votes, members of the board of directors and op-ed articles. This is unsurprising: the reports are written by a political organisation, and described as explicitly politically motivated in interviews. This influence seems to go both ways. When a report is written, it needs to be approved by the trade union board of directors, unless the political demands in the report are established parts of the trade union policy. However, policy also originates in the reports, as seems to be the case with the trade union's demand to remove general temporary employment following a report where this demand was made. Except for these general remarks, little can be said about these interactions based on this study.

In this chapter, I have alternated between describing the one sending, authoring or publishing a report as Kommunal and as a specific author. As mentioned earlier, there is a kind of dual authorship of the report. When reports are described in news articles and in opinion pieces, Kommunal is normally given as the author, e.g. “This is shown by a survey done by Kommunal” (P4 Västerbotten, 2013); “Kommunal’s analysis is that the new precariousness has several causes.” (Baudin & Odeberg, 2016). But at the same time, the reports are signed by their individual authors. This duality can also be illustrated in two conflicting ways the decision to write a report were described in the interviews. The first two reports in this study were written on the initiative of somebody other than the author themselves, but this was described as an exception to the norm. On the one hand, when describing how the decisions to write reports were made the authors grounded it in their individual thoughts and feelings; that is, in their own subjectivity, e.g. “I felt that we lacked this perspective”; “I wanted to continue to develop this theme” (interviews). On the other hand, it was also clear from the interviews that the reports in a sense had to be written; that other actors would have made sure that the reports would be written if these specific authors had not been the ones to do it. These actors could be the head of the department, or documents from membership congresses and policy decisions, or even the issue of temporary employment itself.

Whether the question that this chapter is structured around has been answered depends on the interpretation of the question, specifically on the word how. If how the reports have developed refers to differences between the content of reports over time, the changing place of precariousness in the reports is a decent answer. If the how is interpreted as a question of what caused the change, the answers given here are a bit more tentative, and perhaps not fully satisfying. Though a more full story of how these changes came to be probably could have been found in another kind of study – an ethnographic study diligently following the authors from site to site over the years of investigation, for instance – it seems out of reach from the material gathered here, at least without exaggerating the certainty of the conclusions drawn.

## **5. The second question: Assembling stable groups**

This chapter aims to answer the second question, namely that of how Kommunal assembles groups in a way that makes the groups more or less stable. If the last chapter focused on the differences between the enactment of temporary employment between the reports, this one starts off from their relative stability, and treats the group that the reports are about (temporarily employed members of Kommunal) as an outcome of the reports. In this chapter, what I (perhaps somewhat pretentiously) call two technologies of social aggregation – that is, two sets of practices that assemble individuals into collectives – are described: that of democracy and that of social science. I conceptualise these as logics according to which translations of multiple individuals into groups are made. As the words social science and democracy in themselves are ambiguous, the choice of names should be explained. Social science was chosen because I believe that the tools and rules of the first one – interviews, statistics, systems of reference – have found their way to the department of investigation by way of the social science education of the investigators. Democracy is what the ethnographers call a members' term; it came from the interviews, in which the democratic nature of the organisation was stressed and put in relation to the investigative work.

The starting point of this analysis is to abstain from assuming the existence of Kommunal members, or temporarily employed Kommunal members, as a social aggregate, following Latour's paraphrase of Mrs. Thatcher, "there is no such a thing as a society" (2005, p. 5), only actors. In this analysis, the existence of a *sui generis* social sphere where objects like human individuals or social groups with particular interests and qualities are is not assumed; instead, they exist locally and as an outcome of interactions. So the object of study in the investigations is, in a sense, brought into being by the investigations. This doesn't mean that it's woven out of thin air; as should be clear from the analysis in the preceding chapter, numerous things go into the assembling of the group. This chapter examines two different ways in which groups are assembled at Kommunal, the investigations described above being one of them, and democratic participation of members in the organisation the other. In a discussion on the peculiarities of political speech, Latour has made the point that its purpose is aggregating the multitude into the singular, and that this necessarily means speaking indirectly or unfaithfully, as the alternative – a direct and faithful transfer of the voices and interests of a multitude – would keep the multitude fragmented (Latour, 2003). In other words, the aggregation of the multitude into a group in political representation is done through translation, and in that way comparable to how I understand what the various actors of the department of investigation are doing.

Kommunal is a democratic organisation, or at least an organisation presented as such both by the interviewees in this study and in its charter. The highest decision-making institutions of the organisation are the congress and the board of directors, the first consisting of locally elected representatives and the second being elected by the congress. And the local organisations are run by elected representatives as well (Kommunal, 2016a).<sup>21</sup> So here is a way of assembling the various perspectives and interests of Kommunal members into a social aggregate: the chair and other functionaries of the trade union write op-eds and hold speeches that perform the members of the trade union as a group with collective interests. Something similar is done in collective bargaining: agents of the trade union enact the interests of the union members in relation to the employer. The legitimacy of the representation of members by their spokespersons is in these cases upheld by the technologies of democracy: elections, meetings, charters and protocols. An exploration of the rules according to which humans and objects are given the ability to represent a collective is found in Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot's *On Justification* (2006). They described something similar to what I will call the technologies of democracy as one of six discrete logics according to which the worth of objects and humans are decided. The civic world, as they call it, has the creation and stabilisation of social aggregates as its central objective and gives the right to represent collectives to human and non-human beings that can pass the test of meetings, assemblies and congresses. The groups assembled by this process have defined boundaries (memberships or demos) and their representatives must give up their particularity and individual interests – the greatest threats to the collectives assembled by the technologies of democracy – in order to embody the group's collective interests. Evidence to an actor's worthiness is given in relation to legal rules and statutes. As this study has not gone into the particulars of democratic procedures in Kommunal, Boltanski and Thévenot's description of the civic world will be taken as a reasonable representation of how collectives are assembled through the technologies of democracy.

