Exploring identity construction from a critical management perspective: a research agenda

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary western society, questions of identity concerning "who am I?" and "how should I act?" (Alvesson, 2000: 1105) are now a central concern in people's lives. Indeed, the western, liquidly modern context (Bauman 2000; 2001; 2003; 2005; Bauman & Haugaard 2008; Bauman & Tester 2001) is characterized, precisely, by absences: the loss of traditional sources of authority, such as family, union, or religion, foundations that used to provide individuals with a collective sense of belonging around commonly taken-for-granted bases of identification (Collinson, 2003). The absent spaces are now occupied by a multitude of ephemeral bases of identification that blur old dualisms such as capital and labour, man and woman, married or single. Culturally tribal fashionable codes of speaking, dressing, playing, and so forth, mostly grounded in consumption rather than production, increasingly provide experiences of belonging. In such a fragmented context, constructing a distinctive identity becomes a constantly shifting project (Knights & Willmott, 1989; Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1996). Consequently, individuals tend now to problematize identity through projects of the self more likely undertaken at an individual or group level rather than as a part of an organized collective process that is automatically reproduced.

Slowly, management research has been coming to terms with liquid modernity (Clegg and Baumeler, 2010). Critical post-structuralist perspectives are among the several approaches that are engaged in this process, and provide insight into the question of identity. The goal of this Unplugged is thus to provide our views about the past, present and future of studies about identity from a critical post-structuralist perspective.

One key characteristic of post-structuralist postures is that they question the foundationalist epistemology and related entitative view of identity characteristic of both Marxist and functionalist approaches; indeed, they embrace a more dynamic and relational view of identity focused on the social processes of identity construction (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The aim is to produce what might seem paradoxical: a non-essentialist account of a seemingly essentialist category – identity. Radical socio-constructionist and non-essentialist views conceive identity as constantly evolving: at the same time, the 'cause' and the 'consequence' of the constitution of social reality (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). For instance, Knights & McCabe (2003) theorize individuals as "social

individualities", i.e., as social be(com)ings whose identity is the precarious result of the different "discourses" they have adopted and confronted during their life process. These post-structuralist conceptions seek to offer "full recognition" of the "relational and dynamic aspect of individuals' identity" and provide a reading grid that does not bind our empirical understanding of identity to a pre-given conception of the self-postulated ex-ante (Watson, 2008). In this respect, we agree with Foucault (1980: 59) when he claims that: "what troubles me with these analyses which prioritize ideology is that there is always a presupposed human subject on the lines of the model provided by classical philosophy, endowed with a consciousness which power is then thought to seize on".

The critical post-structuralist view recognizes the significance of many bases of identification other than traditional conceptions such as class (ethnicity, religion, gender, and so forth) (O'Doherty & Willmott, 2001; Knights & Willmott, 2007). Reductionist conceptions of identity that consider individuals' identity as mainly and primarily determined by their structural position in capitalist relations of production (see O'Doherty & Willmott, 2001 and Mumby, 2005 for a critic of such a posture) or organizational roles (Biddle, 1986) are eschewed. Individuals' identity is not only determined by their structural position in the labour process or organizational roles but depends on all their professional and personal experiences. People can be attached to many bases of identification and not only or primarily to class or organizational cultural consciousness. Thus, the post-structuralist conception of identity offers a very useful perspective with which to render the complexity of the process of identity construction in a liquid society in which individuals are confronted with multiple and fast-changing bases of identification.

The domination of interpretive approaches in post-structuralist studies about identity, while producing fundamental contributions on topics such as identity work (Alvesson, Aschaft & Thomas, 2008), has placed the critical agenda in the background. Many studies have focused on a narrow definition of discourse as text to the detriment of socio-materiality (Orlikowski, 2010; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Wagner, Newell & Piccoli, 2010). It is timely to bring back the material to the fore and offer a reflexive re-reading of the critical literature about identity to reintroduce the critical into the research agenda on post-structuralist identity studies.

Accordingly, a critical post-structuralist reading of identity is required to integrate a broad socio-material conception of discourse. At a basic level, we require an interpretive approach that understands how individuals make sense of identity, as well as how the constitution of identity serves as a main locus of control for individuals within contemporary organizations. The interpretive view has become a dominant and "fashionable" approach for academics adopting a post-structuralist view of identity at the expenses of the critical view (Wilmott, 2007), a trend epitomized by the recent special issues on identity published in two influential journals, Organization (2008) and Human Relations (2009) that almost exclusively include interpretive contributions. Even those contributions presented - at least to some extent - as critical in inspiration, were in fact empty of content with which a critique of the present could be articulated (with the exception of Costas and Fleming, 2009).

