

Building creatures of uncertainty

Crisis, storytelling and othering in the Norwegian building industry

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Introduction

Over the past few years I have spent time at building sites and among builders seeking to understand how they experience the transformations going on in the building industry. A picture has emerged: The builders are concerned by rather immediate things – for example, whether the company they work for might sack all permanently employed carpenters and replace them with temporary workers. Norwegian builders are concerned that they might be forced to queue and compete for short-term contracts with immigrant workers who are known to accept working conditions that fall well below Norwegian standards.

One Friday morning in June, while I was conducting fieldwork at a large building site in Trondheim, I was sitting in the barracks preparing for the day's observations as one of the builders came in: 'Brexit, it was!' he said, smiling. 'What?' I asked. I had not yet checked the news that morning and was rather surprised at the worker's remark. Later that day, after I had left the building site, I met people who were more or less in shock, even grieving the referendum result in Britain. But at the building site, it seemed that the general consensus was that the Brits had made the only reasonable choice. Exiting the EU was the obvious response to exactly the kind of situation that also concerned the Norwegian builders – a situation that can be seen in close relation to the general rise of nationalistic movements in Europe and other post-industrialized countries. The democratic foundations of these movements seem to be the 'ordinary working people', including builders, who are fed up. What are they fed up with?

Unemployment is rising and the income gap between the wealthy and the poor is increasing. Decline in income is not only found in the bottom 10 per cent of the populations of OECD countries, but even the lowest 40 per cent (OECD 2015, p. 15). Wages have dropped to such a low level that many can no longer afford their house and provide for their family, even if they are in full-time work. According to Standing (2011), a new class is emerging from this situation: the 'precariat' – people who do not know until 7am if they will have work that day. Norway is also marked by this situation, despite being a country that has – so far – been relatively unharmed by the turbulent global economy and has one of the lowest income gaps in Europe. Nonetheless, the situation is particularly evident in the Norwegian building industry. Although the official tariff for builders is relatively decent, many builders fall outside the tariff system, as building companies are increasingly using hired hands rather than permanent employees. Many newspapers describe this situation in terms of a 'crisis': 'Collapse in the building industry: The number of permanent employees at the large entrepreneurs in the Oslo-region is halved since 2007. At the same time the use of casuals are exploding' (*Klassekampen* 10 October 2015). With the increase in casual workers, a new precariat is emerging, even in Norway. Similar to other countries, Norway is showing ongoing macro transformations associated with neoliberalization (Bals 2017; Friberg et al. 2015; Marsdal 2015): in the building industry, in particular, competition for work contracts is becoming

internationalized, a massive migration of labor is taking place, new business models are becoming based on temporal employment and new technologies are replacing skilled workers with machines. These transformations are leading to *uncertainty* for Norwegian builders, who are watching the situation worsen from year to year (cf. Whyte 2009, pp. 213, 214).

The situation for builders and other craftspeople has received some attention in recent academic discourse, which has focused on various aspects of the change, from craftsmanship to social dumping.¹ In this chapter, I explore the way in which builders discuss the situation and the stories they tell each other of it. As noted by Michael Jackson (2013, p. 31), storytelling plays a more significant role than simply sharing entertainment or personal expression; it is also an aspect of the ‘subjective-in-between’, wherein public and private interests are perpetually – and problematically – at play. For the builders, storytelling seems to constitute their understanding and experience of the uncertain situation of themselves. It does so by establishing some significant ‘others’ in their world. This happens according to processes that also may be at play in movements of nationalistic protectionism.

In this chapter, I begin by providing a short overview of the Norwegian building industry, before addressing the specific situation of Norwegian builders. In particular, I pay attention to the way in which the builders seem to produce four significant ‘others’, whom I call ‘creatures of uncertainty’. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the role of storytelling in shaping these creatures and thus the reality in which they exist.

Uncertainty in the Norwegian building industry

Work in the building industry has always implied uncertainty, as employment is connected to a company’s success (or lack thereof) in winning contracts, ups and downs in the market and the relatively short-term nature of building contracts. Despite this, in Norway, building work has provided security in many important respects: builders have a certain level of social security and a pension that is guaranteed by the Norwegian state; building companies provide relatively steady work due to regulations that restrict companies from sacking workers at will; workers secure a tariff and a minimum wage; there is a neutral system for measuring wages for piecework; workers have the right to holiday days and sick leave; and workers have influence over their working situation through unions. Such labor security has been protected within the Norwegian state, and it is typical also of other Nordic countries. In these countries, it is common for there to be an organized relationship between worker unions, organizations representing business leaders and the government. This three-part collaboration is responsible for ordered and (relatively) fair negotiations over workers’ conditions, and it is an essential ingredient in the practice commonly referred to as ‘the Nordic model of work’ (Gustavson 2011). In Norway, craftspersons must undergo rather standardized vocational training, which normally consists of two years at school and two years of apprenticeship. Bricklayers, tinsmiths, carpenters, plumbers, electricians and other craftspersons at building sites have unique formal education systems and certificates. This emphasis on formal skills, together with the Nordic model, seems to have contributed to empowering skilled workers in Norway (as pointed out by Tesfaye 2013).

¹ See, e.g., Sennett (2008), Tesfaye (2013), Thorstensen (2015), Marsdal (2015), Friberg and Haakestad (2015) and Bals (2017).

For a long time, the building industry was regarded as quite conservative and unwilling or able to change (Rygghaug and Sørensen 2010) – likely because the industry, in contrast to many others, did not have to face substantial international competition (given that buildings were built on site). However, this situation is now changing due to increased use of prefabricated materials and international trade agreements. In the competition for tenders, there is an increasing tendency for both Norwegian and international building companies to reduce labor costs by employing casual workers on short-term contracts. This manner of operating has been possible since 1999, when laws regulating hired labor were liberated. Since that time, vacancy agencies have played a role in the Norwegian building industry. In 2004, this became a key role, as the EU expanded to include ten new countries in Eastern Europe, enabling the massive migration of workers in the building industry.² From 2004 to 2009, 150,000 new working licenses were given to workers from new EU countries (Bals 2017, p. 24). In 2009, the implementation of the EU Services Directive represented another step towards an open market for commodified labor in Europe, moving the building industry further away from the security of the Nordic model (cf. Frieberg and Haakestad 2015). Although laws are in place to ensure that immigrant workers receive the same minimum wage and similar rights as Norwegian workers, employers can – and do – maneuver around these laws in many ways. One of the tricks used to avoid paying the minimum wage (while giving the impression that this wage is actually paid) is to transfer the minimum wage to a worker's account as official pay and then force the worker to withdraw a part of it in cash to pay back to the company (Bals 2017, p. 37). Unannounced inspections at building sites have revealed quite a few cases in which immigrant workers have worked in conditions that are far beyond what is legal, in terms of contracts, working hours, safety and payment. More than once, inspections in the Trondheim area have found that immigrant workers have been provided illegal and dangerous accommodation that has forced them to – for example – use the basement as a toilet.

