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Freedom at Work in the Age of Post-bureaucratic Organization

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abstract

A central issue in critical organization studies has been whether the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic principles of exercising power increases or decreases individuals' freedom at work. This essay develops the argument that the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic power implicates neither an increase nor a decrease of individuals' freedom, but a reconfiguration of the nature of individuals' freedom. By way of an analytical distinction between freedom as autonomy and freedom as potential it is argued that the two dominant views in critical organization studies are partly misplaced. The post-bureaucratic subject does not emerge as a 'slave' that is subtly forced to subordinate its very self to corporate values, as one strand of critical organization studies has it, nor as a 'silent rebel', that escapes totalitarian subordination through micro – routine – resistance and ironic distance, as the other strand has it, but as an 'opportunist', who, in the process of trying to seize on given opportunities, must fight against any form of subordination – even the subordination to his or her own self. Rather than totalitarianism, it is concluded that the risk of post-bureaucracy is its tendency to make freedom a privilege of those with potential, and of pushing others into vicious circles of opportunism.

Introduction

For the majority of the 20th century the relation between individual freedom and efficient production was seen as problematic and loaded with conflict. Through struggles for higher wages, better working conditions, and shorter working hours, worker movements and trade unions sought to extend workers' freedom both inside and outside the factory walls. Employers, by contrast, saw workers' freedom as a significant cost and as a potential problem that needed to be restricted, controlled, or simply expelled from the workplace. And yet, over the past two decades individual freedom has seemingly become the underlying value principle of the ideologies of worker movements and managerial think tanks alike. It is regarded as no longer a problem to be controlled, but as a central economic resource – it is by constituting individuals as free men and women that corporations and economies prosper.

This glorification of freedom has been accompanied by a critique of bureaucratic principles of organizing work (Du Gay, 1994; 2000; Du Gay et al., 1996). Allegedly, bureaucracy is founded on a number of unfortunate divisions, which restrict individuals'

freedom. Divisions between professional and private behavior, economic and social concerns, rational and emotional motives, etc., at once split individuals morally in halves and push potentially valuable 'resources' such as individuals' social relations, desires and interests outside of work (Adler, 2001). However, in a number of critical organization studies of *post-bureaucratic*[1] organizations, individuals have emerged as free only superficially. In fact, these studies have pointed out that such organizations do not emancipate workers from oppression, but attempt to snare them in power relations even more efficiently than did the iron cage of bureaucracy (e.g. Barker, 1993; Casey, 1999; Kunda, 1992; Fleming and Spicer, 2004). Post-bureaucratic organizations seek to make commitment to and identification with work and the organization a norm that has to be respected by those who wish to keep their jobs. In this regard, post-bureaucratic organizations are seen to be geared towards a more encompassing form of subordination of its members. Some critical scholars have even 'accused' such organizations of settling for no less than the modulation and exploitation of the soul of the individual (Willmott, 1993).

In line with the critical studies referred to the general aim of this essay is to critically assess the nature of control and the status of the individual subject in post-bureaucratic organizations. However, in contrast to these studies, which analyze the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic power in terms of how this transformation affects individuals' degrees of freedom, I analyze this transformation in terms of how it affects the nature of individuals' freedom. The essay develops the argument that the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic organization should be seen neither as an increase nor as a decrease of individuals' freedom, but as a reconfiguration of the nature of individuals' freedom. More specifically, whereas bureaucratic organization configured 'freedom as autonomy', post-bureaucratic organization configures 'freedom as potential'. The essay suggests the ways in which these different notions of freedom imply different forms and idealizations of individual subjectivity. Whereas the former implies a stable and self-conscious subject, which achieves its freedom by setting a distinct course and maintaining a measure of distance between self and other, and between work and private life, the latter implies an unself-conscious and malleable subject, which achieves its freedom by blending into the environment and thereby managing to exploit fleeting opportunities.

By developing this argument I am not implying that critical organization studies are based on an undifferentiated and generally shared view of how post-bureaucratic power affects the freedom and subjectivity of individual members. With regards to this issue we may discern two groups within critical organization studies. One group envisions post-bureaucratic power as a subtly efficient way of subordinating the very self of the individual to corporate powers. Another sees post-bureaucratic power as less efficient, leaving individuals more discretion than suspected. Yet, even if these two groups differ

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1 The focus of the discussion that follows is on the types of workplaces often referred to as 'the culture managed service corporation', 'the network enterprise', 'the knowledge intensive firm', 'the customer centric firm', etc. For reasons which are elaborated further down in this essay I use the term post-bureaucracy as a summary for all these concepts and the type of workplaces they imply. Such post-bureaucratic organizations are not considered here as representative of the structure and functioning of work and organizations as a whole, but as a form of archetypes of the kinds of organizations in which new rules and principles of governing work are most apparent.

in their analysis and conclusions of the effectiveness of post-bureaucratic power, they tend to share the view of post-bureaucracy as harbouring the tendency to subtly colonize the self of employees, i.e. they see it as a trick or as a way of luring individuals into invisible but increasingly encompassing and coercive forms of domination. Such an analysis is based on an understanding of freedom as autonomy and of post-bureaucratic power as attempting – albeit more or less successfully – to regulate or perhaps even to nullify this autonomy. This essay argues that if we analyze post-bureaucratic power against the background of an understanding of freedom as potential we may instead see post-bureaucracy as a way of distributing opportunities to individuals based on judgments of their potential to seize on these opportunities. Hereby, however, we do not necessarily arrive at a more positive interpretation of the social effects of post-bureaucracy. The essay shows that by substituting autonomy with opportunity, freedom in, and in relation to, work is transformed from a right of all employees to a privilege of those with potential. Furthermore, it shows how such distribution of opportunities risks forcing individuals into vicious circles of 'opportunisms'.

