

## Faciality and the Assembly of Organizational Subjectivity: Considering the Possibilities of Emancipation in Management Theory

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### Abstract

One ongoing theme in management theory focuses on mitigating the dehumanizing effects of organizational systems and related forms power over employees. Perhaps paradoxically, the alienating tendencies of neoliberalism resulted in various humanist and emancipatory theories intended to mitigate that alienation, which operate in a way that almost exclusively benefits the organization and subtly yet profoundly subjugates the worker. Critiques of contemporary management theory and practice, most notably by critical management studies and psychoanalytic theory, made important contributions in revealing many of the pernicious mechanisms and resulting effects of human relations approaches. However, in our assessment these critiques still struggle to respond to the emergent socioeconomic and political structures of neoliberalism. As an alternative, this article considers Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work on faciality in order to re-examine the form and function of those structures in a way that explains their perniciousness and suggests that there is a space within those structures for a more liberated form of subjectivity.

### Keywords

Faciality, signification, subjectivity

## Introduction

When considering consequences of organizational forms that reflect elements of Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy and rational-legal form of authority, we may easily forget that his ideas represented a substantial improvement in how workers might be treated by comparison to existing forms and approaches of that time, especially the potential for arbitrary and non-rational behaviors in organizations operating based on traditional or charismatic forms of authority.

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Nevertheless, Weber (1946) himself recognized the potential consequences of operationalizing forms of rationalization so thoroughly into bureaucratic organizational forms. In turn, efforts to articulate management theory that could mitigate the dehumanizing effects of organizational power on employees and the alienating tendencies of modern organizations is certainly not new. Whether starting with Barnard's (1938/1968) efforts to intentionally consider the human and relational side of management or Hawthorne experiments' recognition of social dynamics (Mayo, 1933), what followed was an effort to deal with human and organizational consequences of rationalized structures and practices presented in the work of many of the most influential organization and management theorists, including McGregor, Maslow, Argyris, Lewin, Likert, Deming, Senge, Block, and many others. In varying ways, these efforts sought to enhance human dimensions of organizational practices and shift assumptions about human behavior to a more robust, multi-dimensional model that opened a space for work to be personally fulfilling while still enhancing organizational performance, and this remains a central concern to this day (Melé, 2016). All of this work undeniably moves organizations to be far more human-oriented for those who populate the ideal-type iron cage of Weber's (1946) bureaucracy or who worked as Taylor's (1911) high-priced man, who does what he's told from morning till night with no back-talk.

It is perhaps ironic that many of the approaches intended to make organizations more humane and emancipatory – as conditions coalesced into expressions of neoliberalism – resulted in dynamics wherein those very approaches morphed into a set of hidden and explicit forms of power, which exploit and manipulate workers in subtle yet powerful ways (Sugarman, 2015; Bal and Dóci, 2018; Lazzarato, 2009, Knafo, 2019). Our aim in this article is to illuminate these forms of power and exploitation by using Deleuze's and Guattari's (1987) concept of faciality to extend and augment the critiques of systems and structures initiated by critical management and psychoanalytic theorists. After illuminating this arrangement of influences and their consequences, we briefly introduce the idea of probe-heads – another concept described by Deleuze and Guattari – which we believe presents an alternative opportunity for response and resistance. We begin the article by describing the apparent paradox, in which humanist management theory and corresponding practices resulted in manipulation rather than emancipation. We then turn our attention to several dominant critiques of contemporary management theory and practice, describing what we see as the limits of those critiques. Through the remainder of the article, we explore Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) model of faciality to present an alternative analysis of contemporary organizations, which we believe better explains this emergent and unremitting form of neoliberal organization and its effect on workers. We conclude with an assessment of the insights and opportunities we believe faciality offers and briefly consider the additional concept of probe-heads, which Deleuze and Guattari introduce as a response to the dynamics of faciality.

## Premises and Preconditions

While humanist management approaches purport to improve the experience of work-life in modern organizations, those approaches first and foremost retain the focus on enhancing the effectiveness of organizations. The perspective and premise of all these theoretical approaches is that the primary goal of management and organization theory – and the practices derived

therefrom – is to maximize the effectiveness of the organization. From Barnard’s cooperative organizations to Senge’s learning organizations and volumes of empirical and conceptual research in between, these and other humanist approaches all open a space for more engaged, emancipated, and ultimately, humane organizational processes of coordination. Moreover, they are premised – in a variety of ways – on the notion that people are more than rational, self-interested, utility maximizers. The recognition of workers as being more than “lonely robots” (Curtis, 2007) opens the possibility of more synergistic dynamics within organizations, and it advances the notion that happy, fulfilled, and even self-actualized workers are more effective than those who are – at best – appropriately compensated for their labor.

It is our contention that these approaches at most benefit the organization first, and the worker only coincidentally. Moreover, this imbalance is exacerbated by a set of emerging conditions new to contemporary settings. To be sure, recognizing that effectiveness is not zero-sum with the normative place of the worker in the organization is a critical step – but effectiveness remains the prime concern. Admittedly, focusing on organizational performance is totally reasonable from the perspective of managers and researchers who seek to better understand organizational performance and train future managers so that they can be successful. With those aims as the driving concern, the first concern for managers and administrators is appropriately organizational effectiveness, and any questions about the conditions for and experiences of workers comes after.