Increased use of casual workers is part of a certain business strategy where companies transform from relying on a workforce of permanent employees to hiring labor according to need. Accordingly, companies cut costs and achieve flexibility by reducing their stock of permanent employees during periods with no contracts. Once a contract is secured, a company can hire workers who will literally show up that day to work. In this way, the uncertainty connected to winning or losing contracts is passed 'downwards' to workers on short-term contracts, who subsequently incorporate this uncertainty into their lives. Thus, flexibility for the company office means contingency for the workers. In this situation, the company is reduced to an office and a legal entity, organising projects and producing tenders; it can no longer be understood as a community of skilled workers, as older pictures of men lined up on a building site might depict.

The reduction in permanent employees in the building industry has made it difficult for authorities and labor unions to control working conditions. The work of these authorities has been further hindered by the complex ownership structures of building and vacancy companies, which hides their true owners – those who are responsible for the workers and who are to be blamed if anything goes wrong. A worker at a building site might work for a sub-contractor, who might also work for another sub-contractor; such networks are designed to be difficult to trace. In some cases, when authorities have traced these

² Though Norway is not part of the EU, it participates in the free movement of labor through the EEA agreement.

networks, they have revealed that the real owners are organizations that deal with trafficking, prostitution and other crimes in addition to hiring labor in the building industry (Bals 2017, p. 43). As labor is commodified and made subject to financial speculation, the boundary between legal and illegal operations becomes blurred. Also, the production of tenders and building contracts is enrolled in a form of 'casino capitalism' and increasingly removed from the actual building. Røyrvik (2011, p. 206) shows the tendency in other industries for companies to be run by economists who lack knowledge of the companies' actual value creation; as articulated by one of his informants: 'These guys don't build anything' (ibid., p. 148).

In the face of casino capitalism and the internationalization of markets and new technologies, the situation for skilled workers is changing. As a larger part of the workforce is engaged outside building companies, tariff agreements and union control – even outside the law – and the hard-earned privileges associated with the Nordic model are at stake. In this new industry, wages and working conditions can be so poor that only immigrant workers will accept them (cf. Standing 2011, p. 103). How do Norwegian builders respond to this situation?

Builders and their stories

This chapter is based on my experiences conducting research for the project 'Crafting climate transitions from below', which studies the role of skilled workers in the building industry in light of climate policy. Since 2012, I and other members of the research project have followed the building industry locally in Trondheim and – more generally – in Norway, using several approaches in order to gain a holistic understanding of the experience of skilled workers in the Norwegian building industry, today.

In addition to studying media and policy, we conducted a series of in-depth interviews with builders and apprentices from a wide range of building sites and companies. The interviews were conducted at building sites and the offices of building companies. For this chapter, two group interviews, in particular, were essential. Both originated as workshops at which we spent an evening together, discussing rather freely. The first was arranged in 2013, with Jøran Solli and Robert Næss, together with a group of older, well-experienced builders, all with clear opinions about the changes that were occurring in the building industry. The other was organized in 2014, with Roger Søråa and Jøran Solli, together with four young builders who had recently finished (or were just about to finish) their apprenticeships. As all were at the start of their careers, their experience of uncertainty became rather explicit as we discussed their future. Here, I call them Anders, Bjarne, Cato and Espen.

I also conducted ethnographic fieldwork at a large high-tech building site in Trondheim, where a number of tower blocks were being erected. This site can be said to represent the 'top end' of the building industry, in terms of sophisticated building technology and methodology. Also, the building company had a strict policy of relying only on permanently employed builders, which made it a counterpart to the companies operating at other sites. I followed the same team of carpenters over distinct periods, from February 2016, when the snow blew straight in through the open building frames, through the light summer months, until November that year, when the first snow appeared just as the builders cleaned up and left the site. I spent time both at the building site and in the barracks, where the engineers and

foremen had their offices. These barracks were also where the builders spent their 'nine breaks' and lunch breaks, and attended various meetings. Participation in these meetings and the small talk at the barracks, together with interviews at other building sites, provided the essential ethnography for this chapter.

As my research primarily focused on Norwegian builders, this chapter only shows half the picture; approximately 50 per cent of workers in the Norwegian building industry are immigrants (Marsdal 2015). It is important to keep in mind that the uncertainty and othering described here is that of Norwegian builders, not immigrants. The general situation for immigrant workers is more precarious, uncertain and insecure than the situation for Norwegian workers, and certainly deserves further study (see Engebriksen 2015).

Talking and telling stories

When asking builders about their motivation for entering the profession, one of the reasons mentioned was 'the bullshit talk in the breaks'. The subject of this chapter is based on such talk, which occurred around lunch tables, during breaks, meetings and in group interviews. The talk was obviously more guided and 'serious' during group interviews than it was during the breaks, but both situations were marked by conversations that drifted along according to their own logic. Storytelling played an essential role. I was struck by the builders' willingness and ability to tell each other stories. As soon as there was a break in the work, stories would fill the room. Storytelling seemed an essential part of the builders' way of life.

A story rarely came alone. When the first was told, I could be almost certain that another would follow, inspired by the first according to some creative logic of association. It was obvious that some builders were better storytellers than others, but everyone around the table tended to take an active part in the telling, by nodding, laughing, confirming certain facts or adding detail. Thus, the stories were a product of – and part of – the social community. I did not hear a single story in the one-on-one interviews, but stories were common in the group interviews, as well as in the conversations that occurred during breaks. Groups constituted a kind of dialogical meeting, or a "diatope" that proved to be a far more fertile ground for stories than one-on-one situations – a meeting³. Thus, the builders' storytelling should not be interpreted as individual expression, but collective action: the stories arose in the dialogical *meeting* between builders (cf. Fyhn 2017). This perspective resonates with the work of Hanna Arendt (1958, pp. 50–52) and Michael Jackson (2013, p. 31), who describe storytelling as an aspect of the 'subjective-in-between'. This observation has some methodological significance, as anthropological engagement with storytelling involves more active participation in the collective act of storytelling than passive recording of the stories told. Also, the meaning of a particular story depends on the situation in which it is shared. Thus, the *storytelling event* is more the subject of study than the story, as such.