The investigations studied in this text are another means of aggregation, in this case through the technologies of social science. The different individual answers in surveys and interviews are translated into a group with collective qualities through interpretations of numerical values and interview responses. Different steps are taken along the way to ensure the legitimacy of the reports' claims of representing the groups that they describe. Statistical methods are enrolled to the cause, so that whoever wants to question the aggregation of the group finds themselves faced with a body of

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<sup>21</sup> This description is taken from the Kommunal charter of 2016. No doubt the democratic processes of the organisation is messier than this simple description, but it's sufficient for the purposes of this study.

statistical theory that few would have the resources to credibly challenge. When temporarily employed Kommunal members were interviewed in *Status: Precarious*, the respondents were chosen by first randomly selecting a group of a few hundred possible respondents, and then randomly choosing five of those: a procedure intended to give those interviewed the ability to speak for the group as a whole. And the sources are presented along with the results in the interviews.

If we present an investigation and don't show who we have included, who are the source of the investigation, then we won't get published anywhere, so we have to do that, and there's a high awareness of that. And I've always used Statistics Sweden for that reason, because Statistics Sweden is like, if you say that something comes from Statistics Sweden, no one will challenge it, but they could to a higher degree if we say that this is from Kommunal's member panel survey. (interviews)

This quote shows two things: firstly, the inclusion of sources and methods in the reports serve to give the claims legitimacy and to make them harder to criticise; secondly, there is a gradation of sources and tying a generally accepted source like Statistics Sweden to one's results makes them harder to challenge. Even so, any claim is open to challenge, as is shown in this quote from the seminar conducted at the publication of *Status: Precarious*:

There's a few things to say about this with the labour force survey [from Statistics Sweden] and so on, it's really great statistics but when you break it down [into too many categories] it quickly becomes very uncertain and I have a few questions about the number for care assistants [...] so I'm wondering if it's really correct, I'd like to dig a little deeper. (*Svenskt Näringsliv's* representative at the seminar in Kommunal, 2016b)<sup>22</sup>

The technologies of social science are not just used to assemble the social aggregate, but to give it stability as well; without them the existence or the qualities of the group could be more easily challenged. And even then they are open to challenge. Unlike the victors of scientific controversies described in the early works of Bruno Latour, the social aggregate created through this technology is not a stable entity ready to go out in the world and act once assembled. The group is enacted

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<sup>22</sup> Incidentally, this particular attack seemed to hit home as the same remark on Kommunal's statistics was reiterated by the author of the report in my interview.

anew in every investigation and even the relative stability of a written report depends on the context that the actor is made to act in.

These two different paths from individual members to collectives of members exist in the organisation, and along them we find different means of representing groups legitimately in democratic and social science procedures. They do not, however, run in parallel; they intersect at various points. One such intersection is found in the place of the department of investigations in the organisational structure of the trade union; the employees at the department are employed by the democratically elected board of directors (Kommunal, 2016a). And when a report is written, its political demands have to be approved by the board of directors before publication. In these cases, the collective interests of the Kommunal members as represented in the democratic procedures have a determining function in relation to the representation in the reports: what the reports say the group temporarily employed Kommunal members' interests are is subordinated to what the democratic spokespersons say they are. The opposite relationship can also be found, however. Kommunal's policy is to a large extent decided in the reports, and although political demands have to be approved by the board of directors they can originate in the reports and be suggested by the author. And reports can be commissioned by the congress to be used as material for votes in future congresses. In these cases, the reports are treated as determining in relation to the democratic representation of members.

Although democracy and social science are categories that we organise plenty of things into outside of the trade union as well as at Kommunal, I don't mean to say that the two technologies of social aggregation rest on aether-like discourses of democracy and social science that float freely around the actors. Following John Law's laboratory study, these two technologies of social aggregation should rather be compared to his modes of ordering; self-perpetuating, contingent logics according to which actors are organised that are not necessarily bound to any particular individuals or sites and that are continually performed. Or, similarly, as Foucauldian discourses on a local scale. It seems likely that the interactions between the two technologies would necessitate that individual actors at the trade union negotiate between the two, similar to how the laboratory managers shift between modes of ordering in John Law's study (1994). While a further inquiry into the particulars of these negotiations would be interesting, it would probably take something like an ethnographic observation of the trade union head office, which is not done in this study.

