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Organizing Freedom and Constraint Within the 'Neo-Liberal' Regime of Choice[1]

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INTRODUCTION

> This growth of administration reflected the spirit of utilitarianism. Bentham's fabulous Panopticon, his most personal utopia, was a star-shaped building from the center of which prison wardens could keep the greatest number of jailbirds under the most effective supervision at the smallest cost to the public. Similarly, in the utilitarian state his favorite principle of 'inspectability' ensured that the Minister at the top should keep effective control over all local administration. The road to the free market was opened and kept open by an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organized and controlled interventionism.

Contemporary readers would be likely to attribute the above quotation to Michel Foucault, the reference to Bentham's Panopticon being the decisive clue. In fact, the author is the economic historian Karl Polanyi and it is from his major work of 1944, *The Great Transformation* (1957 [1944]: 55). Polanyi is describing the dialectic of freedom and constraint in modern market societies; a dialectic he seeks to capture via the metaphor of the 'double movement': 'the extension of the market organization in respect to genuine commodities was accompanied by its restriction in respect to fictitious ones [i.e., labour]' (ibid.: 76).

The moral, of course, is that the issue that we are discussing here – freedom and constraint under a 'neo-liberal' *regime of choice*[2] – may be novel in the form that it takes, but is a variation on a familiar theme: the promise of freedom vis-à-vis previous forms of personal subjection versus the reality of new material and bureaucratic (or 'post-bureaucratic') constraint. Karl Marx drew our attention to the matter time and time again, and so did Max Weber:

> the labourer seeks money wages which free him from the dependence and good will of the landlord despite the economic decline that is a result. Just as money rent appeared to the medieval peasant as the most important sign of his personal freedom,

> so does money wage appear to today's worker. The rural worker forsakes positions that are often more favourable, always more secure, in a search for personal freedom. (Weber, 1894: 172)

The emphasis upon *personal* freedom is decisive in Weber's analysis, as it is in the very similar but more elaborate analysis offered by his contemporary, Georg Simmel, in the *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900, English translation 1990). For both Simmel and Weber, the social psychology behind workers' attitudes towards wage labour, and towards capitalism in general, was that the experience and collective memory of *personal* subjection under pre-capitalist conditions were so vivid and oppressive that the promise of freedom offered by the wage contract appeared to make the latter preferable and worth the risk. Flight from the land to the city was as much a search for personal freedom as it was for work. *Stadtluft macht frei* (city air makes us free). Since social action is at least as much backward-looking as it is goal-orientated and future-directed (cf. Hirschman, 1982), Weber and Simmel thought that in this social psychology lay in great part capitalism's attraction as well as – contra Marx – its source of relative stability, despite inherent class conflict. Furthermore, since one's personal fortune under capitalism can plausibly be attributed to impersonal factors, it has something of the quality of fate or luck, for which no individual agent, except perhaps oneself, may be held responsible.[3]

Marx, Weber, Simmel and Polanyi were discussing the emergence of the market society – of capitalism – as such. Whatever their differences, each rejected the notion – central to economic liberalism – of the market as a 'spontaneous order' and emphasized instead the regulatory and coercive measures necessary to establish it. They asserted too that the modern market subject was constituted within this historical process, rather than being its prime mover. And, finally, each sees the dialectic between freedom and constraint as key, though clearly it is here above all that fundamental differences emerge between, say, Marx and the liberal Simmel.

How much of all this is still relevant in discussing the more micro-level issue of the behaviour of subjects who are, firstly, already exposed to capitalist employment relations and, secondly, work *within* state and private enterprises? The transformation with which we are dealing here is not as 'great' as Polanyi's transformation from a pre-market to a market society, but how far must we adapt classical analysis of that wider shift in order to understand contemporary organizational change?

THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM 'FREEDOM TALK'

> It's over! It's over! Praise God ... it's over. ... The world in which 'we' – the best and the brightest, the college kids – depended on 'them', the Big Corps., to 'guide' (micromanage! Dictate! Control!) our careers. ... But .. 'it' is finished. Kaput. Even if 'we' didn't want it to be (and there are literally millions who don't). It is O-V-E-R! New World (Economic) Order: We – white collar 'we' – are on our own. Our lives are more precarious. But they've been given back to us. The challenge: What are we going to make of them? (Peters, 2001: 12)

The parallels between capitalism's original promise to the serf – e.g., Weber's East Elbian farm labourers – and that of contemporary management's promise to the bureaucratic subject are not difficult to discern. A radical critique of bureaucracy and its constricting effects is the common denominator of the managerial discourse of enterprise for which Tom Peters and his various collaborators have all but become a synonym. The 'old management' or 'old rationality', it is argued, is no longer useful since it deadens the living element in business and economy. Bureaucracy in particular is held responsible for lack of flexibility and motivation. It is no longer portrayed, as it was by Weber, as the most *technically* efficient form of organization in and for capitalism, but as hindering and blocking economic development. Bureaucratic rules and norms, as well as analytical distinctions and divisions, are held responsible for the boredom and resentment which are sometimes associated with organizational contexts. They are accused of restricting the flexibility and

creativity that is necessary for survival in the 'hyper competition' (d'Aveni, 1994) that characterizes the neo-liberal context.

In Tom Peters's *Liberation Management* (1992) these ideas are elaborated and radicalized. Management is no longer portrayed as an activity of rational structuring and directing. Rather the idea of (liberation) management is to act as a liberator that radically does away with anything that presents itself as an obstacle to creativity, engagement, entrepreneurial zeal and enthusiasm. According to Peters's own view, his best-selling *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman, 1982) was 'an out-and-out-attack on the excesses of the rational model' (Peters, 1992: xxxi). In the 1990s – the era of liberation management – the situation had changed yet again: 'curiosity, initiative, and the exercise of imagination are in' (ibid.: xxxii). The new form of management, which presents itself in the guise of a great liberator 'provides many people with a heavy dose of liberation, and God knows: it's disorganized' (ibid.: 701). In the chaos of disorganization, it is argued 'thrill' and 'symbioses' are necessary to create 'wow factories' (ibid.: 701).