The essay is organized in four parts. I begin with some brief notes on my position of authority vis-à-vis the subjects discussed. I then develop the distinction between 'freedom as autonomy' and 'freedom as potential' and put it to use in relation to bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic modes of organizing work. The paper concludes with a brief discussion.

A Critical Essay

The essay critically assesses academic discourses on bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic organization against the background of an analytical distinction between two forms of freedom. Given the lack of direct empirical observations I obviously cannot claim to have much to say about how and to what extent individuals actually experience themselves as free or not, both in and in relation to their work. A prisoner may experience him or herself as more or less free – e.g. spiritually and intellectually. Conversely a citizen of a democratic society with access to capital, knowledge, and other resources, may experience him or herself as helplessly trapped – e.g. by previous commitments and social relations. However, I do attempt to make claims about how the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic organization affects the structural conditions of individuals' freedom. By this I refer most generally to what is possible to think about contemporary forms of governance, and more specifically to the role of theory in contemporary managerial and organizational practice. That is, I generally assume that a certain kind of reasoning makes possible both the exercise of governance and the critique of that governance, not least by making governance and its critique understandable, potentially truthful and legitimate. More specifically, I assume that theories of governance, e.g. theories about post-bureaucratic organizations, play significant roles in forming our reasoning about proper forms of governance and in diagnosing the critical aspects of those forms of governance. Developing theories about organizations is, as I see it, not merely to take part in some neutral activity; it is to take part in political action. I affirm this stance: by suggesting some alternative ways of

thinking about post-bureaucratic organizations I hope to introduce some new options into our current political imagination.

What is the ethos of such an endeavour? Following Paul Veyne (1997: 231), I see the critical scholar as someone who, "facing each new present circumstance makes a diagnosis of the new danger." By this I do not mean that critical scholarship should lead towards an anti-power or anti-management attitude; I mean that critical scholarship should attempt to evaluate the costs of present modes of thought, but also that it should point towards other possibilities of existence that these modes of thought may presently exclude, constrain, or condemn (Barratt, 2003). Hence, I would like to see this critical essay not only as an attempt to diagnose the status of the structural conditions of individuals' freedom at work, but also as an attempt to provide analytical tools for political action in the field of organizations and organization studies.

Freedom as Autonomy – Freedom as Potential

Through Descartes, Hegel, and Kant the European philosophical tradition has above all conceived *freedom as autonomy*; autonomy from external influences and constrictions and autonomy from passions and natural drives (Foucault, 1991; Liedman, 2004). One central premise of such freedom has been the individuals' capacity to develop a profound self-understanding on the basis of which self-consciousness and reflection becomes possible. Only the pure and rational subject is free (in this sense of autonomous). That is, the subject that knows itself, and, on the basis of this knowledge, is able to give its own law to itself and remain unfamiliar with any form of abandonment to the world. Hence, self-consciousness functions here as a primary means for the subjects' possibility of maintaining distance between the self and other, and more generally, between the self and the world. Obviously, such intellectual distance does not guarantee an individual's practical autonomy. Yet, without control and understanding of the self, an individual has been seen to be unable to make choices that are unaffected by the negative influence of others.

Within this style of thought freedom is mainly discussed in 'negative' terms, i.e. as the absence of coercion and domination, and more generally, as the absence of power (Preston, 1987). This type of freedom, Nicolas Rose points out, has been discussed as "a condition in which the essential subjective will of an individual, a group or a people could express itself and was not silenced, subordinated or enslaved by an alien power" (Rose, 1999: 1). However, in defining freedom in negative terms, as the absence of power, an implicit relation is inescapably created to a power that, as it were, protects freedom from power. In this regard this notion of freedom as autonomy implies that the free individual is situated within a system of power, or that autonomy, as it were, is a zone within a system of power which protects it and surrounds it.[2]

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2 As shown by Foucault (1991), even in 19th century – 'laissez faire' – liberalism series of administrative and technical inventions were required to shape and protect the freedom of individuals – prisons, enforced medical interventions, compulsory education, moral policing, etc. It was, Foucault

Hence, according to this view an individual is free if he governs himself – i.e. maintains a relation with himself and a distance to the world – on the basis of self-knowledge, which, in order to develop and flourish, require safeguarding by authorities operating in the name of his freedom (Preston, 1987). That is, power functions at once as the antithesis of this idea of freedom and as one of its basic conditions.

Even if the conception of freedom as the necessity of being able to distance oneself from the world – and from oneself – continuous to dominate western thought, it does not exhaust the current meaning of the expression 'being free' (de Carolis, 1996; Preston, 1987). In everyday language being free tends to imply that one has at one's disposal concrete possibilities, i.e. that one possesses power to initiate and complete certain actions (Liedman, 2004; de Carolis, 1996). Understood in this way, freedom is not based on the notion that the individual maintains an autonomous distance to his or her surroundings. On the contrary, it is based on that the individual maintains an intimate relation with the context of his or her actions. Someone who wishes to become member of a group cannot maintain a physical and psychological distance from other members, but must take active part in the groups' practices. Similarly, a person who is confronted with transitory opportunities does not have the time to act on the basis of a reflective awareness of his or her own role and ideals. Acting freely in such situations is more a matter of making agile and instinctive choices on the basis of an unconstrained confidence in one's capacities.

