Mothering the post-industrial city: Family and gender in urban re-generation
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CHAPTER VI
TRANSACTIONS II:
RITUALS OF REFLEXIVITY AND THE POST-INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY
My mother took care never to tell me to do anything. She would only reason with me sweetly, like one intelligent, mature person with another.

Sylvia Plath

Beyond conflict and government: ritual-like transactions

If mothers and professionals work together in a classroom setting with policy ambitions between them, what are they performing together? What is done in the courses? What is it that is produced in their transactions? And how does this relate to the desired urban future for Rotterdam? In this chapter, I argue that whatever conflict I witnessed and described in chapter 5, whatever mediations there were, whoever participated or objected, there was also much cooperation. This is what this final chapter deals with: what was done “in between” the actors.

Policy goals are translated into concrete interventions and some of the original emphasis and ambition is lost. And then, concrete policy interventions meet (a group of) mothers and are mediated in this transaction: some plans backfire, some plans are lost in transactions, some plans never quite translate into consequence because of sluggishness and lethargy. It is tempting to say, then, that parenting guidance practices are futile. That the interventions don’t do much at all, that they have no or very little effect. Alas for the re-generation ambitions. Or maybe the interventions have different effects, perverse even. But such conclusions would be far too easily drawn. To point to the futility of the policies is to look only at what the policy designers and practitioners set out to do. And this would obscure so much of what the practices do, in fact, do. I argue in this chapter that in the parenting guidance practices that I researched, mothers and professionals coproduce reflexive and communicative subject-positions in ritual-like transactions.

The common theme of reflection and communication

When I participated in the practices, I soon identified a common theme to them. We now know from the previous chapters that the practices differed greatly: Frontlijn worked with interns that complained of lethargy, aiming to bring order. Social work organised short courses and “themed meetings” focused on concrete issues. Some practices aim for a basic sense of order and cleanliness in family life, others for frank sex education. Teachers speak from varying dispositions and so do mothers. Practices and their effects can be turned upside down because of these variations.

But the practices also had something powerful in common: they were all centred on reflection and communication. In the previous chapters, I already wrote of communications and reflections of mothers and professionals in parenting guidance practices. There were debates, discussions, exercises, mediations, negotiations and conflict. In fact, parenting guidance practices are often explicitly set up to facilitate discussion and debate, as was the case, for example, in the “Growing
up with love” course about sex educating children. But my claim in this chapter goes further: I argue that reflection and communication were done in parenting guidance practices. No matter the substance of the issue at hand, transactions almost all took a particular form: that of egalitarian talk, negotiation, debate, evaluation or observation. And because of this, communicative and reflexive subject-positions were produced within the transaction. We practiced being and doing communicative and reflexive. The ritual-like transactions thus provided something of a reflexive and communicative mode of being and doing.

Given the ambitions of the city of Rotterdam and the organisations Frontlijn and social work, I expected much more emphasis in the practices on the transferral of pedagogical knowledge. I expected parenting tips to be exchanged, teachers explaining correct ways of correcting children, mothers asking for advice. But the practices were not so much about such types of knowledge-transferral. In fact, the authoritarian or at least hierarchical relationship from which such a practice would be possible was quite explicitly rejected by most professionals and mothers alike. The practices were about concrete issues and teachers did offer advice, but they did so in a particular egalitarian form and it is this form, I argue, that produces something interesting. Professionals teaching the classes and “guiding” the mothers were often uneasy in their role as figure of authority. They much rather stressed their equality to the mothers and engaged in discussion and egalitarian conversation. And on the other end of the transactions, mothers gladly positioned themselves as the ultimate experts, emphasising their unique position and stressing that “you have to be a mother to know”. So parenting guidance practices dealt with issues such as food and eating, school choice, sex and child abuse, bed-wetting and bullying. These contents were part of policy plans for parenting guidance, but what the practice of parenting guidance produced was more dependent on form than on these contents. Whether we talked about bullying or sex, we talked about it as equals, we debated the issues and negotiated statements. Even non-negotiable issues were negotiated and put up for debate. In the end, all contents were subjected – quite radically – to the form of debate, negotiation, egalitarian talk, evaluation and observation. And this had something to do with the uneasiness with hierarchy and what I will term egalitarian authority later on in this chapter.

Beyond the transferral of professional knowledge about certain issues, the point was that we practiced communication and reflection in a most egalitarian fashion. I first started noticing this when every meeting I participated in (first with Frontlijn, later with social work) started and ended with evaluations. Teachers would ask mothers what they thought of the previous meeting, what they would like to discuss in the following one, what aspects they would like to discuss more extensively and so on. Evaluation was, thus, one of the forms of communication and reflection that we practiced.
Ritual-like transactions

This form of the transactions produced something itself, regardless of the substantive message. The production of subject-positions took shape in particular “ritual-like” (cf. C. Bell, 1997: 138) transactions. I prefer the term “ritual-like” to ritual because the transactions that I researched were not rituals in the classic anthropological sense: they were not necessarily symbolic moments (see Verkaaik, 2009 and C. Bell, 1997 for overviews). Moreover, the participants did not see the transactions as rituals, nor did course designers anticipate the ritual-like character of the assignments, debates and discussions. But many transactions that I witnessed were ritual-like nonetheless. That is to say that particular forms of transactions were used repetitively. I distinguish 1) egalitarian talk, 2) negotiation, 3) debate, 4) observation and 5) evaluation. No matter the content or substance of the practices, we dealt with them in distinguished and repetitive forms and the point is that these forms produced something that goes beyond the content of the course or guidance meeting. This was the common theme in the practices that I have studied.

My use of the analytic framework of ritual-like transactions starts from the insights of Erving Goffman (1959; 1967). I, too, focus on ritual-like aspects of social encounters. Goffman did use the term ritual – other than I –and with it he drew attention to the way in which ritual can create conformity to the procedures and form of the situation itself. In general, the focus on form is much cited as a central aspect of ritual (C. Bell, 1997; Verkaaik, 2009). Ritual draws individuals into the situation, or – alternatively – the transaction, in part through this form. Moreover, for Goffman, ritual focuses attention on a particular object, underlining its value. Certain aspects of the situation are highlighted, certain values put front and centre and as a consequence, participants learn to behave and learn to be in particular ways (compare Verkaaik, 2009; 2010). In my research, this analytical focus on procedure and form is interesting. Because whether the content of what we talked about in the courses was sex, food, knowledge, bullying, marriage or authority, the point is that we talked about it in particular, distinguished and repetitive forms. How we talked (in an egalitarian fashion) dominated what we talked about (for example sex education) (compare Van Reekum & Van den Berg, forthcoming). By regulating the form, what we talked about was also limited. And through the form that was thus produced, certain ways of being were highlighted and made possible.

In addition to being so focused on form, the transactions were also repetitive. Some theorists look at ritual as a pedagogical instrument: as a way of becoming a certain type of subject through repetitive acts (Verkaaik, 2009). Especially in the work of Talal Asad (1993), this focus on pedagogy can be found (but this is a point also made by Goffman, for instance when he asserts that it is through ritual that an individual is taught to be a certain way (1967: 44). Asad draws on an analysis of monastic rites from the medieval Christian period to show how ritual was then
understood as practice meant to form certain dispositions. Ritual, in this sense, is not so much about symbolism, as it is about repetitive practice – scripts – through which certain subjectivities emerge. Or, to use the words of Saba Mahmood: ritual uses routine to cultivate desire (Mahmood, 2001). Ritual, in the work of Mahmood and Asad, contributes to the actualisation of a particular type of agency or subjectivity (compare Verkaaik, 2009; 2010). In this sense, ritual is a means of socialisation: of forming a habitus. Asad (1993) and Mahmood (2001) focus their attention on conscious habitus-formation through ritual: of practicing certain acts in order to form certain dispositions. The women in Mahmood’s research, for example, induce the desire to pray in the early morning precisely by practicing early-morning prayer repetitively.