³ The term 'diatope', is introduced by Evensen (2012). See Fyhn (2017) for its possible significance for ethnographic method.

Many of the stories told during breaks – such as fishing stories or stories about a particular colleague who always ended up in a hilarious situation – seemed designed to provide entertainment. Other stories seemed to be told only because they appeared relevant in the situation or to the discussion. In particular, in the group interviews, stories tended to relate to the topics discussed. In both situations, stories were surrounded by discussion, both before and after the story was told, and this discussion was significant for interpreting the story.

At the group interview with the four young builders, the discussion fell on the topic of poor paint jobs. Bjarne, who was still an apprentice, had a story to tell. Despite his young age, he was a great storyteller: ‘Speaking of painting and casual workers’, he said, ‘I was at a project this autumn with another guy. He had left a banana on top of a ventilation pipe, to save for the nine break.’ Bjarne paused briefly, before continuing. ‘Then the Polish painter came in.’ He mimed the painter entering the scene. ‘It was not his job to move the banana, so he just spray painted over it.’ The audience shook their heads and laughed in such a way as to indicate that they knew exactly what Bjarne was talking about. Bjarne continued: ‘A couple of days later he had to come back to do the paint job over again, for there was a banana-shaped contour on the wall that had not been painted.’

Stories such as this provoked much laughter around the table, but they also said something significant about the experience of being a builder. In particular, I was interested in the stories’ role in forming an image of Norwegian builders in contrast to foreign builders through processes we might call *othering* (see, e.g., Jensen 2011). It seems, however, that the identity of Norwegian builders was formed in contrast to not only immigrant workers, but to four significant ‘others’ who were each connected to some experienced uncertainty. I call these others ‘creatures of uncertainty’: 1) unskilled assembly workers, 2) office workers, 3) casual workers and 4) immigrant workers.

Four creatures of uncertainty

1. Assembly workers in the technological production of buildings

Until quite recently, automatization in the production industry did not concern workers at building sites, as houses were built in more or less the same way as they had ‘always’ been. But over the past few years, profound changes have occurred: more building work has moved from building sites to factory halls; simultaneously, robots have entered building sites, threatening to push out the skilled workers.

Fear of ‘technological unemployment’⁴ has inspired several public reports that have attempted to estimate the number of jobs that will be lost to machines within the next 20 years. These reports typically indicate that approximately half of contemporary jobs will disappear in countries such as the USA (Frey and Osborne 2013), Sweden (Hultman 2014) and Norway (Pajarinen et al. 2015). The reports tend to be particularly pessimistic with respect to skilled workers in the building industry: a Norwegian report estimates that 82 per cent of bricklayers will be made redundant in the next 20 years, along with 81 per cent of painters, 80 per cent of building construction laborers and 72 per cent of carpenters. These are alarming numbers, but when I discussed them with the builders, the builders did not seem particularly concerned: ‘No, the building process is too unpredictable, you will always need human

⁴ A term coined by Keynes in the 1930s (Susskind and Sisskind 2015, p. 284).

workers' argued Bjorn, a carpenter and building leader at the high tech building site. However, he added, 'but of course, you never know'. Still, he did not seem very concerned.

Though robots are indeed capable of laying bricks, painting walls and drilling holes in concrete, their presence on building sites is not yet common. To date, prefabrication is the technology that has moved the most jobs away from building sites: walls and floors arrive at building sites in the form of elements to be assembled like Lego bricks; and bespoke windows, insulation, stairs and bathrooms are lifted straight into buildings, fully prefabricated with sinks, showers, sockets and tiles. All of these elements are made in factories by machines and factory workers. Workers at building sites need only to unwrap and assemble them.

The skilled workers were eager to discuss this new technology, but they rarely framed it in terms of technology that was taking away their jobs. To them, such technology was not a source of experienced uncertainty. However, what concerned the builders was the fact that assembling prefabricated houses was not 'real craftsmanship'. This topic came up in the group interview with the young builders. Espen, a young carpenter who was well-respected among the others for his skill and stamina, said: 'With this, you are not a craftsman, you are an assembly-worker. [...] Yes, you are an errand boy [*løpegutt*], not a workman [*arbeidskar*].' Cato, who had just completed his journeyman, agreed. His concern was not loss of work, as such, but loss of a particular kind of work – proper craftsmanship. The effect of prefabrication on the building site was also expressed as a loss of a particular way of life – the builder's way of life. When I asked Svein, an old master bricklayer, whether he had very clear opinions about working inside a factory hall, producing prefabricated houses, he replied: 'You are not a craftsman, you are a factory worker. [...] Being able to work outside, in rain, snow and sunshine is part of real craftsmanship.' Svein observed with sadness that fewer people were working outside. Though outdoor working was often portrayed as difficult, it was also thought to make building sites attractive workplaces. This was reflected in the reasons people gave for becoming builders. For example, Bjarne said: 'I rather wanted to be outside and active. Building houses is much more fun than sitting at an office [...] I think this goes for all in our group.'

Uncertainty in relation to technological development implied a fear of loss – not a fear of technological unemployment, but fear of a future in which anyone could build a house and building was equivalent to factory work. Thus, the uncertainty concerned a loss of craftsmanship and the building lifestyle is a loss of identity. The identity of these builders was not formed in contrast to machines, and machines were not conceived of as the 'other', as was the case when craftspeople raged against machines during the industrial revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁵ Rather, the identity of the Norwegian builders and craftsmen was formed in contrast to unskilled assembly workers, who were their creatures of uncertainty. At the building site, such workers were also called 'errand boys', emphasising their lack of skill and ability in contrast to the skilled 'workmen' the builders identified as.

⁵ The Luddite rebellion is probably the most famous incidence, where weavers raged against the new weaving machines, sabotaging and destroying them (Harbour, 1993). Resistance seemed to be connected with loss of work, devaluation of their craft and a romantic sense that a way of life was at stake; the machines at the factory was seen as unnatural and somehow wrong (Sennet 2008, pp. 107, 108).