However, the conditions we believe to now be in place suggest that it is no longer possible for worker well-being to even be coincident with organizational performance. Under these emergent conditions, a new coincidence now results in more subtle and pervasive forms of subjugation, in this case between organizational systems and a broader set of influences. There is growing reason to conclude that any circumstantial benefits to the worker – let alone intentional synergies between approaches that simultaneously benefit the organization and the worker – are illusory and that the subjugating effect of contemporary organizations is more pernicious than ever before. For example, Jerry Muller (2018a, 2018b) indicates unintended consequences of unreflective over-reliance on metrics, including the creation of misguided and perverse incentives, the establishment of cultures of competition rather than cooperation, and failures to develop valid indicators and measures that accurately represent the individual’s contribution to the mission. Knafo (2020) traces this same emphasis on competition and measurement, disguised in the ideal of making organizations more scientific, efficient, and accountable in the diffusion of new public management practices across a range of organizations and settings. Similarly, Power’s analysis in *The Audit Society* (1997) presents a more constitutive critique of performance audits. Power’s assessment reveals that beneath the justification of expanded performance measurement as an effort to enhance both effectiveness and accountability, an underlying ontological assumption of new public management and auditable performance lingers. The effect of these processes may provide rigorous information about organizational performance, by which the organization and individuals within it can reflect on and enhance their operations. Critically, and perhaps necessarily, these same processes result in the colonization and creation of auditees who embody and become that which is measured. This colonization in Power’s conception, recognizes the subtle and imbalanced psychosocial power that *creates* organizational subjects.

Both Knights and Clark (2014) and Catlaw and Marshall (2018) move beyond colonization in their analysis and explore how forms and approaches to measurement actually create particular

types of individuals. Knights and Clarke's study of academia describes the creation of a typology of attributes that comes to characterize faculty members. Performance audits create a subject that is characterized by a particular form of insecurity directly related to and derived from the indicators and measures used for annual and other forms of academic performance review. Catlaw and Marshall describe how the collapsing symbolic and the resulting hysteria converge into a dynamic that emphasizes work on the self. Developmental concepts like self-actualization (in and through the organization) and entrepreneurialism relocate responsibility to individuals as self-generating subjects who ultimately serve the organization. In turn, performance measurement far exceeds merely gathering instrumental information about outputs or outcomes of one's work. Instead, the creation and utilization of performance measurement techniques and tools creates a new subject that differs both from the one who entered the organization and from the one that might emerge from the subjectification processes of work and the work environment if performance measurement technologies were absent.

These and various other assessments of contemporary organizations reveal the function of a series of interconnected structures that purport to free the worker but actually accelerate and magnify their subjugation in subtle powerful ways. In an effort to better understand these patterns, we now turn to what is perhaps the most extensive and well-developed literatures that seeks to understand and critique of prevailing power structures in organizations, namely Critical Management Theory.

## Possibilities and Parameters of Critical Management Theory/Studies

One of the bodies of theory that most intentionally sets out to detail the operations and functions of modern organizations and effects of those structures on the corresponding experience of modern workers is critical management theory or studies (CMS). Several themes within CMS are particularly relevant to our assessment of contemporary organizations and their function within the larger political economy. According to Adler et al. (2007, p. 2), CMS expresses "skepticism about the moral defensibility and the social and ecological sustainability of the prevailing forms of management and organization." The significant progress of CMS in illuminating and deconstructing the character of the modern workplace stems from the degree to which it draws on Marxist and Critical Theories, not to mention its openness to the influence of structuralism, feminism, post-structuralism, and other bodies of theory. Marxist-oriented articulations of the experience of work constitute powerful depictions of workplace patterns common to contemporary organizations. The alienation of workers from products of their labor not only remains the central feature of modern organizations, but it is a condition exacerbated in increasingly large, geographically disbursed, specialized, and divisionalized organizations. Following that line of thinking, CMS' analysis of the experience of contemporary workplaces reveals that many of the very practices developed by human relations and behaviorist management theorists – and which seemingly benefit both the worker and the organization – often manifest and obscure oppressive tendencies. For instance, in their assessment of teamwork, CMS show the risk teamwork poses to workers and the tendency to "corral [their engagement] towards business goals" and the potential for teamwork to "result in oppressive internalization of business

values and goals,” wherein workers then “exploit themselves and discipline team peers in the name of performance and team cohesiveness and responsibility” (Alder, Forbes, and Wilmott, 2007, p. 2).

Admittedly, these observations and critiques are not new or uniquely the province of CMS. Mainstream organization theorists – including Argyris (1957) and Presthus (1962) – have long recognized the consequences of organizational theory and practice for the worker for half a century. More critical theorists like C. Wright Mills – whose work was directly influenced by structuralist lines of thinking like that of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx – also contribute important criticisms of organizational structures and practices. Mills’ work in both *The Power Elite* (1956) and *White Collar* (1951) describes the experience of working under “an incorporated, a new universe of management and manipulation” (1951, p. xv), and highlights his recognition of systematic and structural oppressiveness of industrial and postindustrial organizations in both private and public sectors.

Critical Management Studies’ critiques of modern organizations and management extends along several other important lines. For example, CMS also contributes an important assessment of structural attributes of organizational oppression that underlie the experiential depiction of contemporary organizations. Among their structural analyses and critiques appears the depiction of social-regulatory structures based on Weberian and Durkheimian theories, but also the adoption of more contemporary assessments such as the inclusion of coercive and symbolic attributes of neo-institutionalism (Adler et al., 2007).

Moreover, CMS examines the evolution of organizational control and ownership. While ownership may be less central to the assessment of the public sector, patterns of control – especially of and by elites – clearly crosses sectors. However, even more profoundly, recent work including that of James Galbraith (2008, p. 144) recognizes the extent to which private and public sectors have come to be conjoined into what he calls a “corporate republic” or as Box (2014, p. 174) describes it, the “predator state” wherein corporations and governments cooperate toward the achievement of overlapping, if not self-same ends through the cooptation of monetary, fiscal, regulatory, and social policies via shared underlying assumptions about the function and operation of political economy.

Much of the current work in CMS also makes use of the epistemological and ontological turn toward anti-foundationalism and constructivism. As such, CMS criticizes both the possibility of objectivism and positivism and embraces the importance of epistemological and ontological awareness of meaning construction and the development processes of social reality (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Fleetwood and Ackroyd, 2004). This becomes a powerful lens through which to recognize that markets are not simply manipulated or controlled but constructed, while concepts like demand and price have no ontological foundations. Moreover, this fabrication remains beyond the control of any one or even a cabal of actors. As a result, they are inherently unstable, as demonstrated by bubbles and information cascades, and the scale and pace at which they appear, grow, are sustained, only to subsequently collapse.