Peters's radical critique of bureaucracy and his call for a 'passionate hatred of bureaucracy' displays some remarkable similarities to the arguments advanced by anarchist thinkers such as Michael Bakunin or Gustav Landauer[4] in order to free us from institutional constraints and bonds. In contrast, however, to the anarchists' outrage against repression and domination, it is lack of efficiency that is the object of Peters's opprobrium and provoked his battle cry. In this respect, Peters's radical critique is typical of the neo-liberal language of choice. The traditional 'values of bureaucracy' (du Gay, ed. 2005) – calculability, predictability, reliability, protection of the private sphere, equality of treatment – are thrown overboard and are recoded in the entrepreneurial revolution. They become vices to be hauled before the 'permanent economic tribunal' of the market (Foucault, 2004 [1979]: 342) since they are seen as blocking the dynamics of competition and the unfolding of productive potential. Whereas Max Weber predicted that under conditions of capitalist rational organization charisma's path 'from a stormy emotional life that is indifferent to economic considerations [*wirtschaftsfremd*] to slow death by suffocation under the weight of material interests' (Weber, 1922: 661) is predetermined, the entrepreneurial revolution promises a paradoxical synthesis which realigns emotions, or even passions, with material interests. The 'new spirit of capitalism', as Boltanski and Chiapello call this discursive regime (see below), attempts to mobilize energies with the help of the spectacular staging of work, performance and productivity.

The traditional division between the work and the private sphere, between *Amt und Person* (office and person) is increasingly omitted; the boundaries increasingly blurred. Work is deterritorialized; every place (including the train in which this sentence is being written) becomes a potential workplace. In contrast to bureaucracy's constitutive distinction between organization and individual, the new discourse spreads out to form total inclusion. With respect to the limitations that are inherent to the model of bureaucracy, this points to the fundamental ambivalence of these organizational limitations. They are not only restrictions on individual freedom, but they are also a means of protecting individuals from *Willkür und Vereinnahmung* (from arbitrariness and monopolizing claims on the entire person). The delimitation in Peters's sense is paradoxical. It deterritorializes entrepreneurial action (via 'deregulation', and expansion of entrepreneurial principles to all spheres of life) and reterritorializes the unleashed forces by culturally re-codifying them and extending management's territorial reach into the realm of the irrational (see Thrift, 2000, and Krell and Weiskopf, 2006).

Entrepreneurial-managerial authors want to convince us 'what a wonderful force passion is' (Chang, 2002: 215), and that passion is 'the single, most important factor for realizing profit' (ibid.: 215). Passion in this view is no longer the opposite of the organizational world, rather it becomes a resource that 'can be controlled, cultivated, and directed to

specific ends' (ibid.: 32).[5] It no longer belongs in 'the realm of the touchy-feely' (ibid.: 13). Rather it is a force that provides organizations with the necessary drive. It 'provides direction and focus', 'creates energy', 'fosters creativity', 'inspires action', 'attracts employees and customers', 'builds loyalty', 'unites the organization' and 'brings the organization to a higher plane'. In the end: 'passion heightens performance: Increased energy, focus, and creativity all contribute to one end: heightened performance. Passion drives improvements in both the quality and quantity of work performed' (ibid.: 14).

Of course, this is only half the story. The effectiveness of the entrepreneurial discourse relies not only on what is said but also in *what is not said*. The discourse of enterprise/'liberation management' conceals that these seemingly wonderful places – the 'passion-driven organizations' – do not only allow 'passion' but rather *demand* it, and thus create new pressures and unfreedoms. For those who cannot be convinced, the new freedom becomes a heavy burden: 'where associates cannot be convinced or inspired to be passionate about the organization or their work ... there is usually little choice: they must leave' Chang tells us (2002: 198). The discourse of enterprise offers alternatives. For those who are not able or willing to be passionate in this sense, there is still the possibility – or the need – to become really 'autonomous', albeit in a very specific sense. Again, it is Tom Peters who has formulated the recipe: 'Fifty ways to transform yourself from an "employee" into a brand that shouts distinction, commitment and passion!' is the title of the little pamphlet that is offered as a signpost to 'the Liberating-New-World-Order-of-brand-new-Brand You' (Peters, 2001: 6).

FREEDOM'S DUTIES: GOVERNMENTALITY AND THE CONDUCT OF CONDUCT

> Twentieth century collective power was exercised through the Big State. Their welfare paternalistic, handing down from on high. That won't do today. Just as mass production has departed from industry, so the monolithic provision of services has to depart from the public sector. People want an individual service for them. They want Government under them not over them. They want Government to empower them, not control them. And they want equality of both opportunity and responsibility. They want to know the same rules that apply to them, apply to all. Out goes the Big State. In comes the Enabling State. Out goes a culture of benefits and entitlements. In comes a partnership of rights and responsibilities. That's why we need reform. (Blair, Tony, 2002)

In one sense, however, the promise of freedom in contemporary managerial discourse is more radical than that of capitalism in its *Urform*. For Simmel, for example, it is enough that the worker is now theoretically free to *choose* his own master: 'by thus eliminating the pressure of irrevocable dependence upon a particular individual master, the worker is already on the way to personal freedom despite his objective bondage' (Simmel, 1990 [1900]: 300).[6] The modern post-bureaucratic subject, in contrast, is promised freedom from *any* master other than him or herself as entrepreneur – as a subject able to conduct his or her own conduct – under one condition: her or she must be able to act and think as a (self-)responsible entrepreneur; must become enterprising, that is to say, 'both an active self and a calculating self, a self that calculates about itself and that acts upon itself in order to better itself' (Rose, 1998: 154). We are free not to only to *choose* but also to *be* our own master in the one project that we can never leave: our own life as an entrepreneurial project.

In the contemporary regime of choice it seems that this freedom is less a right or a privilege than a *duty*. As Nikolas Rose has argued, 'there is an obligation to be free' (1990: 258). We are constituted as (self-)responsible, choosing subjects who 'competently' make use of our freedom and of our passions. We are responsible for our lives (for our success, for our health, for our family, etc.), for making a specific *use* of our freedom and for actively making choices for ourselves: 'we are obliged to fulfill our political role as active citizens, ardent consumers, enthusiastic

employees, and loving parents as if we were seeking to realize our own desires' (ibid.: 258). In this context the role of the state is no longer to guarantee the freedom of the market (as in classical liberalism), rather the market and marketization is itself a governing principle that structures all spheres of life. Foucault's (1991) neologism of 'governmentality' (a combination of government and rationality, which, of course, also refers to a specific mentality of government) comprises the complex of notions, calculations and strategies through which diverse authorities attempt to act upon the lives and conduct of others (Rose, 1998: 152). *Enterprise* characterizes governmental rationality (neo-liberal governmentality) (Foucault, 2004). The vocabulary of enterprise here provides a language for articulating a political rationality and linking it to specific practices. As a language or discourse, enterprise 'not only designates a kind of organizational form, with individual units competing with one another on the market, but more generally provides an image of a mode of activity to be encouraged in a multitude of areas of life' (Rose, 1998: 154).