2. Distance to the office and the “fat bastards in their comfortable chairs”

The builder’s lifestyle tended to be contrasted with that of the typical office worker in many ways. The builders worked outside and their work was physically hard. Though the outdoor, physical work was portrayed as attractive, it also drained the body to such an extent that most of them had to end work prior to reaching pension age. It was typical for the builders to find a new line of work as they got older, such as starting small firms, changing trades, becoming a foreman or retiring early. However, some stayed in the job, and these workers were admired: ‘He is stone hard’, Bjorn, the building leader commented on his oldest carpenter, who was in his 60s. But among the older builders, quite a few were marked by their years of work. Some had lost feeling in their fingers and many had problems with their backs or arms. One carpenter had to swing his arms in order to lift them high enough to use the nailer at eye level. He had lost the ability to raise his arms above his head.

Generally, the builders emphasized the harshness of building work. This harshness was important for their identity as builders, and they contrasted it with the soft and warm comfort that they felt characterized office work. ‘The office’ tended to be a general concept used to refer to anything from the foreman in the barracks at the building site to the faceless white collar workers at the company’s main office in Oslo. It was both the name for and the location of those in charge of building projects. ‘The office’ tended to stir up much more emotion in the builders than did references to technology and assembly workers, and rarely in a positive sense. During the interview with the four young carpenters Anders, Bjarne, Cato and Espen, I asked how many people worked at the office they spoke about: ‘Too many’ was the immediate reply. Bjarne explained the situation in ‘his’ company: ‘There was a downsizing, nearly twenty carpenters had to leave, but not a single bastard at the office! How they made that calculation work I don’t know.’ The discussion soon became more heated. Cato said: ‘You know it is *us* who make money for them. But they can sack us at will, they can.’ Espen replied: ‘Yes, we make their money, while they are dozing in the office, the fat bastards!’ They further emphasized that too many of the office workers had no idea of what it was like at the building site, as – apart from a few ‘strolls in their red helmets’ (the color of visitors’ helmets) – they had never been there. Narratives of the office typically portrayed office workers as ignorant about building and uncaring towards the skilled workers who were working out in the snow.

The builders clearly emphasized the cultural distance between the building site and the office, and this distancing was even stronger with respect to the main office, which they viewed as being run by economists who lacked any knowledge about building a house. When building companies became subject to the speculative economy, distance between the building site and the office seemed to grow, both culturally and physically. Bjarne had previously worked as an apprentice at a steady local company involved in several building jobs in the Trondheim area. One day, this company was bought by a large company in Oslo (the capital). At the same time, it merged with another Trondheim-based company. From that moment, everything was directed from Oslo. The corporate philosophy changed, and the Oslo office only took on large contracts: ‘They would rather sack twenty men in Trondheim than consider contracts worth less than 30 million’, Bjarne told us. ‘What?’ I replied. He replied simply: ‘We are worth nothing.’ He explained that the situation was so ‘insanely changed’; the distance to the office had

become an abyss: 'I have never met my new boss', Bjarne said, 'whilst my old one, I could have a drink with'. He also explained that many of the best and most experienced carpenters in the company left when it was bought. They did not want to work under such conditions, and they were able to find proper work with other companies. Such a transition was more difficult for unexperienced carpenters and apprentices such as Bjarne. When his apprentice period was over, Bjarne feared that he would be sacked. 'There were five apprentices who had started before me; none of them was allowed to continue. You know, you get to know them, and then they get sacked. And you know that in a year it is your turn. I don't look forward to taking the journeyman certificate at all.'

Espen, who had taken the journeyman a year prior, explained that as long as he was an apprentice he was followed up by the education office, but the moment he took the journeyman he did not hear from them anymore: 'You are on your own; in your own world. All you have is a "Yes" or a "No" from the company.' This kind of uncertainty seemed to mark the apprentice period for many. 'You go there with a stone in your stomach', Cato said. The young carpenters also knew of apprentices who had tried to hurt themselves in order to delay their journeyman test. A backdrop for this situation is that many companies, even when downsizing their staff of craftsmen, continued to hire apprentices. This was even true of 'unserious' companies that were said to have no real interest in training apprentices. The apprentice salary was partly subsidized by the government, and this made them cheap labor. Further, having apprentices was often a precondition for getting a public contract. Thus, while many apprenticeship positions were available, apprentices did not have a secure situation: 'They don't make money on you after the journeyman test, and then...'

When the builders spoke about 'being worth nothing', they meant being worth nothing to 'the office'. This feeling was related to their perceived risk of being sacked based on an economic logic of a distant office that was alien to the reality of the building site. The builders were unable to influence office decisions, and these decisions had a great impact on their lives. Thus, their relationship to the office was characterized by a certain contingency that seemed to make their identity as builders worth protecting and holding on to. The lifestyle, values and skills of hard working craftsmen became a 'currency' that the office could not take away from them. It became one thing 'the lazy bastards at the office' could never have. Builders who were offered positions in the office as foremen but declined and stayed at the building site were considered heroes, as they proved the value of that lifestyle. The stories told about the office formed an identity of builders that stood in contrast to this 'creature of uncertainty'. This may be called 'othering' but it is different from the typical othering of minorities, colonial natives and immigrants, which aimed at subordinating (Jensen 2011, p. 65). Rather, it was an othering that worked 'upwards' in the uneven power balance between the builders and the office workers.

3. 'Hired shit' and loss of community

Among the business strategies that were executed by 'the office', the most dreaded was that of sacking all permanently employed builders and hiring casual workers from vacancy agencies according to the changing needs of the company. Of all of the transformations in the building industry, the increasing tendency to rely on temporary employment created the most uncertainty for the builders.

In contrast to this general tendency, the company in charge of the high tech building site I studied had a strict policy of using permanent employees. However, this was not only for the sake of the workers. Rather, the building leader Bjorn told me that this strategy was necessary for the company's manner of planning and building: 'I would never be able to make these detailed plans if I did not know the men well', he said. He continued: 'All the skilled workers at this site are different; one work hour is never the same as another work hour.' Bjorn needed to take these differences into account: 'I can't make Tommy tighten roof plates all day, he would go mad. But he is good at solving problems. Fred, on the other hand, thrives best when having a fixed task in the production line.' I asked him if he thought he would be able to build in this way whilst relying on hired hands. 'Not a chance!' he said, laughing. 'How do you think Rosenborg [the local football team] would perform if they relied on hiring eleven men from match to match?' The ability to build properly was thought to depend on a stable community of builders who knew each other well.

