Few words can compete with “management” in its spread and ubiquity. Its meteoric rise mirrors the parallel rise of English as the international language of global business, politics and academic research. “Management” is one of the most successful exports of the English language, now fully assimilated in many different languages, as is evident from the title of this special issue. The power of the word management is, in the view of some, attributed to the rise of management and managers as major forces in social and economic affairs. Thus, Peter Drucker argued that “rarely in human history has any institution emerged as fast as management or had as great an impact as quickly. In less than 150 years, management has transformed the social and economic fabric of the world’s developed countries. It has created a global economy and a new set of rules for countries that would participate in that economy as equals. And it has itself been transformed”.

Such an essentialist view is consistent with the tendency to lionize the manager as a Promethean superhero who forges a new world, casting behind the fetters and superstitions of the past. Even those, however, not predisposed to glorify the manager feel compelled to acknowledge that his rise\(^1\), coinciding with the high noon of modernity – the period

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\(^1\) The use of the male pronoun is appropriate for this highly masculine archetype.
of large corporations, big government, urban expansion, mass production and mass consumption – signals radical new forms of constructing the subject and novel configurations of social authority relations. Thus MacIntyre views the manager, along the therapist as one of the dominant cultural archetypes of our times. “The manager”, he argues “represents in his character the obliteration of the distinction between manipulative and nonmanipulative social relations; the therapist represents the same obliteration in the sphere of personal life. The manager treats ends as given, as outside his scope; his concern is with effectiveness in transforming raw materials into final products, unskilled labor into skilled labor, investment into profits. The therapist also treats ends as given, outside his scope; his concern is also with technique, with effectiveness in transforming neurotic symptoms into directed energy, maladjusted individuals into well-adjusted ones”. Managers then, along with therapists, could naturally be seen to represent impossible professions, as Freud envisaged: the “ideal outcome” of their endeavours is never fully realized – the ends are forever stretching beyond the limitations of technique. But by the same token, they both represent professions uniquely in tune with our times, that is professions that have attained considerable legitimacy on the back of technique alone, claiming a god-like immunity of those exclusively concerned with means and maintaining an Olympian indifference to questions of values, politics, morality and ends.

Both psychotherapy and management are professions easily given to hubris – Freud warned against extravagant claims made on behalf of psychoanalysis as a cure of souls by declaring that “our cures cannot compete with those of Lourdes”. Management, for its part, has often lapsed into the hubris of total control – the belief that everything is, can be and must be predicted, planned for and controlled. In an earlier paper (Gabriel, 1998), I argued that managers are not masters of their own fate, let alone of their organizations to anything like the extent commonly imagined. Using insights from psychoanalytic theory, I proposed that control serves as a defense against anxiety and as a wish-fulfilling fantasy for managers and some of their followers, some of the time. Fear of outer chaos expresses an even deeper fear, that of inner chaos and disintegration. This configuration of management looms both in the Weberian theory of bureaucracy and the Taylorist doctrine of scientific management; the “managed” represent resources to be deployed in a calculated and effective way in pursuit of organizational objectives. Materials, information, and, especially, people are all pieces on a chess board, moved, exchanged, promoted and sacrificed in an endless game where a dull stalemate is the frequent outcome. In the language of Human Resources Management (HR), the subject has been reduced to an object, to be measured, assessed, appraised and controlled.

In the last twenty years, however, this conceptualization of management has been questioned from different quarters. Boltanski and Chiapello,
for example, have argued that a new spirit of capitalism emerged from the critiques born of May 1968, one that relinquished the hierarchical Weberian structure and embraced new network-based forms promoting employee initiative and autonomy, but at the cost of material and psychological insecurity. Similar arguments emphasizing the non-hierarchical and anti-bureaucratic qualities of modern management and attendant employee insecurities have been put forward by numerous other authors (See, for example, Appay, 2010; Calas & Smircich, 1999; Castells, 1996; Clegg, 1990; Hassard, 1994; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006; Parker, 1992; Sennett, 1998; Thornley, Jefferys, & Appay, 2010). The iron cage, I have argued in my own work, is currently being superseded by a glass cage; while the Weberian iron cage stifled creativity, fantasy and freedom, today’s glass cages allow for more ambivalent and nuanced experiences which stem from an emphasis on narcissistic display and exhibitionism but also from controls which are ever more subtle and ever more invisible. This paper will propose that a new subject is emerging with many significant differences from the subject of the classical management discourses and will delineate some of its qualities – emotion, meaning-seeking, identity-seeking. It will then examine how management itself is currently being reconfigured as an entity far less grandiose than Drucker’s essentialist conception or MacIntyre’s archetypal one, an entity often reduced to a pawn or even a parasite in a game being played way above his head.

THE “CLASSICAL” CONCEPTION OF MANAGEMENT

As we are now aware the word management derives from the French word “manège”, itself a derivative of the Italian “maneggiare”, the training of a horse in its paces. Management originates in taming and domestica-
ting a wild force of nature and turning it into a useful resource for humans. One of its affinities lies in control – controlling a horse is a necessary part of training it. But there are other affinities. To manage also means to treat with respect, to handle as well as to control. It also means to unleash a hidden potential – just as the potential of each horse is developed through its training, management aims at developing the potentials of ideas, of resources and, of course, people. Yet, nearly all of these resonances in the word have been lost or subordinated to control. Failing to be in control would seem to be the cardinal failure of a manager. Why then is this failure such an unpardonable one for a manager? It seems to me that psychoanalysis has made a major contribution to answering this question. As human beings, we are constantly confronted by forces of disorder, inner and outer, which create paralysing feelings of anxiety, against which we raise individual and collective defences. As Freud describes in the following majestic statement this is not an easy task:

“There are elements, which seem to mock all human control: the earth, which quakes and is torn apart and buries all human life and its
works; water, which deluges and drowns everything in a turmoil; storms, which blow everything before them; there are diseases, which we have only recently recognized as attacks by other organisms and finally there is the painful riddle of death, against which no medicine has yet been found, nor probably will be. With these forces nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable; she brings to mind once more our weakness and helplessness, which we thought to escape through the work of civilization... For the individual, too, life is hard to bear, just as it is for mankind in general. The civilization in which he participates imposes some amount of privation on him, and other men bring him a measure of suffering, either in spite of the precepts of civilization or because of its imperfections. To this are added the injuries which untamed nature – he calls it Fate – inflicts on him” (1927c, p.195).

Exposed to the ravages of nature, culture and fate, we seek to generate oases of continuity and safety. Faced with such a situation, the ego emerges as the psychic manager, the controlling subject, the subject that imagines itself as sovereign and in charge, confidently planning for the future, assessing alternatives, making decisions and taking advantage of opportunities. In its struggles to remain in control and maintain its illusions, the ego regularly resorts to various figures of authority, whether sacred or secular. Religion, politics and science have all colluded in this regard, but never fully successfully. More recently, the psychotherapist and the manager have both been commandeered to the same end. It is hardly surprising then that they represent impossible professions. In addition to the obvious fallibility of technique, they are presented with exorbitant expectations – to maintain control in the face of different forces that threaten chaos and disorder.

What psychoanalysis also tells us is that inner and outer disorder readily reinforce each other – all too often, modest signs of outer disorder, such as a leaky roof or a modest work disappointment assume calamitous proportions that undermine a person’s inner stability. It is not accidental then that a manager who fails to deliver the promise of order and control gets readily scapegoated. Of course, we should not feel too sorry for managers – for they collude in their downfall through their own illusions of omnipotence and omniscience. This is what I refer to the hubris of management – the preposterous belief that management can, should and will stay in control. We did not need chaos and complexity theories to inform us that the world is too full of unpredictability, randomness and chance to lend itself to the kind of manipulation that management dreams of.

The concept of management as a compulsive attempt to control goes back to the man generally regarded as the founder of “Scientific Management”, Frederick Winslow Taylor. Born into a family of American puritans, Taylor (1856-1915) was an obsessive-compulsive who sought to control everything around him, starting with his own life which was
dominated by plans, schedules and programmes down to the smallest details of the number of steps taken during his walks or the precise measurement of the terrain prior to a ball game. Taylor made it his life’s ambition to replace the erratic performance of the artisan with the predictable and standardized output of the closely monitored and measured deskilled worker. “The managers assume the burden of gathering together all the traditional knowledge which in the past has been possessed by workmen and then of classifying, tabulating, and reducing this knowledge to rules, laws, and formulae.” Under the so-called “science of the stopwatch”, Taylor aimed to control every aspect of the worker’s performance in order not just to optimise efficiency but to eliminate all unpredictability from industrial production.

Measurement and the elimination of unpredictability are also essential features of the bureaucratic organization as envisaged by Taylor near contemporary, Max Weber (1864-1920). The contrast between Taylor’s celebration of management and Weber’s near-metaphysical gloom should not obscure their overlapping conceptualisations:

“Already now, rational calculation is manifested at every stage. By it, the performance of each individual worker is mathematically measured, each man becomes a little cog in the machine and, aware of this, his one preoccupation is whether he can become a bigger cog... it is horrible to think that the world could one day be filled with these little cogs, little men clinging to little jobs, and striving towards bigger ones... this passion for bureaucracy is enough to drive one to despair.”

Management and administration then grew out of a systematic effort to control humans not through brute force but through elaborate systems of rules and procedures, underpinned by constant measurements of performance. But performance (now institutionalized in regular performance appraisals and reviews) is far from the only thing being measured. Roughly the same time as Scientific Management and the theory of bureaucracy were being developed saw the rise of anthropometry and psychometrics, the systematic attempt to measure everything about human beings, from their physical dimensions and shapes to their psychological aptitudes and abilities.

The measurement of heads, bodies and minds and its fatal consequences in human suffering from eugenic sterilization programmes to euthanasia and genocide have been well-documented by authors as diverse as Stephen Jay Gould and Robert Jay Lifton. Lest it be thought, however, that we have now moved beyond the tyranny of what Gould calls the “mismeasurement of man”, let us reflect on what Boyle refers to as the “tyranny of numbers”, the relentless attempt to convert all quality into quantity which is sweeping across every aspect of social and private life. Rankings, lists, constant tests and examinations, bottom lines, balance sheets and scorecards and the omnipresence of statistics in every scientific domain signal the escalating hegemony of numbers in
our culture which is echoed in the systematic privileging of quantitative over qualitative research in “top-ranked” academic journals. Scientists today may not be as keen to measure infinitesimal cranial variations as they once were, but the measurement of happiness is currently becoming a preoccupation of hard-nosed economists and mainstream politicians such as Nicolas Sarkozy and David Cameron.

The fetishism of numbers and attendant drives to standardize and routinize are vital aspects of the hubris of management. “Anything can be counted, say the management consultants McKinsey & Co, and anything that you can count you can manage”, a belief that has now become commonplace though we first encounter it in the late Pythagorean philosopher Philolaus who argued that nothing can either be thought or known without numbers.