The language of enterprise serves to *problematize* organizational practices in a variety of different places. Public and private organizations, universities, hospitals, etc. are being increasingly re-imagined as 'enterprises', evaluated and recast in language of enterprise, re-modelled in the image of the firm (Marquand, 2004). If there are problems, they are attributed to the 'lack of enterprise', consequently our institutions/organizations have to become '(more) enterprising', that is restructured or re-formed along the principles of Enterprise. The same logic applies to individuals or 'human capital'. The worker here is no longer simply a passive 'factor of production', but rather a 'machine of competences' (Foucault, 2004) in which investment must be made. Even the unemployed or the 'job-seeker' has to become 'enterprising' in order to meet the challenge and to prove and improve his or her 'employability'. Unemployment benefits appear as part of the multiplicity of *investments* that the individual has to make in order to optimize his or her performance.

We are not only 'obliged to be free' but we are also *obliged to be passionate* – and, as it seems increasingly – we are *obliged to be creative*. Creativity is no longer merely a human potential or capacity to be repressed in the name of order, clarity and efficient organization. Rather, creativity is a potential to be used and mobilized in the name of innovation, change and competitive advantage in the knowledge economy. Governing the 'autonomous subject' is not so much a matter of restricting and limiting individuals by defining rules and prescribing behaviour or certain choices (directly). Rather, government operates in a different way. Neo-liberals, such as Hayek and Friedman, have argued that the

> 'well-being of both political and social existence is to be ensured not by centralized planning and bureaucracy, but through the 'enterprising' activities and choices of autonomous entities – businesses, organizations, persons – each striving to maximize their own advantage by intervening and promoting new projects by means of individual and local calculations of strategies and tactics, costs and benefits' (Rose, 1998: 153).

Governing the autonomous subject works by providing technologies that allow the subject to reflect on possibilities and opportunities in terms of the discursive categories provided by government and diverse experts. The autonomy or the possibilities of choice are thus not so much restricted or limited from outside; rather, *certain* choices are encouraged and made more likely by defining the frame (laying down discursive categories) that makes choices plausible and attractive or not. Government now implies that individuals, private and public organizations, communities, universities, etc. are reconstituted and have to see themselves as 'partners' or 'agents' (of government as principle) that take a large part of the burden of responsibility, for resolving problems or, to put it in neo-liberal argot, 'meeting the challenge' to optimize one's life or project. The process of constituting 'partners' of government implies

a double movement of 'responsibilization and autonomization'. Organizations and other agents that were once enmeshed in what are represented as the 'bureaucratic' lines of force of the welfare state are to be made more responsible for securing their own future survival and wellbeing. Yet, at one and the same time, they are to be steered politically from the centre, 'at a distance' through the intervention and deployment of a host of governmental techniques which can shape their action while at the same time attesting to their independence (du Gay, 2004: 40–1).

The specific concept of 'Enterprise' (with a capital E) that informs neo-liberal governmentality constitutes a mode of governing that is neither traditional Weberian bureaucracy nor a free market. As Paul du Gay (ibid.: 46) remarked, it is a 'governmentally constituted quasi-market' in which we make our 'free' choices:

> What we have here, then is neither traditional Weberian bureaucracy nor a free market but a governmentally constituted quasi-market. It is the *formation of opportunity structures and environmental parameters rather then routine daily decisions that is the object of organizational manipulation*. In the public services there is nothing at all subtle about this form of 'government at a distance.' For example, in all those many areas where the state is still paymaster, the price of units of resource is set centrally. By altering those nominal prices the state retains enormous power over those agencies to which it has also granted a degree of real autonomy. The newly free actors, whether organizations or individuals, find themselves responding to centrally determined decisions, but not as they once knew them. They may have no more influence over the formulation of policy, probably they have less, but they certainly have a lot more responsibility for the success or failure of 'outcomes'. (ibid.: 46–7, emphasis added)

Viewed from the perspective of the agent, the (entrepreneurial) regime of choice does more than merely create an obligation to think and act as an entrepreneur, to engage passionately in the project of realizing one's capacities and possibilities, to maximize one's own worth by optimizing one's own life as a 'project', to understand and enact one's life in terms of choice. It also transforms the ways in which individuals think and have to think about themselves: 'they must interpret their past and dream up their future as outcomes of choices made or choices still to make' (ibid.: 87). It also produces its own margins and marginalizations. Those who are excluded, who are not willing or able to 'competently' use their freedom of choice, are 'no longer embraced within a social politics of solidarity, are allocated to a range of new para-governmental agencies – charities, voluntary organizations supported by grants and foundations' (ibid.: 89). The traditional welfare state is supplemented by a host of advisers and agents who promise to 'empower' clients and enable them to 'meet the challenges' in a more efficient – entrepreneurial – way than did the institutions of the welfare state. Where the attempt 'to install the capacities for self-determination and self-mastery' (ibid.: 89) fails, the threat of exclusion is ever present.

Viewed from the perspective of the organization, the regime of choice creates, to adapt a phrase from urban studies, 'new organizational spaces'[7] in which the higher levels of the hierarchy are no longer responsible for the success or failure of each individual sub-level, but in which teams, set in competition with and against each other within the internal market, are freer to make their own strategic decisions, but also bear a correspondingly greater responsibility for their own fate. In the expectation of increasing efficiency by simultaneously lowing costs and raising the level of activity, the organization is no longer imagined as the Weberian cascading pyramid of command within a unified bureaucracy but as a network of nodal points, and a mix of audit and central price fixing has displaced the memo as the central steering mechanism.

THE ANTI-BUREAUCRATIC MOMENT AND THE RENEWAL OF THE 'SPIRIT' OF CAPITALISM

How did we find ourselves in a position in which capitalism's original promise had

to be renewed in this modified form? What conditions prompt attempts to revive the spirit of capitalism? One answer points to conjunctural factors such as increased competition and profit squeeze forcing managers to look for ways of raising productivity by emphasizing creativity and seeking to create 'fast' managerial subjects (see Thrift, 2000). A broader approach foresees such a 'crisis' emerging from the dynamic of capitalism itself. These styles of analysis are by no means incompatible, and they ascribe the aim of such organizational shifts to a common motive: the further increase of efficacy and rationality; the simultaneous lowering of costs and the raising of productivity. In the following discussion we use Weber's analysis in order to identify some of the longer-term factors, and Boltanski and Chiapello to illustrate a more conjunctural approach focusing on changes over the last quarter of a century.