Whenever I discussed this issue with the builders, there seemed to be agreement that reliance on casual workers led to a drop in quality. There were many perceived causes of this. One was that the workers from vacancy agencies did not care for the company. 'I love my company, I want us to succeed', said Fred, who was an apprentice at a small but steady company. 'And I'll do my best to make it happen.' The impression I got was that temporary hires 'didn't give a shit', to use the words of the builders. The same was thought to be true of the vacancy agencies that hired out these workers; they seemed to take no responsibility for the quality of work. 'Where then, is the responsibility?' Cato asked.

Another perceived problem with casual workers is that they did not learn from their mistakes. They would work on a job for a few days, make lots of building mistakes and then leave, without even knowing they had made mistakes. 'And it is we who must do the work over again, repairing their mistakes', Cato said. 'In the meantime the casuals are at a new building site making the same mistakes again, happily unaware.' This problem went deeper than the permanent builders' need to repair a few mistakes. Learning the craft of building a house takes a long time: an apprentice is far from ready when he completes the apprentice period, and he must still work a few years to master the craft. Such learning occurs in the community of practice (cf. Wenger 1998) among fellow craftsmen. In order for such a community to exist, there must be a stable group of craftsmen who work together at a company. If a company decides to rely on temporal workers, this learning community is lost and, with it, the ability to build a house properly.

Not only did the builders perceive the learning community to be at stake, but they also felt that the community of builders on site was at risk. Fellow workers were becoming strangers who appeared and disappeared from the site. Further, when casual workers showed up at the building site, they lacked the necessary tools and equipment for the job. Thus, they would borrow or nick equipment, and often break it. Anders told a story from a site at which some casual workers had borrowed the circular saw of the carpenters of another firm, without asking. The saw was designed to cut listings, but the casual workers used it to cut tubes – something the carpenters certainly did not like. Thus, they turned the electric circuit, causing the saw to spin in the wrong direction. When the casual workers came back to use the saw, it produced nothing but 'blue smoke' and they could not figure out what was wrong. 'So now the carpenters hoped that they could have their saw in peace.' This story provoked laughter, but it also

described the situation of the builders working amongst people they did not trust – even those who posed a potential threat.

At many building sites, it was no longer considered safe to leave anything of value in a locker: ‘They’ll sneak into the lockers you know’, Espen said. ‘You better keep your valuables with you.’ Bjarne said he had previously owned a pair of safety boots, but someone had nicked them. Later he found his boots on a casual worker, who was strutting around the building site wearing them as if they were his own. Bjarne confronted the worker: ‘But he refused, even though I had written my name on them. I ended up being so angry that I nailed the boots to the floor, so they could stay there!’ Apparently this same casual worker was caught stealing more personal equipment and the guys on site talked about hitting him on the head. ‘Whether they did, I don’t know’, Bjarne said.

The work environment at sites dominated by casual workers was unpleasant in other ways. Cato spoke about a temporary hire who was working for a particular sub-contractor, whom he had encountered when working at a site just outside town: ‘He couldn’t be bothered to go to the toilet, so he was shitting in the basement.’ Apparently there was a pattern: whenever that particular sub-contractor was involved, defecation was always found in the basement. Another disgusting act that came up in association with this story was the tendency of some casual workers to urinate on stacks of materials. ‘What are they thinking about?’ Espen asked.

There seemed to be no limit to the critique of casual workers. But the builders rarely used economic arguments when pointing to the insanity of relying on hired hands; rather, they pointed to what they knew – building and building quality. Espen gave an example: Some time ago he had been involved in a job with his company, renovating a house that had been damaged by fire. The fire had been severe, but the firefighters had managed to save most of the house. However, the renovation was a large job. The builders started by tearing down everything that had been damaged by the flames. As they opened the outer walls they made a discovery: the layer of mineral wool was only ten centimeters thick, while it should have been twenty. This had created large open holes inside the walls, similar to chimneys they provided perfect channels for the fire to spread. Such building practices are strictly forbidden. Espen and his team knew exactly who had done this poor job: a certain contractor who had hired builders from a large vacancy agency. At the time, Espen’s employer was considering changing business model to one that would involve hiring temporary builders on a job to job basis. Thus, Espen’s building team took photos of the poor work and its consequences and brought them back to the office. They threw the photos on their employer’s desk and said: ‘Here you have your hired shit!’

‘Hired shit’ was associated with poor quality, building errors, an inability to learn from mistakes and the attitude of not giving a shit about one’s company, colleagues and the quality of the house being built. It opposed what the builders we spoke to wanted to be. It also opposed their tradition of learning quality craftsmanship that was passed down to them from generations of communities of practice. Similar to ‘the office’, ‘hired shit’ was something these builders distanced themselves from when forming their own identity. Thus, the othering spoke to what the builders actually *wanted* to be: skilled craftsmen who were part of a *community* of practice, caring for their colleagues, caring for their company and caring for the quality of their work.

Espen was lucky and got a job in what he called ‘a serious company’. At the time of his interview, he had been temporarily laid off due to a lack of contracts, but he hoped to be engaged again soon as the firm expected to secure a larger building project in the near future. But he was nervous. I asked him what he feared the most in this situation: ‘To be sacked and end up in a vacancy agency’, he said. He paused, before continuing: ‘And then, to be hired back to the same building site, having to face my former colleagues as a casual. That is my worst nightmare.’

In Norway, fear of unemployment does not imply fear of starvation. Any Norwegian citizen who works for a vacancy agency will not starve. There is, of course economic uncertainty connected to a lack of continuous employment. But the fear Espen expressed was different. His was the fear of *falling* from the status of ‘employed’ to that of a ‘casual’. His nightmare was that of becoming exactly what he despised, and having to face his former colleagues as one of them – one of those creatures of uncertainty called ‘hired shit’. Something that may have added to Espen’s fear was the association of casual workers with immigrant workers. According to Fridberg and Haakestand (2015), 89 per cent of all temporarily employed builders are immigrant workers. In quite a few of the stories I was told, I got the impression that ‘casual worker’ was used as a more ‘politically correct’ way to say ‘immigrant worker’ or ‘Pole’. This political correctness may have been caused by my own presence in the room. However, it was often obvious that the casual worker in the story did not speak Norwegian.

