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Knowing People

The Empathetic Designer

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This paper puts forward some initial thoughts about design as an activity that is intimately connected with certain forms of emotional labour. In particular, we want to focus on the social skill of empathy, which is seen as one of the basic emotional aspects that play a role within design. The socio-philosophical background of the idea of ‘empathy’ is explored in order to better grasp the role of empathetic labour in design and design thinking. The assumption is that the empathetic designer wants the best for the user and for him/herself, but given the theoretical socio-philosophical background of the idea of empathy, we question whether this aim is realistic.

Introduction

Understanding the perspective and social context of the user is one of the most important parts of design and design education. In previous research we were able to show that user-centredness and successful teamwork are directly related to empathy, empathetic knowledge and the developing of empathetic skills.¹ Paying more active attention to empathy throughout the design project is likely to prevent the development of unfeasible products, increasing costs and avoidable time delays.

Thus, empathy and empathetic strategies became important parts of certain design education models being taught in the US (e.g., at Stanford University) and Germany (e.g., Design School, Potsdam). In this paper, we will therefore use design thinking in particular as a concrete example for our subject.

Acting empathetically is something that is basically positive. However, with respect to the term “emotional labour”, which was coined by Arlie Hochschild², one can pose the question as to how far the initiation of empathetic skills for the purposes of companies may lead to “emotional dissonances” on the part of the design thinker, thus giving reason to describe this as a “pathology of modernism”.³ In the literature about emotional labour, empathy plays only a marginal role. It is one aim of this article to extract empathy as a form of emotional work within the designer’s activity. We therefore have to consider theories that connect personal experiences with developments on a macro level within society. For that reason we intend to integrate theories from the sociology of emotions and sociology of work with philosophical approaches. We will focus on two standpoints regarding emotional labour that address either the development of new disciplinary actions or an increase in freedom regarding emotional expressions (informalisation).

We will a) give a short introduction to the history of the term “empathy”, b) shed light on the relevant theoretical background in philosophy and sociology, c) explain what methods are used in education in the area of design thinking to develop empathy as a crucial element of the designer’s activity and d) give some concluding thoughts on the ambivalent role of people-centred design in the modern working world.

Empathy

We will begin with a short and straightforward definition of empathy, then turn to a brief summary of the history of empathy and clarify the theoretical background regarding emotional work and empathy.

Empathy – A Definition

Empathy is the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person.⁴ Empathy as understood within the original philosophical context is best seen as a “form of inner or mental imitation for the purpose of gaining knowledge of other minds”.⁵ As an important form of social cognition, empathy is the capacity “to share, to experience the feelings of another person”.⁶ Empathy is “an affective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another’s emotional state or condition, and that is similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel”.⁷ It is an ability that allows us to comprehend the situation of the other and imaginatively and affectively place ourselves in that situation, in short: to understand the perspectives of others.⁸ In this paper, we understand the term “empathy” in the broadest

sense as embracing the involuntary and the arbitrary feeling with someone as well as the taking over of perspectives or calculating “mind-reading”.⁹

History of the Term Empathy

The term *empathy* has its roots in the German aesthetics of the late nineteenth century, when aesthetics moved from the objective world to the working of the mind as an essential feature of the aesthetic contemplation of objects. In 1873, Robert Vischer suggested the term *Einfühlung*, the predecessor of empathy, to mean humans’ spontaneous projection of feeling into the people and things they perceive. In this tradition, Theodor Lipps (1903) developed the term *Einfühlung* exclusively for psychology from a psychological, non-metaphysical perspective and through a phenomenological method.¹⁰ In 1909, Titchener coined the term *empathy* as a rendering of *Einfühlung*, defined as a process of humanising objects, of reading or feeling ourselves into them.¹¹ An emphasis on perceptive awareness of another person’s feelings was apparent in this view. Psychological theories about empathy in particular were influenced by this view until George Herbert Mead added a cognitive component, an ability to understand, to empathise. Mead introduced the terms of “role taking” and “perspective taking” to the socio-psychological, philosophical and sociological debates.¹² Mead points out, that ‘perspective taking’ is the central premise of human action. He describes how the imitation of social roles leads to the development of an individual self: socialisation in his eyes takes place via social interactions within groups and the testing of different roles. In the following decades, theoretical debates arose in various disciplines about the concept and nature of empathy. Psychoanalytic theorists and psychotherapists in particular described their own practical experiences within the clinical setting and developed psychological concepts and frameworks.¹³ These created attention in economics research and still are of great interest for management theories, human resource management as well as for organisational psychology.