A significant aspect of the hubris of control lies in the identification of managerial control with rationality and the forces of disorder with irrationality and even madness. What could be more rational than to seek to maintain control over everything, optimize returns on investment, minimize waste and make the best possible use of all resources. For Taylor and his successors this was self-evident, although Weber struggled long and hard to maintain a distinction between means-end rationality or instrumental rationality (‘Zweckrationalität’) and a deeper rationality of ultimate ends or values (‘Wertrationalität’), which is more akin to Freud’s God Logos fighting the daemons or irrationality. Doray eloquently describes what ensues from privileging instrumental rationality above all else as a “rational madness”, a view echoed by Bowles:

“The rational approach to management decisions hinges on information, modelling and analysis, attempting to reduce all organizational phenomena to numbers. What cannot be reduced to numbers cannot be managed and therefore is not worthy of attention. Consequently, the human and social reality of organizations, which cannot be decomposed into mere numbers, is discounted. As such, management analysis based on the rational model mostly trivializes and simplifies organizational phenomena in its obsession for control.”

What then is the view of the subject that emerges from this managerial discourse? It is a subject denuded of his/her subjectivity, stripped of his/her complexity, emasculated of his/her desire and reduced to being a controlling or more often a controlled subject, a measuring and measured subject, and appraising and appraised subject, an at times resourceful subject that cannot conceal the fact that he/she is viewed as a resource, cast as a resource, reduced to a resource.  

2. In what follows, I treat the manager as a concept, an abstraction that is conceptualised in relation to other concepts drawn from social theory, organizational studies and psychoanalysis.
LATE MODERNITY AND THE RISE OF THE CONSUMER

Late modernity has forced a re-evaluation of many concepts in the human sciences and it would have been surprising had it not also prompted a rethinking of management. In fact, the account of management that we painted above has been challenged from numerous quarters, ideological, political, psychological, economic and pragmatic. Some of the challenges date from its heyday, but these have gathered momentum in recent times. Starting with Human Relations School, different schools proposed alternatives to the rational economic man model and sought to develop more humanistic approaches to management. Social critics like Marcuse, Whyte and numerous others criticized different aspects of the “organization man” (always “man”) while Japanese managers scolded their Western counterparts for adhering to an outdated concept of management. By the 1980s, many of the criticisms of this concept had stretched into popular management literature and the pronouncements of “management gurus”. Thus Chan and Clegg maintain that leading management guru Tom Peters initiated an attack on bureaucracy, every bit as belligerent and maybe more effective than Mao’s Cultural Revolution. The core argument of Peters and others is pragmatic – bureaucracy no longer works (if it ever did), it leads to decay and failure. The future belongs to organizations that rid themselves of the iron cage and celebrate creativity, entrepreneurship and freedom (see, for example Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Kanter, 1983; Peters, 1992; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Boltanski and Chiapello’s *The New Spirit of Capitalism* represents a cogent account of a capitalism that is reinventing itself through new network-based organizations, enhanced employee autonomy and post-Fordist horizontal work structures.

At the political level, the attack on bureaucracy has been master-minded by Anglo-Saxon politicians, most notably Thatcher and Reagan, under the influence of neo-liberal economists who sought to roll back the frontiers of the state and play up to voters demanding lower taxes and less government. Bureaucracy, according to this view, should wherever possible be supplanted by market or quasi-market mechanisms and the

3. “We are going to win and the industrial west is going to lose out: there is nothing much you can do about it, because the reasons for your failure are within yourselves. Your firms are built on the Taylor Model; even worse, so are your heads. With your bosses doing the thinking while the workers wield the screwdrivers, you’re convinced deep down that this is the correct way to run a business. For you, the essence of leadership is getting the ideas out of the heads of the bosses and into the hands of the labor. We are beyond the Taylor Model; business, we know, is now so complex and difficult, the survival of firms so hazardous in an environment increasingly unpredictable, competitive, and fraught with danger, that their continued existence depends on the day-to-day mobilization of every ounce of intelligence.” Konosuke Matsushita, Founder of Matsushita Corporation, speaking to a group of US industrialists in the 1970s.
citizen be treated as a sovereign consumer, exercising his/her freedom to choose as he/she pleases and offering no explanations or accounts for his/her actions.

Many inter-related factors have colluded to a partial reconfiguration of capitalism and attendant reinvention of management in late modernity. The rise of new information and communication technologies, the accelerated pace of innovation, political and economic changes that have seen the partial lifting of borders and frontiers, the off-shoring of traditional industries to the new industrial nations, the demise of the Soviet block and the rise of powerful new economies, the emergence of new looser organizational structures and networks, as well as a profusion of political and ideological developments have all played a part. The growth of the service economy at the expense of manufacturing has been a major factor in the industrialized countries; managing service employees is certainly different from managing metal-bashers. Yet, it seems to me that one of the major forces prompting this reconfiguration has been the rise of contemporary consumerism and its virtually unopposed expansion. Consumerism, proclaiming consumption as the uncontested way to the good life, freedom and economic development, has conquered ever wider swathes of the globe but also, and equally importantly, has colonized every nook and cranny of social, personal and private lives. Thus, education, health and virtually every social service (including prisons) routinely refer to service recipients as “customers” or “clients” in some important ways (affecting to offer them choices, opportunities for redress, explanations for decisions and so forth) treat them as such.