Hence, from this perspective a person is free if he or she is ready to exploit the innumerable chances offered by the world. Such an understanding of freedom, which I will refer to here as *freedom as potential*, implies that the subject becomes entangled with the environment and that such intimate interaction with the environment is celebrated – because without it, the potential of doing and accomplishing things does not exist (de Carolis, 1996). This idea of freedom is substantially different from the former one, especially in two regards. First, the lack of distance between self and others implies that individuals are not autonomous in the sense of the term developed above. To act freely implies action that is frictionless because it is seamlessly integrated with its social environment. That is, the freedom of an individual is not based on a self conscious distance, but on the individuals' willingness and ability to mould him or herself into social structures, even if it means rendering the self indistinct. The person who is free in this regard does not wish to stand at the side of the world, looking at it and analyzing it from a distance, but wishes to belong to it in a way that lets him or her move through it like a fish moves through water (de Carolis, 1996). Second, when the ability to seize on opportunities is accentuated before autonomy, power is no longer an antithesis to freedom but instead becomes an integral part of freedom. What is then emphasized is not that freedom means liberation from power, but that it requires power – power to act and to seize on opportunities. That is, if freedom as autonomy means freedom from power (which, however, is safeguarded by authoritative power), freedom as potential means freedom to seize on opportunities via distributed power.

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remarked (1991), the same political movement that in the 19th century celebrated liberty that built the prison.

The idea that freedom not only implies autonomy with regards to power, but is also related to potential and thereby to power, is in no way completely new. Already in the 1930th the American philosopher John Dewey (1935) argued that 'freedom is power' and that freedom from coercion was but a means to 'real' freedom; the power of accomplishing things. Similarly, in the early 1940th the German social-psychologist Erich Fromm (1969) famously explained how in modern societies individuals' liberation from traditional authorities also leads to growing isolation, aloneness, and alienation. Liberation was but one – negative – aspect of freedom. The other aspect was 'positive freedom', i.e. growing individual strengths which helped individuals reach their full potential. Yet, Dewey's and Fromm's 'positive' notions of freedom were articulated in a society structured and dominated by powerful institutions such as the family, the school, and the factory, which together with the still relatively strong hold of tradition, at once constrained individuals' actions and provided them with unambiguous identities and life courses – as workers, fathers, mothers, housewives, etc. (cf. Virno, 1996). Put differently, their notion of positive freedom was not articulated against the notion of freedom as autonomy, but as a complement to it. Fromm (1969: 270) writes:

> We cannot afford to lose any of the fundamental achievements of modern democracy – either the fundamental one of representative government… nor can we compromise the newer democratic principle that no one shall be allowed to starve, that society is responsible for all its members… In spite of the fact that this measure of democracy has been realized – though far from completely – it is not enough. Progress for democracy lies in enhancing the actual freedom, initiative, and spontaneity of the individual, not only in certain private and spiritual matters, but above all in the activity fundamental to every man's existence, his work.

Fromm as well as Dewey meant that the systems of power, which protected and circumscribed individuals' autonomy, should not stop at that, but should in addition provide individuals with specific resources enabling them to act spontaneously on the basis of their desires. In its time this notion of freedom was interpreted by for instance Hayek (1986) as a demand for state controlled pursuits of reducing inequalities in income, education, health care, etc. In other words, it was interpreted as a demand for what later became known as welfare-state politics (Liedman, 2004).

In our age of post-welfare-state politics sociologist such as Rose (1999), Dean (1999), and Bauman (2004) and political thinkers such as Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) argue that we have a good reason to suppose that the notion of freedom as potential will become more dominant, pushing the notion of freedom as autonomy to the margins of societal practices. Why? During the last 20 years we have witnessed how global flows of technologically mediated culture and financial capital have multiplied the number of job and life opportunities available to individuals. This multiplication of opportunities is closely related to how 'advanced liberal' political ideals and practices, which glorify self-governance and a distribution of choice via markets, have gained prominence over traditional welfare-state politics (Bauman, 2004; Dean, 1999; Miller and Rose, 1990, 1995; Rose, 1999). As argued by Rose (1999) freedom in the sense of autonomy implies a society structured and dominated by powerful and distinct institutions such as the family, the school, and the factory. During much of the 20th century individuals lived their lives in successions between such distinct institutional sites, which at once fettered them to specific roles and identities and provided them with autonomy – in the form of distance from the roles played at work, at school, in the family, etc. In contemporary

society, says Rose (1999), we are always in continuous training (we never leave school behind), we must always work on our employability (we are always potentially in between jobs), we are always still at work (even at home), and are never able to keep our private life outside work. This, he argues, is because contemporary institutions of work and education are not structured around a centralized but a dispersed principle of power and control. Power and responsibility are distributed in the form of opportunities which may or may not be realized depending on the individuals' practical powers and potential.

Hence, a common denominator of these financial, technological, and political transformations is that they create and distribute opportunities, that access to these opportunities is not evenly distributed, and can decreasingly be guaranteed (Castells, 2000; Hardt and Negri, 2004). University and college students may serve as an example. For a growing portion of the young populations of the western world it has become increasingly important to acquire bachelor and master degrees to be able to get jobs. At the same time such qualifications no longer function as guarantees for a limited ensemble of jobs, careers, and life courses, but as means of getting access to fleeting opportunities individuals would otherwise not have. Hence, access to increasing assembles of possibility demands more competence, wealth, preparation, social capital, and other particular qualities. In circumstances where the individual is surrounded by combinations of such possibilities, requirements, and insecurities, the pursuit of autonomy – in the sense of a self-consciously controlled distance to the world – not only seems inaccessible, it also risks becoming a conduit of marginalization. More pragmatic in such circumstances is to seek to develop one's powers to seize on opportunities by remaining attentive and open, constantly striving to connect, to learn, and to change.