Empathy in Philosophy

An intense debate in the current philosophical literature about empathy focuses on two essential ways which supposedly lead to empathy:¹⁴

1. *Understanding the other via similarity (simulation theory)*: empathy is based on the ability to mentally simulate another person. It is a special case of mental simulation, in which the outputs are affective or emotional states: “empathy consists of a sort of ‘mimicking’ of one person’s affective state by that of another”.¹⁵
2. *Understanding of the other via the generation of knowledge (theory theory)*: the observer understands the other person via an Archimedean point. There exists a shared emotional knowledge

and vocabulary about feelings, so that one can relate to these intersubjective feelings. Theory theorists consider this folk-psychological body of knowledge to be essentially equivalent to a scientific theory that people can construct about another human being.¹⁶ This is why the theory theory is characterised as emotionally “cold”.

While there is ongoing scientific discussion between simulation theory and theory theory¹⁷ we think that the differences between these two models are not critical¹⁸ and we therefore argue for a construction model embracing both approaches. Construction here means that we need to be able to construct alternative realities in order to understand other human beings who are not completely like us. This model helps us understand empathy not only at an ontological level but also helps shed light on its function. The assumption within design discourse is that from empathetic interaction with users and other design team members, viable products arise. To better grasp the role that empathy plays in the field of social interactions, we apply a broader comprehension of empathy that focuses on functions and interactions, addressing theories at the intersection between philosophy and sociology, including sociological theories on labour and emotions.

Emotional Work and Empathy

The socio-historical theory of emotions shows that the control of affect, which resulted from economic forces as described by Norbert Elias as well as the typical modern attribute of the “flattening” of emotional life that Georg Simmel described, were relieved by the emphasis on emotions and “the emotional”.¹⁹ An inverted development seems to have taken place: people who nowadays do not give their emotions free reign are likely to be labelled as conspicuous or even as having a disordered personality, although the expression of certain emotions would have caused astonishment or even corresponding sanctions in former decades.²⁰ Furthermore, this growing public articulation of and discussion about emotions goes hand in hand with the postulated possibility of the individual's access to his or her own personal feelings. Guidebooks on emotional self-management and constructs like David Golemans “emotional intelligence” indicate the tendency towards teaching the individual how to lead the right kind of emotional life.²¹ Parallel to this, scientific discourse across all disciplines about emotions evidences a clear upturn of this kind.²² In socio-philosophy the assumption is that emotions are fundamental to the structuring of day-to-day social reality and at the same time arise in reaction to social constellations.²³ Feeling rules and emotional competencies are necessary in all social systems, which is why daily routines within the work context are also permeated by mechanisms that both teach and necessitate