4. Immigrant workers giving a face to uncertainty

A very visible transformation at building sites has been the increased presence of immigrant workers. From 2004 to 2013, the number of immigrant workers increased from 10 to 33 per cent in Norway. This percentage is still rising. Among carpenters, the percentage of immigrant workers is 33 to 34 per cent; for painters, it 63 per cent; and for bricklayers, it is 66 per cent (Fridberg and Haakestand 2015). Most immigrant workers at Norwegian building sites come from Eastern Europe, and particularly Poland and the Baltic countries. As the Polish were the first to arrive in large numbers after the EU expansion in 2004, the general term for an immigrant worker in the building industry is ‘Pole’ (in Norwegian: *Polakk*).

When the builders got together and talked, their stories tended to rapidly rest on the topic of immigrant workers; most builders seemed to have a good repertoire of these stories. Whilst acknowledging that the Polish workers were normally very hard working, the builders still associated them with the flaws they attributed to casual workers, plus some more qualities that seemed to contrast those of Norwegian builders. I should point out that when asked directly, all of the builders acknowledged that Norwegian workers could also have such flaws (in particular, Norwegian casual workers), and also that they knew some ‘really good’ Polish builders. Stories about immigrant workers were told by Norwegian builders to other Norwegian builders. I have no experience or data to suggest (or dismiss) that the stories reflected reality, but it is certainly reasonable to conclude that they did not reflect the whole reality. The stories I present here should be read as examples of the ways in which Norwegian builders portrayed immigrant workers, not as examples of the ways in which immigrant workers work. I must also emphasize that the stories the Polish workers tell about themselves differ from those told by the Norwegians, as they highlight different qualities. According to Linda Dyrliid (2017, pp. 189–218), the Polish term *Polak potrafi*

(‘the Pole can’) says a lot. It points to the Polish worker’s ability to work hard, work long hours, be flexible and find solutions to any problem that might arise. Another saying among Polish workers is: ‘A Pole can do in a day what it takes a Norwegian a week to do’ (ibid., p. 204). In general, there is a tendency for Poles to portray Norwegian workers as slow workers who lack the stamina to work long hours and who are easily sick. In addition, the Norwegians are said to possess very narrow and specialized qualifications, while the Poles claim that they can do almost any job at a building site. Linda Dyrliid sees the way in which Polish workers portray themselves in contrast to Norwegian workers as a form of ‘counter-othering’, wherein the Poles speak back (ibid., p. 209)⁶.

Amongst the builders, the most prominent attribute assigned to immigrant workers was their tendency to work quickly but to perform sloppy work. Cato told a story: ‘A friend worked in an apartment building downtown. He had started out at the same time, with a similar apartment as a Pole. Suddenly the Pole came out and was finished. My friend was only halfway through. This went a little too fast, he thought, and had a look; the whole wall was put up five centimeters wrong, by eye.’ The wall had to be taken down and put up anew. In this way, the hasty work resulted in more time having to be spent on the job than if the wall had been put up properly from the start. ‘You must always inspect what they do, every time!’ was a saying I heard several times. The immigrant workers’ sloppiness tended to be explained by various attributes. One of these was a lack of skill, as many of the immigrant workers were thought to lack knowledge of how to accurately measure. Another was said to be an attitude of ‘not giving a shit’ about anything but getting away with doing as little as possible. The story of the painted banana provides an example of this attitude. When this story was told, a similar story came up that described an experience in which Polish workers had not bothered to move the trash bins as they put list work on a wall. As a result, there was a gap in the listing exactly where the trash bins had been. These stories contrasted the Polish workers’ attitude with the care and exactitude cultivated by the Norwegian builders.

The stories also tended to highlight a certain lack of concern for safety measures, and featured, for example, Poles wearing slippers rather than safety shoes. Bjorn told a story about a job he had had as a building leader for a team of Poles. ‘They really worked hard’ he said, ‘but...’ and he shook his head. He explained that they had been building the internal structure of an elevator shaft. He had worked according to Norwegian hours and left them to work for themselves when it was time for him to go home. The Poles went on working through the night. When he came back the next morning, he saw that the Poles had come to a point at which they could no longer reach higher. At that point, they had begun to build a high scaffolding of plank residues, in order to keep working. ‘Very dangerous and totally illegal’, Bjorn said. The workers had to spend most of that day tearing the scaffolding down and putting up proper scaffolding. After hearing this story, another carpenter, Knut, told a related story about his experience as a building leader for a team of Poles. ‘They worked all right’, he said, ‘but I had to watch them all the time’. He told us that he had been away for a few hours, and when he came back the Poles

⁶ Using a concept from Iver Neuman (2001, p. 170). The Polish narratives can be said to form a contrast that disassociates the Poles from the role assigned to them through the Norwegian narratives (cf. Hall 1992).

were gone, nowhere to be seen. 'But I found them, yes, at the café!' His point was that they would do whatever he told them, but when that task was finished they would simply stop if he did not give them another task. They were unable to find something to do by themselves. This was not because they were lazy but because they had not been trained to think in that way. 'Here the Norwegian builders have an advantage', Knut said, addressing me.

In summary, the builders' stories tended to emphasize the immigrant workers' lack of exactitude: they did not follow 'health, environment and safety-procedures' (HES), they had no concern for the interests of the company and they did not 'give a shit' about hygiene or the community of workers. In addition, many of the immigrant workers were unable to speak Norwegian or even English. When they did not understand what the building leader was telling them, they would, according to some stories, pretend that they understood and somehow do everything wrong.

Building sites at which few workers speak Norwegian (apart from office workers and building leaders) are already quite common. Some of the Norwegian builders I spoke to complained that if they were offered a job as a building leader at such sites, they would end up quitting, as it was no fun to work with people they could not speak with. After all, 'the bullshit talk in the breaks' was listed as a motivating factor for becoming a builder, and such sites put 'the bullshit talk' at stake. The nightmare future for Norwegian builders seemed to imply an alien building site with no place for Norwegians, symbolizing a lost community and a lost way of life.