The dominance of the interpretive over critical perspective is problematic inasmuch as it tends to reduce the analysis of identity to one of discourse understood as textual artifacts. As Willmott (2007: 5) puts it, "a process of hegemonic sedimentation would seem to be developing presently in contemporary research and scholarship in management and organization studies (MOS) where an interpretive fixing of the meaning and significance of `identities' in organizations is occurring through forms of narrative and discourse analysis." A narrow understanding of post-structuralist thinking undergirds the latter forms of analysis, with central authors such as Foucault being focused on for attention to the "linguistic" aspects of identity construction. How individuals make sense of their own identity or contribute to the construction of others'

sense of self through "talks" and "texts" dominates at the expense of material components of discourse (Reed, 2000). Indeed, by retaining such a narrow definition of "discourses" when dealing with the social construction of identity, certain 'post-structuralist" scholars regard critique as merely deconstruction of an abstract sense-giving/sense-making language game rather than analysis of the material and concrete forms of domination exercised by certain individuals over others (see the critiques from Reed, 1997; 2000, or Newton, 1998). Aesthetic textual deconstruction of managerial rhetoric - rather than analysis of the practices enabled by and sustaining such rhetoric - prevails (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2001). The result is an imbalance between textual knowledge of official discourse and actual identity practices both from an organizational and individual perspective. While discourse analysis has contributed to several aspects of the identity phenomenon, it is time to shift the balance back to alternative approaches in a post-structuralist perspective. While the textual remains important in shaping reality and is core to understanding any technology of power, limiting investigation to official discourses to the detriment of analysis of identity practices that are embedded in socio-material conditions unnecessarily limits the range of diagnostics we conduct. Indeed, if we accept that both experiential language and materiality create meaning for people by framing the field of possibilities (Bardon & Josserand, 2011), then we have to bring back the material into the equation.

Arguing that materiality has been neglected is not new (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2001; Iedema, 2007). Indeed, both sympathizers with discursive approaches (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2001; Bardon & Josserand, 2011) as well as the detractors of such perspectives (Newton, 1998; Reed, 2000) have already pointed out that post-struturalists tend to adopt a narrow understanding of discourse as "language". Bardon & Josserand (2011) argue that the notion of discourse should not only be understood in its linguistic dimension but also as any actions affecting the field of possibilities; that is, which influence the way we make sense of ourselves and others. Nevertheless, if we reflexively consider current post-structuralist research concerning identity, we may realize that most of it still privileges a narrow linguistic understanding of discourse and, consequently, continues to provide idealistic accounts of the identity phenomenon. In order to counter this tendency towards such an idealistic post-structuralism, we unpack here the concrete benefits associated with adopting a broader understanding of discourse, one which includes materiality; thus, one of the main challenges that critical scholars of identity currently face consists of further understanding how "materiality" influences how the question of identity is posed. Adopting a materialist post-structuralist view about identity construction thus seems to be a promising posture to adopt. Our goal in this Unplugged is to evaluate what a critical post-structuralist reading of identity still has to offer, despite the decline of popularity such a perspective has experienced in organization theory. To do so, we have structured this Unplugged around the two general topics that have been addressed by this tradition, namely "identity regulation" and "individual (dis)identification". For each topic, critical post-structuralist scholars ask broad questions that we formulate as follows: "How does identity regulation operate within contemporary organization?" and "How do individuals actually construct their identity in reference to the prescribed corporate identity?" For each question, after having reviewed the extant literature, we provide our views about the promising research avenues offered by such a critical perspective of identity.

IDENTITY REGULATION

How does identity regulation operate within contemporary organization?