As the two technologies are different ways of translating individual members into collectives, they could also be conceptualised as different enactments, in Annemarie Mol's terminology, of the



individual Kommunal member and collectives of Kommunal members. Both technologies are logics according to which stable groups are assembled, and as such, they have implicit ontologies of what they assemble. The Kommunal member in the investigations described above is a respondent: a human research object assumed to have certain capabilities and qualities based on the research method. For most of what is gathered in the reports above, they are assumed to be able to give relevant and correct information on their situation when asked in a survey or an interview. Statistics on other things like wages and work-hours are collected without direct interaction with the members; employers are obliged by collective bargaining agreements to make information on wages available to the trade unions, for instance. When responding themselves, the members are assumed to be truthful; they are to give information about their circumstances in a disinterested way, and not give answers with particular goals in mind other than reporting on their situations. They are, however, assumed to have interests. These interests are determined by the investigator.

Again, Boltanski and Thévenot's description of the civic world will serve as a description of the member as a democratic participant. As this kind of members, they are assumed to be able to represent their own interests. They are also supposed to have access to a Rousseauian general will, and thus be able to make a distinction between their particular and their collective interests. And they are assumed to be able to represent these interests when voting for, or when acting as, representatives. In other words, they have the capacity to leave whatever other positions and identities they may have and act as trade union members when acting within the democratic procedures of the trade union. This does not mean that they are disinterested but that they act on the specific set of interests that they have as members of this particular group (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

The most notable difference between these two different members – the member as research object and the member as democratic participant – is that between being an object and being a subject in relation to their collective interests. The interests of the member as a research object are objective in the sense that they can be determined by somebody other than the member. The member is passive in relation to their interests; they provide information on their work situation (either directly or through their employer) and what their interests are are clear from this information. Conversely, the member as democratic participant is active and subjective. The difference can be illustrated with an example: it's conceivable that the member as a research object could fail as research object by being interested. They could, for example, inflate their hardships in an interview because they want to present an image of temporary employment as detrimental to

employees and in this way let their interests disrupt the objective investigation into their circumstances and (ironically) their interests. The same is not true for the member as democratic participant: they are supposed to act in accordance with their interests. The way they represent their collective interests in democratic assemblies can never be disrupted by those same interests.<sup>23</sup>

This conceptualisation offers a way to understand what happens when the two different paths of assemblage intersect. If the investigations and the democratic processes are different technologies of aggregating members, with different implications of what they are aggregating through their practices, the intersections between the two serve the function of unifying the two different versions of the Kommunal member into one. This follows Annemarie Mol's concept of "less than many, more than one" (2003): different practices at the organisation imply different versions of the Kommunal member, and other practices serve to unify them into one. It is, for example, curious that what would supposed to be an investigation into matters of fact should be approved by a group of elected representatives in an organisation, as is the case when the author of a report goes to the board of directors for approval before publication. But this practice makes sense if we see it as a way of coordinating what is said of the Kommunal member between the investigations and the elected representatives, in order to make sure that the different versions of groups assembled of different versions of members are one and the same. Through the meeting points between the technologies of social science and of democracy, Kommunal is made to speak with one voice about the same object.

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<sup>23</sup> The member as democratic participant could, of course, fail as such by letting their particular interests get in the way of their collective interests, as was abundantly clear in a 2016 scandal at Kommunal. The scandal was in part about about how the trade union leadership spent unacceptable amounts of money on alcohol and luxury dinners for themselves (SVT Nyheter, 2016).

## 6. Reflections on this study

This chapter serves as a reflection on what has been done in this study, and what has been written in the rest of this thesis. Three questions that I have asked myself during the production of this text will be answered. The first questions concerns what this study is a study of, and what kinds of claims are made in this text. The second question is about the relationship between this thesis and actor-network theory. And the third question concerns how a study like this one could've been done differently, or how this line of inquiry could be continued in other ways.

### *What is this a study of?*

In this study, I have looked at something very particular: how one trade union in one Nordic country investigates one subject. Yet I hope to be able to say something that could be useful in the study of other subjects. This is a question of what is called generalisability, though the term will have to be somewhat modified to fit the ontology of this study. Normally, the word is a quality of scientific results and defined as the answer to something like, “for what things other than the ones studied are what has been said true”. One of the central premises of this study is that the results of any study are as real as what is studied; that there is no abstract plane of existence where statements exist in reference to concrete things in another, more material reality. A scientific result is not a reference, but a translation. Kommunal's reports on the precariously employed do not point at something that exists in reality; they are the reality, or a reality, of the precariously employed. This goes for this thesis as well as for the reports. An implication of this is that generalisations are something done to a text rather than a quality of the text itself, and that the question of generalisability ultimately is something for others to decide. Annemarie Mol's study of a Dutch hospital and John Law's of a British laboratory are generalisable to the context studied in this text because I related them to what I studied, and this would have been difficult for either of those writers to predict when they wrote their respective books.

Still, I have some ideas of what I think this text is about, apart from how Kommunal has investigated temporary employment in the last several years. The discussion on interactions between what I have called technologies of aggregation could be useful for seeing how other organisations assemble groups. It might serve as an analogy different systems of evaluation, or different logics of enactment interact in other contexts as well. And the narrative of the investigations could be a useful starting point for a further examination of how precarious employment has been constructed in Sweden. The patterns that are described in this thesis,

however, are effects of the different interactions at Kommunal rather than explanations for it. Any study or other description that employs what is written in this text to understand something else should use it as analogy rather than as fact; whatever regularities found in this study are not nomothetical laws of the social (or socio-material), but something else. And to use them analogously takes an act of creativity on the part of whoever wants to use them. Which, of course, is as true for studies with nomothetical claims to objective truth as for this study. So the possible uses of the study are hard to decide from this point in time. Still, the most probable use seems to be a continued examination of investigations done at Kommunal or other Swedish trade unions. More on this in the answer to the third question below.