The rise of the consumer could then be seen for the latter part of the 20th century as emblematic as the rise of the manager was for the century’s earlier part. Yet, unlike the manager who could properly be viewed as an archetypal figure of modernity by MacIntyre, the consumer is some way away from attaining the same degree of coherence. While the consumer is ubiquitous in contemporary social discourses, he remains a figure that comes in and out of focus, donning different attires and wearing different masks (Gabriel, Lang, 2008). Consumers are often viewed as embodiments of contemporary freedom, making choices and offering no explanations, rewarding those producers who satisfy their desires and punishing those who take them for granted (Bauman, 1988, 1998). At other times, however, they are viewed as victims easily swindled by cunning advertisers and unscrupulous producers, as addicts unable to shake off their dependency on diverse opiates of consumption or even as rebels rejecting and challenging the very ethos of consumption. Economic and social inequalities among consumers are vast, leaving substantial numbers of them window-shopping with only restricted opportunities to make a purchase and many, in the developing countries, without even windows to window-shop. All this is contributing to the fragmentation of the consumer as a meaningful archetype, leaving him as
an “essentially contested concept” that cannot be claimed, controlled or managed. The consumer, then, can be viewed as unmanageable, both as a concept, since no-one can pin it down to one specific conceptualization at the expense of all others, and as an entity, since attempts to control and manage the consumer result in a mutation from a stable consumer concept to an unstable one.

In spite of his far-from-stable stature, today’s consumer has been drawn inexorably inside the world of organizations in a way that he was never inside Henry Ford’s factories. He features in every meeting, every strategy and every plan; his whims and desires are endlessly strategized around; and although ultimately unmanageable, every manager and every organization aspires to manage him. As a result, several authors have argued that organizations are no longer arenas populated by managers and managed; instead, they have become triangles, involving the worker, the manager and the customer, whose mutating dynamics form the basis of most organizational processes, political, social and psychological (Korczynski, 2003; Leidner, 1991). Politics, identity, structure, culture and so forth can no longer be viewed from a perspective of the old fashioned tug-of-war of control, power, resistance and conflict between workers and bosses. Instead they must be viewed through a “lens” that acknowledges the triadic nature of contemporary work and organization. Triads, as Simmel recognized a long time ago, are radically different configurations from dyads. They are more unstable, they involve potentially shifting alliances and conflicts in which the third party can be the stakes or the beneficiary. The entry of the consumer as an important figure into the world of organizations has therefore not just complicated matters, by sometimes tipping the balance in unexpected and ambiguous ways. It has reshaped the nature of management, the more so as different parties of the triad are frequently found to swap masks and adopt each other’s position. The worker is also employee as indeed is the manager. The manager becomes worker in her dealings with her superiors and consumer in her relations with different departments within the same organization. The consumer often re-enters an organization as manager or worker.

Consumerism has seen the rise in nearly every part of the globe of the so-called “cathedrals of consumption”, like shopping malls, tourist resorts, theme parks, sporting venues, casinos and so forth, carefully constructed and monitored spaces where consumers can shop, window-shop, observe, be observed, daydream and fantasize all in pursuit of meaning, fulfilment and identity. It is here that we observe an initial dislocation of the role of management from the careful deployment of resources to imaginative orchestration of consumer fantasies. Equally intensive have been the explorations of new work regimes designed to provide consumers with such experiences. The core qualities expected of executives today, argues Ritzer, are imagination, flair and the ability to make
their customers feel happy, by offering them opportunities to realize their dreams. Walt Disney rather than Henry Ford appears as the archetypal executive in this conceptualisation. Value is created not through the methodical and “rational” deployment of resources but through the clever manipulation of images, spectacles and symbols, through symbolic and emotional hype. Consumers visiting the cathedrals of consumption are not after things. They are after experiences and things are of value if they can promise exciting, tingling and above all emotional experiences. Colourless, unimaginative “bean-counters” are not people capable to engage with the consumers, tempt them, lure them and seduce them. Instead, today’s executive must be a psychologist in tune with trends in the market place, a visionary brimming with imagination and, above all, an entrepreneur constantly exploring and exploiting new ideas. An entrepreneurial ethos is gradually replacing the bureaucratic one, as organizations turn outward looking for new openings, new “gaps” and new opportunities. This ethos is, of course, resisted at many levels but its effect is far-ranging, dominating not only the thinking of many managers but also many employees. A new enterprising or entrepreneurial self, according to this conceptualisation, is dislodging the old subject, a self always looking for opportunities, ready to reinvent him/herself. Success for this self is not to be found in tying his/her fate to one organization, one career or one job, but it flexibility and opportunism – being at the right place in the right time. Sennett who has put this argument most forcibly describes this self as a chameleon self, lacking the backbone of real “character” but able to blend in any environment and play any game.

The new entrepreneurial self severs loyalty bonds between an individual, whether as manager, employee or consumer, and an organization. What matters to entrepreneurial selves is the freedom to pursue opportunities to realize themselves. This is the only obligation that entrepreneurial selves have, and in pursuit of such opportunities they are prepared to endure a lot of uncertainty, insecurity and precariousness.

AN EMERGING CONCEPT OF THE SUBJECT

So what is the subject emerging from these new discourses? If “classical” management discourses approached the subject as a controlling and controlled subject, a measuring and measured subject, an ungendered and uncultured subject, the emerging managerial discourses with their distrust of bureaucracy, their veneration for markets and consumer freedom and their celebration of difference, enterprise and freedom invite a different concept of the subject. This subject is, in the first instance an emotional subject, a subject whose emotions are not incidental but constitutive of who he is. In contrast to Weber’s “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart”, new discourses construct subjects, whether as managers, employees or consumers, as essentially governed
by their emotions, minutely examining their emotions, expressing their emotions and requiring full emotional engagement from others. According to this view, organizations are “emotional arenas” where a variety of psychological dramas are acted out and whose executives must be “psychologically oriented”.