Capitalism can be understood, in ideal-typical terms, as the child of Protestant individualism with its emphasis upon self-reliance and self-help, but also as contributing to a rationalization process in which effective power comes to be exercised on a day-to-day basis via routine administration (*Handhabung der Verwaltung*) (Weber, 1918a: 145). What Weber most feared in socialism was the restoration of essentially pre-capitalist conditions in which 'the master was not a simple employer, but rather a political autocrat' (1894: 161). Whereas capitalism divided political authority from relations of economic dependence, socialism reunites them, exposing workers to economic exploitation and political domination from a single source: the state as both ruler and employer (1918b). However, and this is the crucial point, the self same tendencies are inherent within capitalism itself (albeit in a milder form due to the at least formal differentiation – 'pillarization' – of state and market). This is so for two reasons: (i) the capitalist firm increasingly takes the form of a corporate bureaucracy (which includes the provision of stability of employment, relative security, and a fixed career structure); (ii) state welfare measures ascribe rights on the basis of *occupation*, thus, as under socialism, fusing once more economic and political status. In this way a 'polity of estates' (*Ständestaat*) can re-emerge within capitalist society, but in a more rational, and thus still more oppressive, form. This scenario has occasionally been referred to as Weber's 'Egyptianization thesis', and his formulation of it is truly spine-chilling and worth quoting at length:

> A lifeless machine is *congealed spirit*. It is *only* this fact that gives the machine the power to force men to serve it and thus to rule and determine their daily working lives, as in fact happens in factories. The same *congealed spirit* is, however, also embodied in that *living machine* which is represented by bureaucratic organization with its specialization and trained, technical work, its delimitation of areas of responsibility, its regulations and its graduated hierarchy of relations of obedience. Combined with the dead machine, it is the process of manufacturing the housing of that future servitude to which, perhaps, men may have to submit powerlessly, just like the slaves in the ancient state of Egypt, *if they consider that the ultimate and only value by which the conduct of their affairs be decided is good administration and provision for their needs by officials (that is 'good' in the purely technical sense of rational administration)*. Bureaucracy achieves this, after all, incomparably better than any other structure of rule. This housing, so praised by our native littèrateurs, will be augmented by shackles chaining each individual to his firm (the beginnings of this are to be found in so-called 'welfare arrangements'), to his class (by an increasingly rigid structure of ownership) and perhaps at some time in the future to his occupation (by state provision of needs on a 'liturgical' principle, whereby associations structured along occupational lines carry a burden of state responsibilities). This housing would become more indestructible if, in the social area, as in those states in the past where enforced labour existed [*Fronstaaten*], an organization of the ruled based on their social and occupational status were to be attached (which in truth means subordinated) to the bureaucracy. An 'organic,' that is an Oriental-Egyptian social structure, would begin to emerge, but, in contrast to that ancient form, one which would be as strictly rational as a machine. (Weber, 1918a: 158–59)

The passage stands at the beginning of a long history of the critique both of bureaucracy and of the state as a source of welfare aimed at protecting the employee from his/her

fate in the market, but the outline of this critique is already evident here; the 'road to serfdom' (Hayek) had already been marked out by Weber. Peters and Waterman, whom we discussed above, are merely the propaganda end of a much more sophisticated bureaucracy critique that finds its highest contemporary expression in public choice theory and in the theory of new public management. Rather than pursue those intellectual arguments further here,[8] we want to examine how the view, deduced from them, that the employee needs to be liberated yet again from his/her housing of present servitude translates into organizational practice; how a 'neo-liberal' regime of choice' has been (re-)constituted.

Probably the most comprehensive account of contemporary capitalism's recent attempt to avoid the fate that Weber foresaw for it, and certainly one that is gaining influence, is Luc Boltanski's and Ève Chiapello's 1999 text *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (translated as *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 2006a).[9] On their account, capitalism's 'new spirit' emerges as a response to, indeed partial absorption of, the capitalism critique of the 1960s, particularly as it had been articulated – and performed – by artists. This response is highly selective, retaining the emphasis on personal freedom, self-determination and authenticity, but ditching the social aspects of the 1960s' critique: its demands for equality, social justice and solidarity. While the economic justification of capitalism – as articulated in economic theory – remains stable over time, its social justification – which must demonstrate capitalism's 'excitement', 'security', and 'fairness' – is in periodic need of renewal. Taken together, the economic/theoretical and the social forms of legitimation constitute capitalism's 'justificatory regime' or 'order of worth' (*Cité*). The concept of *Cité* refers to the way in which philosophical notions of justice find their way into common sense and are echoed in everyday discourse and practice, thus acquiring 'validity' and providing legitimation for a variety of social (sub-) systems (see Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999). The new spirit of capitalism, which they see emerging since the 1980s, is characterized by the 'project-oriented *Cité*' (see below).

As for Weber's early Protestants, an intrinsically meaningless activity – work – which had previously been a means towards an end under the 'old economy', has become an end in itself, and thus has had to acquire meaning. However, whereas the famous conclusion to the *Protestant Ethic* suggests that this original meaning can fall away once this form of life – this 'coat' – has institutionalized itself into a 'steel-hard casing'[10] (2002 [1920]: 123), for Boltanski and Chiapello, institutionalization is not enough: work has to acquire a new meaning and a new significance once its previous legitimation has exhausted itself and been challenged. Habitualized patterns and/or external compulsion are insufficient. Work, where it has become our life, not only has to *have*, it also has to *give* meaning. Whereas for Weber rationalization processes take over where Protestant values leave off, for Boltanski and Chiapello, who reject the rationalization thesis, capitalism has to constantly renew itself, it has to periodically change its (moral) coat.

Although Boltanski and Chiapello are careful to note that their analysis of capitalism – developed on the basis of a broad and in-depth reading of managerial literature – may in some respects be specifically French, the picture they draw is familiar enough from other national contexts, perhaps unsurprisingly so given that a goodly proportion of that literature constitutes French translations of English-language (particularly North American) texts. Their argument concerning the emerging 'network polity' is not that networks, network organizations, project work, temporary contracts, and the rest are either qualitatively new or are replacing older forms, but rather that these already present aspects of capitalist production have recently (i.e., since the 1980s) taken on a central legitimizing function. In some fields they have at least supplemented, if not replaced, the 'industrial' justificatory regime with its emphasis on scale, stability, predictability, career, etc. The new 'project-orientated' *Cité* exists alongside other forms, just as it had

long done as a peripheral part of the dual labour market at a time in which the industrial regime played this, largely unchallenged, central justificatory role, but now it has come to compete with the industrial regime.