Below we will see how these general societal transformations of the principles of exercising power and of distributing freedom and opportunities are relevantly captured by the transformation of the bureaucratic institution.

Freedom and Bureaucracy

Before I begin discussing freedom in relation to bureaucracy, let me just make two brief remarks about the relevance of this discussion and about the way in which the notion of bureaucracy is defined and used. In contrast to mainstream management and organization theory where bureaucracy tends to be treated merely as a specific type of organization – where individual behaviour is governed by an encompassing and hierarchically structured system of rules and standardized procedures – I will treat bureaucracy in line with the Weberian tradition in sociology. Here bureaucracy emerges as "a major social innovation, essential to the expansion of industrial capitalism and the embeddedness of crucial social and economic goals or ideals such as progress, growth, meritocracy and egalitarianism…. bureaucracy coincides with the advent of modernity: it is part and parcel of it" (Kallinikos, 2004: 4). Hence, from this perspective an investigation of the relations between freedom, power and subjectivity in relation to bureaucracy is not just a way of developing an understanding of these relations in a

particular type of organization, but a way of developing a basic understanding of these relations in modern society at large. Furthermore, to the extent we can say that the bureaucratic principle of organization has changed or has been modulated into a post-bureaucratic principle of organization, investigating freedom, power, and subjectivity in relation to post-bureaucracy is a way of developing an understanding of changes in these relations in a post-modern (Bauman, 2004) or late-modern (Giddens, 1991) society.

To Weber (e.g. 1947: 1978) the defining characteristic and the social innovation implied by bureaucracy was the way in which it regulated the relationship between the individual and the organization. As pointed out by Kallinikos (2004), Weber's analysis shows that the distinguishing feature of bureaucracy was its disassociation of "organizational role-taking from social position and the experiential totality that is commonly associated with the personality or the particular mode of being of a person" (Kallinikos, 2004: 20). This means that a bureaucratic organization is not made up of concrete persons, but of systems of abstract work roles. Obviously individuals play these work roles. Yet, they are only partly included in the organization; those aspects of their personalities, social networks, and life worlds that fall outside the pre-established requirements of the work roles are kept outside work by the bureaucratic system of command. In this regard bureaucracy functions according to an *excluding* logic of organization and control; it demands and promotes some behaviours and excludes others. Below I will discuss what this basic principle means in terms of individual freedom in work and in relation to work.

With regards to the first aspect, freedom in work, let us first note that the fact that bureaucracy functions according to a principle of exclusion does not mean that it expels all forms of freedom from work. We may distinguish between two principal forms of autonomy in a bureaucratic setting. First, given that a bureaucratic system can never plan for and direct all the contingencies an individual faces in the job he or she performs, any type of work will imply at least some leeway. That is, the individual is expected to play his or her work role sensibly, with a sound professional judgment. In this regard the individual is more or less autonomous. An individual may also be autonomous in the sense that he or she gives orders that determine the behaviour of others. This form of autonomy is, however, not principally different from the first, because in a bureaucracy individuals who give orders are authorized to give orders, and more specifically, to give certain types of orders to certain types of people. Hence, in a bureaucracy an individual's autonomy is always relative to the heteronomy (i.e. the condition of being under the domination of an outside authority) that the individual faces (Weber, 1978).

Two points are important to make here. First, the heteronomy implied by the work roles individuals play not only restricts their autonomy, it in fact also creates their autonomy. It is through legislated duties that individuals are authorized to exercise autonomy. Individuals in bureaucratic organizations have rights – autonomy – which are relative to their assigned duties and obligations – heteronomy (Donzelot, 1991). Furthermore, the determination of individual work roles (heteronomy) implies that individuals are protected from prevailing external conditions. The individual does not have to take into account all the factors that may or may not be or become important to the organization

as a whole, only those which relate to his or her job (March and Simon, 1958). In this way the individual is enabled and given the right to distance him or herself from work, leave it behind for the benefit of private matters. [3]

We thereby arrive at the second aspect of freedom and bureaucracy: freedom in relation to work. Above we said that bureaucracy implies an excluding principle of organization. We now have to note that in terms of individual freedom this principle not only excludes aspects of individuals' lives from work, it also creates a private sphere of life outside work where, essentially, the bureaucratic powers of capitalist work organizations and state-controlled organizations cannot reach.[4] Bureaucracy means that work is sealed off from the rest of individuals' lives and conversely that the rest of individuals' lives is free from work.

The main point of this discussion of freedom and bureaucracy should be clear: in and in relation to bureaucratic organizations freedom takes the form of autonomy. Bureaucratic freedom is a circumscribed freedom – the autonomy of the work role and the autonomy of life outside work. It is a form of freedom that is relative to the bureaucratic system of command, which gives the individual the ability of maintaining a measure of distance vis-à-vis his or her work, vis-à-vis his or her role and professional identity, and vis-à-vis the representatives of power. It is, as we shall see below, in relation to these principles that post-bureaucracy differs most significantly from bureaucracy.