The current popularity of organizational (and other) emotion as an important area of study, analysis and discussion has been much debated. Some theorists view the earlier underemphasis on emotion as a legacy of classical emotion-blind discourses (Fineman, 1993a, 1996); others, however, have offered strong arguments according to which emotion or at least the unrestrained display of emotion has itself assumed a far greater role in late capitalism than it had in its earlier configurations. Thus Campbell has argued that where early capitalism, especially in its puritan variants, sought to suppress emotion, late capitalism has made emotion the basis of a new pleasure principle that underpins modern consumerism, a pleasure principle that aims not at satiation of the senses but at experiencing a great variety of emotional experiences. Any emotion (including anger, fear, envy, hate and disgust) can be the basis of pleasure, according to Campbell, so long as the subject can imagine him/herself as having “chosen” to experience it and being able to tolerate it. In this way, the more excruciating an experience the better – living dangerously, engaging in extreme experiences, drugs, overpowering music and most variants of youthful “fun” are all aimed at producing unique and powerful emotions.

If the response of classical management was to suppress emotion, contemporary management is seeking to commercialise it, control it and turn it into an organisational resource. Hochschild’s important book, appropriately titled The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling, highlighted the importance of emotional work in service occupations where engaging emotionally with the consumer’s emotions is every bit as important as mental or physical labour. More recently, the fad of emotional intelligence and the growth of a cottage industry aimed at boosting the emotional intelligence of executives have highlighted the conceptualization of emotion as a fundamental organizational resource and the determined effort on the part of management to work with it. Some may argue that the resurgence of emotion in late capitalism does not fundamentally change the character of management or its obsession with control – it merely represents an extension of managerial controls into the sphere of emotion, whereby even the employees’ emotions and their displays, in smiles, nods and gestures must be regulated with the same precision as their movements. But I think that this stands at odds with another line of argument highlighted by Boltanski and Chiapello that links emotion to freedom and authenticity. A generation of managers, it is argued, that grew up in the 60s, and was nurtured directly or indirectly on its critiques of capitalism and bureaucracy, came to regard
the expression of emotion as its inalienable right and its suppression (if not its control) as a pathway to personal and social pathologies. The unemotional or emotionally overcontrolled subject, variously described as straight, square, tight-assed and so forth, has come to be viewed as an object of derision and ridicule, behind whose carefully controlled exterior loom dangerous desires. The reconceptualization of the management subject from an unemotional to an emotional subject has infiltrated numerous discourses, including leadership, group relations, consumer studies, learning, gender relations, performance appraisals, and so forth. Individual emotions too, such as anxiety, shame, guilt, envy, anger, ressentiment and nostalgia attracted the attention of numerous scholars (see, for example, Fay, 2008; Stein, 2000; Vidaillet, 2008) while the study of emotion is now central to many areas of industrial sociology and organizational theory.

The emotional subject is also a subject that is vulnerable, easily hurt and willing to acknowledge such vulnerabilities. He/she is sensitive to criticism and easily feels offended. If this emerging subject is quite insecure, requiring constant reinforcement of self-worth, it is because it is a meaning-seeking and identity-seeking subject, aspects that were at best peripheral to classical management discourses but which are currently omnipresent. Classical management discourses would have had no difficulty in recognizing the subject as a value-seeking or career-pursuing subject, but meaning and identity were not seen as especially problematic or central to his/her concerns. To be sure, many scholars criticized the meaninglessness of contemporary capitalism, none perhaps more than Marcuse (1955; 1964). But was it not at the heart of the concept of alienation that meaninglessness becomes “unproblematic” – that people waiting for Godot give up trying to find meaning in their predicament? By contrast, late capitalism has restored the quest for meaning to a central position in defining the subject as it emerges from the surge in interest in organizational culture among both scholars and practitioners of management in the early 1980s, precisely on the back of a critique of bureaucracy not merely as dehumanising but also, remarkably, as inefficient. The argument developed by theorists (for early accounts of organizational culture, see Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984; Gagliardi, 1986; Linstead, 1985; Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Meek, 1988; Mitroff, 1984; Smircich, 1983) was that organizations are not culture-free bureaucracies but seek and often succeed in imbuing their members’ lives with meaning and value. The parallel argument put forward by management gurus (Deal et coll., 1982; Pascale & Athos, 1981; Peters et coll., 1982) was that what marks successful companies are their “strong” cultures which emphasize values like innovation, customer service, quality and so forth. While the belief in a strong culture as the panacea for all management ills has now abated, the emphasis on organizational sensemaking and meaning continues to characterize current conceptions of the subject, who is able to
understand hardships and perform tedious and monotonous work if he/she finds it meaningful. 4

Parallel to the discourses highlighting people’s search for meaning at the workplace was the rise of a new approach to consumer culture, not as the nightmarish dystopia of meaninglessness and alienation, but as offering diverse yet effective substitutes to religion – a new celebratory attitude towards consumerism (represented by many marketing theorists and theorists of consumer culture including Bauman and Ritzer), seemed to displace the earlier critical and censorious attitude. Consumer choice, it is now argued, offers not only valid answers to people’s quest for meaning but also new ways of experimenting with different identity-constructions and self-presentations. What earlier generations of scholars had castigated as the depth of alienation is being rethought as a magical, enchanting terrain enabling people to exercise choice, celebrate their individuality and discover their authentic beings.