From these theoretical perspectives on ritual, I take the focus on ritual-like practice and what practices produce. I look at the production of subject-positions within transactions. I will explain what I mean by subject-positions below. But first, I think it is important to note that my approach differs from Mahmood’s and Asad’s in the respect that I focus solely on what happens within the transaction, instead of looking for more durable, or long-term effects beyond the transaction. I did not follow much mothers nor teachers for a longer period of time due to my research design and the nature of the practices that I studied (most of them were short-term courses, I gave a full explanation of these aspects in chapter 3). And most parenting guidance practices were not long-term and disciplined enough to be considered in the same way as the repetitive rituals of for example the women in Mahmood’s research. A repetitive practice of early-morning prayer may be considered a means of inducing the desire to wake up early and pray. But participation in the ritual-like transactions that I studied most often consisted of much more incidental and partial participation, as I have described in chapter 3. Most importantly, though, I have looked at ritual-like transactions in relative isolation because I consider each transaction to be co-constituted by the participants. And as a consequence, each transaction requires participants to be and act differently. I will explain this theoretical perspective in more extent now.

**Producing subject-positions**

My focus in this chapter is on the production of subject-positions within transactions. I define subject-positions as “ways of doing, being (...) and thinking” (Starfield, 2002: 125) that become available in transactions. The ritual-like transactions open up possibilities for specific ways to be, talk and act. These possibilities exist within the transaction: they are produced in between the ones participating (in this case: mothers, teachers and myself). These participants are co-constituted in the transaction and are shaped according to the subject-positions. And their practice coproduces these positions. So in the case of the productions in parenting guidance practices, the available subject-positions are reflexive and communicative in specific ways: to be heard in a parenting
guidance practice, a participant is most likely to use a reflexive stance and to use for example egalitarian talk and evaluation as communicative strategies.

The participants are not only subjected to subject-positions. They co-produce these positions as well. My use of the term subject-positions and my focus on their production in transactions borrows from the work of Louis Althusser ([1971] 2008) and Michel Foucault (see for contemporary social scientific work based on Foucault’s writing on this subject Cruikshank, 1999; Edley, 2001; Youdell, 2006). For Foucault, persons are subjectivated in discourse. And for Althusser, persons are interpellated or hailed by Ideological State Apparatuses to become subjects ([1971] 2008; see also Van Reekum & Van den Berg, forthcoming for a contemporary application of Althusser’s framework, see also Korteweg, 2003; Adams & Padamsee, 2001). In both their approaches, the central point is that subjects are formed by discourse (Foucault) or ideology (Althusser). Power relations produce positions from which to be, act, talk and think. They create possibilities to be and do in certain ways. It limits these positions at the same time as it leaves room to manoeuvre. In the words of Youdell (2006: 517): “productive power constitutes and constrains but does not determine the subjects with whom it is concerned.” The focus on subject-positions is one that has been further developed and used in the field of sociologies of education (among other fields) (see for example Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989; Youdell, 2006; Starfield, 2002). There, like in my research, transactions in educational or pedagogical settings are the focus of attention as is the question what is produced through these transactions. Starfield (2002), for example, uses the term subject-positions to point to the way in which sociology students develop a position of authority in their writing and her definition of subject-positions (cited above) fits my approach very well.

In my approach, the production of subject-positions does not necessarily lead to durable habitus-formation (as with Bourdieu, 1996 or Asad, 1993) or subjectivation beyond the transaction itself. In future transactions, the participants of the parent guidance practices are subjected to and co-producers of what is available to them in these particular future transactions. These future situations will require them to behave and be differently. If transactions are always a coproduction, co-constituting the elements within the transaction, then the participants of the parenting guidance practices change according to the transaction. In other words: the transactions in parenting guidance produce reflexive and communicative ways of being that not necessarily translate to other transactions. For instance, a mother-child transaction in the home context probably produces quite different subject-positions. An adolescent child might, for instance, behave rather aggressively, prompting the mother to take a more authoritarian, strict or angry position than in the context of the parent guidance practice.

I am thus concerned with the local practice of transactional coproduction instead of the transformational power of policy. My perspective focuses on what mothers and teachers do, in
fact, produce together in classroom settings and guidance meetings instead of the policy effects in terms of how mothers undergo durable change as an effect of policy.

**Five ritual-like forms**

**Egalitarian talk**

In general, what we did in the courses and what we practiced in assignments was a particular form of communication: egalitarian talk. Talk was advised often as a parental strategy. But more importantly, we talked. And we did so in an egalitarian fashion. We practiced being communicative by talking. As I described in the previous chapters, the courses were designed to talk about certain subjects and to sit in a circle and debate. At times, it seemed that egalitarian talk was not only the primary parental strategy taught in courses, but also the only one. Communicative mothering, it seemed, was to solve problems through mere talking. *Egalitarian talk as a form of parent-child interaction* was consequently often rehearsed in the courses as was egalitarian talk as a form of dealing with parental problems in the context of a parenting guidance practice. We – the participants of the parenting guidance practice – engaged in the repetitive performative transaction of talking. In many instances, this took a distinguished form. There were many assignments in which we practiced egalitarian talk and these were by their form set apart from other talk. From my field notes:

> We do an assignment together. Half of the group of women (among whom myself) are asked by the teachers to go outside of the classroom. The other half stay inside. The group that is outside is asked to – once we come back into the room – act as though we are not interested in what the members of the group that stayed inside will tell us when we come back. The women inside the classroom are asked to tell us something about themselves. When I come back, Fatiha tells me a story about her life and I act as though I am not interested. Fatiha is irritated by my behaviour. When the teachers declare that we can stop doing the assignment, I am relieved that I can stop acting and Fatiha makes a joke to smooth over the initial irritation. When the teachers ask Fatiha and some others what they thought of this assignment, they tell us how bad it felt to not be heard.

In this assignment, we practiced bad communication in order to learn communicative skills. We took the role of the other – in this case the adolescent child – in order to practice empathy and understanding of the importance of attention and communicative skills for parent-child interactions. This is done in the form of an assignment in which “the mother” (impersonated by
half of the group of women) is placed vis-à-vis “the child” (the other group of participants) in a one-on-one situation. In this fabricated situation, we talked in a replicated real life situation, rehearsing talk for such situations.

Importantly, the parenting guidance practices centred attention on talking about the issue, no matter what the issue was. Both mothers and teachers engaged in talking as a repetitive form. Even when egalitarian talk was quite obviously limited as a form of dealing with the issue at hand. Here it is instructive to remember Robert from chapter 4. He came to a themed meeting about sex education because of his anxiety about his seven year old daughter’s early sexual behaviour. Robert quite explicitly asked the teacher for a solution to his problem and he indicated having talked to and with his daughter about sex numerous times.

When Anne (the teacher) asks Robert what he would like to teach his daughter, he says: “Well, a year ago, I think my answer would have been that I think that she should do whatever it is she wants as long as she is clear about her own boundaries. But now... I’m not so sure anymore. Because it seems to me she wants quite a lot. Now, maybe I think that as a parent, I should put some boundaries in place for her.”

Anne, in response, asks Robert questions about the situation and talks with him about possible solutions. She proposes to talk to his daughter about what it is that happened at school. She also proposes to talk to the parents of the boys in her class. Anne thus proposes more egalitarian communication while Robert is very explicitly trying to depart his communicative strategies, looking for clearer boundaries. The other parents offer him the help he is looking for in this instance:

“Can’t you just forbid that kind of behaviour?” A mother in the class says. Robert replies: “So you just forbid things and put up boundaries yourself?” The other parents look at him puzzled: “Sure we do”.

Robert looked for a solution to his parental problem beyond talking and found an alternative in the strategy of forbidding that is suggested by the other parents in the class. Apparently, Robert was so very used to talking to his child in a highly egalitarian relationship, that forbidding behaviour and putting up boundaries were innovative solutions to him. But the point is: in the transaction between Robert, Anne and the participating mothers, egalitarian talk is 1) practiced (rehearsed) and 2) highlighted as the primary and most important parental response to difficulty, even when talk is recognised as a limited means of dealing with the problem at hand. In this
ritual-like talk, the relative egalitarian relationship between parents and children is brought into focus and underlined as an important value.

**Negotiation**

Forms of communication that underscore hierarchy and authority, such as forbidding certain behaviours, commanding children and punishing transgressions, can be considered common in parent-child relationships. In the course materials and in the views of many of the teachers I encountered, these are called “authoritarian parenting practices” and considered a central and important problem, responsible for a range of problems with “youths”, especially when applied in parent-adolescent relationships. Later in this chapter, I will investigate this in more depth, but here, it is important as an introduction to one particular form of communication that was practiced in a ritual-like manner in the courses: negotiation.