Justificatory regimes are distinguished by a number of features: (i) the criteria of success and failure (or 'greatness' and 'smallness' as Boltanski and Chiapello put it) that are applied, and (ii) the kinds of test that individuals face in their work-related activities. For the new project subject, old-fashioned qualities of reliability (finishing the job), stability, and solidity give way to activity, process, and future orientation. Agents are led into an action trap in which they are propelled, or dragged, into an infinite, though poorly defined, future:

> In the project-oriented *Cité*, a 'great one' must be adaptable and flexible. He or she is polyvalent, able to move from one activity, or the use of one tool, to another. A 'great one' is also active and autonomous. He or she will take risks, make contact with new people, open up new possibilities, seek out useful sources of information, and, thus, avoid repetition. (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006b: 169)

The emphasis upon risk taking, interpersonal skills and trust building, and networking abilities, plus the capacity to move between – and act effectively within – a variety of contexts or subsystems is the key. In return for success, the project subject must be willing to make an investment that may entail sacrifice: 'what is relevant is to always be pursuing some sort of activity, never to be without a project, without ideas ...' (ibid.: 169); anything that could curtail one's availability must be abandoned. Project workers and their managers have to develop a set of complementary skills quite different from those of, say, the traditional bureaucratic subject. A spirit of public or organizational service is replaced by a 'just do it' culture in which due process is subordinated to outcome, and results trump correctness (cf. du Gay, 2000). The successful actor – unlike his or her bureaucratic predecessor – is no longer rewarded with a stable career, but with an increase in *employability*. If successful, they will have proven themselves, and on that basis are in a better position to garner future contracts. Entrepreneurialism comes to replace loyalty as the personal quality that is recognized and rewarded within the new regime of choice.

Within the project-orientated polity, an agent's value is measured in terms of his/her degree of activity, their ability to adapt, and their flexibility and mobility. The inability to network, or to co-operate across a broader spectrum of social subsystems, is a sign of weakness. Projects are temporally limited; they are medium-term solutions within an increasingly insecure and unpredictable life course. Theories of social capital that verge on rational choice theory (e.g., Lin, 2001) view participation in collective life as motivated by the desire to access community resources out of essentially self-regarding considerations. Such an account chimes well with the activity of the project subject. In the process they are unable to pursue the kind of vocation (*Beruf*) – in the sense of a life-long commitment to a single project and its attendant values – of the professional and have more in common with the early Protestant entrepreneur than they do with the bureaucratic subject: self-monitoring, self-discipline, restlessness and anxiety (see Pasqualoni and Scott, 2006: 164–65 and Weiskopf and Loacker, 2006: 406–7). As with early Protestants, on Weber's account, hyperactivity and anxiety are the price of liberation from tradition.

Example: The Creative Industries

To make this clearer, we shall briefly analyse one of the cutting-edge areas of capitalism in its neo-liberal guise: the creative industries. Creative Industries (CIs) are a heterogeneous and notoriously ill-defined field in which creativity counts as an essential factor for the provision of products or services (performances). Depending on political motivations and purposes, communication software, multimedia, Internet, games, fashion, design, visual/performing arts, museums, architecture, music and literature are all subsumed under this label. On the other hand, CI is a discourse, which emerged in the context

of neo-liberal restructuring in the United Kingdom from the 1980s onwards. 'Cool Britannia', coined at the time of Tony Blair's New Labour ascension to government in 1997, emerged as a label that signified a new attractiveness, attributed to the 'creative' professions. Ever since, CIs have gained a growing significance in economic-political discussion. They are widely considered and discursively constructed as both a powerful motor of a modern economy and as a model for dynamism and innovation (see, for example, Caves, 2000; Florida, 2002; Jones and Thornton, 2005; Lash, Lury and Boden, 2006).

The CIs are examples of capitalism's ability to transform itself by integrating critique. What Boltanski and Chiapello call the 'artistic critique' (in contrast to the 'social critique'), which focused on the boredom and lack of creativity, the lack of possibilities of self-actualization and expression that characterized the traditional regimes of production, just as much as the bureaucratic organization, has been turned into a central resource of production. Contemporary capitalism seeks its own renewal and dynamic in innovative and creative fields. The artist as the exemplar of the 'creative worker' is no longer constructed as representing the strict and radical opposition to the economic system and rationality. Rather, the artist turns into a new role model (Menger, 2003). The artist is an exemplar of 'greatness' in Boltanski and Chiapello's sense; a new 'cultural *Held der Arbeit*' (lit. 'Work Hero,' honorary title in the GDR). To work creatively and intensively, flexibly and passionately, as an artist, is presented as an attractive and more exciting alternative to traditional office work. Work in the creative field promises to realign material and expressive rewards. It promises possibilities of creative self-expression and to give meaning to individual lives. 'Creative work' is hard work but it also provides lots of 'fun'. Risk taking, the avoidance of repetition and the ability to move from one project to the next are essential attributes of the entrepreneurial subject in the cultural field (see, for example, Storey, *et al.*, 2005). Characteristically, the ideology of the autonomous, creative and ever-active, artist who constantly (re-)invents him- or herself serves as a legitimatory principle that supports the readiness and openness to change. 'Thinking differently', being different and 'making one's life a work of art'[11] which the artistic (and philosophical) avant-garde once saw as an attempt to break out of a regulated and conventionalized world, has become a norm itself: 'Be distinct ... or extinct!' (Peters, 2001, front cover).