If concepts like emotion, sensemaking, meaning and culture are now suffusing many management discourses of the subject, nothing quite compares to the dizzying rise of the concept of identity in the same discourses. It is hard to imagine that a mere 50 years ago identity was a concept restricted to a few ghettoes in the social sciences, such as professional identity, deviant identity and identity crisis. Today, it seems that identity holds the key to understanding a bewildering array of topics in psychology, sociology, politics, culture, philosophy and, of course, management. Identity remains a profoundly problematic and contested idea, and yet, it is this that accords it much conceptual power and allure. Most discourses, it seems to me, converge on the notion that identities, whether at the individual, group, organizational, or national levels, are never stable, never easy and never fully accomplished. Identity is always a “project”, never a destination, something to be forever pursued and forever moulded. This constitutes the very essence of reflexivity – the subject who pursues an identity by constantly trying out different storylines, different narratives, which a protagonist, who, in turn creates a new subject. Thus the story’s teller and the protagonist are forever redefining each other in a enduring project of identity. As Giddens, argues:

A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though it is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly

4. Nothing, it seems to me, demonstrates the seriousness with which management is now embracing the subject as a meaning-seeking being than the serious attempt to develop a paradigm of management spirituality that is meant to go beyond mere temporary sense-making and reach for the transcendental meanings in human experience. Calas & Smircich (2003), Driver (2005), and Mitroff & Denton (1999).
fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing “story” about the self.

Giddens and many others have emphasized that in the pursuit of identity we have “no choice but to choose”. Choice, or at least the primacy of choice, is the vital feature that sets the subject in late modernity apart from his/her predecessors – choice of career, choice of sexual orientations and life partners, choice of appearance and physique, choice of lifestyle and nutrition, choice of hobbies and holidays, choice of role models and values, even choice of when to end one’s life. In consumerist society, every choice is modelled on consumer choices, and every choice, no matter how trivial, becomes an existential choice – i.e. an identity – and self-defining choice. Choice and the all-powerful consumerist edifice that sustains it constitute, in the view of Bauman (1988; 1992), the foundation of freedom as it applies to our time and maybe its supreme value. In consumerist society, every choice is modelled on consumer choices, and every choice, no matter how trivial, becomes an existential choice – i.e. an identity – and self-defining choice. The absence of choice represents failure – those who have to rely on state hand-outs or the charity of others are “failed consumers”, individuals who have relinquished the right to make choices and maintain a parasitical existence that outrages, intimidates and disciplines the others. Acknowledging that one has no choices automatically consigns one to being a failure – holding onto a job that makes excessive demands is acceptable, so long as one can maintain that it is one’s choice to do so. Equally, opting out of a well-paid job is enviable, so long as it can be narrated as the outcome of choice. If freedom signifies success, entrapment indicates failure, even when this is beyond one’s control.⁵

All illusions, Freud taught us a propos of religion, involve a price; and so too do the illusions of freedom and choice. Clinging on to life-sapping and precarious jobs while maintaining that one does it out of free choice, in order to sustain a lifestyle of consumer choices between carefully choreographed alternatives generates levels of anxiety that maybe would have been unbearable to earlier generations. Constantly worried about whether one has made the right choice, endlessly comparing oneself to others and wondering whether there is a better life out there, a more alluring lifestyle, a better house, a better career choice, a smarter outfit, a cooler party to attend, today’s subject must endure a constant state of insecurity and dissatisfaction. Each and every of life’s experiences, health, career, aging, children, politics, housing, appearance, relatives

⁵ One of the most interesting findings of recent work that I have been carrying out with unemployed professionals and managers in their 50s is that virtually nothing has the same depleting effect on their self-esteem than finding themselves “caring” for a dependent relative, something that they experience as stiflingly restrictive of their freedom.
and so forth, become linked to identity, something that must be endlessly groomed, worked at and agonized over:

Individuals are incited to live as if making a project of themselves: they are to work on their emotional world, their domestic and conjugal arrangements, their relations with employment and their techniques of sexual pleasure, to develop a “style” of living that will maximize the worth of their existence to themselves.

The emerging subjects, emotional, identity-seeking, insecure and image-hungry and always looking out for opportunities, may not make very loyal employees or consumers; they may not be very dependable and may be constantly looking for exit routes and new openings. This makes them easily seducible as their disappointments reinforce their hunger. They collude in their own deceptions and are easily swayed by the power of the image. Their insecurity, their emotional instability, their longing for experiences, their constant worries about their appearance and measuring up against the celebrities with whom they identify, are all consistent with the deeper narcissism that characterizes our times. Such subjects are determined to see their lives as the product of their own choices and will do anything to maintain this story. As one of the protagonists of Sennett’s *The Corrosion of Character*, says “I make my own choices; I take full responsibility for moving around so much”, in spite of frequently being laid off by his employers.

**MANAGEMENT – A NEW SUBJECT?**

It seems to me that management today widely *recognizes* the subject that we have been sketching above. Yet, it no longer *defines* it, in the manner that Taylorism, Fordism and bureaucracy defined his predecessor. This has much to do with the way that management itself is currently being reconfigured in a manner distinctly different from that envisaged by Drucker and MacIntyre at the start of this paper – the very meaning of the word “manager” gradually being dislocated. To start with, an ever-growing number of people in industrial nations are now said to hold managerial jobs, senior cadres increasingly referred to by other labels, such as executives or directors. One could then say that the “manager” is falling prey to the general erosion of titles, gradually being downgraded in a similar way as “secretary”, “administrator” and “professor” were previously. Beyond this, however, the reality today is that managers are less likely to control, rule and deploy others and more likely to be controlled, ruled or indeed dismissed. Far from sovereign Olympian figures commanding resources on the chessboard of international capitalism, managers today are more likely to be victims of redeployment, off-shoring, deskilling and downsizing. Instead of agent of precarization, management is as often as not its victim. This is reflected in the literature. Since the 1970s, at least in Anglo-Saxon literature, a concerted move
has seen “leadership” separated from “management” (see, for example, Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Zaleznik, 1977), with the former consistently privileged at the expense of the latter. The manager finds himself stripped of those qualities that characterize “real” leaders, namely vision, imagination, creativity, intuition and so forth. Unlike leaders who are now lionized the way that managers once were, managers are now more likely to be disparaged as mere functionaries, “management” itself increasingly viewed as a cost for an organization. Efficiency gains in both state and private organizations these days are increasingly synonymous to “reducing management costs” and cutting down bureaucracy. Far from an all-powerful, all-controlling figure, the manager is currently being reinvented as someone who frequently fails to add value and frequently feeds on the work of other people, a parasite even.6