The courses I participated in were very much focused on teaching mothers scripts for negotiation as an alternative to “authoritarian practices” and helping them to incorporate these through assignments and repetitive practice. Explicitly and especially, the course for parents of adolescents (“Dealing with adolescents”) aims at departing “authoritarian” command as a parental strategy. We practiced this in a parent room in Rotterdam:

> Simone (the teacher) tells us that if you want your adolescents to do something, stating a wish is the most effective form of communication. Commanding your children to do something breeds conflict, Simone says. She shares with us five guidelines for effectively stating a wish. She has printed them on a plastic card that she puts up on the blackboard. The five guidelines are: “Makes sure your wish is clear”, “Use the singular form”, “Aim for concrete behaviour”, “Be aware of your tone” and “Direct your wish at your adolescent child”. Simone gives an example: “So for instance, you could say: ‘I would really like you to…’”. You should be clear to your child about what behaviour you find desirable and not just talk about what kinds of behaviour you dislike. Stating a wish is a nice way of communicating this.” (...) After a while, Simone also confronts the participants in the class: “stating wishes is necessary, because, you know, children learn in school to talk back and negotiate. They don’t get orders in school anymore either. That’s why it has changed so much.”

This focus on negotiation and egalitarian relationships was not always agreed upon in the transactions in the classes. Mothers sometimes underscored their authority, highlighting the need for them to be clear about “who’s boss” or, alternatively, “who’s the mother”. They negotiated
the prescript to negotiate and thus did participate in the transaction using the form negotiation. Negotiation was produced nonetheless. For instance, in the next excerpt of my field notes, Ellen particularises negotiation:

Ellen feels that negotiation and deliberation may work in dealing with small problems with your children, but where “real problems” are concerned, it doesn’t work. She refers to her son and how he refuses to go to school. “You know, he has to. I cannot deliberate or negotiate this with him. He has to go to school. He is obliged by law and I am responsible. You know, but I didn’t go to school either. So I am asking something of him that I didn’t do myself. I understand where he’s coming from, but I want him to go to school too.” The other women agree: with “real problems”, negotiation is difficult if not impossible.

Through particularising negotiation, Ellen underscores the importance of negotiation and deliberation. She uses the form of negotiation. She does this first by deliberating with the participants of this class what she should do in this situation with her son. But second, she acknowledges the limits of her power in her relationship with her son and shows her empathy for his position. In response, Simone once more emphasises talk as a means of solving Ellen’s parental problems in – again – a negotiating transaction between the teacher and the mother. Negotiation was so very dominant as a form, that even something quite non-negotiable was negotiated. In the Netherlands, using physical violence towards children is prohibited by law. And professionals in the field of pedagogical advice thought of punishing children in general as an ineffective parenting tool. They much preferred praise and example as parental strategies (and this was also reflected in course outlines and official documentation of the organisations). So when one mother discussed a particular incident with a professional and student from Frontlijn, I was surprised by the negotiation that the professional engaged in. It is important to note that the mother in this example was monitored by the Dutch child protection services. And that this is an excerpt of field notes reflecting a “guidance house visit” of Frontlijn: a professional, an intern and I visited a mother in her home.

Jody (the mother) says: “you know I don’t hit my child, he’s far too cute for that, you know? I didn’t make him to do that to him! Look at him! (She points at a picture). But that one time, he almost jumped in front of a truck. And then I grabbed him and because I panicked, I smacked him too (een klap geven). Well I guess a neighbour saw that and she called the services instead of coming to me, you know?”
Justine (the professional from Frontlijn) responds: “Yeah, I understand why you would smack him then: you’re panicking.”

Jody: “and there are probably times where I would smack his behind, you know, I guess. But child abuse? No way.”

Justine: “Yeah, I sometimes got smacked by my parents.”

Instead of being clear about her professional norms and Dutch law, Justine engages in a negotiation that was initiated by Jody. Even smacking children is something to negotiate in this instance. Justine does not talk from a position of authority, rejecting or denouncing Jody’s statements and behaviour. Instead, the issue of hitting children is presented in this transaction as an object for negotiation. Justine first attests her understanding of Jody’s narrative. Jody, first having claimed to only have hit her child once, can then respond with a more general statement about smacking him, but that in her opinion, this does not constitute abuse. And then Justine accepts this negotiation with the affirmation using her own experience. In the rest of this “house visit”, Jody’s problems and run-ins with the child protection services were discussed, but in this instance, the form of negotiation is dominant and the equality of the two women is affirmed.

Debate
The most clearly distinguished form of communication we performed was debate.

The theme of this morning’s meeting with parents and professionals in Feyenoord is bullying. The idea is that mothers will debate with each other using statements about bullying. The morning is introduced by Lydia (the professional pedagogue): there are large posters on the walls with statements about bullying. All participants (the mothers, two interns and I) walk around the room to read the statements. We are given Post-its on which to write our name. The idea is that we can put these on the posters with the statements that we would like to talk about. Some preliminary discussion starts this way and pretty soon, several statements are evidently most popular. They are about the need for parents to supervise their children’s use of the internet, about responsibility for bullying, about kids that bully and those standing by, the responsibility of parents, and whether or not designer brand clothes should be banned from schools. Especially this last theme was very popular. Lydia monitored the debate that followed. She read one of the statements and then asked one of the women to say something about it. We were also asked to stand on one of two sides of the room signifying whether we were or weren’t in favour of or in agreement with the
Lydia passed around a carpet-beater to signify whose turn it was to speak. During the debate, Lydia highlighted several times that we were to debate the issue of bullying in a democratic manner.

In this example, we participated in a ritual-like transaction in a distinct debate form. The term democracy was used throughout the assignment and the form of debate highlighted the democratic ideal too. We distributed ourselves spatially according to our opinions, in a mimic of for instance the UK House of Commons, being allowed to speak only when the chair (Lydia) gave us the carpet beater. The democratic message became most convincing in the form of the transaction: a structured performance of equality and exchange of arguments.

In a theme meeting on “norms and values”, too (see again Van Reekum & Van den Berg, forthcoming for a detailed discussion of this course), these aspects of equality and democracy were highlighted in a structured debate about parenting values. The discussion was structured by the use of seven plastic cards, each with a word on it that refers to a specific value: ‘cooperation’, ‘honesty’, ‘politeness’, ‘obedience’, ‘patience’, ‘neatness (order and hygiene)’, and ‘respect for everything and everyone around us’.

Anne (the teacher) asks us to divide ourselves into smaller groups of five participants, and discuss these values in order to be able to put them into a hierarchical order. Anne explains how everyone finds certain values important, but that those are not always the same as the values that others prioritise. Some people, she says, find honesty more important than politeness. And others find them all to be equally important. ‘Which, of course, is OK too.’

Anne here stresses her equality to the mothers and her unwillingness to act as a figure of authority that will tell us which values we should find most important. To her, that is not the point of this assignment. More important is the fact that we debate the values and this is why Anne stresses that disagreement in our groups should be welcomed, as a basis for debate. And there were many other instances in which the form of debate was successful and mothers participated in voting games and debate assignments. Even when we discussed subjects of a rather delicate nature, we used voting cards to express our opinions.

For instance, in one of the courses for sex education (as described in length in chapter 4), we used voting cards to say whether or not we thought that statements were true. The statements were about topics such as birth control and hymens.
Yvonne wants to discuss some more issues that have to do with birth control. “Let’s do this in a game: true or false?” She distributes red and green cards and presents us with a list of statements about sex and birth control methods. When one of the statements is to teach the women that the pill protects you from pregnancy, but not from sexually transmitted diseases, Khadija intervenes and explains that she has used many different types of birth control pills, but when you take a painkiller like ibuprofen, she says, they might not work so well and you may end up getting pregnant anyway. Yvonne says how nice it is that she can learn from the mothers each time.

Interestingly, even a fact (the effects of birth control methods) is a topic for debate here. Khadija’s statement is in a way non-debatable: Yvonne and other participants in this transaction know it is not true. Yet, Yvonne accepts her statement as a contribution to the “debate-game” and underscores their equal relationship by stating how much she learns from the mothers. In this instance, form is more important than content. Yvonne and Khadija are engaged in a transaction of egalitarian communication in the democratic form of debate. Khadija’s opinion and Yvonne’s statements of scientific facts appear in this transaction as equal. The transferral of professional or scientific knowledge that I expected to take place in parenting guidance practices is here in fact undermined by the dominance of a democratic form: Khadija’s false statement is not corrected.