With respect to the modes of organizing work, CIs belong to a 'precursor group' (Voß and Pongratz, 2004). A great many *workers* in the CIs are both *highly qualified and underemployed* (Menger, 1999). *Flexibility,* self-organization and self-management are imperatives which dominate work and life practices that are often precarious. The CI can be considered as exemplifying project- and network-based forms of organizing work. As Menger (2003) put it, the CIs are a 'field of experimentation of flexibility'. *Structurally* the employment relations in this field are characterized by high inter-/trans-organizational mobility, flexible work times and wages schemes, temporary contracts, high levels of self-responsibility, unclear boundaries and insecure incomes.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE OLD ORDER AND THE INSTALLATION OF THE NEW

With respect to the issue of the new constraints that accompany the alleged shift to a neo-liberal world of choice, we need to walk a narrow line. If our aim is an account that is adequate at the level of meaning, then we need to avoid mere ideology critique that treats these freedoms as illusory and the promise as entirely empty. As Simmel (1990 [1900]) showed, if we contextualize these choices, then, remembering that freedom is negative in the sense of freedom *from* a given and known source of subjugation, the alternative is indeed liberating, whatever its attendant risks and costs. Neither the choice, however constrained, of the rural labourer nor that of the contemporary worker opting for life in the project world are irrational when we examine

the experiences that have given rise to them. At the same time, we need to acknowledge, first, that those actors will inevitably be confronted with, and caught within, what the Weberian scholar Wilhelm Hennis calls new 'orders and powers' (Hennis, 2000), second, that these orders and powers may indeed be more – or more rationally – constraining than those left behind. In other words, we are not dealing with illusion (or ideology in the Marxist sense), but with logic of disappointment (*Enttäuschung*, dis-illusion): in the search for the opposite to that of which we have personal and historical experience, we fly into the arms of regimes that bring with them a contrasting set of frustrations and dilemmas (see Hirschman, 1982). Since there is 'a conflict in each between the ways they free and enslave us', the latter may turn out to be even harsher, making the former appear in retrospect as a 'happy past' (Deleuze, 1995: 178).

However, what might be said about the new orders and powers of the supposedly post-bureaucratic, flat and teamwork- and project-based entrepreneurial organization? Are, for example, these new forms of work organization accompanied by some equivalent of the Benthamite principle of 'inspectability?' Is Karl Polanyi's 'double movement' hypothesis – greater freedom for goods; greater restriction on labour – valid for this renewal of the spirit of capitalism? There is now a vast body of work in recent critical management studies and elsewhere arguing that the current emphasis upon 'transparency' and 'measuring everything' is indeed the contemporary equivalent of the inspectability principle, and that audit is the technical instrument of its realization (Power, 1997 and Strathern, ed. 2000 are key references). Since this matter is covered elsewhere in this volume, we want to focus on the means and problems of realizing the neo-liberal organizational form. To do so, we shall continue to move back and forth between contemporary analysis of the renewal of the spirit of capitalism, and classical accounts of its original form.

We need to acknowledge, first, that in a 'neo-liberal' regime of choice' not all actors are at the cutting edge and in the exciting world of the CIs, but rather many work *within* large-scale (and in many ways 'traditional') organizations, which, however, in order to retain legitimacy, must accommodate themselves and make reference to the dominant discourse, thus creating greater homogeneity in organizations that seek to imitate the dominant model within their organization field; a process that neo-institutionalists characterize as 'institutional isomorphism' (see di Maggio and Powell, 1991). Second, we also have to recognize that the response of actors is often more complex than is frequently acknowledged, and is sometimes downright contrary and bloody-minded in its refusal to grasp the freedoms offered. It is important to avoid an overly functionalist language in which the subject is constituted – in one smooth movement – simply by being 'interpellated' as the new entrepreneurial self (Jones and Spicer, 2005).

We need, in other words, accounts of the ways in this regime fails, as well as accounts, whether panglossian or critical, of the way in which it succeeds. This entails acknowledging that the subject is a historical form rather than an essence, existing only in the embryonic form of its becoming; in 'forms which are far from being completed' (Foucault, 1989: 263). The constitution of the *form* (i.e., the entrepreneurial self) is always supplemented by the logic of *life*, which always partially escapes the forming imperatives. The infinity of manifestations of life escapes the cultural formation (e.g., of the neo-liberal subject of choice) and can never be fully captured (cf. Simmel, 2005 [1916], ch., 1). All efforts to establish performance criteria – supposedly capable of anticipating even that which cannot be anticipated – are supplemented by the dissipative logic of life; by intrinsically nomadic forces of life that are 'not just changeful, but intrinsically complex, heterogeneous, multiple and surprisingly novel at every turn' (Chia, 1999: 214). Technologies of organizing need to be 'applied,' that is they have to be 'folded back' to the immediate context of life. Application is not a linear transferring of imperatives, rather it is a *social process*

in which these organizational imperatives are adapted, modified, and changed in the process of *application* (which more closely resembles bricolage rather than technical engineering).

In *Economy and Society*, Weber draws a useful ideal typical distinction that makes this struggle to constitute the new subject quite apparent, namely that between two types of *revolution*: the charismatic and the bureaucratic. Despite the fame of the triad: tradition-bureaucracy-charisma, this particular use of the schema has gone largely unnoticed in organizational studies, but it provides a novel approach to the issues with which we are concerned. Both bureaucratic and charismatic revolutions are ways of breaking the hold of tradition; of disrupting 'patterns', to use the more contemporary language of neo-institutionalism, but they work in different ways. The charismatic revolution seeks to change actors from within by altering their basic convictions.[12] In contrast, the bureaucratic revolution works from without by changing 'facts and routines' [*Dinge und Ordnungen*], and then, on that basis, people; the latter by altering the conditions to which they must adapt [*Anpassungsbedingungen*] and then perhaps by increasing their possibilities of adaptation [*Anpassungsmöglichkeiten*] to the outside world by setting rational ends and means' (Weber, 1922: 657). The charismatic revolution appeals to emotions, and its mode is that of quasi religious *conversion*. The bureaucratic revolution appeals to reason; to us as calculating rational actors (*Homo economicus*), and its mode is that of *rational persuasion*, including the use of incentives and sanctions, and *law*. The former works on our imagination, on desire, on passion, on fantasy; the latter on behaviour. The former demands inner conviction, faith; the latter conformity, obedience. It is thus not surprising that Weber concludes that:

> Charisma is *the* great revolutionary force in tradition-bound epochs. In contrast to the likewise revolutionizing force of '*ratio*' [reason] that works precisely from outside – either through change in the conditions and problems of life and thus indirectly [affecting] the orientation to these, or through intellectualization – charisma *can* be a reformation from within which, born out of necessity or enthusiasm, means a change in the direction of core convictions [*Gesinnungen*] and actions under a completely new orientation of all attitudes towards all forms of life and to the 'world' in general. (ibid.: 142)