However, though the immigrant workers were associated with uncertainty and frustration related to the situation of the building industry, they could hardly be said to have caused the situation. Rather, the increased presence of immigrant workers could be ascribed to changes associated with neoliberalization, such as the internationalization of the labor market and the building industry (as seen in the introduction of business models relying on casual workers recruited from an international supply). Also, many of the flaws associated with immigrant workers seemed to be caused by the office and the system that involved their hire. For example, the perceived tendency of immigrant workers to borrow or nick equipment was related to the fact that many of them were sent to the building site without the necessary equipment for the job. Their use of the basement as a toilet at the building site might be related to the expectation that they should use the basement of their main accommodation in exactly this manner. Further, their lack of care for the company could be considered a natural reaction given that they were hired from day to day by a company that treated them like a commodity. Finally, many of the building errors conducted by the immigrant workers seemed to have been caused by poor organization and communication on the part of the company, rather than some inherent flaw in the immigrant workers, themselves. None the less, even when they were not blamed directly for the situation, immigrant workers were associated with it. In my experience, they were the main target of othering among builders. Why? A reason for this may be found in the role storytelling played in the production of the creatures of uncertainty.

Telling stories, making experience

Above, I described four targets of othering that the Norwegian builders strove to distance themselves from. I called these targets 'creatures of uncertainty' in order to emphasize the uncertain situation from which they arose and to demonstrate that the act of distancing was also an act of creating. To reiterate, these 'creatures' included: 1) unskilled assembly workers in technologized building processes; 2) distant white collar office workers, who were thought to rule the destiny of the builders whilst dozing in their comfortable chairs; 3) casual workers, who are hired by an office with no concern for the building or builders; and 4) immigrant workers, who are quickly overtaking Norwegian building sites. The deeper causes of the uncertainty experienced by the Norwegian builders (if it is at all possible to imagine something like a cause) seemed complex and difficult to discuss around a lunch table. Thus, the four 'creatures of uncertainty' may have served as a way to conceive, interpret and express uncertainty in such discussions. As such, they may have also played a role in forming responses to the situation.

The creatures of uncertainty did not arise through systematic attempts at understanding the situation at the building site, but in the unsystematic talk about it during breaks. Storytelling was essential in these situations. While it provided laughter and amusement, it also enabled the builders to deal with uncertainty. Telling stories allowed the builders to express who they were and to form a sense of belonging (Jackson 2013, p. 32). For this reason, an examination of their storytelling may be revealing.

While most stories claimed to be more or less accurate reports of events at building sites, there can be no question that the events were selectively refashioned and given a narrative structure that made them interesting and recognizable in the eyes of others. The stories tended to include the following ingredients:

- The stories described the careless or stupid behavior of antagonists, such as the Pole who spray painted a banana because he could not be bothered to remove it, or the casual worker who stole Bjarne's boots and had the audacity to deny this to his face.
- The stories reviled the consequences of this behavior; for example, the 'banana-shaped contour' on the painted wall and other variations of building errors, or the moral decay when builders no longer dared to leave their valuables in their locker.
- The stories often included comic elements, such as slapstick situations caused by an antagonist's stupidity, ignorance or laziness. These tended to be of a physical or visual nature, such as the image of the 'banana-shaped contour' or the worker coming out of the lunch room trying to put on a pair of boots that had been nailed to the floor. When these stories were told, both the narrators and the audience seemed to highlight the stories' comic qualities.
- The stories pointed out the role of the narrator (or someone the narrator knew well) as the participating witness to the events. Thus, they always involved a sense of nearness to the events.
- The stories tended to emphasize a moral that positioned the narrator or protagonist in opposition to the antagonists. Often the witness served as protagonist defending the values of the storytelling community.

- The stories often ended with some kind of action from the narrator/witness, such as nailing the stolen boots to the floor. This action often became the highlight of the story, illustrating that the protagonist had power and *was able* to strike back after all.

When Bjarne nailed his stolen boots to the floor, he acted on the situation and got even with the casual worker. The context to this story was a situation in which the building site had essentially been overtaken by casual and immigrant workers and turned into an unsecure place. Bjarne, as an apprentice, could not prevent this from happening; neither could his colleagues. In reality, they were rather disempowered. However, by nailing the boots to the floor, Bjarne acted on the situation and evoked a sense of *agency* and *control*; the story had an empowering quality and when telling the story, he shared this empowerment with his community. In his story, as in many others, the protagonists were *symbolically* in control of the situation, empowered with a sense of agency that may have otherwise been scarce in their working life (Jackson 2013, pp. 33, 34). Thus, it is possible to see the storytelling as more than the builders' way of conceiving and expressing their uncertain situation; it also provided the builders with a way of *acting* upon it. Theirs was almost a magical action, in the sense of Sartre (1948, pp. 58, 59) – despite being blocked from acting directly on the situation, they had an alternative way of responding.

Through the storytelling, the values of the narrator or protagonist were more or less revealed and positioned in contrast to the values of the antagonist. In the banana story, when Bjarne said 'It was not his job to remove the banana', he described the situation from the imagined perspective of the Polish painter and thus evoked a sense of this painter's professional *ethos*. In doing so, Bjarne implicitly evoked a sense of the professional ethos of the storytelling community, as the idea of not removing the banana obviously *negated* this morality. The moral backdrop may not be so obvious when the story is heard in isolation, but in the context in which it was originally told, the morale was rather obvious; the story came in a series of stories about how shortcuts led to bad paintwork. Also, when Bjarne told the story about the worker who stole his boots, he gave an example of an ethical attitude that represented the negation of his community. In particular, Bjarne's reaction was revealing. When the casual worker did not return Bjarne's boots, Bjarne did not steal them back. This would not be the sort of thing that 'proper builders' did at the building site; instead, Bjarne made a statement by nailing the boots to the floor. This was how Norwegian builders did it, and the professional morality of the storytelling community was evoked and confirmed through this act. The values of the storytelling community were experienced in contrast to the values of others. Thus, in the process of storytelling, a sense of the other took shape.

The logic of this process may have some significance. The story of the Polish painter who could not be bothered to remove the banana spoke to the professional morality of this particular painter. But it also said something about the professional morality of Polish and immigrant workers, in general. Thus, it contributed to the 'knowledge' of immigrant workers. In terms of theory of knowledge, this contribution followed an *inductive* inference process:

An immigrant worker did X;
 ergo, all immigrant workers *can* do X.

There is nothing wrong with this inference, but it seems that the actual interpretation of the story drew the inference a bit further, into something like:

An immigrant worker did X;
ergo; all immigrant workers *tend to* do X.