The emergence of a critical literature about identity regulation in the mid-80s is a complex historical phenomenon (see, Carter, 2008); nevertheless, the rise

of neo-liberal ideology in western countries under the influence of New Right politics from the end of the 70s certainly constituted the main conditions of possibility for such development; indeed, this neo-liberal "zeitgeist" (du Gay, 2000: 43) proposed a new social pact putatively based on individual autonomy and personal responsibility, epitomized at the organizational level by the belief that employees' participation should be obtained through identification with corporate goals and values rather than through carrot and stick mechanisms characterizing the old bureaucracies. Management gurus have presented this so-called "post-bureaucratic" way of running organizations as a "paradigm shift" (Hechker & Donnellon, 1994) which would "revolutionize" (Hammer & Champy, 1993) management; indeed, they argue that this "new wave management" (Wood, 1989) is more humanist than the bureaucratic way because employees' participation is based on the consent of "free" individuals around a shared collective identity rather than on coercive means; they add that it is also a more efficient mode of organizing because, to the extent that it can create an absence of recalcitrant subjects it reduces the need for dedicating costly resources to "commanding and controlling". Some of the more enthusiastic management gurus even announce the demise of management and the rise of "organizational democracy" (see for instance Cloke & Goldsmith, 2002 and Willmott, 2003 for a critical reading).

In reaction to these management gurus' exhortations, critical-inspired scholars re-assess the beneficial effects of such a post-bureaucratic mode of organizing by highlighting that identification only constitutes a subtler form of control based on enculturation, which, in fact, aims at strengthening corporate discipline. Explicitly post-bureaucratic programs such as Total Quality Management/ Just In Time (Parker & Slaughter, 1993; Deldridge, Turnbull & Wilkinson, 1992 ; Boje & Winsor, 1993 ; Steingard & Fitzgibbons, 1993 ; Tuckman, 1994 ; 1995), Business Process Reengineering (Grey & Mitev, 1995 ; Grint & Case, 1998 ; Willmott, 1994 ; 1995) or Teamworking (Barker, 1993 ; 1999; Ezzamel & Willmott, 1998) have attracted most of the critical attention as they constitute the concrete artifacts through which organizations attempt to manufacture employees' identity in order to engage them in an "endless dance of performativity" (Boje & Winsor, 1993: 60), by manufacturing "consent" (Burrawoy 1979). Such programs seek to incorporate new ways of functioning which contribute to the shaping of individuals' identity, i.e., which mould their ways of be(hav)ing in the corporate setting. For instance, these programs introduce market arrangements within organizations, such as project-based functioning, management by objectives, decentralization of responsibilities and continuous business improvement instead of the old hierarchical disciplines previously used in bureaucracies (du Gay and Salaman, 1992; du Gay, 1996, 2000).

New ways of delimiting, partitioning and quantifying render both the organization and their participants 'calculable' (Townley, 1993: 526). More fundamentally, they change how individuals make sense of their environment as well as how they behave in the organizational context (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). For instance, Tuckman (1994) argues that Total Quality Management changes the way employees perceive the organizational environment, seeing it no longer as composed of stable hierarchical relations but instead as a competitive internal market composed of numerous transitory supplier/customer relations. In such an internal market, he suggests, each customer exerts pressure on their suppliers to provide a better service for his/her own customers. Moreover, post-bureaucratic practices typically convey humanistic rhetorics that operate as "a control strategy based upon the internalization of rules" (Grey, 1999; 575). Such "corporate culturism" (Willmott, 1993) assumes the shape of a discourse of empowerment, one which attempts to convince individuals that it is in their best interest to become "enterprising" subjects, working better and faster in order to gain social recognition and self-esteem by taking the best advantage of the opportunities offered by the new market arrangements (du Gay, 1996; 2000; Salaman & Storey, 2008). The identity of this enterprising subject would be characteristic of the neo-liberal "zeitgeist" (du Gay, 2000) in which "certain

enterprising qualities – such as self-reliance, personal responsibility, boldness and a willingness to take risks in the pursuit of goals – are regarded as human virtues" (du Gay and Salaman, 1992: 628). Subsequently, by promoting the enterprising identity as a desirable model to follow, corporate discourse aims to persuade employees that it is in their best interest to "want … what the corporation wants" (Deetz, 1992: 42).