While the structural, normative, and anti-foundational critique emerging from CMS is crucially important, that critique is limited in its capacity to contend with a new and distinct set of conditions. To start, because it works from theoretical foundations in a Marxist analysis of capitalism, CMS tends to see current conditions as “the latest in a historical sequence containing the seeds of its own transformation” (Adler et al. 2007, p. 8). It assumes a dialectal logic and trajectory whereby the new ultimately emerges from the old. However, it is our contention

that such change and transformation – and especially the possibility of anything like socio-economic revolution – is prescriptively foreclosed for several reasons. The dialectic within CMS is arguably anchored within a philosophy of negativism in which each entity in the dialectic maintains an orientation that directly seeks to eliminate the other through negation. For example, the Hegelian and Marxian dialectic establishes a relationship between the master-slave opposition based on difference. The dialectic itself is embedded in contradiction as it merely inverts the relationship rather than revealing the multiplicity of difference. However, difference is actually not captured entirely and thus only expresses an overgeneralization that is ultimately one-dimensional (Deleuze, 1994). For instance, being a slave holds negative connotations in that the extent of oppression brought out by the master limits the slave's freedom to self-actualize. The inverse is that the master maintains a centralization of power disproportional to the slave's power as a means of owning and controlling the being and products of the slave. The result is that "there is no Subject underlying the appearance of difference, no preliminary inside that relates itself to an outside, or projects its own limitation onto an alien or external reality" (Lambert, 2002, p. 78).

Furthermore, there is no longer a point of departure from the dialectic as it continues to manifest in a modernist trajectory. There are two related attributes of this difficulty. First, the specialization and division of labor required to maintain anything resembling the contemporary, material quality of life enjoyed in developed societies has accelerated and become increasingly striated (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Under such conditions, neither the market nor hierarchy (command and control mechanisms) suffice to coordinate the productive activities across the breadth and complexity of the system. While regulatory mechanisms can mitigate some of the more egregious effects of a political economy functioning in conditions of societies of control, they are not and cannot be sufficient. In short, hierarchies are too crude an instrument for the coordination needed in contemporary environments, and markets suffer both instability and structural bias that necessarily replicates inequitable distributions of resources.

Second and relatedly, the complexity and entangledness of systems of production from local to global, the distribution of resources, and the function of regulatory regimes are all so enmeshed with one another that no revolution is possible without simultaneously and fundamentally upending the stability and quality of life in the developed – if not the entire world. This is, to a great degree, what Marcuse's (1964) description of the conditions of one-dimensionality highlights. While it is important to remain mindful of the revealing structural mechanisms in the system like leveraging the material benefits accrued by workers as a means of making them complacent in their own oppression, there is an emergent and more vexing problem to confront. There is no longer an antithesis, no other or external system that can be created and framed as the possibility of change, let alone progress, which has been stymied. To understand this phenomenon, we draw on Deleuze's (1992) depiction of *societies of control*, which seems to have come to be. Very briefly, Deleuze develops the concept of societies of control to describe a qualitatively different set of sociotechnical and sociopolitical conditions that include a highly complex and extensive interconnectivity between different domains of human activity, including political, economic, social, scientific, and other of its fields. The emergence of societies of control does not replace what came before, such as the one-dimensionality described by Marcuse (1964) or social disciplinarity introduced by Foucault (1994), but instead subsumes and integrates these features into a web of interconnections in an increasingly digitized and globalized political economy. As a result, the delineation between industries, sectors, professions, and other domains

collapsed, becoming a smooth space (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), such that there is no antithesis to drive a Marxian, dialectical socioeconomic historical evolution. Moreover, this dynamic forecloses the possibility of anything resembling teleological or utopian progress and instead yields a cyclical pattern that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe as deterritorialization and reterritorialization. That is, rather than even the most modest, halting, or incremental forward movement toward something like egalitarianism, we find ourselves facing a pattern that cycles back and forth between more benign and progressive forms of power, and those which are more autocratic and oppressive (Holland, 2011).

If this assessment of contemporary political economy is accurate, and the structures of political economy are creating and accelerating conditions that increasingly subjugate workers in ways that humanistic management makes worse rather than better, then we must employ an analytical lens beyond those of CMS to make sense of these dynamics, and to find opportunities and responses that support greater agency and emancipation for the worker. We believe that Deleuze and Guattari's notion of faciality allows us to describe both the structural forces acting on and the experience of the contemporary worker. Before examining the concept of faciality, we must first describe their notion of subjectivity, and then present that description in contrast to the more familiar model of the Cartesian cogito.

## From Cartesian to Desiring Subjects

To extend the structural critique raised within CMS – but in a way that we believe avoids the limits we describe in the section above – we now turn our attention to Deleuze and Guattari's depiction of subjectivity. To do so, we briefly summarize the critiques of the Cartesian cogito and introduce the alternative conception of the subject and subjectivity as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari in their concept of faciality. We do so not to return to the modernist or positivist model of methodological individualism, which we find to be advanced in, for example, new public management and resulting forms of managerialism (Pollitt, 1990), but instead to establish a different sort of structural analysis, which we believe also opens a space for a different approach to and experience of contemporary organizations.

One concern that appears in continental philosophy, which in turn highlights a problem in the current modernist, neoliberal political economy is the presence of a particular structure of Cartesian logic. To reveal the structure of this problem, we begin by recognizing Heidegger's particular critique of Descartes' essentialism in *Being and Time* (1962) as an articulation of Cartesian assumptions and their implications. One of Heidegger's central projects is to explore the extent to which Cartesian essentialist logic and language permeated philosophy, and the effect of that logic and language on our collective perception of our place in and relationship to the world. Perhaps even more critically, Heidegger makes significant strides in showing how those very Cartesian assumptions that helped drive the Enlightenment and scientific revolution have now reached their own functional limits. Nevertheless, Cartesian logic remains deeply embedded in both our thinking and our systems. This is particularly true, for the purposes of our analysis, in much of the contemporary and new public management literature, especially that which draws directly or implicitly from economic approaches like transaction cost economics, public choice theory, and principal-agent theory. The critical component of this for our project is the articulation of the Cartesian cogito and its establishment of the subject-object

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distinction that pervades our ontological and epistemological understanding and navigation of the world around us. Deleuze describes the subject-object separation as a distinction between determination and the underdetermined (Deleuze, 1994):

The determination (I think) implies an undetermined existence (I am, because ‘in order to think one must exist’) – and determines it precisely as the existence of a thinking subject: I think therefore I am, I am a thing which thinks (Deleuze, 1994, p. 85).