The possibility that immigrant workers *can* do such a thing was somehow turned into a statement claiming that such behavior was *typical* of immigrant workers. The behavior became a quality that was attributed to them. Very few of the builders would probably acknowledge the accuracy of such an inference if asked directly, but the inference was not necessarily subjected to evaluation. Rather, it worked implicitly in the background of the hilarious stories. The inference also became more plausible as several stories were told, inspired by the first and suggesting the same conclusion. These were stories of immigrant workers nicking equipment, using the basement as a toilet or otherwise displaying poor professional morality. The aggregate of these stories formed a sense of the professional ethos of immigrant workers through a more robust inductive inference:

In all the various stories I heard about immigrant workers, they displayed poor professional morals;
ergo, immigrant workers have poor professional morals.

This inference assigns the quality of poor professional morality to immigrant workers. But at the same time, it also *establishes* the immigrant worker as ‘an entity’ – a person who might *have* such qualities (cf. Larsen 2010). This act of *entification* marks boundaries around the ‘immigrant worker’ and defines what is inside and outside these boundaries. The location of these boundaries is just as important as the assignation of qualities to the entity inside them.⁷ Through the boundaries, the immigrant worker at the building site becomes an entity that one can point to, tell stories about and fill with meaning. Pointing to one of them somehow points to all of them. This is where the inductive inference may become dangerous.

I must stress that such inferences were not applied in a scientific setting, or with the explicit goal of examining immigrants; rather, they were employed in informal storytelling situations. However, though the stories did not contribute to forming a scientific hypothesis about immigrant workers, they did make an *experience* of these workers.

Stories give form to experience by making graspable a version of reality that might otherwise be characterized by uncertainty and chaos. Similar to stories, experience implies a certain order. Experiencing the world means imposing a certain order on it in order to delineate a meaningful chain of events (Desjarlais 1996). We create such order all the time, for example by telling ourselves or others what just happened. What we experience, remember and believe seem to be closely related to the stories we tell about it. This is how the human mind works (Carlisle 2012). For example, studies have

⁷ Fyhn (2012) highlights the importance of understanding the drawing of boundaries and the establishment of entities as the basis for inductive and other inferences. The act of creating entities follows a more creative, *abductive*, inference process (cf. Peirce 1960, vol. 5., paragraph 189) than the process at play in the inferences drawn between already established entities.

shown that, when telling of events we remember, our stories gradually replace our original memories in such a way that we ultimately remember the story as the original event (Fyhn 2016). Thus, collective acts of remembrance – such as storytelling or rituals – can be essential in forming our memories and actual experience of the world (Connerton 1989). For this reason, those who listen to and tell stories of immigrant workers at the building site may find that the mythical ‘immigrant worker’ in the stories ends up replacing the actual living immigrant worker at the building site; the constructed entity replaces the real thing, as Larsen (2010) points out.

A day at work at the building site involves taking part in a myriad of situations that may form the basis of stories. But only a few of these are eventually told; only a few are allowed to make experience in this particular way. Amongst the builders, stories about immigrant workers seemed preferred over stories about the office or unskilled factory workers. We still must ask: Why?

The perfect other

Given that much of the uncertainty in the building industry is caused by the way in which corporate offices run their business in the neoliberal labor market, we might expect that the office would have been a more important target for the builders’ othering. Many of the builders’ stories emphasized the stupidity of the office’s reliance on short-term casual workers rather than on steady skilled workers in a community of practice. These stories mocked the way in which the office ran their business, but still, the immigrant and casual workers often ended up as the main antagonists in these stories; it was they who always ended up making the inevitable building errors.

In any story, the other is always opposed to the self. However, this implies that the other needs to be comparable to the self, at some level. In order to be comparable, the other somehow must be similar. Business models are too different from Norwegian builders to properly serve as the other. The white collar workers at the office serve this purpose better as they also are human beings; they can be compared to the builders as according to criteria of humans. Thus, the builders told more stories about these workers than they did about the business models. The office workers were described as sitting in comfortable chairs inside warm offices while the builders did the exact opposite, working hard out in the cold. Also, when the white collar workers were said to know nothing about what occurred on the building site, they were described in perfect opposition to the builders. But at some point, the reservoir of office stories seems to have been drained. This is probably because office practices were perceived as too remote from the practices on the building site. Office workers never made building errors because they never built anything, and the paper world of the office was not sufficiently interesting to talk about forever. On the other hand, immigrant and casual workers made all kinds of building errors, and provided material for innumerable stories. These stories were interesting because the immigrant and casual workers dealt with the same world as the Norwegian builders. They seemed to have a rich and bodily sense of building errors, with many subtle nuances, making building errors much more interesting to talk about than office matters. This made the immigrant and casual workers into more interesting and recognizable antagonists.

The unskilled assembly workers involved in the technological production of buildings were also human beings dealing with the same world as the builders, but they rarely served as antagonists in the builders' stories. Maybe this is because the boundary between these workers and the real craftsmen was not very clear. Othering implies the production of boundaries, but in this case, the boundaries are not easy to point at, as all craftsmen expect to do some assembly work in their career. Another – and maybe more important – reason why unskilled assembly workers did not stand out as a very obvious target in the builders' stories is that there were simply not many stories to tell about them. They seemed more like a projected consequence of technological development than something you actually would encounter at building sites.

Casual workers were subject to more stories and more othering than assembly workers, but not nearly as much as immigrant workers. However, let us remember that these two terms were often used synonymously: 'casual' often meant 'immigrant' and 'immigrant' often implied temporary employment. But there was also a difference in the way these terms were used. When Norwegian builders distanced themselves from casual workers, they distanced themselves from something they risked becoming. When they distanced themselves from immigrant workers, they distanced themselves from something they could never become – something that was alien, so to speak.

Taking these considerations into account, it seems that the immigrant workers possessed the perfect balance between being simultaneously similar enough and alien enough to the builders to serve as the ideal 'other'. Therefore, they became the most important creature of uncertainty in the builders' eyes. In addition, the builders' nightmare future of an alien building site at which no one speaks Norwegian, no one trusts each other and there is no community of skilled craftsmen at work, is inhabited by the immigrant workers. Their presence at the building site is what catches the eye when gazing into the nightmare future of the building industry. No matter how little the immigrants are to blame for the situation; they inhabit the consequences of the problems.

This analysis is limited to my experiences with Norwegian builders and their stories. When other people (notably immigrants) are allowed to tell their stories, different experiences and understandings of uncertainty probably take form. But I argue that similar patterns and inferences are likely to be at work in respect to how the storytelling constitutes experience and creatures of uncertainty. A next step could be to ask how such patterns might generate or contribute to larger movements, for example towards the nationalistic protectionism that promises a solution to the problems that many face today.

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