However, it is the bureaucratic rather than the charismatic revolution that, for Weber, characterizes the modern fight against tradition, because charisma *in its pure form* is at best indifferent, and at worst hostile, to rational and economic considerations. It seeks 'to shape facts and routines according to its own revolutionary intent' (ibid.: 658), and is thus anathema to the central principles of the 'new economy': goal-directedness and efficiency; in other words, rationalization. However, most of what we have described earlier – particularly the evangelical (a more accurate term than the self-ascription 'liberation') management of Peters and Waterman, looks remarkably like Weber's charismatic revolution in its appeal to passion and in its irrationalism. If a charismatic revolution is more effective, but less controllable, than a bureaucratic one, then a synthesis combining the power of the former with the controllability of the latter would be a more effective modernizing tool than either in its pure form. What Weber calls 'bureaucratic domination' the political anthropologist James Scott has more recently labelled 'cadastral rule', rule via cadastral maps such as organizational charts, bench marking reports, etc. Cadastral rule simplifies complex realities and exercises power by seeking to make the material conform to the schema. For Scott, cadastral rule is the typical mode in which power is exercising within 'high modernity'. As well as tracing its irrational consequences – from Corbusian utopian city planning through to still more terrible cases such as the forced collectivization of agriculture – James Scott also draws our attention to its relative weakness, namely the gap between the map and the territory:

> Redesigning the lines and boxes in an organizational chart is simpler than changing how that

> organization in fact operates. Changing the rules and regulations is simpler than eliciting behavior that conforms to them (Scott, J.C., 1998: 255).

It is this relative weakness of the bureaucratic revolution and of cadastral rule that may help to explain a seeming paradox of the modern, flatter 'post-bureaucratic' organization: while the language is vaguely 'post-modern' in its anti-rationalism, and vaguely libertarian in its emphasis upon individual freedom, the technical means adopted for the realization of these aims are, on Weber's definition, strictly bureaucratic-rational, and, on James Scott's, high modernist. We are back here to Karl Polanyi's 'double movement', but in a modified form: not merely the freeing of goods and the restricting of labour, but the *simultaneous loosening and tightening* of control (see Le Galès and Scott, A. 2008). Part of this double movement is the, again seemingly paradoxical, simultaneous emphasis upon flatter organization and the growing centralization of power within contemporary organizations;[13] a process that delayering has reinforced.[14] This Janus-faced character of modern organizational change – this combination of ir- or at least non-rational rhetoric and highly rational technique – is reflected in contemporary managerial discourse.

CONCLUSION

It would be tempting at this point to characterize the regime of choice as the new steel-hard casing. Weber's frightening Egyptionization thesis might even be trumped. It relied upon bureaucratic power alone, whereas here we seem to be dealing with an even more potent combination of charisma and refined bureaucratic technique, but we should resist this temptation. The regime of choice is, above all, a programme; an attempt to bring about the conditions that it asserts are already in place. First, it does not follow that the rhetoric will work on all of the target actors all of the time. As the Marxist historian Christopher Hill noted of the seventeenth-century enclosures of the commons: 'propagandists were upset by the failure of the poor to understand that it was in their interests to quit the relative security of the village in order to work for others elsewhere' (Hill, 1996: 40). Once exposed to, or faced with the prospect of, the new work conditions, the language of neo-liberal choice may be as likely to induce boredom or cynicism as to muster enthusiasm and mobilize passion. This can be expected partly because the everyday experience of those who are called upon to act as entrepreneurs *for* rather than servants *of* an organization (Scott, A., 1996: 104) is so manifestly different from that of the (supposedly) free-floating creative workers upon whom they are exhorted to remodel themselves. The precariousness of work may become just as heavy a burden as the imperative to constantly reinvent oneself. Besides this, so much of the routine work still required simply does not demand creativity while, on the other hand, creative work (or the work of 'creatives' as they are known in the trade) is increasingly subjected to control and proletarianized (see Zukin, 1988 for an influential early account). Second, even the combination of emotional appeal and further rationalized means of control does not guarantee projected or planned outcomes, nor necessarily secure conformity. In perhaps what is the best contemporary analysis we have of the complexities of micro-level responses to organizational management and their macro implications for organizations, Christopher Hood's *The Art of the State*, it is argued that no 'polar' form of management is immune to 'reverse effects' – i.e., achieving 'the very opposite of the desired effect' (Hood, 1998: 210), and furthermore that the responses of actors at lower-levels of the organization can wring concessions from managers that can systematically subvert the latter's reform intentions ('placation'). Hood's analysis is a sobering reminder that it is not the job of the organizational analyst to mistake organizations for managerial prescriptions or talk *about* organizations, or to confuse 'managerial subjectivity' (Thompson and Findlay, 1999: 172) with organizational practice.

What summary conclusions might be drawn about the dialectic of constraint and freedom under the 'neo-liberal' regime of choice from the above discussion?

(1) The regime of choice is a discursive construct, or, less politely, a 'modernizing rhetoric' (Hood), or, less politely still, propaganda, but, in order to be effective, it must address and articulate agents' frustrations with the forms of (personal) subordination that they have experienced (Simmel) and offer them a contrasting alternative;

(2) The promise to free actors from *particular* forms of subordination (e.g., those associated with highly welfarist corporations) is in principle realizable;

(3) Not realizable, even in principle, however, is the explicit or implicit claim to release actors from *all* forms of control other than those they opt to exercise over themselves. This is to be viewed primarily as an attempt to shift responsibility – occasionally blame – from a collective agent (the 'organization') to the individual 'owner' of the problem (Foucault and Rose). We remain caught within 'orders and powers' of some sort or other (Hennis), and we continue to be ruled or governed in some way or other (Weber and Foucault); often more rationally, but perhaps less personally (Simmel), than before;

(4) Where accompanied by such exaggerated claims, the language of organizational and employee choice seeks to (i) cloak and supplement highly, and increasingly, rationalized forms of organizational control with a non-rational (or even irrational) charismatic appeal such that the actor is addressed as an emotional and not merely as a rational being; (ii) vie to become the dominant form of organizational legitimation to which all organizations have to appeal if they are not to appear out-dated and lose external legitimacy (di Maggio and Powell, 1991);

(5) A language of choice has perhaps as much to do with legitimation (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999) as it does with actually changing the organization or behaviour within it, since, first, as authors such as James Scott and Christopher Hood have shown, managerial claims, however they are cast, often go unrealized; organizational re-engineering does not necessarily induce genuine change, and, secondly, in the 'post-bureaucratic' organization, bureaucracy is, in respect of control, more itself than ever, having been stripped of its 'cumbersome' and 'inflexible' accompanying ethic of correct procedure (du Gay, 2000 and 2005).