Post-Marxists (Lukes, 1974; Burrawoy, 1985; Ackroyd & Thompson, 1995) suggest that employees are subjugated by the enterprising discourse of empowerment because it offers them a subjective sense of dignity and autonomy which divert them from their "real interests" and makes them forget that they are exploited by capitalists. Alternatively, post-structuralists interpret the vulnerability of subjects to enterprising discourse not only as a product of class relations but more largely, as a characteristic of the liquidly modern epoch in which disciplinary regimes are characterized by the use of technologies of power, such as post-bureaucratic programmes in organizations, which create the condition of their own efficacy (Knights & Willmott, 1989; Willmott, 1990; 1994b; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003). On the one hand, post-bureaucratic programs isolate individuals, placing them in competition with each other by individually targeting the application of standards as well as using them to evaluate performance. Any sense of solidarity and collective belonging between individuals is minimized, and there is a rising insecurity and a need to secure a stable identity in order to overcome isolation experienced. On the other hand, the enterprising discourse glorifies the figure of individual subjects as independent and autonomous, and whose success depends only on their own actions - this is epitomized by the discourse on intrapreneurs. Subsequently, through this double individualizing mechanism, enterprising discourse isolates people from each other while promoting the identity of an individualistic self-made enterprising subject (Knights & Willmott, 1989; Collinson, 2003).

Identity regulation as Foucauldian apparatus: a research agenda
While these initial responses to the increasing liquidity of identity are of interest, they only tell us part of the story of identity regulation in our contemporary society. Indeed, these studies tend to provide idealistic views of identity. In line with Foucault (1977: 299), we propose to conceptualize identity regulation within organizations as an "apparatus" understood as a "thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures and scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions". In this way, apparatus should not be interpreted as a Machiavellian plot conspired by cunning managers to further exploit employees but simply as the precarious result of diverse conditions of possibilities which make the emergence of a given "regime of truth" possible. Indeed, Foucault suggests that power is not a commodity possessed by an elite to regulate individuals' identity; as he puts it, power "is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy (…), that one should decipher in it a network of relations constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one possesses; it is not the 'privilege' acquired or possessed by a dominant class but the overall effect of its strategic positions" (Foucault, 1979: 26-27). Subsequently, apparatuses are the precarious results of various decentralized exercises of power in interaction and are characterized, in a truly post-structuralist perspective, by an "intentionality without subject" (Hoy, 1989: 148). Such an apparatus can be qualified as one that is "polymorphous", actualizing identities differently according to individuals' position within the social environment conceptualized by Foucault as a matrix of power/ knowledge. Thus, a common management program can be actualized through various configurations of concrete exercises of power embedded in diverse material artifacts (technologies, rules, mechanisms of control, incentives/ sanctions systems, moral injunctions, and so forth) depending on individuals' occupations, hierarchical level, gender, ethnicity, as well as the contexts in which they reside. The "same" program can differ widely even if it is presented

or understood under the same label by variously characterized people in these different contexts.

Two major avenues for future research on identity regulation transpire: First, the importance of exploring the "socio-material actualization" of identity regulation apparatuses beyond moments of discursive instantiation from official rhetoric. Indeed, it is imperative to go beyond the study of official rhetoric if we want to actually understand how identity regulation apparatuses are actualized in practice. Second, we must also take into account the "positional actualization" of identity regulation attempts. Since apparatuses actualize differently depending on the position occupied by those subjects in the social environment, this involves re-assessing the conclusion of a "one size fits all" entreprising identity regardless of consideration of the organization and the individual's position in it.

Critically researching the material actualization of identity regulation apparatuses

The first element to consider further is the "material actualization" of identity regulation apparatuses. As we mentioned above, current research tends to marginalize the role played by socio-material elements in identity regulation because they approach discourse only in its language-use. While useful for deconstructing official discourses, such studies fall short of confronting managerial rhetoric with actual socio-material practices developed in organizations. As a result, if they question enterprising ways of be(hav)ing in terms of their effects on employees, they do not question whether the socially-valued identity within contemporary organizations actually corresponds with this enterprising figure (Salaman & Storey, 2008).

A very good example of the relevance and limitation of such studies was conducted by Kelly, Allender & Colquhoun (2007) with respect to a health and fitness program in a large multinational corporation. The authors analyzed the documents that framed this program in order to provide a detailed description of the "corporate athlete" being promoted in this workplace. "Corporate athletes" are described as entrepreneurial subjects who coach themselves to improve their physical and mental qualities. Ideal corporate athletes espouse this ethos because they are convinced that it contributes to their own well-being as well as to the performance of the organization. From this linguistic analysis, Kelly et al., (2007) conclude that this enterprising figure epitomizes the "new work ethic" characteristic of a "brave new world". However, they do not question – beyond the managerial rhetoric – whether the identity that is expected within such an organization actually corresponds with this enterprising figure. Indeed, as the only texts the authors have deconstructed are managerial ones, they only expose the managerial rhetoric, the very rhetoric which aims precisely to convince employees that they work in an enterprising organization.