Descartes’ establishment of existence, or being, separates the individual (subject) from the external world. In a sense, “man creates himself” and through this creation emerges the separation of the subject and world (Newman, 2001). The world itself consists of extended objects that are completely external to the subject. The subject embraces essentialism from which emerges one true being or piece of humanity that is immediately known to the subject. Moreover, the subject can begin to understand essences of objects through ontological empiricism or logical positivism. Heidegger, by comparison, assumes a more radical approach that eliminates the problem of essentialism as it focuses more on the totality of relationships and the involvement of those relationships in reaffirming an individual’s being-in-the-world. This stark departure restructures the creation of knowledge by directly relating to the integration of the subject in the previously established external world. That is, collapsing the determination and object into one world problematizes the a priori and essentialist claim of the self. The determination becomes altered as the subject-object distinction cannot be viewed as two separate worlds. ‘I am’ must always be associated with being-in-the-world. It is no longer an epistemological claim, but rather ‘life as it seems’ is the result of an ontological understanding. The notion of the self is understood to be qualitatively different when identity formation cannot be separated from the multiplicity of relationships one has in the world. For instance, Guattari (1995) uses the example of watching television to illustrate this point.

When I watch television, I exist at the intersection: 1. of a perceptual fascination provoked by the screen’s luminous animation which borders on the hypnotic, 2. of a captive relation with the narrative content of the program, associated with the lateral awareness of surrounding events (water boiling on the stove, a child’s cry, the telephone...), 3. of a world of fantasms occupying my day-dreams (Guattari, 1995, p. 16).

None of these relationships in Guattari’s example provide a point of departure for the individual to become essentially distinct or separate from the world. To the contrary, these relations only strengthen the critique of the Cartesian cogito by understanding the lifeworld as a complex pattern of relations, rather than a dichotomous, subject/object arrangement.

Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987) similarly reject the notion of an essentialist self or identity and are instead interested in *processes* of subjectification, or means or mechanisms by which subjects are produced, rather than seeking to describe any sort of *essence* that might constitute a necessary and sufficient core of the subject. Importantly, these processes do not cease, and the subject does not become reified in adolescence or adulthood but rather continues to *become* throughout life. According to Deleuze and Guattari, this occurs in relation to what they call the regime or chain of signification, which includes sets of influences that frame, situate, and give stability and coherence to the subject. The connected dynamics of signification



and subjectification provide an alternative way of thinking about the production of the individual, particularly in organizations. In our view, this line of thinking offers a distinct and useful way to understand the possibilities of emancipation in contemporary organizations.

### *From the Cogito to Faciality*

In order to understand the mechanisms of subjectification in organizational settings, we now turn to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of faciality. Faciality allows us to diagram the relationship between signification – or systems of signs – and the points of subjectification that reproduce particular standardized homogeneous subjectivities; for our purposes here: organizational subjectivities. The process of subjectification produces a particular type of subject, in this case, the employee who is inseparably entangled in a chain of signification that reifies, reinforces, and advances the trajectory and aims of the organization. In turn, this diagram or map of the dynamic relationship between subjectification and signification can reveal other possible arrangements and the production of other sorts of subjects.

Simon O'Sullivan (2012, p. 189) describes faciality as “the dominant abstract machine of the contemporary world, providing the coordinates and contours that allow the signifying subject to emerge.” It is nonhuman, not natural, and is only produced through historical and geographical assemblages or entangled systems of power. Therefore, the face is a form of politics operating at the intersection of two semiotic regimes: the signifying and post-signifying regimes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Moreover, with the shift into conditions of societies of control, exemplified by the movement from the factory to late modern corporation and the intertwining of the public and private in the neoliberal state,<sup>3</sup> understanding faciality in the organization is no marginal study. For Deleuze and Guattari, faciality is a core productive process that drives the contemporary political economy in a particular, patterned way. The details of faciality are important to understand if it is to be useful for analyzing contemporary organizations and other settings.

The production of the face – which Deleuze and Guattari use both metaphorically and literally – is a result of the interplay between two mixed semiotic regimes called the *signifying* regime and the *post-signifying* regime, which emerge after the collapse of the pre-signifying regime. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), in the tribal, pre-signifying, or pre-modern regime, the face itself is hidden behind the mask where the head and body are expressed as one system. Points of subjectification – those things that establish and sustain a stable subject – never emerge, and instead there is a continual process of becoming in which identity is never fixed. Furthermore, the polyvocality and natural codings of this regime resist the formation of the state, imperial signifiers, and transcendent abstractions. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the collapse of this regime occurs with the rise of the White-Man's face, or the face of Christ (1987). Their analysis is not focused on the face of Christ as a historical figure but, instead, on the symbolic manifestation of Christianity in Europe and Western Christianity, especially as it appears in Weber's (1958) assessment and in contemporary movements like prosperity theology or the gospel of wealth. The spread of Christianity – both historically and socioculturally – and ultimately its preeminence in the pre-signifying world caused the dismantling of the entire

<sup>3</sup> We should bear in mind that, for Deleuze and Guattari, the State comprises not only formal organizations, policies, and operations of the government but also the interconnected and mutually reinforcing structures of the government and myriad other institutions of the wider political economy.

semiotic regime, replacing it with new patterns or faces of the signifying and post-signifying regimes. Through much of the modern era, the appearance and operation of faces of the signifying and post-signifying regimes can be understood as occurring in and through the disciplinary domains described by Foucault, including the hospital, school, military, factory, and other rationalized and bureaucratized settings.