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3 According to Donzelot (1991) it was this double-edged relation between bureaucracy and individual freedom that explained the ambiguous attitude towards bureaucracy among 20th century worker movements (and the academic schools associated with them). Donzelot (1991) illustrates how the diffusion of bureaucratic principles in the early 20th century had severe effects on the balance of power and freedom in work. The 19th century industrial worker had been subject to the arbitrary power of bosses over the system's penalties and rewards. Yet, the worker had still been able to maintain a level of independence through capitalists' and state officials' dependence on his personal competence and craftsmanship. He had handled work according to the rhythm and principles that tradition and experience had taught him. In the early 20th century the introduction of encompassing bureaucratic administrative systems coupled with Tayloristic technological systems helped management radically reduce the craft element in work. According to the critics, this general reduction of professional autonomy was inhumane in the way it gradually turned workers into mere movements in the production process (e.g. Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979). However, says Donzelot, through bureaucratization workers achieve "rights which protect their conditions of work and reduce the arbitrary power of bosses in their employment of a deskilled workforce. It is as though the one change were the condition for the other, as though the gradual professional deskilling of the worker gave rise to his juridical requalification" (Donzelot, 1991: 254). Bureaucratization gave workers regulated rights while it created a deskilled workforce that could no longer lay claim to independence through mastery of a profession.

4 My point here is not that individuals, once they left the factory or office, would have been completely autonomous with regards to the powers of capitalists and the state. In an industrial capitalist society the social sphere outside work and production is largely based on consumption. Hence, once the worker or clerk leaves work he or she enters the consumption market, i.e. a sphere of life that is no way free from relations of power. In this respect, a more qualified view would be that individuals, once they left work, were autonomous with regards to the bureaucratic power, but significantly constrained by the restrictions of the consumption market. What this implies in terms of power and subjectivity falls outside the scope of this paper.

Freedom and Post-bureaucracy

In this section I will attempt to assess how post-bureaucracy transforms the structure of freedom and power at work and how this transformation affects the individual subject. As a first step I develop a workable definition of how post-bureaucratic organizations differ from bureaucratic organizations. Above I defined bureaucracy by the way it lets work-roles, which are developed by an organizational hierarchy, mediate the relation between individuals and organizations. Richard Sennett (2003) indicates how post-bureaucratic organizations at once transform and extend this basic principle. Whereas bureaucracy used estimates of individuals' abilities of performing specific tasks as a yardstick for making employment and promotion decisions, post-bureaucracy uses estimates of potential abilities as its corresponding yardstick. In the world of work, Sennett argues, hierarchies of imposed roles based on technical skills are replaced by networks of self-created and self-governed roles where the person and his or her potential to adapt and evolve are as important as the technical skills he or she may possess.

> Modern organizations judge the 'whole man', and especially what the whole man might become. In work as in education, the bald judgment 'You have little potential' is devastating in a way 'You have made a mistake' is not. (Sennett, 2003: 77)

What Sennett points out has been indicated by others (Casey, 1999; Garsten and Grey, 1997, 2001; Maravelias, 2001, 2003; Virno, 1996), namely that post-bureaucracy relies on a principle of organization which is inclusive rather than exclusive. As I have written elsewhere:

> In contrast to bureaucracy that excludes those individual characteristics, which fall outside its instrumental schemes, post-bureaucracy, in its urge to harness aspects of the 'free spheres' of individuals' lives, does not obliterate these 'other' forces it faces, it opens itself to them and includes them in the networks of practice. (Maravelias, 2003: 562).

The question we need to answer here is what this inclusive principle of organization means in terms of individuals' freedom in and in relation to work.

Post-bureaucracy – A Critical Perspective

To begin answering this question I will account for critical organization studies since it is the scholarly tradition which has dealt with it most extensively. With regards to the implications of post-bureaucratic power critical organization studies can roughly be divided in two groups (Knights and McCabe, 1998: 2000), although inevitably there are some overlaps. Despite post-bureaucratic organizations more democratic appearance, one group tends to see in post-bureaucracy reasons to return to Braverman's (1974) thesis that capitalist control of the labor process reduces the individual to a mere instrument with very little autonomy remaining (e.g. Willmott, 1993, 1994, 1995; Barker, 1993; Ogbor, 2001; Casey, 1999). Under the disguise of supposedly empowering and emancipating initiatives, such as corporate culture programs, teamwork, Total Quality Management, etc., management is seen to have shifted its traditional focus on controlling employees' behavior to a focus on controlling the selves

of employees (Casey, 1999; Delbridge, 1995; Sewell, 1998). More specifically, it is argued that management uses such programs and techniques to make commitment to and identification with work a norm that is enforced and controlled by workers themselves (Barker, 1993). In developing this argument this group tends to draw on Foucault's works on discipline, and especially his use of the 'Panopticon' as a metaphor for moderns systems of control. Management is thus seen to be able to supersede panoptic – hierarchical – surveillance and replace it with post-bureaucratic control techniques such as peer- and self-control, which are seen to exercise an even more efficient form of surveillance. For in such circumstances control appears to be nowhere, when in actuality it is everywhere. This drives employees to consent "to be subject to a system of surveillance which they know will immediately identify their divergence from norms and automatically trigger sanction or approval" (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992).

In sum, this analysis implies that post-bureaucratic organizations would seek to increase individuals' commitment and loyalty to their work – not by altering the relations of power in work, but by manipulating individuals' emotional relation to their work (Hughes, 2005). Furthermore, it implies that individuals would not be allowed, but in fact be required, to put their heart and soul into work (Fleming and Spicer, 2003). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it implies that the distinction between the disciplinary sphere of work and the free sphere of life falls apart (Fleming and Spicer, 2004). Or more specifically, that the disciplinary sphere of work would risk taking over the entire life world of workers – the worker being left with no autonomy, any place becoming a place of work, any time a time for work, anyone a potential customer, partner or colleague. Together all these implications lead this group to view the post-bureaucratic regime as potentially totalitarian (Ogbor, 2001; Willmott, 1993). Rather than providing individuals with freedom it snares them in boundary-less responsibilities. Hence, we are led to believe that individuals in post-bureaucratic organizations confront a 'dictated autonomy'; an autonomy which is so wide that it is no longer defined by its opposite – the heteronomy that gives it its direction and limits – but is instead completely absorbed by it. It is a dictated autonomy in that it conceals its heteronymous determination. In such circumstances subordinates would need to anticipate the intentions of the persons in command and the only way of effectively doing so would be to internalize their values, norms, and intentions (cf. Friedman, 1977). This would in fact be the highest perfection of a bureaucratic system: a system of power which is completely internalized by its subordinates.