If we accept the idea that identity regulation is better conceptualized as a Foucauldian apparatus, we ought not limit our investigation to official discourse. Identity regulation rests on a much more complex ensemble of objects than official talks and texts. Understanding identity regulation thus requires seriously studying - through a socio-material perspective - how the managerial enterprising rhetoric is concretely deployed and understood in practice, through technologies, spatial arrangements, processes, routines and any other material artifacts.

Critically researching the positional actualization of identity regulation apparatuses

The second element that we must take into account is what we call the positional actualization, understood as the various ways identity regulation occurs in practice, depending on the position considered in the social environment. We believe that it is much too simplistic to argue that contemporary organizations' attempts to regulate individuals' identity follow a single model as these are likely to differ depending on the individual's position and, of course, the organization in which s/he evolves in identity terms. Subsequently we call on post-structuralist

scholars to give accounts of the various corporate subjects that are actually expected within contemporary organizations and to consider management programs as polymorphic apparatuses that may be actualized following various ways of be(hav)ing. Taking into account the positional actualization of identity regulation apparatuses will thus involve critically re-assessing the idealistic belief that a "one-size-fits all" enterprising identity is promoted within all (supposedly post-bureaucratic) contemporary organizations.

On the one hand, our call echoes several studies that suggest that the "demise of bureaucracy" and the advent of the "age of enterprise" has been asserted more than studied (Courpasson & Reed, 2004; Clegg, Harris & Höpfl, 2011). Indeed, recent accounts show that, even if contemporary organizations have been generally regarded as post-bureaucratic, they tend to correspond better to being "hybrid" settings which include features from both bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic ideal-types (Josserand, 2004; Josserand, Teo & Clegg, 2006; Gomez & Korine, 2008). Future research should provide a more nuanced picture of the corporate ideal worker(s) actually expected within contemporary organizations (Salaman & Storey, 2008). Indeed, as contemporary organizations correspond to "hybrid" settings rather than post-bureaucratic ones, the workers actually expected in such a context are certainly not pure "enterprising subjects" but rather "hybrid subjects", ones incorporating both bureaucratic and enterprising qualities. In this way, if the bureaucratic ideal-type is based on a "moral of legality" following which people are encouraged to unquestioningly obey legal-rational authority (Courpasson & Dany, 2003; Willmott, 2011) the post-bureaucratic ideal-type promotes an "enterprising moral", one that values individual initiative, risk-taking and personal judgment (du Gay, 2000). Future research must unpack how the combinations of the distinct ethos occur in practice. Of course, and following the principle of positional actualization mentioned above, we suspect that the combination will be different according to the positions of individuals within the social environment. Indeed, the co-existence of bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic logics may occur in a great variety of ways. We believe that such an investigation is particularly promising because, by better assessing the outlines of these ideal subjects, post-structuralist scholars will provide a more nuanced and acute diagnosis of the actual "zeitgeist" of liquidity. Thus, we encourage the use of a critical post-structuralist perspective to question further how identity regulation operates in practice in order to provide a non-monolithic view of how contemporary technologies of power are implemented within organizations and, thus, of the various ways they may manufacture individuals' ways of be(hav)ing.

One the other hand, our conceptualization of identity regulation as apparatus may also contribute to foucauldian studies providing genealogical accounts of how a given organizational "discourse" may become a "regime of truth" within a given organizational context (Knights & Morgan, 1991; 1995 ; Knights & McCabe, 1998 ; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008). These studies propose "possible" histories (following the Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008 formula) of the different environmental, organizational and individual conditions of possibilities, understood as exercises of power, which may explain that a discourse became dominant and appeared as reality at a particular moment in time. The goal of such studies is not to provide historical truth but to show that management practices are not objective "one best ways" but only results of complex exercises of power at different levels (Baratt, 2008). In short, it has been argued that genealogy is not a history of the past but an account of the present (Burrell, 1988). Conceptualizing identity regulation as apparatus will permit one to adopt an interesting take on how an organizational "discourse" may allow for nuancing these genealogical accounts. Indeed, Foucault calls on us with this notion of apparatus to "cut off the King's head" (Foucault, 1980: 121), that is to say to consider that an apparatus is not only an exercise of power imposed from the top in order to regulate employees' identity but also the sum of its local actualizations. Moreover, and following the principle of positional actualization, we mentioned that local actualizations may vary depending on the position considered within the organization. As

a result, future genealogical studies should explore in detail how regimes of truth may be actualized differently through various discursive and material arrangements at the local level, according to the position considered, and conversely, how these local material and discursive actualizations may either sustain, modify or disqualify in different ways the regime of truth. Subsequently, research conceptualizing management programs as material and discursive apparatuses that actualize differently according to the position considered within the organization, will provide much more nuanced genealogical accounts of identity regulation.