Beginning with the signifying regime, the production of the face involves the process of decoding the head/face from the rest of body,<sup>4</sup> thereby creating an entirely new system – a holey system – from which the face emerges. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the face in the signifying regime is formulated with the rise of the state apparatus and assemblage of power (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that include a particular sort of despot. Taking up the idea of a ruler with absolute power, the despot may be represented physically or symbolically. The face of the despot, in a manner similar to the concept of the king's two bodies, is both the master signifier and the manifestation of that master signifier. As such, the face of the despot establishes a prescriptive system for social behavior, which is depicted as a spiral, or circular network of signifiers that eventually establish a rigid line of paranoid interpretation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The despot's paranoia is an expression of the anxiety and uncertainty about the coherence and stability of their control, perpetually asking questions like "What do my subjects think of me?" or "Are they happy with me?" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The systemic fear expressed in these questions is that the incompleteness and deception of the despot-as-master-signifier will be exposed when (not if) a sign-packet detaches itself from the regime and the free-floating self-referentiality of the system can no longer be hidden. This dynamic establishes a particular, constitutive relationship between the despot and their subjects, or leaders and subordinates. These constant questions require an interpreter, whose only point of reference is the imperial signifier. The inherent paranoia in this regime is a result of "the interpreting priests who continually recharge the signified in the temple, transforming it into signifier" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 116). That is, the despot requires the interpretations of his priests – those who have either formal or symbolic authority – to reinforce existing structures due to his own paranoia concerning the fallibility of the transcendent signifier. It manifests itself in the constant obsession of translating and coding signifiers and redundantly conferring those signifiers into other signifiers. Namely, the despotic regime refers, "only to other signs, and the set of all signs to the signifier itself, the corresponding semiotic enjoys a high level of deterritorialization; but it is a deterritorialization that is still *relative*, expressed as frequency" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 133). In effect, all signs only refer back to the master signifier in the form of the face of the despot. As such, the despotic regime operates as an apparatus of capture that overcodes everyone and everything that flows through it – through this obsession with interpretation. Signs themselves become arbitrary and redundant in this process of overcoding. Despite the free-floating character of the system, faciality functions within the signifying regime in a way that helps explain and maintain the stability and coherence of the symbolic and its social expressions. Anything that disrupts that stability or risks a collapse of the system in an organization or other social setting will represent a major threat and generate a substantial defense or resistance response.

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<sup>4</sup> This separation of face from the body can be understood in relation to Deleuze's and later, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the Body without Organs, which views bodies as having various potentialities of what they can do or be. In contrast, the face is structured in a particular way, which can be separated from the variety of possibilities that can be emergent in the body or Body without Organs.

Turning now to the post-signifying regime, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) note that this regime deals specifically with the formation of the subject, which results from a sort of doubling of what was once seen as a singular, self-aware cogito. They see this new doubled cogito as at once the *subject of the enunciation* as cogito who speaks as and about him or herself and, at the same time, the cogito as the grammatical *subject of statement*. On the one hand, the subject of enunciation is what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call *a point of subjectification* or the confluence of flows and intensities that constitute the subject, or the 'I' to which one refers when speaking for and about him or herself. On the other hand, the subject of the statement represents the discourse of or grammar about the subject that does not merely denote the subject but exists in addition to and separate from it. For example, the first subject is the Cartesian moment, "I think, therefore I am," which separates the subject from the world and creates a mental reality that is only known by the subject.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 129) extend this logic by arguing that the chain of signifiers expresses the subject as "bound to statements in conformity with a dominant reality (of which the mental reality just mentioned is a part, even when it seems to oppose it)." The post-signifying regime – the stratum that comprises the interlocking layers and patterns of signs that contribute to subjectification – is akin to the Lacanian symbolic order that underpins social reality. However, the formulation of this stratum is not a condition internal to language in Deleuze's and Guattari's description. Instead, something different emerges within the process of subjectification that includes both the subject of enunciation and subject of expression, which links both to each other. What occurs is a process wherein the "subject of the statement has become the 'respondent' or guarantor of the subject of enunciation" (p. 129).

The result of that process is a collapse of any semblance of the purported coherence of the Cartesian cogito in conditions of societies of control. In Deleuze and Guattari's vocabulary (1987), it is an absolute deterritorialization of the despotic regime and the creation of what they call the black hole of consciousness and passion. The emergence of the black hole of consciousness and passion results from the turning inwards of the subject of enunciation (self-identity) into the subject of statement (dominant, discursive reality). According to Lorke (2013, p. 99), "[t]he regime is associated with subjectification because it subjects the sign to an authority, but also because the subject plays a role in it." This arrangement produces a particular sort of subject within a particular setting or context, which in turn, has its own logic and inertia. The contemporary expression of this subjectification process is the neoliberal entrepreneurial spirit that pervades modern organizations (Catlaw & Marshall, 2018). There is an emphasis on self-reliance (our rational and intentional interiority) within the marketplace, which results in the liberation of the self through the illusion of rational and entrepreneurial choice and agency to partake and the subjugation of the self to the necessary practices of (self)-discipline required to succeed in this environment. Moreover, it is in the recognition of the collapse or deterritorialization of the signifying regime and focusing on the interiority of the subject that we arrive at passional betrayal. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) position passional betrayal in the context of a relationship between God – functioning as a master signifier – and his subjects. They describe this metaphorically by writing "[t]he god averts his face, which must be seen by no one; and the subject, gripped by a veritable fear of the god, averts his or her face in turn. The averted faces, in profile, replace the frontal view of the radiant face" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 123). It is in this doubling that we attain an absolute deterritorialization as both the despot and subject draw their own lines of flight, thereby replacing the hysteria and paranoia found in the

despotic regime with passional betrayal. The subject betrays God, just as God betrays the subject. In other words, there is a rupture in the coherence of the system of relations, but the patterns of that system remain in place. Putting this in the terms of neoliberalism illustrates that

the basic premise of “the market” shifts away from naming a particular, bounded domain (in contrast to state and civil society) or even general process for allocating resources efficiently and maximizing social welfare. Rather, the market names the practically and normatively preferred model for human relationships in general and for generating certain kinds of behavior (Catlaw & Marshall, 2018, p. 108).

