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Combing One's Hair

There were many rules. The workers were not allowed to loiter on the stairs, in the corridors, in the entrances. They were not allowed to go to other toilets than those intended for them. Their clothes and bags could be searched at any time, to prevent them from stealing. All these rules were constantly being propagated by management, and there were also notices, making the workers feel as though they were back at school. There was, however, one rule that they accepted as rational: 'The combing of hair is forbidden in any Department.' Loose hairs could get into the product and, although they regarded breaking the rules as a symbol of autonomy, they did not want a low-quality product.

One day, management was visited by some important guests, who were shown around the workplace. The event was to be immortalized in photographs. The photographer arranged the visitors and managers into photographable positions and prepared his camera. To look good, the visitors took out combs and started to comb their hair. The managers did not say anything about this being prohibited, instead combing their hair too. A couple of the workers started to shout at the most senior manager: 'He's combing his hair! If we combed our hair in the factory, he'd go out of his mind.' 'Well, that's nice, he ought to practice what he preaches.' But the managers and the visitors just carried on with their grooming.

(Pollert, 1981)