emotional competencies. This means that economic scopes of action and emotionally detached professional organisations formerly signified as “callous zones”²⁴, cannot today do without certain forms of emotion management. Studies demonstrate the important role that emotions play for products and sales as well as for personnel policy.²⁵ Labour itself tends to be an attitude to life, linked to emotional experience. Realms from which emotions originate (family, friendships, relationships) are made use of – a characteristic of modern emotional labour.²⁶ The common ground of the scientific approaches in the field of emotions in the context of work (in philosophy, psychology, economics and sociology) is to be found in the idea that a mere rational bureaucratic organisation in the Weberian sense has been abandoned in favour of the emphasis on manifold ways in which organisations can be seen as “emotional arenas”.²⁷ New questions arise from this viewpoint, such as how to manage one’s own feelings in favour of the different institutional contexts in which certain emotions are expected or how myths, art and mass media influence typical emotional roles and scripts regarding the new emotional generosity. The aim is to interpret these new scopes of freedom, which come from knowledge about our own feelings. In these theories about social interactions and the social function of emotions, there are two main tendencies: 1. the “thesis of disciplinatio” and 2. the “thesis of informalisation”. They relate to two fundamentally different appraisals of individual emotions and emotional labour.

Thesis of disciplinatio: The commercial utilisation of emotions in all realms of human life results in a conditioning of feelings. The use of emotions within companies for the purpose of the company may lead to forms of alienation²⁸ and social pathologies (the term stems from Habermas²⁹). New forms of heteronomy are the outcome. Stakeholders learn to view their feelings as “emotional capital” and to behave as “emotional entrepreneurs” who invest (and cancel) their feelings on the employment and relationship market in order to gain social appreciation.³⁰

Thesis of informalisation: The binding character of external codes of conduct and the control of affect (e.g. regarding clothes and sexuality) became less obligatory in the late twentieth century³¹ leading to more freedom of expression of emotions. Emotion management on the part of the employee may lead to subjective control vis-à-vis the customer or colleagues. This allows for an implicit account of power that might be experienced by the individual as an affirmation of his impact on others and therefore may strengthen his self-confidence.³² An example of the economic version of the informalisation theses is the *new service management school*. They argue that the alienating assembly-line approach to organising service work belongs to the past, and that to deliver the sort of qualities of service that customers want requires an ‘empowerment’ approach towards service work.³³

If actors interpret their work as a way to develop their personality and gain benefits and appreciation within society, one can ask the question as to whether individuals are able to achieve that form of valuation – and if all individuals actually want it. Furthermore, the promise of new possibilities of emotional self-monitoring is accompanied by the promise of being able to control other stakeholders' emotions³⁴, which also applies to the usage of empathy in design. Emotional self-management can be prepared and sold as canned knowledge, “transforming emotion into a marketable product”.³⁵ This means that a person does not reflect his or her emotions for the sake of their reflection, but rather due to their utility in fulfilling certain purposes, which are subject to more rational calculations about safety, well-being and the impact of one's own emotional self on others. It is questionable, if this process is clear to individuals and would therefore stand for an autonomic view of oneself, like the theses of informalisation states.

As we pointed out before, on the one hand the non-emotional is stigmatised and regarded as “unhealthy”. At the same time, there is also limitation on what feelings *can* be displayed in public. In the economic realm, it is mainly only controlled and reflected emotions that are sought (which can be seen in the successful concept of emotional intelligence, see Neckel 2005 and Sieben 2007³⁶). Actual emotions, which possess a body-bound and involuntary affective part, are not accepted as a valuable informing medium about the inner state of a person in their own right. If these feelings defy deliberate control and therefore cannot be applied to achieve cognitively set aims, they are likely to be given the stigma of a symptom of mental illness.³⁷ If this is the case, the exclusion of spontaneous emotions has only been moved gradually from one level to another. This paper poses the question about whether this also applies for the profession of the designer.

Even if empathy is a basic requirement for mutual emotional understanding and even if empathy is part of arguable models like “emotional intelligence”³⁸, the issue of practice-oriented empathy is only broached marginally. The specific demand concerning empathy and its purpose-rational and instrumental usage has been neglected in most parts of the literature. But empathy can be regarded as a basic factor for emotional labour. This can be deduced from different demands concerning teamwork capacity and “social skills”. Furthermore the amount of literature about personal tests regarding social competencies and “emotional intelligence” is increasing. The economic psychologist Uwe Kanning explains:

Nowadays companies can hardly afford to only look at the professional competence or work experience of job candidates. In times when highly-qualified employees work in multi-professional teams and appear self-confident vis-à-vis their executives in the same way as customers vis-à-vis a

provider, social conduct is more and more becoming the key variable to success.”³⁹

In view of the realisation that the number of workers in the service sector connected with emotional labour has increased compared to the total number of employees⁴⁰, one can assume that empathy as an emotional and communicative skill will also be of greater importance. As an emotional and social competence, empathy functions as an important determinant in de-escalating behaviour and encourages a willingness to achieve a “win-win situation”.⁴¹ Empathy is also a means to reinterpret anger by placing oneself in the perspective of another person in order to assume a declarative reason for his or her conduct. Accordingly, we have seen an emergence of the view that empathy is an active and learnable technique that can be used for economic interests. Parallel to this, we have also witnessed an increase within the scientific discourse about empathy, as data bank analyses show.

The Empathetic Design Thinker

Empathy is oftentimes proposed as one of the key qualities of the designer.⁴² Dorothy Leonard was one of the first authors to write about the strong correlation between design and empathy and coined the term “empathic design”.⁴³ In her view, empathetic design enables companies to make product refinements in their customers’ own environments by identifying and addressing needs that may not be obvious. She states: “Habit tends to inure us to inconvenience; as customers, we create “work-arounds” that become so familiar we may forget that we are being forced to behave in a less-than-optimal fashion – and thus we may be incapable of telling market researchers what we really want.”⁴⁴ Thus, empathetic expertise could be considered a low-risk and low-budget investment.

We now want to analyse empathy in design using a Wittgensteinian framework, specifically his thoughts on language games, that can be used to clarify meanings of words taking different contexts into consideration. In this view, a single-edged definition of empathy must be misleading, because we do different things with the term. As Wittgenstein explains: “It is as if somebody explains: “Playing consists in moving things on a space according to certain rules...” – and we answer: You seem to be thinking of board games; but these are not all games that exist.”⁴⁵ He decides in §7: “I will call the whole thing “language game”: language and the actions that are interwoven with it.” Language games are courses of action in behaviour in which speaking and other forms of acting are connected with each other. In the following we will treat “empathy in design” as one of many possible language games about empathy in order to analyse a particular mode of talking about empathy. We present various models that have been described focusing on the

enhancement of empathetic user experience, the communication of user insights within design teams and teamwork. We have chosen design thinking as an example for an empathy-driven approach.

Beyond Leonard's "empathic design" and certain techniques for creating empathetic understanding, some forms of 'design thinking' teach techniques which aim at deploying empathy in order to gain information that cannot be gathered through traditional marketing or product research. This kind of design thinking is user-centred and teamwork-based and seeks to solve problems in an iterative way. It accentuates the importance of trans-disciplinary teams and a variety of methods and tools gathered from different fields, ranging from design to social sciences. The term "design thinking" as it is used in this context was mainly coined by a group of Stanford Professors (David Kelley, Terry Winograd and Larry Leifer) and the design firm IDEO, based on their experiences in product and engineering design. Many define design thinking as human-centred innovation, a method for innovation and enablement⁴⁶ and the third culture in education besides science and humanities⁴⁷, while others are of the opinion that the decade of design thinking already has ended.⁴⁸ Design thinking relies on six iterative working modes:

"Understand" and "Observe" are about exploring the nature of the problem and understanding the users and their needs: "one of the principles of design thinking is that it requires empathy for users to inspire ideas."⁴⁹

The findings from this phase are then categorised in a "Synthesis" step, which incorporates the main findings and acts as a "persona" (an ideal user) to validate decisions later in the process.

The remaining three modes are "Ideate", "Prototype" and "Test". They are about generating ideas expressed through prototypes in order to test them with users, which are close to the persona.