*Where are the machines of loving grace?*

Probably the most well-known, if not infamous, feature of actor-network theory is the agency it allows non-humans. Through decoupling agency from human intentionality, actor-network theory authors have been able to write accounts that give due attention to how the objects of technology and nature interact with humans and others. In this study, all materials were gathered from the same organisation. In John Law's words, an organisation is composed of heterogeneous materials, including "people, devices, texts, 'decisions', organizations, and interorganizational relations" (Law, 1994, p. 23). By allowing room for non-human actors in the explanation, the stability of an organisation (or other kinds of institutions) can be explained; human bodies and words do not reach far enough to maintain the kind of regularity in social ordering that an organisation is without non-humans. Apart from the texts of the reports, non-human objects are conspicuously absent from this study. This doesn't mean that they are not important parts of what goes on at Kommunal's department of investigation. The statistical analysis of the investigations would have taken prohibitive amounts of resources to conduct without computer programs, for example, and a look at the computerisation of the office whenever that happened could show how the introduction of computers shaped the daily work of the investigators. The architecture of the building could be analysed as well; perhaps the structure of the building with different departments on different floors has an effect on how projects are integrated between the different parts of the trade union organisation. Analyses such as these, though potentially interesting, are not present in this study. This is a consequence partly of the subject matter of this study and partly of its methodology. Firstly, in contrast to studies of laboratories or biologists, the investigations studied in this thesis are not investigations into nature or technology, but into groups of humans. A

consequence of this is that non-human objects, though active in the investigative work at the department, have a relatively minor place in the reports. Secondly, the methodology of this study puts human rather than nonhuman actors in the spotlight. This study has the reports – linguistic productions – as its focal point, since they were the theme of the interviews as well as objects of analysis in themselves. Although I visited the Kommunal head office when conducting interviews, I saw very little of the building on my way from the entrance hall to the rooms booked for interviews. More could probably have been said with a different method. Is this a flaw in the choice of methodology and materials of this study? I don't think so, though it certainly means that not everything that could be said of what goes on at Kommunal's department of investigations has been said in this thesis.

When writing this text, I've been somewhat wary of situating it within actor-network theory, or even using the term actor-network theory. The main reason for this has been that I wanted to avoid the reader's idea of what an actor-network theory study should be to interfere with the interpretation of this text. That an actor-network theory account is about the interactions between non-humans and humans is one such idea, and a possible expectation that the greater part of my study more or less fails to meet.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately I'm still unsure if this is an actor-network theory study, or even if the question of whether or not it is is interesting. Clearly an interesting question, however, is if I've succeeded in sticking to the ontological and theoretical framework outlined in chapter two throughout the text. I've tried to, and I hope that the reader will agree that I have.

#### *What could have been done differently?*

At a few places in this text, I've alluded to what could have been said had this been an ethnographic study. If a continued investigation into how Kommunal produces political facts or knowledge is to be undertaken, this seems like a fruitful means of inquiry. Some aspects of the work at the department of investigations that were elusive with the methodology of this study – the actions of nonhumans discussed above, for example – could probably be better described through prolonged participatory observation. Such an approach could be understood as a variant of laboratory ethnography; a genre of sociology of science research that goes beyond the works of Latour (Latour & Woolgar, 1986) and Law (1994) mentioned in this thesis.

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<sup>24</sup> As do other texts normally placed within the actor-network theory tradition to varying degrees, such as the ethnographic works of Mol (2003) and Law (1994). Mol's book *Ontology in Medical Practice* is also an example of a text normally placed within actor-network theory without ever explicitly describing the study as such.

The questions that originally motivated this project, and that were dropped along the way, concerned the place of positive statements about society in ideology. If these questions were to be picked up, the Kommunal department of investigations would be a good place to start. A fruitful inquiry bearing these questions in mind, however, should go beyond the offices of the department of investigation and follow the reports to wherever they have an impact. It would be interesting to see how the reports are used by other parts of Kommunal's organisation: at local or regional offices or in collective bargaining, for instance. Or if they are brought into and are differently enacted in discussions on precarious employment at political party conferences or elsewhere.

Alternatively, a study focused on the relation between, or the division into, values and facts at Kommunal's department of investigation would be interesting. While the relationship between policy decisions, ideological beliefs and the enactments of reality in the reports is discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis, it deserves to be explored further.

One ambition I had with this study was to see if the theoretical, methodological or ontological tools of translation and enactment could be useful for understanding what went on at a site that seemed important for those with an interest in the ontology of politics. I believe that the answer to this is affirmative, and I'm convinced that there is plenty more to be said on the topic.

## **7. Summary and conclusion**

This thesis begins with a story about the development of actor-network theory: this story serves to establish a theoretical or ontological vantage point from which the investigations of the trade union Kommunal is observed. Two questions guide the empirical analysis: one about different enactments of precariousness in the reports, and one about how stable groups are assembled at the trade union. The answer to the first question is reached through a chronological account of how the reports were written in chapter 4. I argue that precariousness both becomes more complex and more central in the reports over time. Although some patterns that explain this change can be proposed, they are somewhat tentative. Specific actors that have an effect on the reports are suggested.