The other group emerges as an attempt to criticize and refine the first group's basic arguments (e.g. Knights and McCabe, 1998, 2000; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003; Harris and Ogbonna, 1999, 2000; Bain and Taylor, 2000). Generally, it draws attention to how post-bureaucracy in fact leaves individuals with more space for autonomous movement than the first group claims it does. There are two strategies in this critique. One is to present empirical studies of call centers, banks, grocery retailing, IT-consultancy, etc., as evidence of how individuals find ways of escaping or avoiding managerial pursuits of colonizing their selves. Individuals ironically play along while secretly referring to managerial programs as 'corporate bullshit' (Kunda, 1992), or they routinely resist through ambiguous, half-hearted accommodations, gossip, withdrawal, etc. (Prasad and Prasad, 2000; Ogbonna and Wilkinsson, 2003). The other is to criticize

and further develop the first group's theoretical elaboration of the relations between power and subjectivity. A central element in this critique concerns the first group's alleged misinterpretation of Foucault's works (Knights and McCabe, 2000). It is pointed out that Foucault viewed subjectivity neither as an essence, which is impermeable to the influence of others, nor as a passive product of technologies of power, but as a process in which individuals are active participants in their own subordination to power. Such an understanding rules out the totalitarian interpretations of post-bureaucratic power. Because even though post-bureaucratic power implies a subtle and comprehensive confinement of individual subjectivity, this confinement is only effective if it maintains or even enhances subjects' freedom (Bain and Taylor, 2000; Knights and McCabe, 1998). From this perspective we cannot separate the processes in which individuals are regulated from those in which they are liberated; it is the regulation of individuals' behavior that opens spheres of autonomy and points of resistance; it is the fact that individuals are – to some extent – free that makes power what it is, a force that 'makes and breaks' freedom. Hence, the result of post-bureaucratic programs and techniques for regulating individuals' subjectivity can never be altogether predictable and effective; the result may be consent and compliance, but it may also be resistance (Knights and McCabe, 2000).

Over and above these differences both groups find a common denominator in the implicit assumption that post-bureaucratic power is geared towards the subjectivity or self of individuals and towards the pursuit of subordinating it to an integrated system of corporate values and norms. The main difference between the two groups is that the first at least implicitly treats post-bureaucratic power or control as effective, whereas the latter treats it as partly ineffective. The difference in effectiveness in turn relates to how the first views subjectivation as something that is done to individuals, who, as it were, passively succumb to it, whereas the latter views subjectivation as a process in which individuals actively use instruments of power to constitute themselves as particular subjects of this power.

Post-bureaucracy – an Alternative Interpretation

It is thus via case studies and a careful reading of Foucault that the second group draws our attention to how post-bureaucratic power can be both regulating *and* liberating. It thereby provides critical organization studies with a more civilized and balanced view of post-bureaucracy, where the ambition of regulating the selves of its members is never altogether effective and predictable since it presupposes rather than diminishes individuals' free and active participation. This view of post-bureaucracy has considerable face validity. Yet, analytically it does not help us distinguish post-bureaucracy from bureaucracy, for, as I have tried to show above, a defining characteristic of bureaucratic power is precisely that it both regulates and liberates; it sets boundaries which at once restrict individuals and provide them with circumscribed spaces of autonomy and movement. Given the relative stability of institutional domains in modern society (cf. Jepperson and Meyer, 1991), it is of course reasonable to assume that real world organizations of the type we have come to refer to as post-bureaucratic would refine rather than completely do away with basic bureaucratic principles

(Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004). Even so, the fact that both groups within critical organization studies analyze post-bureaucratic power in terms of *regulation-autonomy*, i.e. in terms which define bureaucratic power, prevent them from distinguishing in which respects post-bureaucracy differs from the bureaucratic legacy.

My basic argument is that an analysis of post-bureaucratic power in terms of *potential-opportunity* enable us to see post-bureaucratic management principles not merely as more or less successful attempts at 'tightening the iron cage' (Barker, 1993) via subtle and encompassing command systems, but also as attempts to increase the pressures to perform by withdrawing the command system. As shown by Peters (1999), such principles lead individuals to work until they drop, apparently highly motivated and with full commitment precisely because no one forces them to do it. Hence, I argue that a defining characteristic of post-bureaucratic organization is that it does not situate individuals within more or less wide zones of determined autonomy, but instead seeks actively to make individuals independent of the command system, thus confronting them with the prevailing conditions external to the organization. Based on judgments of individuals' potential post-bureaucratic organizations provide them with opportunities and independence, but with no protection and no guarantees. In this regard they generalize the conditions distinguishing the top of a bureaucratic organization. Top management of large commercial companies is relatively independent of a bureaucratic command system. Top management jobs are full of potential and opportunities. However, the fact that top management's freedom to act is not restricted by a command system does not mean that it can do what it wishes, but simply that no one forces it to do more or less specific things. Top management is relatively free of heteronomy, but is thus also without protected and circumscribed zones of autonomy. Instead of having autonomy it is, as it were, exposed to the autonomy of the prevailing conditions surrounding it.