The whole process should guide the designer iteratively from a vague understanding of a problem to a concrete and appropriate solution. The six modes can be passed in linear order, but they can also be adapted depending on the status of the given project. If, for example, a design team discovers that they did not fully understand users' behavior while testing a prototype, they might go back to the "Understand" mode to conduct further interviews. As a learning model, design thinking supports design creativity, utilising project and process-based learning by emphasising creative confidence and competence.

Empathy cannot only be taught by conveying techniques and methods: a change in mentality, the generation of new mindsets is necessary to achieve empathy – for being empathetic is a complex, demanding, strong yet subtle way of being.⁵⁰ It can be seen as both a cognitive and an emotional construct. Precisely because empathy is such a dichotomous construct between affective

and rational capabilities, an education focusing on building empathy needs to be double tracked. This is realised on the one hand by teaching methods and tools (rational/cognitive) as well as imparting mindsets and, on the other hand by an empathetic culture (emotional). In a broader sense, empathy in design thinking is relevant on three fronts:

- Empathy with the user.
- Empathetic communication of user insights within the team.
- Empathetic teamwork.

To give an overview of empathetic activities, we will begin with the concrete tasks and techniques concerning empathy within the designers' and design thinkers' work.

Empathetic User Experience

Clearly, the phases "Understand" and "Observe" are strongly related to empathy, and are the most demanding phases of the process. Until the end of a project, the team will always go back to these phases because the point of view of the user and the user insights gained determine the measure for future ideas and results. Design thinking provides basic skills for interview techniques and ethnographic user observation. Thus, design thinkers gain insights into the user's thoughts and feelings in order to create an empathetic framework. This method is linked to the model of *theory theory* mentioned above: they learn to understand people better by collecting facts about them.

Other authors in design research literature also describe the social skill of empathy in relation to designers' need to empathise with users in order to understand their experiences on an emotional level.⁵¹ Buchenau and Fulton Suri furthermore point out, that a deeper understanding is obtained when user experiences resonate with personal experiences.⁵² Thus, it is generally accepted that strengthening designers to make personal connections is the most successful way to a deeper understanding of the user's special needs and to developing successful products. At the same time, the understanding gained should not only help to better grasp the user's needs, but also to explore new associations when things are seen from a different perspective.

It is assumed that the strategies to develop such a profound knowledge about the user's needs should exceed common market analysis methods, by using extensive interviewing techniques and direct observation. But empathetic user research is also likely to be accompanied by certain problems that need to be considered within design education. For example, active observation of the users can make it harder for a designer to abstract from the point of view of the user. Once the designer possesses knowledge about the requirements of others, it will be harder to get back from an individual level to a more general level. According to

Kouprrie/Visser, when training designers to design with empathy, one must enable them to step into and step out of the user's life.⁵³ The empathy that is established by these techniques is an "inquisitive feeling of opportunity: to imagine what it is like to be another person, in another situation, with new tools and systems and services."⁵⁴ Indeed, empathy always indicates that there remains some distance between the empathiser and the other person – otherwise we would more likely talk about certain forms of emotional contagion. The concept of the reflective interspace is already interwoven into the concept of empathy, as Theodor Lipps has previously pointed out.

In general, the design research literature seems to assume that empathetic competencies already exist within human beings and are only enhanced via empathetic design techniques: "these methods are often the most fulfilling for design teams because they 'feel right': the methods act as extensions of characteristics you already have".⁵⁵