**Evaluation**

One of the first patterns that I distinguished while doing my field work was that in almost all encounters, mothers and professionals engaged in evaluations. They evaluated the previous encounter, they evaluated the plan for the next meeting, they evaluated their own behaviour, that of the mothers, of the room in which the course took place and the effects the previous meetings had had on the mothers’ lives at home.
In a morning class by the student-teachers of the “Practice Guidance” Programme of Bureau Frontlijn, one of the items to be discussed is “Learning to say ‘No’”. The participating mothers interpret that the student-teachers want to talk about saying no to children, about how to put up boundaries. But that is not the intention of Samira, the student-teacher in charge. Her idea was to talk with the mothers about “saying no” in general, as a way to become more assertive in life as an autonomous person. (...) Right after the assignments and discussions, a good half hour of the scheduled time is allotted to evaluating the meeting we just had. Barbara, one of the mothers, says how she likes the fact that she can now “stop to think” (stilstaan bij) when it comes to communication.

Like in the examples above, the teacher does not aim to teach mothers concrete parenting skills, like putting up boundaries, as the mothers expected her to. Rather, she wanted to encourage the mothers to become more assertive and autonomous for themselves. In this aim, evaluations are an important form. As a very specific form of reflection, evaluation necessitates a certain lack of involvement in the moment itself. It necessitates distance. Barbara, one of the mothers, has appropriated the vocabulary of the teachers and says it best: she now “stops to think” about communication. The necessary distance that is thus produced is further extended in this transaction by reflection on parenting and life in general, instead of focusing on parenting practices in a more narrow or concrete sense.

Assignments of evaluation were repetitive: most meetings started and ended with evaluations, involving both mothers and teachers in a repetitive moment of reflection and focused attention on the process of the course itself. And they were a particular form of transactions. Evaluating the parenting guidance practices in parenting guidance practices can be seen as a means of practicing reflection: of creating a temporary distance to the practice itself. The form of evaluation was thus so very dominant that even the transactions in which the form was dominant became subject to it.

Many professionals teaching the practices were after a similar reflexivity: they wanted the mothers to be able to evaluate their lives, reflect on their behaviour and thus create opportunities for change. For them, or so they explained to me in interviews, the idea is that better parenting comes from the creation of a (temporary) evaluative distance: parenting will improve because of this distance to the usually intimate relationship between mothers and children. That is not to say that the teachers set up the evaluations for the practice of evaluation and reflection. Rather, evaluations were the effect of other logics: the organisational logics of Frontlijn and the social work agencies prescribed evaluations, for instance. And at times student-teachers’ and teachers’ insecurities about teaching and their consequent need for affirmation in such transactions, was, at least in part, a cause. Also, the focus on evaluation and reflection is a translation of the
educational programmes of the universities for applied sciences (HBO opleidingen) in which the student-teachers are enrolled and which most professionals in the field of pedagogical advice had completed. In their own on-going education, the interns and professionals are very frequently asked to fill out “reflection reports” and evaluations, sometimes to their own dissatisfaction. On several occasions, the aspiring-professionals in Bureau Frontlijn complained about the amount of time they had to put into “reflection reports” for the supervisors from their universities. Nonetheless, they translated teaching methods from their education to the classes that they provided for the mothers.

**Observation**

A quite similar translation (like the translations in chapter 4) is the way in which interns and professionals translated what they learned in their studies about observing children and families into teaching material to use in transactions with mothers. For example:

*The student-teachers of Bureau Frontlijn talk with the mothers about developmental stages of children and how you can observe and chart your child according to the standardised “observation-lists”. “We always work with them”, one student says. The interns had planned for the mothers to observe their own children with such “observation-lists”. They ask Lee: “Are there things that you worry about, Lee? Where do you think your children might be behind in their development?”*

Lee did not raise a concern about the development of her children in this transaction herself. Rather, the student-teachers do, using the instrument of the standardised “observation-lists”, creating a new perspective on Lee’s children’s development, trying to make Lee participate in a reflexive assignment.

Besides evaluation, observation is an important form of reflection in parent guidance practices. Standardised instruments, itineraries, schedules and videos are used to produce, again, a certain distance to the everyday reality and routine of raising children. They produce a certain temporary distance and disengagement.

*The mothers use a standardised form to chart their daily routines. They have to fill out the form with daily activities charted on a timeline. The student-teachers use the forms to initiate a discussion about structure. Debby (the student-teacher) asks: “is this a consistent structure of your day? Why do you do it this way?” The mothers respond shrugging: “Isn’t that commonsensical? It just takes shape a certain way.”*
Like in the evaluative assignments, the task is to make the everyday concrete, involved, immediate experience of life and raising children into something more abstract, distanced, to be debated, contemplated, discussed and planned. In many of the courses that were provided in elementary schools by social work, video material was used to produce a similar distance through rituals of observation.

We watch a DVD with three short examples of parent-child interactions in which the child asks the parent for money. In the first example, the (Dutch native) mother is very permissive and gives in: the child takes the money, the mother says: “What can I do?” In the second clip, the (Moroccan) mother says no immediately, without listening to the child. In the third clip, the (Turkish) parents don’t immediately give in, but listen to the child and then say: Maybe.

Simone (the teacher) asks us what we think of the different clips, of the possibilities of dealing with such a situation. The mothers agree that the first clip is a bad idea: far too permissive. They prefer the third clip, which is entitled “Democratic parenting”, even though the mothers explain that in real life, you react in different ways to different situations at different times. Concluding, Ellen, one of the mothers says: “you know that second example, that kind of parenting is why we’re dealing with criminal youth!”

I will elaborate on the categorisation of “parenting styles” and “democratic parenting” below. But here, my point is that the reflection on parenting and daily life is accomplished through the observation of video-material. The form of observation is rehearsed in a ritual-like manner by using the distance provided by the video.

**What the ritual-like forms produced: reflexive and communicative subject-positions**

In the five ritual-like forms, we practiced being reflexive and communicative. By engaging in talk, negotiation, debate, evaluation and observation, we opened up the possibility of being reflexive and communicative within the transaction: we produced reflexive and communicative subject-positions. Whether we talked about breakfasts or bedtime stories, the point was that we talked and whether we looked at schedules of daily eating routines or videos, the point was that we observed parenting from a distance and learned how to reflect upon our daily life. All issues were subjected to the form of the ritual-like transaction: even the non-negotiable was negotiated, even well-established facts were debated. I do not mean to argue that the substance or content of the practices was unimportant. Indeed it was important and I have analysed the translations and mediations of content in chapters 4 and 5. The point is, rather, that no matter the issue at hand, it
was dealt with in a particular form in which we practiced being reflexive and communicative: by engaging in egalitarian talk, for example, or evaluation.

In the ritual-like transactions, a particular balance between distance and involvement surfaced as an important aspect of parent-child relationships as well as other relationships in which parents participated in their role as parent, such as their relationship with their children’s school. Especially in the ritual-like transactions evaluation and observation, a particular distance and disengagement were addressed as important values. But on the other hand, a particular involvement in children’s lives and school careers was emphasised as well. The idea of involvement, then, puts parents in something of a double bind: they are either too involved or not involved enough (compare Nakagawa, 2000; Van den Berg & Van Reekum, 2011). The issue that is put forward in the ritual-like transactions is not so much involvement or distance per se (after all, the mothers do already participate in parenting guidance). Rather, the issue is the right kind of balance between distance and involvement. Or, in other words, the question of what kind of involvement is preferable. This balance involves emotional labour (Hochschild, [1983] 2012): the ability to have the right kind of emotions in particular situations. Anger, for example, was frowned upon as a parental emotion in the transactions. Mothers and teachers agreed that this was not a productive emotion to have when it comes to raising children. In the following paragraphs, I will analyse this importance of emotional labour in the light of the twenty-first century economy. Because now I will return to the larger theme of this dissertation: the re-generation of Rotterdam.
Reflexivity, communication and the post-industrial economy: an elective affinity

I studied parenting guidance practices in relative isolation. But of course these transactions are not isolated at all. They are located in a place and time where industrial production is moved elsewhere and new jobs and careers are available in an interactive service economy. In this paragraph, I connect what I found in the parenting guidance practices to the larger issue of this dissertation: Rotterdam as a re-generating city.