The market’s betrayal lies in the fallacy that we are free to choose if we participate in the cultivation of the entrepreneurial self. Let us recall that the post-signifying regime is more about action and affect than imagination and ideas. This fact positions the entrepreneurial self as the most desirable path to self-actualization because its point of subjectification is marked by a betrayal of the master signifier. The situation allows for the construction of the subject’s relationship to the sign and obscures the degree to which this construction is despotically enforced.

Given the above discussion on signifying and post-signifying regimes, we can now turn to how the face, as both a manifestation of and metaphor for the structure of meaning and subjectification, operates in our contemporary world. It is important to highlight that the face is neither universal nor transcendent, but exists as a structure such that in order to enunciate – to conceive of and articulate ourselves and our place in the sociopolitical world—we must know the face. O’Sullivan (2012), for example, describes the face as delineating our mode of being, or what we perceive and understand to be the signifying subject. Given this function, he views faciality as the principal machine for the ordering of life in our contemporary setting, and he argues that the dynamics of faciality are inherently political.

However, O’Sullivan also indicates that the face “is not reducible to significance and subjectification, but ‘subjacent to them’” (O’Sullivan 2012, p. 189; also see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 180). There is no “outside” to the face, as it underlies and subsumes all sociopolitical settings in its contextual and subjective logic. The machinic function of the face operates as a *white wall/black hole* system in which subjects are, in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) words, “pinned to the white wall of significance and stuffed into the black hole of subjectification” (p. 181). The white wall acts as a backdrop or a canvas on which black holes of subjectification are inscribed through our axiomatic cultural and linguistic practices. Not only does the face inform and frame our ideological perspectives as an effect of the structures of signification and subjectification, but the face also conveys certain practices and behaviors as being desirable and even necessary to conform to. The white wall serves as a surface onto which meaning is projected in the form of signification. These surfaces that can include bodies and inanimate objects function as “the ground ... against which we define our subjectivity and interpret a variety of events” (Safaei, 2020). The absorption of these signs by the subject produces black holes of subjectification, in which the individuated subject and its categorization is actualized within the broader sociopolitical and economic assemblages. O’Sullivan (2012) remarks that “we might say then that as well as producing a subject, faciality also produces the world he or she moves in and through” (p. 190). It produces modes of being through certain assemblages of power. For our purposes, this includes a particular mode of being: a neoliberal, consumer-producer subjectivity, wherein

even something as purportedly personal as self-actualization is subsumed into the neoliberal chain of signification and subjectification and, correspondingly, into the assemblages of the market. This makes escaping the face appear impossible as any line of flight away from the face is immediately abolished or reterritorialized.

The logic of the faciality machine implies a one-to-one relationship between subjects that slide into preexisting faces, and a yes/no algorithm that either rejects or accepts faces. For Edkins (2015), these are extrapolated to “only a certain particular form or concatenation of power, a particular politics that produces the face” (p. 4). Embedded in this logic is an exclusionary aspect that operates internally across faces. For instance, faciality becomes the basis for racism where race is topographically categorized in relation to the White-Man’s face. O’Sullivan asserts that “it is in this sense that aberrations to, or deviations from, faciality are intolerable” (O’Sullivan, 2012, p. 190). Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 178) describe this dynamic further, as it appears with respect to power and race when they write:

Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face, which endeavors to integrate nonconforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves, sometimes tolerating them at given places under given conditions, in a given ghetto, sometimes erasing them from the wall which never abides alterity.

Present in this racial exclusion is the either/or calculus, in which those nonconforming traits are rejected to maintain homogeneity across the facial landscape. Likewise, there is the establishment of preexisting faces in which subjects are placed within the black hole of subjectification. In addition to the face as a point of reference, individuals become black holes themselves, acting as attractors or points of subjectification that reify exclusionary practices and principles. Furthermore, faciality “never detects the particles of the other; it propagates waves of sameness until those who resist identification have been wiped out (or those who only allow themselves to be identified at a given degree of divergence)” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 178). This pattern seems entirely consistent with, for example, Pollitt’s (1990) description of the features of managerialism.

Extending the pattern of faciality into an organizational setting reveals an oppressive mode of being that operates at every level of the organization. The faciality machine is axiomatic and not just a circumstance of a particular organization or unit, but it is instead the preeminent assemblage of time as the resulting pattern echoes or rhymes in recognizable ways across settings including, for our purposes, organizations. The production of subjectivity is no longer concerned with creating individuals but instead what Deleuze (1992) calls *dividuals*. The movement from Foucault’s disciplinary enclosures into Deleuze’s societies of control not only changes practices, policies, and procedures of organizations but also reconfigures coordinates of the work-life assemblage. Life as it seems becomes organized and coded in terms of work. As such, the white wall/black hole system exemplifies this neoliberal faciality machine in that the code represents – and re-presents – the dominant language that “sticks” to the white wall and produces a particular sort of signifying subject. For Deleuze, the codes become “the numerical language of control ... that mark access to information or reject it” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5). Moreover, the effect of subjectification for organizations – or the black hole – is a form of control that functions in such a way that dividuals are ever-increasingly “measured, regulated and judged by the axioms of the market” (Newman, 2016, p. 22).

One important consequence is that the boundaries of the organization that collapse in organizational subjectivities no longer “clock out” and move to other domains by assuming other subjectivities, following Foucault’s (1994) notions of disciplinary enclosures. This is not just a matter of managerialism creeping into public organizations and obscuring or distracting administrators from the publicly-oriented mission or normative orientation – and even obligation – of a public agency. What it does instead is use the seemingly reasonable language of performance and accountability to advance a performance reform that simultaneously – and largely obscurely – creates very specific organizational subjects. This is not merely a matter of creating neurotic entrepreneurs who seek to “keep up with the Joneses” who are now their coworkers rather than neighbors. Labor now becomes a component in a much larger and more comprehensive sociopolitical assemblage at the core of societies of control.