The question about group stability is answered through a comparison between the investigative work that led to the reports and the participatory democratic processes of the organisation. Both are described as ways of assembling different individual members to social groups with interests and other qualities, though resting on different logics that I in this thesis call technologies of social aggregation. These two different systems of group creation imply different things about the members studied; that is, different enactments of the members. The interactions between the two are understood as a means of harmonising the representation of members by elected representatives and the representation of members in the reports.

The broader questions that this thesis relates to concern how political organisations establish a reality to act in, and the political aspects of doing this. If one can imagine that complete answers to such questions could ever be given, they are not given here and further exploration of the topic would be interesting. Still, this thesis hopefully provides a way to understand at least some aspects of how this is done at one such organisation.

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## **Appendix A: Supplementary sources**

Supplementary sources used in writing the account of Kommunal's investigations into precarious employment:

- Kommunal's list of published reports.
- Email correspondence with the head of the department of investigations (to verify the shift in focus of the department of investigations around 2010).
- Phone conversation with the former head of the department of investigations (to verify the shift in focus of the department of investigations around 2010).
- Retriever, a Swedish media archive service (to find out the impact of the reports on news media, and the use of the term "precariat" over the last decade).
- A report by Swedish employers' organisation *Svenskt Näringsliv* on general temporary employment (Sahlén, 2017).
- Video recording of the seminar held in connection with the release of *Status: Precarious* (Kommunal, 2016b).

## **Appendix B: Code guide and coding**

The tables in this appendix are the summaries of the coded reports that were used in the analysis.

The five broad codes that were used in creating the tables are the following:

1. What is gathered: Parts of the text that describes what has gone into the reports, i.e. statistics, methods, references to earlier reports and to academic writing.
2. Relation to the labour market: Text about how temporary employment relates to the labour market as a whole, mainly concerning the number and percentage of temporary employees over time.
3. Relation to other groups: Descriptions of who the temporarily employed are, or, how membership of the group temporary employees or temporarily employed Kommunal members relates to other identities and group memberships, such as gender, age and whether or not one is born in Sweden.
4. Consequences of temporary employment: How temporary employment affects individuals, what the outcome of temporary employment is.
5. Interests and normative statements: How the question of temporary employment relates to different interests (both societal interests, and the interests of specific groups) and normative statements about temporary employment.

The first code roughly corresponds with the materials and methodology of the report. The following three are fairly similar to three central implicit research questions of the reports, i.e. “how has temporary employment developed?”, “who are the temporarily employed?”, and “what happens to the temporarily employed?”. The final question includes normative statements from conclusions and political demands, and explicit descriptions of the interests of groups described in the reports.

All shorter codes from the first round of descriptive coding were included in these five broad codes from the second round, which was possible because of the relative similarity in structure and topic of the reports. These codes represent a step of the analysis that came before the actual writing up of my report descriptions, and aren't all that visible in how the reports are described in chapter 4. Instead, they primarily served the purpose of giving me a manageable overview of the reports when comparing them.

## Always on Standby (2011)

What is gathered	Relation to labour market	Relation to other groups	Consequences of precarious employment	Interests and normative statements
Kommunal's wage statistics	Number of temps have increased by 40 000 over the last ten years	Over 1/2 of temps are over 25 years old	It's a myth that temporary employment is for a short time, it takes many years to get permanent employment	"Temporary employment is not only a <i>youth problem</i> "
Statistics from Statistics Sweden	Percentage of temps in Kommunal's sector has increased from 25 to 28% over the last 3 years	Over 2/3 of temps in Kommunal's sector are over 25 years old	50% of temps are permanently employed after 3 years; 90% after 6 years	Increasing the number of permanent employees can save money for local governments and increase job satisfaction for employees
A survey of 1016 temporarily employed Kommunal members done by Novus Opinion for Kommunal	140 000 individuals, or 28% of all employees, in Kommunal's sector are temporarily employed	Average age of temps is 35 years, and at the age when many start families and buy homes	1/3 of temps have been temporarily employed for $\geq 4$ years	
Follow-up questions to 472 hourly employed Kommunal members		The Swedish labour market is markedly gender segregated	7/10 temps want permanent employment	
Survival analysis of Kommunal's membership data 1994–2010		Jobs with more women are systematically valued less than those with more men	Temporary employment leads to lower full-time wages and temporarily employed have 51% lower income on average	
Temporary employment includes all employments that are not temporary		A 10% increase in the percentage of women in a job correlates with 2.5% lower wages in blue-collar jobs	Temps who became permanently employed between 2008 and 2010 increased their income with 20.1%	
[Precarious employments not defined explicitly, but used as synonymous with temp]		A 10% increase in the percentage of women in a job correlates with 5% lower wages in white-collar jobs	When asked if they could acquire 8 000 Swedish kronor after living expenses in one month, 22% of temps said no (17.4% average)	
The report "New Times", an evaluation of a local government project to increase permanent employment in Nynäshamn		70 000 more women than men were temporarily employed in 2010	Temps have difficulties in planning their working hours: 8/10 temps have varying number of hours between weeks and half of temps are informed of their hours less than a week before they work	
Kommunal's report "Summer Break Stress" (2011), about daycare during the summer		Kommunal groups with more women have more temporary employment	For temps with children, planning is particularly hard, especially since daycare centres often close during the summer	
Employment protection act (LAS), regulates when temporary employment should be converted to permanent employment		In the age group 25–54 those born outside of Europe are twice as likely to be temporarily employed	For 1/10 men and 1/5 women, being temporarily employed has affected decision to have children	
The law against discrimination of part-time and temporary employees, prohibits giving less benefits or lower wage to temps			Almost half of temps have not received training or pay rise since employed	
<b>Demands in Always on Standby</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The law must be followed. Temporary employees should not be discriminated against.</li> <li>• Temporary employment with the same employer should be limited. The employment protection act (LAS) should be changed so that a maximum of 12 months temporary employment within a five year period is possible before conversation to permanent employment, except when substituting for a permanent employment in which case the maximum should be two years.</li> <li>• Act against the unjust wage difference between men and women. A gender equality wage pool should be introduced.</li> </ul>			