The reflexive and communicative subject-positions that were coproduced through the repetitive practice of talk, negotiation, debate, evaluation and observation resemble the type of employee that the new service economy desires. I argue, therefore, that there is a remarkable affinity between the subject-positions that were produced in the transactions in the courses that I researched and the vocational ethic for a desired post-industrial future economy of Rotterdam. The concept that is most suitable to use in this argument is “elective affinity”, or “Wahlverwandtschaft”. The term Wahlverwandtschaft was introduced in sociology by Max Weber in his study on the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism (Weber, [1920] 2002). In this famous study, Weber showed an “elective affinity” (the English term for Wahlverwandtschaft) between Calvinist beliefs and capitalism’s success. For example, the Calvinist belief in predestination led many to look for signs of being elected. And these doubts were resolved by seeing success through hard work as a sign of being chosen. This stress on hard work, thrift and responsibility fitted very well with a capitalist vocational ethic, needing hardworking individuals (Engbersen, 2009; Kalberg, 2002; Weber, [1920] 2002). The Protestant ethic and the values of capitalism strengthened each other. The relationship between the two phenomena is one of affinity, not causation. That is to say that there is, what Weber called a “meaningful connection” (Weber cited in Kalberg, 2002: xxviii) between values and materiality, but the direction is less clear.

Fast forward into the future (or at least a later stage in history), at the moment in time when Fordism was at its peak, there was a clear connection between a mode of production and a certain “way of life” or “ethic” too, albeit not one of affinity per se, but one of planning. I dealt with this in chapter 2 to some extent, but it is useful to recount here that Fordism depended on employees that were consumers too. It depended on men with a five day work week and enough leisure time and income to be able to buy a Ford car themselves; to go on vacation and to invest in a home. This way, the quantities of production could go up. Fordism also depended on a gendered division of labour in which men worked in factories and offices and women stayed home, did grocery shopping and raised children. The home came to be seen as a tranquil retreat from the market (Abramovitz, [1988] 1996) and women’s domesticity fitted wonderfully with the need for increased mass consumption (Ehrenreich & English, [1978] 2005). Fordism was thus characterised by a more or less stable working class and the nuclear family (McDowell, 1991). Feminist scholars
like Mimi Abramovitz ([1988] 1996), Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English ([1978] 2005) and Linda McDowell (2003; 2009) have analysed this constellation and relation between markets and gender roles at home. In my work in this dissertation, I build on and position myself in this work and line of analysis by focusing, too, on the connection between market and private life.

The Fordist division of labour and women’s consequent domesticity was what second wave feminists like Adrienne Rich ([1976] 1988) struggled against. Adrienne Rich wrote about the condition of motherhood in during the 1950s and 60s, when Fordism was at its peak: “we learn, often through painful self-discipline and self-cauterisation, those qualities which are supposed to be ‘innate’ in us: patience, self-sacrifice, the willingness to repeat endlessly the small, routine chores of socialising a human being” (37). This quote characterises the role or ethic that was prescribed for women in the 1950s and 1960s. And this ethic accompanied the Fordist mode of production: women were required to be domestic, patient, caring, mystical, romantic mothers. They were supposed to self-sacrifice, again in the words of Rich: to let their “autonomous self” die with the birth of their children, working only towards the right individuality for the child. As I showed in chapter 2, this led to a new interpretation of the role of mothers: mothers were increasingly asked to educate their sons and daughters into their roles in Fordist society. And this meant gender specific parenting (preparing boys and girls for different roles) and values such as hard work, the importance of consumption, authority and obedience.

The cultural shift departing this model and introducing anti-authoritarian values to parenting and social relations in general of the late 1960s and 1970s, coincided with the introduction of a new mode of production: post-Fordist and flexible (Harvey, 1989). While mothers remained responsible for the moral education of children, what precisely this moral education should entail changed and has been changing since. The point here is that modes of production and capitalism showed “meaningful connections” to cultural practices: ways of being and doing in both the age of the industrial revolution (as argued by Weber) and at the peak of Fordism in the 1950s and 1960s.

I argue that what I witnessed in the parenting guidance practices in Rotterdam in 2009 and 2010 was the coproduction of reflexive and communicative subject-positions that showed a similar affinity with a post-industrial capitalist vocational ethic. In a way reminiscent of the “meaningful connection” between capitalism and Protestantism, or of the relationship between Fordist production and domestic, self-sacrificing motherhood, the stress on equality, autonomy, democracy, reflection, communication and emotion management in the parent courses fits what the post-industrial service economy needs: autonomous, reflexive and communicative employees. A similar neo-Weberian argument was made by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) about what they call a new spirit that accompanies post-Fordist or post-Taylorist capitalism. In the following, I will elaborate on and explain this argument by first introducing descriptions of the post-industrial
vocational ethic, to then compare this with the reflexive and communicative subject-positions that were produced in the transactions.

**The post-industrial vocational ethic**

In the new service sector, young working-class people are far more likely to “learn to serve” (McDowell, 2000; 2003) than to “learn to labour” (Willis, 1977). In Willis’ famous ethnography of teenage working class boys, “Learning to labour”, he showed how the boys’ counter-school culture prepared them for the shop-floor culture of manufacturing plants. Today, however much alive some components of this culture and its masculinities, young people are far less likely to transition from youth to adulthood through industrial jobs (Nayak, 2006). In most parts of the Western world, the service sector has become much larger than the industrial sector. And learning to serve – or learning to bank, learning to practice medicine or learning to teach – entails a different set of skills and dispositions than learning to labour in industry.

Much has been written about this “sea change” (Harvey, 1989) in modes of production and job markets. The enormous surge of the service sector has had far-reaching effects so far and many scholars have taken note (see for example, Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Harvey, 1989; McDowell, 2009; Sassen, 1991). The optimistic story in the literature is about the new knowledge economy and ever increasing education levels of populations, globally connected through the internet, “foot loose” and free (see for instance D. Bell, 1974; Hage & Powers, 1992; Castells, 2001). The pessimistic story is one of the increase of precarious service sector work, insecurity and risk; exploitation and inequality (see for instance Sassen, 1991; Nayak, 2006; McDowell, 2009; Sennet, 1998). The first story is, roughly, one of “brain work” and the global, the second of “body work” and the local. How the two stories relate in the urban context is the object of fierce debates in urban studies (see for instance Van der Waal & Burgers, 2009; Sassen, 1991) but not the object of my concern here. That is, rather, that despite the enormous differences in type of employment for high-skilled service sector workers (such as bankers, scientists, managers) on the one hand and type of employment for low-skilled service sector workers (such as waiters, cleaners, hairdressers), there are similarities, too. Working in the service sector, whether in jobs that are for low-skilled workers or those that are suitable for high-skilled workers, roughly entails 1) being able to manage emotions, 2) being communicative and 3) reflexive.

The courses that I studied were, to paraphrase Willis once more, about “learning to mother” (and this is also the title of this section of this thesis). And in the following, I further explain the above three characteristics of service sector work and compare these with aspects of parenting that were highlighted in the ritual-like transactions talk, negotiation, debate, evaluation and observation: reflexivity, communication and emotion management.
Emotion management in parenting – emotional labour

Since the first publication of Hochschild’s “The managed heart” in 1983, it has been widely acknowledged that both high and low-skilled work in the service economy entails emotional labour (Grandey et al., 2012; Nixon, 2009). Like Hochschild’s famous flight attendants, hair dressers, waiters and nurses, too, work at the emotional style of the service they are offering (cf. Hochschild, 2012 [1983]: 5). The management of their feelings to “create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, [1983] 2012: 7), is part of their labour. The bar tender sells his smile, the nurse her empathy, the hairdresser her chatting. Being able to manage your emotions is more important in post-industrial service work than it was in the Fordist factories or on the docks of the Rotterdam harbour. In fact, it has become one of employees’ most important skills because so many are working in what has been called interactive service work (McDowell, 2009). As a consequence, “personal qualities” or “character” are increasingly often selection criteria for jobs and, in Boltanski & Chiapello’s words, this leads to the “exploitation of human abilities” such as the ability to relate (2005: 242).