Moreover, the above situation has the effect of collapsing the public-private dichotomy, in that it flips the logic that Allison (1980), Appleby (1962), and others advance. Their claims of the existence of a normative distinction between the public and private highlights that public organizations are necessarily normative, along with showing the presence of particular values that – following Deleuze and Guattari – manifest in the process of subjectification. Taken together, this insight implies that all organizations are organizations first, and that this form of subjectification and signification is, in fact, axiomatic. From this perspective, rather than treating the public and private as distinct, we should consider all organizations as normative, political, and ultimately public, in that they necessarily create subjectivities regulated or *political* in a particular way. If this is true, then what we need to do is advance a normative theory of public management that prompts or even forces organizations to recognize the regulatory role they play and are held to a corresponding normative standard. In part, this is because there is no mechanism that can withstand these processes, be it through the use of corporate responsibility initiatives, codes of ethics, or the selection of public benefit or nonprofit organizational forms.

This opening up of organizational domains or enclosures (e.g. public and private) simultaneously shifts the production of subjectivity away from the original taxonomies and categories of traditional identification, be it line and staff, exempt and non-exempt, professional silos and the like. This opening occurs by placing employees in an unremitting network saturated with an ideology of productivity and control. Alternatively, subjectification becomes a series of “affective states and overlapping subjective thresholds, which may traverse the subject in different and contradictory ways” (Newman, 2016, p. 21). This is expressed in organizations through the modulation of employees’ affects and desires. The yes/no algorithm of the face determines the desirable comportment that is necessary to maintain control over the subject and meet the ends of the organization.

In his delineation of the transition from the factory to the corporation in societies of control, Deleuze (1992) expresses this collapse of enclosures so that work, as one example, exceeds and spills beyond the enclosure of workplace. Market mechanisms and rationales infiltrate and operate in the periphery of the organization, covertly shaping and enforcing behaviors. Originally conceptualized outside the organization, the market now spreads across the entire body, acting as an apparatus of capture, in which decoded flows of capital and labor are overcoded and overdetermined by the faciality machine. Sørensen (2005) writes about this point by describing how one’s employment status becomes a part of subjectification, in which

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[t]he ultimate test of 'being human' is not: are you currently in or have you been to prison, gone to school, been in the army? The ultimate test is: do you currently have a paid job, and which paid jobs have you had? (p. 9).

Again, we see the merging of private life into the hypervisibility of the public realm through specific market measures, algorithms, and databases. In the workplace, we see the diminishment of Foucauldian organizational panopticons, which are replaced with big data measures that act as a form of control by placing the subject into a perpetual state of anxiety. That anxiety transcends the workplace as a disciplinary enclosure and now traces across the blended domains of societies of control. No longer is the ideal worker either the Tayloresque one who does what they are told with no backtalk, or the Maslowian individual who is self-aware and seeks to fulfill higher order needs. Instead, according to Newman (2016, p. 25), "the subject is thrust back upon himself and his own resources, making his life one of constant uncertainty, which allows him to be more effectively governed." The consequence of this subjectivity is that the organizational structure becomes a marketplace with competition as its driving force. Performance measures and audits assume the role of the dominant signifier, while the subject becomes the interpreter. Moreover, exactly like Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) despotic regime, the interpretations can only refer back to the master signifier, but unlike their example, it is not the despot that is paranoid, it is the subject-as-interpreter. The paranoia stems from the illusion that the subject must be completely self-reliant in the market to meet the required outputs the organization needs to achieve its mission. Deleuze indicates that in this environment the traditional separation between supervisor and workers dissolves and is replaced with multifarious flows of competition at every level of the organization. He states, "the corporation constantly presents the brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5). The patterning of this behavior across multiple public and private organizations only reveals the scope, power, and scale of the neoliberal face. The absence of an outside to this logic only perpetuates the mechanisms of control that produce obedient and productive subjectivities.

To reiterate our aim in this part of the article, in illuminating the mechanisms of subjectification in organizations, we are developing a diagram or map of the organizational power dynamics that helps us to understand their form and function in new ways. Moreover, this map implies something about a way forward that reflects and responds to the constraints present in societies of control as we described them above.

### *Faciality and Subjectification in Organizations and Management*

As we described in the first part of the article, the critiques of management theory and effects of management practices on those who populate organizations are not new. Here, we want to turn our attention to the dynamics of faciality in organizations. However, before we do so, we first want to reexamine and consider how other critical organizational theorists have critiqued the organizational processes and practices that create (organizational) subjects and particularly recent assessments of performance measurement and audit practices. We see faciality as extending several critical assessments of the use of performance audits and performance management that have already been developed in the existing literature.

### *Signification and Organizational Performance Systems*

Signification is the process by which a more-or-less stable framework or order is established and replicated so that understandable action is possible. While this is akin to the creation and maintenance of the symbolic order described by Catlaw and Marshall (2018; also see Catlaw, 2007; McSwite, 2004, 2006), one important distinction in how Deleuze and Guattari describe the regime of signs is that it is necessarily intertwined with the dynamics of societies of control. As such, the regime of signs, which comprise all chains of signification, are inseparably informed by forces that reterritorialize difference back into the machine of the neoliberal state. That is, signification is always already political and includes forms of power consistent with Foucault's conception of power-knowledge and biopower, which reterritorializes and reinforces the inertia of setting in support of the state-machine.

Performance appraisal systems – be it focused on individual performance management or extended into wider organizational assessment and evaluation systems – are illustrative of how measurement becomes an element of the regime of signs. While performance appraisal and management practices have evolved away from what can be seen as more ontologically reductionist techniques that make dramatic assumptions about the validity of the measures used – and what those measures indicate – best practices remain deeply focused on developing accurate and actionable measures of performance. Such measures are increasingly likely to be contextualized to the organization and even the employee and augmented by or even entirely narrativized in their content. Nevertheless, they are operationalized in a way consistent with the dominant regime of signs. In relation to that regime of signs, the measures, narrative rubrics, and corresponding instrumentation all cohere into the implicit ideology of that regime.