## Temp for Life? (2013)

What is gathered	Relation to labour market	Relation to other groups	Consequences of precarious employment	Interests and normative statements
Statistics Sweden's Labour Force Survey (AKU)	1990–2007, moderate decrease of precarious employment and increase of safe employment	More temporary employees in the private sector, but increase for both private and public sectors	Temporary employees work fewer hours each week	Limit temporary employments to two years
Kommunal's wage statistics	2007–2012 increase in temporary employment, decrease in permanent employment	More women than men are temps in Kommunal's sector, as in the labour market as a whole	Permanently employed Kommunal members in elderly care work 75% of a full-time employment on average, temps work 60%	"From the graph we can see that from 2008–2012, all three sectors <i>have been bad</i> at employing permanently."
Survey with 10 000 members in child and elderly care (2013)	5 percentage point increase in temporary employment 2008–2012 in the local government sector, smaller increase for Kommunal's members	Employment categories with more female employees have more temps (four examples: child carers 90 % women, 40 % temps; nursing assistants 90 % women, 45 % temps; janitors 7 % women, 13 % temps; firefighters 4 % women, 10 % temps)	Permanently employed members in child care work 50% of full-time on average, temps 35%	"To be temporarily employed affects the individual's economy negatively. It's important that permanent employment is the norm."
Survival analysis on Kommunal's membership data 1994–2012 (that includes employment status)	Increase in temps over 2013, but probably due to seasonal factors	Greater percentage of men in temporary employment, could be explained by country of birth	Temps have 15% lower full-time wages, 50% lower income	Gender inequality in parental responsibilities and sick leave leads to more temps and less continuity in Kommunal's sectors
Definition: safe employment = permanent employment	Temporary employment increases for fifth year in a row	[A few pages on gender inequality in part-time employment and time use; not directly related to precarious employment]	After three years, 50% of temps get permanent employment. After six years, 90%	Employees should handle planned absences (parental leave, leave of absence for education) better, so that positions aren't left vacant
Definition: precarious employment = temporary employment (hourly workers, substitute employment, general temporary employment)		Temporary employment is not only a youth problem, there are temps in all age groups, though mostly in the age groups between 20 and 34	60–70% of temps are still precariously employed after two years	Employees should permanently employ people to fill in for sick leaves and other short time absences
Financial crisis 2007 as potential explanation for increased use of temps, but the local governments have had stable budgets			Young people who start as temps are as likely to be permanently employed as the average member after about six years	"To be temporarily employed is not only a youth <i>problem</i> "
New law 2007 that made it possible to stack different kinds of temporary employments as more likely reason for increased use of temps			Young people who start as temps work as many hours as the average after about five years	Although those who stay in the Kommunal sector eventually get permanent employment, it takes too long
Unnamed earlier reports by Kommunal about country of birth and working conditions			Young people who are temporarily employed get higher wage increases than average and will eventually catch up, though their lifetime wage suffers because of underpaid years	Kommunal thinks that a mix of different kinds of temporary employment should not be possible for more than two years
Employment Protection Act (LAS) states that an employee should be permanently employed if they've been temporarily employed with the same kind of temp employment for more than two years in a five year period			Young people who start as temps aren't "temps for life" but it takes time for them to catch up to the average in terms of wage, employment security and number of hours	The percentage of employees in temporary employment after two years is too high
The law against discrimination of part-time and temporary employees prohibits giving worse or less benefits to part-time employees or temps				"To solve the problem of temporary employment it is important to limit employees ability to employ temporarily"
				Temporary employment should automatically become permanent after two years

## Temp for Life? (2013)

What is gathered	Relation to labour market	Relation to other groups	Consequences of precarious employment	Interests and normative statements
				The high percentage of temps in the welfare sector makes the jobs unattractive
<b>Demands in Temp for Life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current laws must be followed. Temps cannot be discriminated against in terms of wage or working conditions.</li> <li>• A mix of different kinds of temporary employment should not be possible for more than two years.</li> <li>• It's important to reduce the wage difference between women and men.</li> <li>• Short time leave should not be solved with temps, employees should have pools of permanent employees to fill in.</li> <li>• Employees should plan ahead better when it comes to planned absences.</li> <li>• Employee turnover because of retirement and other changes is relatively high and employees should plan for that so that there's no gap between employments.</li> <li>• All actors in the welfare sector should make plans for long time recruitment of staff with adequate training.</li> <li>• Local and regional governments should continue to hire and train staff guided by the trade union collective agreements.</li> </ul>			