Interestingly, Hochschild already argued that the socialisation in (in her interpretation middle class) families prepares workers for this emotional demand by constantly foregrounding feelings and emotions as important and sanctioning certain emotional responses. And indeed, this important aspect of service sector work corresponds with the way in which emotion management was accentuated in the ritual-like transactions in the parenting guidance practices that I studied, especially when it came to the delicate balance between involvement and distance. Both mothers and teachers agreed that anger was an unproductive or even destructive emotion in parent-child relationships and that a certain emotional distance was necessary to provide the best parental response to particular problems. On the other hand, other emotional involvements of parents in childrearing, such as empathy, were promoted. A certain hierarchy in emotions thus emerges as does a certain particular balance of involvement and disengagement. The important lesson in the practices I studied was, thus, that emotions must be managed in order to be effective as a parent. And this corresponds with the importance of the management of emotions for service sector jobs and careers.

Communicative subject-positions – communicative work

Related to this emotional labour is the ability to communicate. Interactive service work means co-presence of the one providing and the one consuming the service. In the words of David Harvey, in service work, the turnover time is immediate (1990). Much of this work – whether it is nursing in a hospital, presenting a new marketing campaign to a client, selling mortgages in a bank or fries at the counter of a fast-food restaurant – thus entails face-to-face contact. As a consequence,
communicative skills are immensely important. In the words of Linda McDowell (2009: 33), “the ability to convince” is a crucial element in service exchanges. The rough behaviour of the working class boys in Willis’ “Learning to Labour” would not be appreciated in most jobs today because of this communicative aspect. Persuasion has become ever more important, both as a technique of management because authoritarian close supervision is no longer considered effective or efficient, and as a technique of worker-client interaction.

Even in jobs outside of these interactive services, much work consists of deliberation and sharing information and is in that sense interactive and communicative too. Much work that was routine in Fordist or Taylorist organisations, is now automated or outsourced to other parts of the world. The work that is left is far more communicative (Hage & Powers, 1992; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005) and presupposes the ability of workers to act and interact in written language and some to have some measure of “discursive ability” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005: 241). Moreover, the widespread use of communication technologies requires quite complex communication skills, for which continuous training is necessary. The capacity to communicate has, as a consequence, become ever more important in the selection of employees, for which psychological tools to assess “personalities” are frequently used (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).

Given this immense importance of communication in the new economy, the emphasis put upon communicative mothering in the parent courses I studied becomes understandable. The technique of egalitarian talk as parental action and negotiation as an alternative to command that were produced in between mothers and professionals in parent classes show much resemblance to the communicative subject that the post-industrial economy needs: (seemingly) egalitarian and focused on persuasion and convincing rather than on command and conflict.

Reflexive subject-positions – reflexive autonomous work

Both the emotional and communicative aspects of post-industrial work presuppose the ability of individuals to 1) understand themselves as an autonomous individual self and, 2) to reflect on that individual self and its behaviour. It presupposes the ability to observe oneself from a distance, to analyse and evaluate one’s behaviour and to then change it according to the demands made by the job market, business, restaurant owner, concrete customer exchange or the local social services “street level bureaucrat”.

It is no surprise, then, that much has been written about what has been termed reflexive modernisation (Beck et al., 1994) and the restructuring economy (see for instance Adkins, 2002; McDowell, 2009). The thesis of reflexive modernisation identifies a radicalisation of modernisation itself. Often, (but this is only one interpretation, see for a brief overview Van den Berg & Ter Hoeven, forthcoming 2013) reflexive modernisation is interpreted as a process in which autonomous
individuals choose their identity throughout the bricolage-project that is their life. According to Giddens (1991), the self is more and more understood as a reflexive project, an open product, a constituted identity. ‘We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves’ (ibidem: 75).

Although the limits of the framework of reflexive modernisation have been illustrated by many scholars (see for instance Adkins, 2002; Duyvendak, 2004 and Elchardus, 2009 for critiques), reflexivity is an important asset of workers in the twenty-first century. Today’s labour market is both more flexible and more interactive. Individuals (have to) change jobs more often than they did before and individuals more often work in direct interaction with clients, patients and other recipients of services. The ability to reflect on demands made by employers, customers or the job market in general is a crucial skill in today’s labour market because of these characteristics of flexibility and interactivity. Labour market success or failure is increasingly perceived as both an individual accomplishment and the result of the ability to perform whatever identity and type of behaviour is required in different social settings (Adkins, 2002). And although this fluidity of identities and flexibility of careers should not be overstated – after all, social categories such as race, gender and class still are immensely important – service sector employment does require individuals to understand themselves as more or less autonomous individuals and to be reflexive of this position and the fitting performance. Successful workers in the post-industrial economy build “portfolio” careers, selling constructions of themselves (or in Goffman’s terms: “presentations of self”, 1959) and their biographies (McDowell, 2009: 68). To give only two examples here: a good hairdresser not only has the technical skills to cut hair, she also knows what clients like to chat and who prefers a more anonymous transaction. She can interpret a social situation and present herself accordingly. Likewise, a successful businessman understands what suit to wear to what meeting as much as he understands the content of the meeting.

Practicing reflexivity in the ritual-like transactions in parent courses that I studied fits very well with these labour-market demands. The importance of “stopping to think” (stil staan bij) and personal autonomy was one of the most striking features of what mothers and teachers produced together through ritual-like transactions like filling out observation-lists to monitor their own behaviour and the continuous meta-evaluation of the parent classes themselves. In both the future labour market and in the parent classes, individual autonomy and reflexivity were highlighted.
Egalitarian authority and anti-authoritarianism

Anti-authoritarianism and “authoritative parenting”

The policy makers, managers of social work organisations, school directors and politicians initiating the organisation of parent courses did not necessarily have the desired future Rotterdam economy in mind. Nor were they primarily trying to establish a new service economy and educating the next generation to work in service jobs. Rather, they were trying to manage youth “nuisance” in the street, to improve school achievements through parent involvement, to help mothers in their daily struggles or to combat poverty. The mothers that participated had reasons of their own to do so too. They liked chatting about what it is that they do every day, met with friends or made new ones and sometimes had concrete, everyday problems for which they wanted professional advice. While future employment of their children may have been a concern, though, no mother mentioned it to me as the primary reason to participate in a meeting. The new service economy was not a dominant framework for organising and executing parent courses or parent guidance programmes, nor was it for participating in one.

A framework that was dominant for the organisers, course designers and teachers was the opposition of two parenting models: “authoritative” (sometimes also called “democratic”) and “authoritarian”. In the analysis of the ritual-like transactions above, these terms already manifested themselves. The terms and opposition comes from modern pedagogical sciences. In the Netherlands, the interpretation of these terms in the work of Dutch social scientist Micha
de Winter was highly influential in the pedagogical field: with policy makers and practitioners. Micha de Winter argued that in order to defend democracy, parent guidance courses, schooling and other pedagogical social policies should promote authoritative parenting. In 2004 (he later repeated the argument several times, see for example 2005), he made a plea for what he termed a “democratic-pedagogical offensive”. Building his argument on Dewey’s work, he argued that parenting guidance and other pedagogical policies in the Netherlands needed to focus on socialising children and youths for a role in a democratic society. This entailed teaching negotiation, equality, responsibility and debate as skills and as alternatives to violence, authoritarianism and discrimination. This offensive was to form “democratic personalities” (2005: 9) and De Winter argued that an authoritative parenting strategy is most fit to do this. Authoritative parenting, according to De Winter, is more based on authority than power:

“Parents (...) explain their actions to their children, they promote the development of a feeling of responsibility, give good moral examples and act according to an open, democratic leadership style. This way, the family is the first learning situation for a democratic moral. Authoritative childrearing thus represents the common good and this justifies, I think, that parents should at least be properly educated about this through parent guidance, (...).” (2005: 11).

The model of “authoritative parenting” was quite actively promoted in the courses that I studied, if only because it featured quite dominantly in the course methods and materials that the teachers used. Most teachers were convinced of the necessity and usefulness of this model for everyday parenting practices. But not only teachers advocated the parental strategies that fit the authoritative model. Interestingly, the ritual-like transactions in the courses created conformity to this form. Mothers coproduced communicative and reflexive subject-positions, underlining the importance of equality, distance and emotion management. And this fitted the model of “democratic” and “authoritative parenting” perfectly.

In the table below, I summarise and synthesise the oppositional discursive system of “authoritarian” versus “authoritative” parenting. The table is based on what I found in the literature on the models or “ideal types” of parenting methods. The model of “authoritative” parenting is preferred by Micha de Winter and the teachers I interviewed.
The constructions of authoritative versus authoritarian parenting.