INDIVIDUAL (DIS)IDENTIFICATION

How do individuals actually construct their identity in reference to the prescribed corporate identity?

Along with the deconstruction of corporate attempts to regulate people's identity, critical post-structuralist scholars have also explored how individuals actually construct their own identity in relation to the prescribed enterprising identity. Of course, post-structuralist scholars highlight many cases of "conformist selves" (Collinson, 2003) who identify with the enterprising identity and conform to corporate discipline (Grey, 1994; Kerfoot & Knights, 1998; Alvesson & Robertson, 2006; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). Nevertheless, we have to recognize that they may have been more interested in describing cases in which individuals (dis)identify with the enterprising identity.

Focusing particular attention on dis-identification can be interpreted as a consequence of the harsh criticisms to which post-structuralism has been subject; indeed, labour process theorists (Thompson, 1993; Ackroyd & Thompson, 1995) as well as other critical realist scholars (Newton, 1998; Reed, 2000) argue that post-structuralist academics provide totalizing views of organizations in which individuals are described as "corporate clones". Notably, labour process theorists claimed that post-struturalists' focus on identity regulation excludes any possibilities of resistance, as every aspect of individuals' ways of being and behaving are considered as manufactured by the organization; they add that this emphasis on identity constitutes a "fatal distraction" (Thompson, 1993) from the "core issue" of modern times which, they believe, resides ultimately in the "indeterminacy of labour power". This indeterminacy is defined as the gap that can exist between the potentiality of labour and the labour actually realized - a gap that implies fundamentally problematic relationships between labour and capital (O'Doherty & Willmott, 2009). The intensification of work within post-bureaucratic settings would thus inevitably lead to dissatisfaction for certain workers, encouraging them to resist. Following such an interpretation, individuals will dis-identify with the enterprising identity when they realize that this way of be(hav)ing does not contribute to their own well-being. As Smith & Thompson (1992: 14) put it, the post-structuralist's exclusive attention to the question of identity "denies the objectivity of capitalist relations, property interests and any systemic tendencies within something called capitalism" and, subsequently, distract them from identifying the putatively "real" cause of dis-identification (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2001). Of course, there is a degree of circularity to these positions – the putatively "real" conditions have no ontological status outside the discourses derived from Marxism that constitute them as such.

As argued above, it is precisely because the post-structuralist posture understands people's (dis)identification not only in reference to capitalist relationships of labour but in reference to all the diverse and heterogeneous bases of identification offered to individuals within contemporary societies that we feel it is a more promising approach to the question of identity in a liquidly modern world. Capitalist relations of production are increasingly of less immediate concern than relations of consumption that may or may not be dependent on these relations of production: it is not only exploited employees of capitalists that consume but also organizational subjects in the not-for-profit

sector, state bureaucracies, non-governmental organization, and so forth. Accordingly, post-structuralist scholars offer a non-essentialist understanding of individuals' identity, arguing that "social individualities" (Knights & McCabe, 2003: 1589) will dis-identify with an enterprising identity if they are already attached to competing bases of identification that are not in line with the prescribed identity. For instance, Knights & McCabe (2003) show how certain employees who do not buy the corporate discourse of empowerment promoted in their organization or the extra-time team-building activities that these include, do so because they privilege other identities linked to family and personal hobbies over the prescribed enterprising identity. There is a need to recall the attitudes-to-work concept of the "Affluent Worker" studies (Goldthorpe et al., 1968). Dis-identification should not be understood in reference to a putatively objective class-consciousness but it should be recognized that individuals can be attached to many bases of identification – and not only as members of class – that may be in contradiction to the enterprising identity.