It would seem then that the earlier hubris of management, the notion that managers can control everything, is gradually meeting its nemesis – many managers are unable to control their own fate, let alone those of others. Of course, old habits die hard, especially when they become enshrined in discourses and ways of thinking that take longer to change than other things. It would then be premature to proclaim the death of management and of the manager although few can deny that his apogee, the era and the subject that he defined, are now nearly over. If nothing else, managers in the foreseeable future will continue to be useful as scapegoats whenever things go wrong for football teams, health systems or banks.

Nor should it be thought that with the decline of management, we have moved beyond hubris. Today’s organizations, increasingly preoccupied with communication, branding, the orchestration of collective fantasies and the venting of collective emotions through the merchandizing of symbols and images (see, for example, Du Gay & Salaman, 1992; Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Ritzer, 1999), it could be that we are witnessing the rise of a new hubris. As an economy of objects is sidestepped by an economy of persuasion and seduction, organizations (including firms, charities, government and international bodies, state institutions, including universities) increasingly focus on marketing and public relations to create desirable images of themselves that will raise their profile with their consumers. Branding, reputation, image, rhetoric and gaming become as important as cutting costs and removing waste. This involves a new form of grandiosity, one that grows not out of total control but one that

grows out of a belief in the all-conquering powers of image. This, in turn, is translated into a belief that value can be created out of nothing, merely by manipulating symbols, by endless facelifts and aesthetic makeovers, by coining smart slogans, by rebranding, relabelling and reinventing. This, in my review, represents a dominant hubris of our times – the arrogant belief that whatever fate or fortune throw our way, we can maintain our freedom and independence through the exercise of choice.

CONCLUSION

It could be argued then that the earlier management hubris, that of total omnipotence and control, is currently being superseded by a new type of hubris, a hubris revolving around the idea of choice and freedom. Unlike the earlier hubris, this new one acknowledges that a world “out there” is full of ups and downs, risks and precariousness. However, it insists on viewing misfortune as the product of wrong choices and mistaken decisions. Instead of seeking solace in an oasis of blissful routine, the subject here acknowledges that he/she must stay on the move, evaluate alternatives, make choices and take responsibility for their outcomes. Even in adversity he/she must remain independent, dependence coming to signify failure and worthlessness. A permanent state of discomfort prevails – people, organizations and even nations being constantly warned to abandon their comfort zones and look for opportunities and openings.

If the fantasy of control was the central illusion of traditional management, the fantasy of free choice could well be the emerging illusion of our times. It is an illusion that sustains many aspects of social life and many social institutions. Like the illusion of control, the illusion of choice serves a defensive function, one notably in tune with the narcissistic qualities of our time. In a series of powerful publications, Howard Schwartz (1987; 7. Indeed, Ritzer (2004) has gone as far as to refer to this entity as “nothing” and has proclaimed the “globalization of nothing” as capturing the spirit of our times. Referring to something that destroys human lives and communities as “nothing” is maybe a hubris in its own right.

8. One shrewd reviewer of this paper raises two powerful questions. What kind of organization does the new type of subject fit in and is he/she liable to be organized at all? These would need separate papers to address. I have described elsewhere (Gabriel, 2005) what I view as changes in organizational structures that can be captured through the metaphor of a glass cage in opposition to the iron cage of classic bureaucracy. As for the highly narcissistic and emotional subject that I have sought to delineate in this paper, he/she is not without self-discipline or self-control; on the contrary, in the interest of maintaining his/her ego ideal, he/she is capable of remarkable feats of transformation, play acting and self-reinvention (Sennett’s “chameleon self”) that require much discipline and self-control.

9. An idea I have borrowed from Martin Corbett.
has argued that late modernity has supplanted the Oedipal configurations ruled by the omnipotent figure of the primal father with a pre-Oedipal configuration dominated by the figure of the primal mother whose rule seeks to restore freedom, authenticity and self-actualization. If earlier generations sought to escape freedom opting for the security of a protective or even authoritarian system, ours is a time which (at least in Western societies) raises individual autonomy above all other values, viewing it as a fundamental right of every person.

A system of psychodynamic defences revolving around obsessive-compulsive attempts to control externality is now yielding to one in which narcissistic defences of grandiosity, spontaneity and emotionality seek to create a new reality in which the ego can fulfil itself. The subject does not seek to control but to “engage”, feel, experience and discharge emotion. Instead of a defensive formation proceeding from the superego, patriarchal authority and attendant repressions and restrictions, the emerging configuration rests on a denial of externality and its replacement by a fantastic one, one in which every subject can claim to be special, unique and worthy of love and admiration. In line with Schwartz’s argumentation, this seems to reflect the pre-Oedipal dynamics, in which every child is special in the eyes of the all-loving and all-caring mother, before the Oedipal father steps in to spoil the idyll. It seems that consumer capitalism does everything to restore the idyll, along with the narcissistic illusions of specialness, uniqueness and freedom from external constraint.