Empathy in design is often compared with the empathetic relationship that the therapist tries to establish with a client/patient – the therapist is predominantly working in order to help the patient. In design, "you will need to empathise with the people who will be using, buying, considering, or consuming your design".⁵⁶ But can we talk about an empathetic "relating to" the user if the aim is a monetary one? What can the user expect from an empathetic designer, what does s/he need? Drawing on the socio-critical theories of the Frankfurt School, there is empirical research that shows a multidimensional picture of the consumer not as a sovereign and rational being, but rather as a being unsettled by commodities and very emotional when handling monetary issues: individuals often act out of shame or insecurity, e.g. they buy certain things because they do not feel respected.⁵⁷ Many purchases are motivated by (negative) feelings and not by a rational and well-considered decision. Conversely, consuming the products that the market provides can also be seen as a possibility of experiencing freedom – the freedom to choose whatever one likes, being able to select between different versions of a product and develop an individual identity using commercial artifacts. The philosophy of the Frankfurt School challenged this conception of "customer is king", viewing the user (or consumer) as victim of capitalist industry. Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse described the advertising industry, mass media and consumption markets as outcomes of the expansion of capitalism, creating more and more new products and "false needs". In contradiction to this production of "false needs", design and design thinking focus on the generation of user needs from close observation of people – meaning that the aim is not to design products that *should* be needed but rather products that *are* needed without the customer knowing it. But does the designer really make use of empathy and create viable

products that fill up a void which the user did not know was actually there? Or does the designer create needs under the guise of empathetic user-centredness? These are the main questions that remain open when taking into account theories of emotions and work and transferring them to the realm of empathetic design. A more in-depth investigation of these questions is beyond the scope of this paper, but further investigations should look at how far one can talk about an autonomous user who is being supplied with meaningful products by an attentive design thinker.

Communication of User Insights within Design Teams

The design thinker has to exchange user-insights gained with the other team members. S/he has to make sure that team-mates get the same picture of the user. There are a few methods to share this empathetic knowledge, which are connected with the basic steps that are crucial to developing empathy – a high competence of reflection, a sophisticated language⁵⁸ and aesthetic clarity.⁵⁹

Storytelling

Storytelling helps to communicate the user's insights to the other team members as well as to the client. In fact, narration is a requirement for creating an empathy-inducing situation. With the storytelling-technique, design thinking aims at developing a sophisticated language, which is also a premise of empathetic understanding and perspective-taking.

Metaphor

To communicate the design challenge or the given problem to team members and external partners, it is helpful to use the “metaphor” technique. Creating new metaphors also generates new vocabularies and provides different perspectives which help to interpret the world; the philosopher Richard Rorty emphasises how the creation and development of new vocabularies coincides with the development and adoption of new perspectives.⁶⁰ Using the metaphor technique, a form of aesthetic clarity is trained, that is, an ability to transform facts and information into metaphors, which helps the other person or team member to create a clear and accurate empathetic picture. This aesthetic clarity is a basic precondition for empathy.⁶¹

Persona

After taking the perspective of the user and “walking in his shoes” via observation and interviews, the user insights need to be clustered and synthesised. This is done by creating a point of view combining all user profiles (a persona). The ability to be reflective, being able to step back from one's own opinions and the ability to regulate one's own emotions are reflected in this method and at the same time form a basic premise for empathy.

Empathetic Teamwork

Design thinking functions through the interplay of different perspectives, which gather together within interdisciplinary teamwork. For a company this means that colleagues from different disciplines interact in a much more distinct way than before. IT experts, biologists, designers, psychologists, economists, etc. do not work individually on different process steps and pass on their results to other colleagues. The focus on interdisciplinary teamwork demands an extensive exchange of ideas as well as an empathetic and constructive climate. But the more far away a person is from another person's point of view, his background and education, the more difficult it is to take over his perspective. As the ability to think oneself into another person and to look at the world through his eyes, empathy can be regarded as the most relevant and basal social competence of a team member. People sometimes feel constrained in their subjective and individual development because of the emphasis on team consensus. That is why empathy in design teams focuses on negating an excessively strong relation to own agendas and topics. Team processes also defy control via company-internal hierarchies, for example. At this point, design thinking is meant to work as a new organisational concept that discharges achievement potentials which do not require control anymore.