Under these conditions, the language of choice may have become primarily a type of legitimation that has generally been neglected, namely self-legitimation: the ways in which powerful actors explain and legitimize their actions *to themselves and to each other* (see Barker, 2001). It may, in other words, become, above all, a form of talk among those with considerable power resources about themselves and about – and indeed to – those who are subordinate to them, casting the former in a positive, and the latter, on occasion, in a negative, light.

NOTES

1 This chapter is informed by two research projects in which the authors are separately engaged: 'European governance: multi-level or post-democratic?' funded by the Austrian Ministry of Science (www.NODE-research.at) (Scott) and 'Re-creating organization: Organizing work and the work of organizing as ethico-aesthetic practice,' funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF grant no. FP 190260) (http://www.re-creating.org) (Weiskopf).

2 The term 'regime of choice' is taken from Nikolas Rose. See, for example, Rose, 1999: 87–89. We discuss his analysis below.

3 And thus not a question of justice or injustice for libertarians such as Robert Nozick, 1974.

4 Or indeed by Chairman Mao during the Cultural Revolution.

5 This supports Weber's view that 'rational discipline' must include the instrumentally rational channelling of irrational forces (the 'moral element'). Weber traces the techniques required to achieve this back to military discipline and the conduct of war. See Weber, 1922: 682.

6 For a detailed discussion of the implications of Simmel's analysis for organization studies, see Scott, A., 2008.

7 The phrase is 'new state spaces' (e.g., Brenner, 2004). The argument is the same, but at the level of the state: 'spatial post-Keynesianism' 'rescales' the state, which no longer seeks to govern a unified object – 'the nation' – but reconstitutes the subject of governance as 'the entrepreneurial city', 'the learning region', etc. Again, these are set up in competition (*Standortpolitik*; the politics of locational advantage) in the expectation of lifting general standards by

simultaneously lowering costs and raising the level of activity.

8 For a review of the main lines of argument and critique of new public management, see Palumbo, 2001.

9 The following discussion of the *New Spirit* is a slightly modified version of Pasqualoni and Scott, A. 2006. We would like to thank *Max Weber Studies* and Pier-Paolo Pasqualoni for allowing us to use this material. A briefer – article length – version of the new spirit of capitalism argument can be found in Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006b.

10 This is a more accurate translation of *strahlendes Gehäuse* or *stahlhartes Gehäuse* than is the more familiar 'iron cage'.

11 Foucault (1982: 237) famously concluded from his refusal of an essential or timeless subject: 'there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art'. Some decades earlier Max Weber had warned: 'Even with a personality of Goethe's standing, it would have been disastrous, as far as his art was concerned, if he had taken the liberty of trying to make his "life" into a work of art. And ever if one doubts this, one would have at least to be Goethe to allow oneself to try at all. At the very least, everyone would admit that even in the case of someone like him, who appears every thousand years, such a liberty has its price' (Weber 1919: 11). It is a matter for research and personal experience what price has to be paid in following the advice or imperative, and if the gains in freedom are worth it.

12 The term Weber uses is *Gesinnung*, which is broader and deeper than conviction. In English its equivalent would be a family of terms: conviction, mind-set, cast of mind, orientation, perception, general outlook (the stem is *Sinn*, sense). The term is thus, for example, less behaviouristic and external than Pierre Bourdieu's influential notion of 'habitus'.

13 At a more macro (political and economic) level, Andrew Gamble characterized Thatcherism as the combination of 'free economy and strong state' (Gamble, 1988). Although his main theoretical inspiration came from Gramsci, there are, again, clear echoes of Polanyi's great transformation thesis in this formulation.

14 Again, a more macro level, in this case that of politics, Colin Crouch (2004) has argued that the increasing 'disembedding' of élite actors – i.e. growing distance and lack of democratic control from below – encouraged the emergence of 'post-democratic practices,' styles of political governance that are increasingly monocratic and monological. Crouch, like a number of contemporary analysts, is thus aware of the interrelatedness of organizational and political governance. Chapter Ten of Sheldon Wolin's 1960 text *Politics and Vision* – 'The age of organization and the sublimation of politics' – remains the classic expression of this view.

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Volume II
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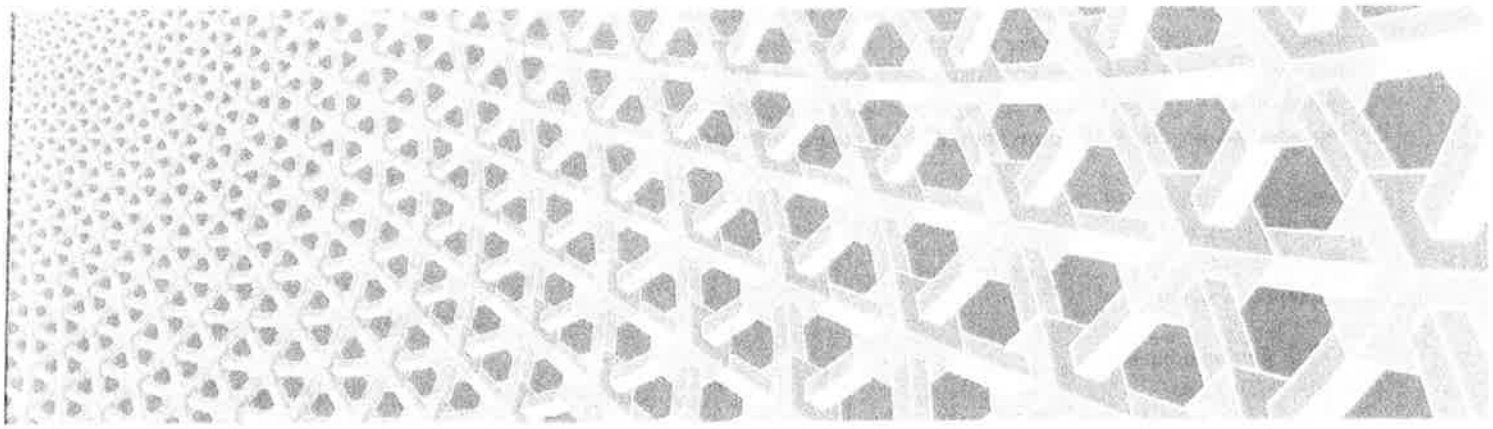

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