## Is This Okay? (2014)

What is gathered	Relation to labour market	Relation to other groups	Consequences of precarious employment	Interests and normative statements
The report "Temp for Life" (2013)	Number of temporary employments is increasing for the fifth year in a row in Kommunal's sector	Private sector employees are temps to a higher degree	After three years, 50% of temps had become permanently employed	The time it takes to become permanently employed is too long
A survey from 2012 with 10 000 Kommunal members in child and elderly care, this report only uses the 5700 elderly carers	Number of temporary employment was high in the 2000s but decreased until 2008 (except for 2005 and 2006)	80% of permanently employed members in elder care have care training or equivalent, 65% of temps, and 55% of hourly workers	After six years, 90% of temps had become permanently employed	"As can be seen in diagram 2.1, the percentage of temporary employees is somewhat higher in the private sector compared to the public sector, but both sectors are <i>bad at employing permanently</i> ."
Kommunal's wage statistics	In 2008, 25% of employees in Kommunal's sector were temporarily employed; in 2013, 31%		That more than half of the precariously employed in elderly care have training implies that they want to work with elderly care but can't find permanent employment	It's worrying that many Kommunal members do not see a future in their line of work
Employment statistics from Statistics Sweden	24% staff turnover in Kommunal's sector (8% for local government white-collar employees)		Elderly care: 40% of permanent employees work full-time; 30% of temps and 25% of hourly workers	The great percentage of temp workers in the welfare sector makes the jobs unattractive
Definition: safe employment = permanent employment			Elderly care: One in ten permanent and temporary employees have a second job, one in five hourly workers	The welfare sector will have great recruitment needs in the coming years
Definition: precarious employment = temporary employment, hourly work			Elderly care: More than half of the precariously employed have split shifts, 44% of the permanently employed	Precarious employment and employee turnover affects the quality of welfare
Definition: temporary employment = substitute employment and general temporary employment			Elderly care: The precariously employed have to take the shifts they're offered to get a living wage	High employee turnover is cumbersome for the permanent employees

## Is This Okay? (2014)

What is gathered	Relation to labour market	Relation to other groups	Consequences of precarious employment	Interests and normative statements
Hourly work is in this report separated from other temporary employment			Elderly care: Temps have fewer evaluations with their bosses than permanent employees, 75%/50%	It's unreasonable that an employee can be temporarily employed for as long as they can be now
General temporary employment, ALVA, a Swedish employment law from 2007 introduced as explanation for increasing temporary employments			Elderly care: Temps have fewer chances to negotiate their wages than permanent employees	
Statistics are from Kommunal's members, non-members probably have worse conditions			Elderly care: Temps have lower full-time wages and 50% lower income than permanent employees	
The law against discrimination against part-time and temporary employees			Elderly care: 50% of permanent employees were offered training on the job in the last year, 40 percent of temps and 35% of hourly workers	
EU law is supposed to protect employees from long temporary employments			Elderly care: No difference between groups in trust in management	
			Elderly care: Permanent employees experience more stress than the precariously employed	
			Elderly care: No difference in work load or motivation between safe and precarious	
			Elderly care: Permanent and temporary employees want to keep working in the same sector in three years to higher degree than hourly workers	
			Elderly care: Permanent employees worry less about unemployment	
			Elderly care: Small differences in how easy the different groups think it would be to find a new job	
			Elderly care: 70% of permanent employees have access to healthcare benefits, ~40% of temps, ~25% of hourly workers	
			Elderly care: 79% of permanent employees have access to work clothes, 62% of temps, 57% of hourly workers	
<b>Demands in Is This Okay?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit temporary employment, remove AVA. Temporary employment should have to be motivated. Employers should negotiate with trade unions over the right to temporarily employ.</li> <li>• Right to full-time, politicians should work towards a right to full-time employment. Publicly funded employers should by law be required to lead the way.</li> <li>• Limit split shifts, employers should be prohibited by law to use split shifts more than necessary, labour negotiations should regulate exceptions from the rule.</li> </ul>			