It is in this regard that post-bureaucracy transforms the bureaucratic structure of freedom and power. It places individuals in professional circumstances where autonomy has changed sides. If the autonomy of the employee of a bureaucracy gives him or her a limited ability of self-determination, the employee of a post-bureaucratic organization is determined by the autonomy of the prevailing conditions surrounding it. Hence, the post-bureaucratic employee is independent with regards to a command system, but dependent with regards to the autonomy of the conditions surrounding him or her.[5] It is also along these lines we should understand Sennett's (2003) argument that post-bureaucracy judges 'the whole man.' What Sennett makes clear is that post-bureaucracy does not only, or even primarily, take something away from its employees – their protected zones of autonomy – it also provides them with opportunity. That is, post-bureaucracy provides individuals with access to opportunities on the basis of judgments of their will and power to use their potential to transform their selves in ways that enable them to make productive use of these opportunities. Such principles of organization do not differentiate individuals in terms of what types and levels of autonomy they should be given and what regulated rights they have, but in terms of who

5 This of course implies that the role of top management is also transformed; top management transforms itself from a commanding and punishing authority to an aspect of the prevailing situation faced by the employees who act as entrepreneurs within the company.

has and who does not have potential, and accordingly, who should and who should not be granted access to opportunity. What this implies is that freedom is transformed from a derivative of individual rights and regulated demands and duties, to a derivate of individuals' potential. Those who lack potential are not given opportunities, and even if they were, their lack of potential would make them unable to use them. In post-bureaucracy, *freedom thus becomes the mark of an elite and the privilege of those who already have it*.

Above I noted that, if we analyze post-bureaucracy against the background of a notion of freedom as autonomy, the post-bureaucratic worker emerges as either a '*slave'* to a subtle totalitarian regime (Willmott, 1993), or as an unpredictable '*silent rebel'* who develops spheres of free range within an all encompassing system of power (Kunda, 1992; Knights and McCabe, 1998). From such a perspective the individual's work-roles are destined to become so extensive that they more or less encompass their selves. From the perspective of freedom as potential a quite different image of the post-bureaucratic worker emerges. We are then enabled to see that the post-bureaucratic worker is not primarily subordinated to roles worked out by an authority; because post-bureaucracy does not first and foremost distribute role-related directives, but opportunities of working out temporary roles, which enable individuals to exploit the possibilities of the tasks or projects at hand. Rather than as a slave or a silent rebel the post-bureaucratic worker here emerges as an *opportunist* who must constantly fight against any form of subordination, even the subordination to his or her self (Sennett, 1998; Virno, 1996).

Post-bureaucracy and Opportunism

But, more specifically, what do we mean by an opportunistic subjectivity and opportunism as a style of work/life? Above I suggested how freedom in the form of autonomy implies an idealization of a self-conscious subject who directs its actions towards principles of a greater scope and who affirms its autonomy from the ephemeral opportunities of the moment. Conversely, freedom in the form of potential implies an idealization of an unself-conscious subject who does not base its actions on a reflective consciousness of his or her own roles and ideals, but on a more or less spontaneous, confident, and unconstrained advancement in fields of opportunities and risks. The ambition of the opportunistic subject is not enlightenment or emancipation, i.e. an ambition of understanding better its self and the situations in which it takes part, but an ambition of instinctively moving in and through these settings with greater efficiency, comfort, and ease. Hence, the opportunistic subject is basically an uncritical subject. It does not attempt to change or criticize the situations in which it takes part. Rather, the opportunist stands out as a politically indifferent subject who seeks to adapt to the explicit and implicit rules of each situation without any genuine commitment and with an instinctive awareness of the situated, conventional, and possibly ephemeral nature of these rules. The opportunist makes sure to always keep at least one door open, ready to act on and adapt to new potentialities.

Based on this I would suggest that we can distinguish between two general directions of an opportunistic style of work/life. First, opportunism can be seen as behavior that is motivated by desire – desire for new experiences and challenges, desire to develop and

to prove ones potential, etc. From this perspective opportunists are those who are able to act in accordance with their inner drives. Second, opportunism can be seen as a reaction to insecurity and fear (Collinson, 2003). An opportunist is then a person who keeps open as many options as possible, turning to the one closest and swerving unpredictably from one to the other. From this perspective, opportunism emerges as the style of life of those with little security and protection. Those who know that they cannot let go of or sidestep their activities, not even for an instant, without the risk of losing the opportunities they presently have. Post-bureaucratic work is likely to be permeated by a precarious balance between these two figures of – positive and negative – opportunism. To the extent the balance of forces turns in the favour of the first, post-bureaucratic work would unfold in accordance with individuals' desires and talents.[6] Such forms of opportunism would then be more or less synonymous with Fromm's utopian vision of 'positive freedom' as consisting in "the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality" (1969: 268). The premise of such spontaneous activity would then be "the acceptance of the total personality and the elimination of the split between 'reason' and 'nature'; for only if man does not repress essential parts of his self, only if he has become transparent to himself, and only if the different spheres of life have reached a fundamental integration, is spontaneous activity possible" (Fromm, 1969: 257). It is, as Donzelot (1991) notes, as if management representatives and trade unionists alike have come to embrace this positive form of opportunism as an ideal and attempt to translate it into a model of management.