Empirically, and following the rationale mentioned above, post-structuralists offer fine empirical accounts of employees' dis-identification. Notably, they have highlighted the various discursive forms through which dis-identification can be expressed such as humour, (Ezzamel, Willmott & Worthington, 2001), skepticism (Fleming & Spicer, 2002) cynicism (Fleming & Spicer, 2003) or irony (Musson & Duberley, 2007). These discursive forms of dis-identification have either been interpreted as forms of resistance which may have symbolic power (Fleming & Spicer, 2002) - ways for individuals to distance themselves from the enterprising identity and to preserve what they consider as their real self (Kunda, 1992; Gabriel, 1999), or as means through which individuals construct a sense of selfhood by defining themselves in opposition to the prescribed enterprising identity (Fleming, 2005; Fleming & Spicer, 2007). In any case, we would argue that such discursive forms have little effect in disrupting managerial ways of doing (Willmott, 1993; Collinson, 1994); indeed, we can even consider that, in certain cases, they may hinder and self-defeat more overt forms of resistance as the possibility to engage in such behaviours can be interpreted as a sign of the firm's commitment to openness and freedom of speech (Willmott, 1993).

Individual (dis)identification in a liquidly modern society: a research agenda

Our research agenda concerning identity regulation calls on scholars to nuance understanding of identity regulation by further exploring the material and positional actualization of the managerial apparatuses implemented within contemporary organizations. Symmetrically, it would be beneficial to put more emphasis on the material forms of (dis)identification that have been marginalized so far by post-structuralist scholars as well as on how (dis)identification may occur differently according to the position occupied by individuals within the social environment.

Researching the role of socio-materiality in (dis)identification

The accent put on the linguistic aspects of discourse inevitably led to a focus mainly on the forms of (dis)identification expressed through "talk" and "texts" at the expense of material acts of resistance or conformity. Notably, this over-emphasis on language has involved a pessimistic and partial view of organizations in which dis-identification mainly appears as symbolic mis-behaviours which are either mediated through "talks" – such as humour, (Ezzamel, Willmott & Worthington, 2001), scepticism (Fleming & Spicer, 2002), cynicism (Fleming & Spicer, 2003) – or through "texts" – such as office graffiti (Bell & Forbes, 1994) or other signs of disapproval such as wearing a "McShit" tee-shirt for McDonalds' employees or ridiculing the corporate brand by fixing hundreds of company stickers to one car (Spicer & Bohm, 2007). Of course, we would not want to neglect the symbolic power of such forms of dis-identification (Fleming & Spicer, 2007); nevertheless, we may regret that post-structural scholars do not give more accounts of the material forms of dis-identification

at work in contemporary organizations which have the potential to concretely disrupt managerial ways of doing.

Indeed, other forms of resistance – such as absenteeism, being late or any other forms of sabotage – that receive attention from labour process theorists (Thompson & Ackroyd, 1999), have been relegated with the decline of this intellectual tradition. Post-structuralist scholars need to pay more attention to these and other material forms of resistance if they want to avoid providing an idealistic view of (dis)identification and thus, a pessimistic account of organizations. Recent events show that these material forms of (dis) identification still exist in contemporary organizations. For instance, we could mention the occupation of work premises, the collective strikes or even sequestration at Arcellor-Mittal, Continental, Doux, Fralib, Ford, PSA or Sanofi that have recently received media coverage. Post-structuralist scholars should further explore how individuals may concretely influence the field of possibilities through material forms of (dis)-identification which have the potential to disrupt managerial ways of doing, even minimally.

The neglect of materiality has not only distracted post-structuralist scholars from providing empirical accounts of forms of (dis)identification but has also exposed them to providing idealized interpretations of (dis)identification. Indeed, we may regret this tendency to interpret (dis)identification only as the precarious result of an abstract sense-giving/sense-making language game through which 'social individualities' will accept or refuse corporate discourse depending on its compatibility with the other discourses they have been exposed to during their life (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2001). To overcome the risk providing aesthetic interpretations devoid of any radical content, critical post-structuralist scholars must embrace a fuller conception of discourse that puts a stronger emphasis on the material conditions in which people are embedded. Indeed, individuals' decisions to accept or refuse the prescribed corporate ways of be(hav)ing do not (only) depend on an abstract struggle between "competing bases of identification" (Knights & McCabe, 2003) but also depend on material imperatives – such as taking care of their kids or reimbursing their loans. Subsequently, the "competing basis of identification" to which people are attached – such as "being a good mother/father" or "being a responsible citizen" – which have been recognized as influencing people's (dis)identification (see Knights & McCabe, 2003), are mediated by the specific material circumstances in which people are embedded. Considering the limiting or facilitating roles of material circumstances is crucial for exploring (dis)identification from a critical perspective because such a posture precisely attempts to denounce such forms of inequality. As such, we call on post-structuralist scholars to include these material aspects in their analysis in order to refine the understanding of (dis)identification.