## Status: Precarious (2016)

What is gathered	Relation to labour market	Relation to other groups	Consequences of precarious employment	Interests and normative statements
[In this report, temporary employees refer to both hourly workers and others]	Temporary employment has increased since the late 90s	Kommunal's members are more precarious than others because their work is characterised by high employee turnover, low wages, and part-time work	Temporary employees have lower access to social insurance, and are less often union members	The high employee turnover in the public sector cannot be combined with maintained quality and continuity
Precariat: People with different backgrounds but shared uncertainty when it comes to wage, line of work and material conditions	Six different kinds of temporary employment, big differences between them	Male coded jobs have higher wages and safer conditions; temporary employment is more common in jobs with >50% women	Increased precarisation of work makes life more unpredictable for permanent employees too	Interviews: Quality of elderly care is damaged by high turnover
Economic historian Berit Bengtsson: replaceability of workers leads to worse conditions, structural changes in the economy has created a precariat	General temporary employment introduced in 2008	Women and individuals born outside of the Nordic countries are overrepresented among part-time employees	Highly employable individuals can experience temporary work as a beneficial, to less employable individuals it leads to precariousness	Temporary work affects quality of welfare
Guy Standing defines the precariat as a heterogeneous group that share a feeling of working instrumentally, opportunistically and precariously	More precarious forms of temporary employment have increased	Members of the gender minority have worse conditions than the overrepresented gender when it comes to temporary employment	Most temporarily employed Kommunal members want permanent employment, in all age groups and in different lines of work	Poor and precarious working conditions is a risk to staff recruitment in the welfare sector
Unspecified research shows that continuity is an important indicator for quality in the care sector		Temporary employment has increased more for blue-collar than white-collar jobs	Interviews: Unpredictable working hours and little control over when you work.	Quality of care is clearly hurt by the increasing use of temporary employment
Economic historian Inger Jonsson and gender studies professor Anita Nyberg make a ranking of precariousness in Sweden: 1, undocumented immigrants, 2, unemployed housekeepers, 3, temporary employees		Men are less likely to be temps in both blue-collar and white-collar jobs	Interviews: Temp has to sign away right to permanent employment to keep working	"The precarisation of the public sector is indefensible."
Stress researcher Hugo Westerlund (radio interview): risk of unemployment makes people stay at jobs that they dislike, which leads to stress		Temps are younger than permanently employed (31.2/42.8 years) but the average age of temps have increased over the last 30 years	Interviews: Hierarchy between temps and permanent staff	Action must be taken to reduce the difference in precariousness between men and women regardless of their line of work
Kommunal's report "Is This Okay?" (2014)		Temporary employees in Kommunal's sector is older than the average, 37 years; they also start working earlier on average	Feeling of work being for survival, of being forced to work as much as possible and of precarious living conditions, as in Standing's definition	One reason for gender inequality could be that women have a greater responsibility for taking care of family members and unpaid housekeeping
Carin Ulander Wänman, department of law at Umeå University: temporary employees are used as a flexible work force for local and regional governments, and this leads to social, economic and medical risks		There's a big gender difference in temporary employment within age groups as well as in total	Conflict between permanent and temporary employees at the same workplace	
Kommunal's report "Temp for Life" (2013)		Only 6% of the youngest age group temps are temporarily employed because of higher education	Employers exploit the precarious position of temporary employees	
Kommunal's report "The Price of Flexibility" (2016)			Worry about finances	
Kommunal's political programme for gender equality (2016)			Social life is hard to combine with temporary work	

**Status: Precarious (2016)**

What is gathered	Relation to labour market	Relation to other groups	Consequences of precarious employment	Interests and normative statements
Five semi-structured interviews with randomly chosen temporarily employed Kommunal members			Difficult to question employer	
The law of general temporary employment, AVA, has made it easier for employers to use temporary employment			Precariousness leads to stress and health risks	
<b>Demands in Status: Precarious</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove general temporary employment. There should always be an objective reason for temporary employment.</li> <li>• Introduce obligations to keep the staff when publicly financed services are taken over by private enterprise.</li> <li>• An individual who has been temporarily employed with the same employer should be permanently employed after two years.</li> <li>• The order of priority in employment of the employment protection act (LAS) should be counted from when an employee first started working for the same employer regardless of if it is private or public.</li> <li>• The Swedish central organisation for local and regional governments (SKL) should have a 10% goal of temporary employees in care, school and healthcare.</li> <li>• Introduce substitute employee pools as the norm for local and regional governments, so that permanent employees can fill in for vacancies.</li> <li>• Individualise paid parental leave, with no possibility of transferring days between parents or legal guardians.</li> </ul>			

### **Appendix C: Temporary employment in Swedish labour law**

Historically, Swedish trade unions and employers have found a common interest in promoting self-regulation over state regulation. As a result, Sweden has little substantive legislation in labour law compared to other European countries. Instead, the Swedish model is one of “bipartite self-regulation distinguished by industry-wide collective agreements, high union density and a high rate of affiliation to employers’ associations” (Kjellberg, 2017, p. 370). One of few exceptions to self-regulation is the statutory limits on employers’ rights to hire and fire, regulated in the employment protection act (*LAS*); a law that has been a frequent target of criticism from employers (Kjellberg, 2017). As temporary employees are exempt from many of the protections of the employment protection act, this law also regulates temporary employment. Because of this, several of the political demands made in the reports in this study relate to it. Temporary employment in the Swedish legal context is used in contrast with permanent, salaried employment, and includes both employment by the hour and employment for a longer pre-determined duration. Up until 2007, employers were required to have what was called objective justification for temporary employment: such justification could be to cover for the temporary absence of a permanent employee, or to employ in order to complete a temporary project. In 2007, a new kind of temporary employment was added to the employment protection act called general temporary employment. While this kind of temporary employment has a legal time limit of two years (like other kinds of temporary employment in Swedish law), it doesn’t require objective justification (Glavå & Hansson, 2016). The employment protection act as a whole has been a point of contention for the employers, but this particular part of the law has been criticised by the blue-collar trade unions in the last few years.