The result is the creation of objective assessment tools, performance measurement processes, and metrics, which are not merely “end of the pipe” quality assessments (e.g., see Deming's critique of traditional mass inspection in Walton, 1986) or even, in the best case scenario, reflective, mission-sensitive, public-regarding, and integrated feedback and coordination mechanisms. Moreover, these systems are inseparably a part of the regime of signs that recreates and reinforces the ideology and inertia of the state within the society of control. The regime of signs not only indicates what is valued in the society of control but also fundamentally determines what *is* in the society of control. It is not merely that those things cannot be measured or are not valued, but to the contrary, they simply do not exist at all.

### *Subjectivation in the Organization*

Turning to the second element of faciality, subjectification, the processes of subjectification, at least to some degree, follow dynamics described by both Knights and Clark (2014) and Catlaw and Marshall (2018) in their depictions of the mechanisms that contribute to the creation of subjects. Using Deleuze and Guattari's vocabulary, the production of black holes of subjectivation function in such a way as to arrange the subject so that it reflects the form or pattern of signification projected onto the white wall. That form is not just a natural or even random form of subjectivity, nor is it even a thin or calculated superficial subjectivity oriented toward the organization. Instead, that subjectivity is necessarily oriented toward and functions in support of the organization and its coincidence with the state-machine. The regime of signs is the system in which specific signs are overcoded onto individuals, thus creating a form of not just thinned, organizational subjectivity but political subjectivity in that it manifests the allocation of certain values coincident with and supporting organizational functionality. Catlaw and Marshall (2018)



indicate that the collapse of the symbolic order creates a dynamic in which the construction of the individual comes to be framed around work on the self and the creation of a neoliberal, entrepreneurial self that is measured relative to both a particular vision of the self and an admonition to be a certain way. Faciality extends that consideration and reveals the structure that ensures consistency with and advances the trajectory of the state-machine.

Taken together, the intersecting dynamics of signification and subjectification describe the degree to which the contemporary worker is not simply alienated but made into a component of a larger assemblage of the political economy. Moreover, this analysis reveals the degree to which these subjective and sociopolitical systems are intertwined in a way that makes their resistance to change more than a matter of power and control among elites. However, Deleuze and Guattari's assessment also suggests that there are pathways for resistance and change, although of a decidedly modest and non-teleological form.

## Future Directions and Concluding Reflections

For this piece, our aim has been to describe the dynamics we see in place and conduct a preliminary analysis of a particular set of management practices so as to demonstrate how faciality functions. That analysis can be extended to other organizational practices and operations, but it also sets the stage for a concept within Deleuze and Guattari's work that suggests potential responses to the structures and features of contemporary organizations that we have explored throughout this article. At the end of their chapter on faciality, Deleuze and Guattari briefly introduce the concept of *probe-heads* as an assemblage that enables a response to the dynamics of the face. Although a thorough exploration and development of the concept of probe-heads is beyond the scope and space of this article, we want to introduce what we see as the potential of this line of work as we conclude our analysis. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 190) describe probe-heads as entities that support defacialization and can "dismantle the strata in their wake, break through walls of significance, pour out of the holes of subjectivity, fell trees in favor of veritable rhizomes, and steer the flows down lines of positive deterritorialization or creative flight." While this passage typifies Deleuze and Guattari's tendency to abstract metaphors, it suggests that probe-heads can serve as a means to dismantle the dynamics of faciality by both breaking its power as an assemblage and creating a new smooth space which enables other lines of flight or other flows. In other words, probe-heads are to be a means to support the generation of other forms and modes of subjectivity that function by disrupting existing patterns and by opening pathways or opportunities for other ways of being and functioning to emerge. Picking up the idea of probe-heads, O'Sullivan (2012) describes them as tools for undoing habitual ways of being, which open a space to creatively construct our lives and produce our own subjectivities in ways resistant to these dynamics of faciality. However, probe-heads are not presented as a means of returning to some nostalgic pre-facial setting, nor are they suggested as a mechanism to progress beyond or escape from the dynamics of faciality. Instead, probe-heads are presented as enabling new or variable forms of becoming – new "polyvocalities" within societies of control (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; O'Sullivan, 2012). O'Sullivan goes on to suggest that probe-heads can assume a variety of forms, including individuals and groups who function in adapted and creative ways, or can manifest in practices like art that, for example, play with and tweak the use of different media and correspondingly shift audiences' perceptions. Within the

scope of this brief introduction, we want to suggest that probe-heads present a conceptual lens through which we may consider responses to contemporary conditions different than those from other critical social and organizational theories, including CMS and psychoanalytic theories. The exploration of how probe-heads can support the development of a positive theory of management that is less susceptible to the black-hole of neoliberal, organizational faciality will need to be the focus of subsequent work.

To conclude, we see faciality as useful for several interconnecting reasons. Following Deleuze and Guattari's thinking, we too see the creation of organizational subjects as central to understanding the structures and functions of oppression in and through the organization. However, we argue that by approaching this question through Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work, faciality not only illuminates processes of subjectification – thanks to the broader treatment of faciality's conditions associated with societies of control – but it also provides a mechanism that illuminates the manifestations of power and knowledge that make subjectification function in a way that reterritorializes the subject into assemblages of the state. Thus, beyond the way that behavioral and human relations theories leverage human motivation or the meeting of human needs in ways that ultimately benefit the organization, subjectification ultimately codes individuals not just to or for the organization but also into the larger state assemblage that characterizes neoliberalism. When coupled with the pragmatics (O'Sullivan, 2012) of probe-heads, we see faciality as yielding an analysis and response to contemporary conditions that is subtly but importantly distinct from other current theoretical lenses.

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