Researching the role of materiality within (dis)identification will thus permit the stimulation of a critical exploration of "identity work" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), defined as the process through which people mobilize the different "discourses" to which they have been exposed in order to build and maintain a consistent understanding of who they are and how they must behave. Indeed, if post-structuralist scholars largely explore individuals' identity work, they mainly do it from an interpretive posture rather than a critical one (see, Organization, 2008; Human Relations, 2009). In this way, Ybema et al. (2009) approach identity work as a dialectical and dialogical process that they conceptualize as an "identity talk" between self and others through which individuals construct and maintain a consistent "self-narrative" (see also Watson, 2008 for a close theorization). We argue that taking into account the role of materiality for understanding (dis) identification may enhance possibilities of problematizing identity work from a critical perspective. Indeed, exploring materiality will notably reveal how material circumstances make the prescribed corporate ways of be(hav)ing more difficult to refuse for certain individuals than for others. Thus, the ways individuals will construct an understanding of who they are and how they behave will also

depend on the material conditions in which individuals are embedded. These considerations will thus allow the denunciation of inequalities in the shaping of individual becoming, because certain ways of be(hav)ing will be less accessible to certain individuals than to others. However, emphasizing the influence of material conditions does not mean embracing a structuralist and deterministic view of identity work following which individuals ways of be(hav)ing will be totally determined by structural conditions. Indeed, we have also called on critical post-structuralist scholars to further explore material forms of (dis)identification which precisely have the potential to disrupt structural constraints and thus enlarge or limit individuals' possibilities to shape their becoming. In conclusion, we call on identity scholars to adopt a materialist post-structuralism which not only explores how individuals' identity is both the cause and consequence of language but also of material arrangements.

Researching (dis)identification in relation to individuals' position

Organization scholars should also consider the implications for (dis)identification of the principle of positional actualization mentioned above. Indeed, we suspect that (dis)identification will occur differently and for different reasons for individuals who occupy different positions within the social environment because they would be confronted with different forms of identity regulation. Here, we believe that the contribution provided by McCabe (2008) constitutes a valuable first step in this direction. Indeed, McCabe (2008) presents a case in which the co-existence of both bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic logics is dysfunctional from a managerial perspective as it stimulates dis-identification for some individuals who point out the contradiction between the rhetoric of empowerment and the actual tightening of rules. Notably, McCabe mentions cases of individuals who initially subscribe to the enterprising discourse but become frustrated as they are unable to take more responsibilities in line with the empowerment rhetoric. McCabe also provide accounts of other individuals who interpret the gap between rhetoric and practice as revealing the "real" managerial agenda (McCabe, 2008). However, as the positional actualization of the identity regulation apparatus may occur in a greater variety of ways, we have to consider that, in certain circumstances, it may lead individuals to conformity rather than dis-identification. In this respect, Bardon, Josserand & Clegg (2011) observed how certain individuals who do not ethically subscribe to the rhetoric of empowerment and the underlying enterprising ethos still conform to corporate prescriptions because they fear bureaucratic forms of control and sanction. Moreover, we suspect that such a combination may occur in many other ways; for instance, cases in which individuals do not subscribe to the discourse of empowerment promoted in organizations but still conform to the corporate discipline because it simultaneously incorporates a "moral of legality" that pushes them to unquestioningly obey corporate prescriptions. In any case, this shows that (dis)identification may be understood differently following the particular combination of both bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic logics with which individuals are confronted.

We invite critical scholars to explore further how (dis)identification will vary with the position occupied by individuals and, thus, the identity regulation apparatus in which they are embedded. What is required is a return to the action frame of reference (Silverman 1970) first developed in the Cambridge 'Affluent Worker' studies, but one that is informed by the subsequent 40 years of contention, construction and deconstruction of the space of organization studies and the space of organizations. It is not simply that individuals slot into class position to which they variously respond, dependent on their biographies: it is more that in employee relations at work, the identity of the employee becomes a contested terrain, a site of many struggles, in an arena in which many and varied fragmentary discourses and practices seek to interpellate the subject.

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