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<tr>
<th>PARENTING MODELS</th>
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<td><strong>Authoritarian</strong></td>
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<td>Values in upbringing</td>
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<td>Tradition</td>
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<td>Hierarchy</td>
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<td>Authoritarian regime</td>
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<td>Community</td>
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<td>Goal upbringing</td>
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<td>Obedience child</td>
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<td>Focus</td>
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<td>Rigidity</td>
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<td>Negative parenting</td>
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<td>Command</td>
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<td>Parents control children</td>
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<td>Patriarchy</td>
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<td>Strategies attributed to</td>
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<td>Allochthonous</td>
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<td>Non-West</td>
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<td>Working classes</td>
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The “authoritarian” model is considered a “traditional” way of bringing up children, geared towards hierarchical relationships in the home, in the community and in society at large. The obedience of the child to those in positions of power (the parents, grandparents, community leaders) is the goal of such types of parenting and the system is based on the legitimacy of those in power. Parenting strategies consist of a certain rigid obedience to rules and punishments if the rules are broken. Parents order, or command, children to do things and parents are thus focused on controlling the behaviour of children, using “deductive correction”: children are disciplined according to a set of rules. On the other side of this opposition, “authoritative” parenting is a “modern” type of childrearing, geared towards equality and democracy. The individuality of the child is a central value here and for this purpose, parents apply themselves to the development of a healthy self of the child. Rules are not as strict and rigid as they are in an “authoritarian” upbringing; parents use persuasion and communication as techniques and build their ideas about parenting on scientific insights. The relationships in families are rather informal and open and parents use “inductive correction”: the rules are made on the basis of the behaviour and development of the children. Parents control themselves rather than the children and they make sure that their emotional response is effective.

Importantly, in the literature, the two parental strategies are attributed to particular categories of people. Depending on the particular goal of the texts, the authoritarian strategies are attributed to either “allochthonous”, “Non-western” or “working class” parents. And these are thus placed vis-à-vis “autochthonous Dutch”, “Western” and “middle class” parents. In this move, the meanings of “Dutchness”, “modern”, “democratic” and “middle class” thus become intertwined (see for a more elaborate analysis of this logic: Van Reekum & Van den Berg, forthcoming). And using “authoritative” parental strategies thus becomes a move towards modernity, democracy and Dutch Western society, possibly leading to class upgrading as well. At any rate, “authoritarian” parental strategies are presented as a thing of the past, as “traditional” and definitely not “modern”.

Those that “stay behind” in this authoritarian past are, thus, “working class” or “allochthonous”. To further elaborate on this point of “staying behind”, I put the constructions of “authoritarian” and “authoritative” parenting on a timeline in the figure below. Here, the point is not to accept or reject this logic or narrative. The point is that history is told in this particular way and this particular narrative helps to produce the opposition “authoritarian” “authoritative”. The logic in the course texts that I analysed and in the pedagogical literature that emphasises the opposition between “authoritarian” and “authoritative” parenting (please see De Winter, 2004; 2005 for overviews) is that before the 1960s and 70s, authoritarian parenting was the norm, in the Netherlands and elsewhere. “Authoritarian” parenting thus belongs to “tradition” and to strong knit “communities”. In response to “authoritarian parenting”, the 1960s and 1970s were
characterised by a vehement anti-authoritarianism (Van den Berg & Duyvendak, 2012) in which there were experiments with forms of parenting, with radical equality and far-reaching freedom of children. The limits of this radicalisation were soon reached and out of the critique on the extreme permissiveness of the 1970s, there emerged a new and modern model: “authoritative parenting”, or so say. In this representation of history, the period before the 1960s was characterised by a focus on community and the authority of the father. In the short period of experiments and “anti-authoritarianism”, the autonomy of the child was put front and centre and in the period after the 1970s, the two became more balanced into a focus on a democratic order. In the figure below, I added the restructuring of the economy as it is often represented. There, too, many have written of a “sea change” in modes of production (Harvey, 1990) and a fundamental shift towards “post-Fordism” (Harvey, 1990), towards the “knowledge economy” (D. Bell, 1974), towards the “rise of the service sector” (McDowell, 2009) and so on.

**Constructions of the development of parental strategies vis-à-vis economic restructuring**

![Diagram showing the development of parental strategies vis-à-vis economic restructuring](image)

- **Time:**
  - **1960/70s**
  - Authoritarian
  - Anti-authority
  - Authoritarian

- **Economic restructuring**
  - (Reflexive modernisation)
  - (Feminisation)

- **Sectors**
  - Fordism
  - Industry
  - Post-Fordism
  - Service sector
By putting these two histories together in one figure, I further elaborate my point of the elective affinity between the twenty-first century vocational ethic and the production of reflexive and communicative subject-positions in parenting guidance practices. Pedagogues writing of authoritative parenting and its advantages rarely speak of the job market and opportunities there, but the values that are central to this parental model fit perfectly what the “new economy” of services and interactions needs and this figure shows that the two developments (towards authoritative parenting and towards post-Fordism) are presented as simultaneous. The economic shift of the 1970s was thus, it seems, accompanied by a shift in values in upbringing.

In line with the call for “authoritative parenting”, the focus on talk, equality and communicative skills in the parenting guidance practices was to discourage the act of punishment. In general, restricting children is advised against and called “negative parenting”. Instead, parents are coached to learn how to parent “positively” (this is an emic term: “positive childrearing”, positief opvoeden), to praise good behaviour instead of punishing children for bad behaviour. Positive praise of desired behaviour should take precedence over other, more “negative” and “authoritarian” strategies, so say the course materials used in the practices that I studied. For example, the course material of the course “Opvoeden zo!”, designed for parents with children between the ages of four and twelve, says:

“If parents try to influence their children’s behaviour in a negative way, this can have several consequences. A: It will have less effect. Praising and rewarding desired and acceptable behaviour is far more effective than criticising and punishing undesired and unacceptable behaviour. B: And the self-image of children is negatively influenced. (…) leading to fear of failure and bravado (bravoure gedrag).”(emphasis in original, MB; NIZW, 2006: 20)

I will return to this problematisation of “bravado” below, in my paragraph on feminisation.

**Egalitarian authority**

The aversion against “authoritarianism” and the idea that hierarchy belongs to the past, to “lagging behind” people, “allochthonous”, or “working class”, creates a problem in the daily practices of professionals and mothers alike. Because sometimes authority is both necessary and expected. As the mothers rightfully pointed out: sometimes they have to decide without deliberating their decision with their children. And sometimes professionals teaching parent classes could use some form of hierarchy. In the ritual-like transactions in the parenting guidance practices, equality was repetitively put forward as an important value: professionals and mothers alike subscribed to
the ideal of them being equal and of relative equality within the family. But in the practices, the teachers were the ones initiating certain debates on certain issues, not the mothers. The teachers provided the course material or the advice on how to deal with bullied children, landlords or yet another debt collector. In those instances, they were not exactly equal to the mothers. Professionals in the field of pedagogical advice performed a paradoxical kind of authority: on the one hand affirming equality to their clients, on the other hand positioning themselves as experts. After all, they participate in the practices in their role as professional. The successful negotiation of these aspects of their role granted them authority. In situations in which some level of authority was necessary, the preference for equality led to tensions and insecurities for professionals and to the question: how to perform authoritatively while maintaining a position of equality to the mothers? In other words: how to perform egalitarian authority?

This preference for egalitarianism and these insecurities came to the fore in the way in which teachers talked of their ambition to “stand beside” the mothers, to see the mothers as “experts of their own children” and to create “consciousness”. They were much more reluctant to use the language of “teaching”. Even in Frontlijn, where the use of this language was more common than in social work (for example also the use of the word “guidance”), the interns were much more comfortable in an egalitarian relationship. The interns of Frontlijn sometimes even went so far as complaining about the involvement of the mothers because they saw this involvement as “doing something in return”: a form of reciprocity (this was one of the themes in chapter 5).

Parenting guidance professionals were wary of taking a role of power and instead wanted to use persuasion, negotiation and reasoning. One of the teachers, for example, said to me:

‘I feel so much like a teacher, you know, when I teach. I don’t feel comfortable in that role at all. I would much rather just join the discussion, you know?’