> Whereas the individual's freedom hitherto basically meant the possibility of either accepting or refusing his assigned status, it is now seen as meaning the possibility of permanently redeploying one's capacities according to the satisfaction one obtains in one's work, one's greater or lesser involvement in it, and its capacity thoroughly to fulfil one's potentialities. (Donzelot, 1991: 252)

In general, however, such – positive – forms of opportunistic behavior rely on the assumption that individuals' desires are put to work without being stifled in the process. Individuals who lack motivation or who distrust their own potential of taking hold of the opportunities that present themselves, easily become victims of the will of others and of their own insecurity and desperation. That is, as soon as the individual loses initiative, post-bureaucratic work/life takes on a threatening rather than enabling character. Rather than desire it is then the precariousness and tension that comes from living with constant insecurity that turns the post-bureaucratic worker towards new opportunities: "Fears of particular dangers, if only virtual ones, haunt the workday like a mood that cannot be escaped" (Virno, 1996: 16). That the individual thus acts opportunistically in a desperate attempt to avoid threats and fear may become damaging to it, at least in the long run. This, however, does not necessarily mean that such forms of opportunistic behavior are damaging to the organization. Fear, writes Virno (1996: 16), "is transformed into an operational requirement, a special tool of the trade. Insecurity about one's place during periodic innovation, fear of losing recently gained privileges, and anxiety of being 'left behind', translate into flexibility, adaptability, and

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6 Such forms of work points in the direction of Marx' vision of work as action which is an end in itself. "The realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases: thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production…. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom" (Marx, 2006/1894: 959).

a readiness to reconfigure oneself." That such insecurity is not necessarily viewed as an unfortunate result of the functioning of post-bureaucratic organization is illustrated by the president of the Intel Corporation:

> Fear of competition, fear of bankruptcy, fear of being wrong, and fear of losing can all be powerful motivators. How do we cultivate fear of losing in our employees? We can only do that if we feel it ourselves. (Grove, 1998: 6)

This form of opportunism thus compels the individual to take a reactionary stance in which it imitates power in order to take hold of the possibilities of his or her work and life. In post-bureaucratic work, says Virno (1996), employees have a tendency to adapt cynically to the contingencies of each situation, each new project, without any true conviction. Hence, opportunism incited and driven by fear emerges as the opposite of opportunism driven by desire; for it is here the lack of inner drives and ideals that defines the individual as an opportunist.

Conclusions

In a seminal paper on liberal forms of government, Graham Burchell (1991) begins with the maxim that any particular form of governance implies a particular type of subject, which at once constitutes and is constituted by this system of governance. This paper has attempted to add to that maxim the argument that in modern societies, particular forms of governance and particular types of subjects are at once constitutive of and constituted by particular forms of freedom. The majority of the critical studies on post-bureaucratic organization focus on how the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic principles of exercising power affects the individual subject at work. A crucial question in these studies has been whether post-bureaucracy emancipates individuals from restrictive bureaucratic power or if it in fact subordinates individuals to power even more effectively and totally than bureaucracy. The answer to this question has been that the focus of post-bureaucracy, despite appearances, is to limit rather than to extend individuals' freedom. Yet, these studies are conducted against the background of a notion of freedom as autonomy, and thus they do not fully acknowledge the extent to which post-bureaucracy implies not only a transformation of the principles of exercising power, but also a transformation the very notion of freedom itself.

This essay has suggested how bureaucracy was structured around a fundamental distinction between the space, time, and culture of work and that of life outside work, and how this not only made it a particular system for exercising power, but also a particular system for configuring freedom. Bureaucracy divided the lives of its members in two separate spheres: a productive professional sphere, where they were subordinated collectively to obligations, rights and interests governed by the organizational hierarchy, and an unproductive private sphere, where they could pursue 'their own' individual interests. Hence, the free, private sphere was as untouched and safeguarded from authoritative intervention as it was unorganized, unproductive, and impotent.

Critical organization studies have explored how post-bureaucracy transforms the bureaucratic principles of exercising power. Yet, they have not paid enough attention to how post-bureaucracy also transforms the bureaucratic principles of configuring

freedom. In this respect, critical organization studies provide us with a picture of post-bureaucracy which helps us see how contemporary work organizations continue, and in part extend, the bureaucratic legacy. However, critical organization studies do not help us see in which respects contemporary work organizations transcend the bureaucratic legacy. This essay has suggested that post-bureaucracy transforms individual freedom from unproductive autonomy to productive, self-organized opportunism. It is productive in that freedom becomes an essential part of post-bureaucratic work; post-bureaucracy does not keep the free choices of its members outside work, it promotes and presupposes an active and enterprising spirit. It is self-organized in that post-bureaucracy builds less on a distribution of directives and formal cooperation than on an organic and immediate cooperation amongst individuals. It is opportunistic, finally, in that post-bureaucracy distributes opportunity without guarantees to those who are perceived to have potential to develop themselves through work.

The image of the post-bureaucratic subject that thus emerges is one that departs from the image developed in most critical organization studies. For it is not a subject that is forced or lured to belong to any community or particular role, but a subject that 'belongs to' a continuous uprooting of the very possibility of any authentic tradition. It is a subject that exploits what Granovetter has termed "the strength of weak ties" (1973), a subject that has learned to live in what Castells has termed a

> culture of the ephemeral, a culture of each strategic decision, a patchwork of experiences and interests, rather than a charter of rights and obligations. (Castells, 2000: 214)

For this subject freedom is literarily a potential; it is never altogether realized and never experienced to the full; it is a practice of self-overcoming and a dream about becoming the 'superman' (Townley, 1999). As pointed out by Virno (1996), in these circumstances the crucial issue is no longer liberation, but how desire might evolve and be maintained when changing opportunities constantly risk driving individuals into cynical and self-satisfied opportunism.

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