In conclusion, we can now extract some aspects that seem to be important for the meaning of empathy in design and design thinking. Tools of empathetic design are seen as transporters of "real feelings".⁶² Empathy is something that goes beyond mere knowledge⁶³ and therefore tends to be a sure form of wisdom. This wisdom stems from experience of the "human condition" itself and involves a "relating to" more than just a "knowing about" the user.⁶⁴ Empathy as a strategy relates most closely to therapeutic approaches: the designer is open-minded, absorbs user-experiences "without judging", etc. Empathy supports the design process as design considerations move from rational and practical issues to personal experiences and private contexts. The designer can become the user for a moment.⁶⁵

Discussion

As the literature about empathy in design claims, designers "feel right" when they act empathetically and acting empathetically is something that is truly positive. These statements parallel recent publications about the "empathic civilisation"⁶⁶ or "the age of empathy"⁶⁷, which are convinced that empathy is genuinely positive and leads to a better world. Their standpoint clearly advocates the informalisation theses: empathy empowers the designer to view his emotional capacities as unique and to act in a self-controlled, autonomous way, taking into account – empathetically – the needs of others. On the other hand, one should keep in mind the

mechanisms and rules of customer-oriented bureaucracy, in which the work of a designer takes place – a form of work organisation in which there are dual, and potentially contradictory, logics at play. Through this lens, one could see the “dictation of the customer” and the need for emotional self-management as a new form of social constraint. New patterns of emotional regularisation then do not have much in common with emotional liberality, because emotional self-management, as it can be found in the discourse about emotional intelligence, stands for a socially standardised request for the sanction of socially undesired feelings and for the “good”, truly felt emotions that are expected from the individual. At this point we can see that we are once again talking about affective control and regulation. That would contradict the theses of informalisation, which hypothesised a change from externally controlled to self-determined and spontaneous feelings. If we transform these assumptions to the field of empathy in design, we should question to what extent we find aspects of empathy that are socially desired and need to be controlled by the individual. Being empathetic as an imperative within the economic area is a form of discourse that has the possibility of leading to new forms of dissatisfaction and – more than this – new extremes of inauthenticity. Further research has to identify the manifold and ambivalent ways in which the language game of “empathy” serves or fails to fulfil its purposes for the designer’s activity.

If emotional and empathetic self-management indeed function as a general cultural program, and if the achievement of purposes that are provided by programs like emotional intelligence should count for the proof of emotional and empathetic autonomy, then there is a strong influence from external parts. But there is no direct link to these “external parts”: the emotionality of the actors is affected and manipulated by the actor *himself* as well as by the economic system that integrates the actor’s emotionality in itself. The concept of the autonomous self that asks for individual initiative and mental skills carries with it the paradoxical effect that enhanced self-monitoring and strengthened control correspond to each other.⁶⁸ This speaks for a commodification of feelings and, vice versa, the emotionalisation of the economy. It is not the subjective or social control of empathy that comes into question, because then we would have to assume a “real” empathy that is being controlled and deformed. In fact the focus should be on the empathetic habitus which is, for example, embedded in a history of the “empathic civilization”.⁶⁹

As mentioned before, an interesting discourse on emotions and their usage in the economy characterises the debate on “emotional intelligence”. Critics view emotional intelligence as an “umbrella term” that contains not only supposedly trainable capabilities in emotional life but also several desired personality traits and personal dispositions or culturally preferred values and concepts

of morality.⁷⁰ If we look at the rising number of publications that deal with empathy in an economic context and some recent monographs about empathy, which have named attention an indicator for an initial discourse on empathy, we should ask if this empathy discourse possibly generates a completely new idea of our understanding of human beings and empathy.

In the area of design, in particular, a turning towards emotions can be observed, which may represent the “commodification of the authentic” that, according to Boltanski/Chiapello⁷¹, arose from the criticism of the emotional callousness within industrial capitalism. The designer is a dreamer, an artist, who dreams about “directions for products and services”⁷² and at the same time tries to place himself emotionally in the perspective of others. The designer is the symbol for the new worker in late capitalism because “flexible capitalism”⁷³ inextricably connects autonomy and control.

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