This statement surprised me at the time, because she had just finished teaching an actual course, in which some teacher-role was expected of her. But it is rather consistent with the importance of equality and egalitarianism that I found throughout parenting guidance. Another example pertains to the childrearing debates in Rotterdam that I wrote of in chapters 3 and 4. Interestingly, alderman Geluk originally set out to organise debates about ten “rules” for raising children. But the professionals in the field of pedagogical advice resisted this terminology. And this resistance resulted in consequence: they were officially termed vanzelfsprekendheden: “self-evident values”, because the professionals felt that this term did more justice to their egalitarian approach. One manager of a parenting guidance organisation says, for example:
(The organisation of the debates) was sometimes quite problematic. I like the idea of prompting debate. Fair enough. But at first, it was very directive (met het opgeheven vingertje), like the alderman wanted to judge many parents. Now we decided to speak of “self-evident values” instead of “rules”, even though the alderman still calls them “rules”.

This is a particularly telling example of egalitarian authority. The professionals feel more comfortable with the terminology of “self-evident values”, feeling that this is more congruent with their egalitarian approach. And it might indeed be that this term reflects a more equal relationship than does the term “rules”. However, the alderman and professionals still were the ones that initiated debates with parents in Rotterdam about ten values and in this sense, they still operated from a position of authority, only in an egalitarian fashion.

**Feminisation: “Redundant masculinities” and the pink collar economy**

To return to the broader problematic of this dissertation, there is one more theme that I would like to address in this chapter. And that is the question of how this elective affinity between communicative and reflexive subject-positions and the twenty-first century vocational ethic relates to gender. To introduce this theme, I return to a piece of data that I presented above. I will present it here again, but now to point to something different. This is an excerpt from (parenting) course materials:

“If parents try to influence their children’s behaviour in a negative way, this can have several consequences. A: It will have less effect. Praising and rewarding desired and acceptable behaviour is far more effective than criticising and punishing undesired and unacceptable behaviour. B: And the self-image of children is negatively influenced. (…) leading to fear of failure and bravado (bravoure gedrag).”

(Emphasis in original, MB; NIZW, 2006: 20)

Bravado (bravoure gedrag) is not gender neutral. It is very much attributed to boys and masculine behaviour. And indeed, Rotterdam worries most about boys and young men, as I have addressed and analysed in chapter 2. The transgressions that are worrisome to the Rotterdam administration, schools and professionals in the field of pedagogical advice are indeed coded as masculine transgressions. We saw in chapter 4, for example, how when it comes to sexual deviances, young men were held chief responsible. And in the excerpt of course materials that I cite here, these masculine transgressions are quite explicitly linked to “negative” parenting practices that are
part of “authoritarian” parenting. The statement in the quotation pertains to effectiveness of parenting practices, but it goes further than that: “negative parenting” causes certain problematic behaviours. The authoritarian and masculine are connected. And indeed, “authoritarian” parenting is often associated with patriarchy and unequal gender relations.

The move towards “authoritative parenting” is also a move towards the feminine. And interestingly, many scholars have signalled not only a development towards post-Fordism, but also a feminisation of the economy and labour market during the past decades (see for example Adkins, 2002; McDowell, 2009). In the words of Lisa Adkins (2002: 6), there is a “transposition of a feminine habitus into the economic sphere of action”. For the young men in Paul Willis’ study of the relationship between counter school culture and manual labour, manual labour could still signify not only masculinity but also superiority. Mental activity for them was too feminine and therefore inferior (1977: 145). But labour is no longer masculine. Not even bodily labour, as most manufacturing has moved elsewhere or is automatised and interactive service employment has replaced it. Linda McDowell (2009) has therefore argued that the labour market advantages that were historically associated with masculinity have disappeared, at least for men at the bottom end of the job market. In its stead, attributes such as empathy, care and communicative skills are increasingly desired by employers. The elements of the twenty first century ethic that I analysed above were communicative abilities, emotional labour and reflexivity. And these attributes are traditionally considered relatively feminine. Whether or not the increased importance of these attributes should in fact be termed “feminisation” is the object of scientific debate (see for example Adkins, 2002). But we can be sure of this: gender performances are used as workers’ strategies in today’s labour market. The ability to give performances of certain aesthetics and emotions is increasingly part of successful labour market participation. The reflexivity needed to use certain gendered performances can indeed by understood as a most important labour market asset (Adkins, 2002; McDowell, 2009). The change towards a service sector economy is thus gendered. And the twenty-first century vocational ethic is feminine in particular ways, especially when compared to the Fordist ethic of the twentieth century.

In some places, notably those where industry moved away, this leads to “displaced” (Nayak, 2006) or “redundant” (McDowell, 2003) masculinities. The macho and rough behaviour that fitted quite well with manual labour and manufacturing is no longer appreciated in the labour market, nor in many other spheres, such as the Rotterdam streets where young boys are prohibited from meeting publicly (in the prohibition of assembly that I analysed in chapter 2). Young men today may well be the new “culturally oppressed” (McDowell, 2009: 194) because certain masculinities are deemed illegitimate. The city marketing strategy of “la City” which I analysed in chapter 2 can also be seen in this light: for a city moving away from an industrial past, a more feminine
mythology is to accompany the desired service sector future: blue collars are to be replaced by pink collars. These observations do not lead me to say, though, that gendered divisions of labour and power are necessarily on the verge of radical change. But I will go into this in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I asked what the transactions that I researched in parenting guidance practices produced. And in addition, I asked how this production relates to imagined urban futures and the post-industrial economy. This chapter connects what I discussed in chapters 1 and 2 to what I argued in chapters 4 and 5. It brings together scholarly discussions that are very often presented separately: the regeneration of cities and future economies on the one hand and social policy, mothering practices and pedagogical professionals on the other. I have endeavoured to connect theoretical strands and traditions of research in innovative ways to provide an interesting perspective on just what it is that the parenting guidance practices, do, in fact, do.

Parenting and mothering styles in particular (as was one of the main targets of Adrienne Rich’s analysis, 1976) have been debated and promoted in different eras and areas. Because if we think of the child as an innocent blank canvas, then childrearing is to make the promises of the future become reality. And influencing these mothering styles is an especially potent form of social engineering. But the language of engineering presupposes too much of a one-way movement. If we are to look at parenting guidance practices through the lens of engineering and paternalism only, we see too little of the cooperation that such practices entail. Paternalism provides a repertoire that is used in parenting guidance practices. But to answer the question of what the practices do, I looked at cooperations or coproductions in ritual-like transactions. I looked at what was done in between mothers, professionals and interns in community centres, parent rooms and mothers’ homes. In this chapter I argued that what was done had a ritual-like quality. I have termed the transactions that I researched ritual-like to point to the repetitive form in which I encountered much parenting guidance practices. I distinguished five ritual-like transactions: talk, negotiation, debate, evaluation and observation. And I argued that no matter the content at the centre of attention in parenting guidance practices, it was subjected to these forms. The non-negotiable was negotiated, facts debated. Through these ritual-like transactions, the value of relational equality was affirmed as was a particular balance between distance and involvement.

Ritual-like transactions produced reflexive and communicative subject-positions: “ways of doing, being (…) and thinking” (Starfield, 2002: 125). And to return to the larger theme of this dissertation: these reflexive and communicative subject-positions resemble what is desired of employees in the twenty-first century urban labour market. Contemporary employers require
their workers to be communicative and reflexive, because so much of today’s work in cities in the West is in the interactive service sector. Therefore, I consider there to be an elective affinity (cf. Weber, [1920] 2002) between what was produced in the parenting guidance practices and a twenty-first century vocational ethic.

That is not to say, though, that this was a frame in which the other participants in the practices looked at what they were doing. The participating mothers did not participate in the practices primarily because of concerns about the future labour market. And professionals were not so much concerned about service sector employment either. Rather, they were interested in parenting styles and for their professional practice, they used a frame based on an opposition between “authoritarian” and “authoritative” parenting. But by looking at what was produced in the transactions instead of looking at intentions, the relationship between “authoritative” parenting and the service sector became apparent. Parenting guidance practices do not take place in isolation. What is done in these practices is connected to larger phenomena and developments. The parenting guidance practices were not only to bring about “democratic” and “autonomous” individuals (as was the explicit aim of parenting guidance practices and pedagogical professionals). The practices are located at a time and place in which industrial production is moved elsewhere and jobs are to be found in the interactive service sector. The production of reflexive and communicative subject-positions and its relationship with the larger question of the re-generating city is a matter of elective affinity.