Specialness has been singled out as a major psychological defence by Irving Yalom (1991; 1998) on the basis of his long experience of treating cancer and other seriously ill patients. Prompted by an inspiring observation from Tolstoi (Ivan Illich), Yalom notes that “we all know that in the basic boundaries of existence we are no different from others. No one denies that at a conscious level. Yet deep, deep down each of us believes... that the rule of mortality applies to others but certainly not to ourselves” (Yalom et coll., 1998, p. 210). Thus, many of his patients acknowledge a harsh reality “out there” which rules everybody else but not themselves. In their imagination, these patients imagine that illness, suffering and death are for everybody else but not for themselves. They imagine themselves to be different, protected as it were by an invisible shield that keeps them out of harm’s way. Could it be that this defence of specialness is mobilized as a more general socio-psychological defence in our times to protect us from different afflictions, including old age, job loss, abandonment, and every other conceivable misfortune? The belief in the subject’s specialness is of course continuously tested

10. In my own research on unemployed executives, it is remarkable how often sacked executives claim that while they could see others being laid off, they never imagined that such a fate would befall them. Gabriel et coll., 2010.
11. Cf. “because you are special”; “because you deserve it” and other slogans.
and undermined, yet it is one that the subject is not willing to give it up easily, receiving as he/she does ample support from consumer capitalism and the reality created by the media, advertisers and the whole panoply of virtuality. Such a defence does not seek to control the arbitrariness of Fortuna, but denies the extent to which Fortuna may actually visit the subject. 12

We have rejoined a major Freudian theme: the contemporary subject’s narcissistic condition is nothing but a variant of the malaise, the discontents which different cultures inflict on their members, for which they seek to provide different consolations in the form of illusions. Freud’s original contribution in the area of social science was to account for the endlessly mutating configurations through which civilization seeks to offer consolations to humans for the discontents that it inflicts on them. These consolations assume the form of different illusions, religious, political and others, in which people seek solace for the privations and frustrations they experience individually and collectively. Different cultures display considerable versatility and inventiveness in both discontents and illusions that they offer, but what remains invariant is that illusions usually end up reinforcing the discontents for which they ostensibly offer solace. In this regard, the new defences sketched in this paper, may amount to nothing but a new set of illusions, those of freedom, choice and specialness acting as consolations for the precariousness and emptiness of contemporary life. And in this regard they may have the same consequence as earlier illusions – that of reinforcing the discontents for which they purport to offer consolations.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE


12. Such a defence has pronounced reality-denying or psychotic qualities, something noted, a propos of today’s organizations, by Sievers (1999, 2003) and others.


YIANNIS GABRIEL, UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT. SUBJECTS, OBJECTS AND HUBRIS, NEW AND OLD

ABSTRACT
Management discourses have, since their origins in the works of Taylor and Weber, approached the subject as a resource to be deployed, measured and controlled. Late modernity, however, has spawned a rather different modality of the subject, one that is emotional, meaning-seeking and identity-seeking. This conceptualization derives from an increasing emphasis on consumerism, choice, customer service and the shift from manufacturing to a service economy in which emotion becomes a fundamental aspect of the labour process. In consumerist society, every choice is modelled on consumer choices, and every choice, no matter how trivial, becomes an existential choice – i.e. an identity – and self-defining choice. The author proposes that choice is emerging as the dominant illusion for this subject, an illusion for the sake of which he/she is quite willing to endure high levels of insecurity and frustration; the article concludes with the suggestion that a new psycho-social defence, that of specialness, is overtaking more traditional defences. While earlier defences, rooted in Oedipal dynamics, sacrificed freedom in the interest of security and sought solace in bureaucratic routine, the new defensive configuration accepts uncertainty and unpredictability but envisages an imaginary cloak that defends the subject from the slings and arrows of fortune.
KEYWORDS
Psychoanalysis, the subject, consumerism, choice, emotion, identity, the defence of spacialness.

YIANNIS GABRIEL, À L’AUNE D’UN NOUVEAU MANAGEMENT. SUJETS, OBJETS ET DÉMESURE, D’HIER À AUJOURD’HUI.

RÉSUMÉ
Dans le discours managérial, depuis les tout premiers travaux de Taylor et Weber, le sujet a été envisagé comme une ressource à déployer, mesurer et contrôler. Une modernité plus récente a cependant accouché d’une approche sensiblement différente du sujet : un sujet émotionnel en quête de sens et d’identité. Cette nouvelle conception trouve son origine dans l’intérêt croissant porté au consumérisme, au libre choix, au service client et dans le passage d’une économie industrielle à une société de services dans laquelle l’émotion est devenue un aspect fondamental du travail. Dans la société de consommation, chaque choix est façonné par les choix des consommateurs, et chaque choix, aussi insignifiant soit-il, devient un choix existentiel et identitaire. L’auteur avance que l’idée du libre choix est aujourd’hui une des illusions dominantes du Sujet, une illusion au nom de laquelle il serait prêt à endurer un haut degré d’insécurité et de frustration. En conclusion, l’article suggère qu’un nouveau mécanisme de défense psychosociale – celui du singularisme – prend le pas sur des mécanismes de défense plus traditionnels. Alors que les mécanismes de défense précédents, enracinés dans la dynamique œdipienne, sacrifiaient la liberté pour la sécurité et trouvaient consolation dans la routine bureaucratique, cette nouvelle configuration défensive accepte l’incertitude et l’imprévisibilité, mais se dote d’un voile imaginaire censé protéger le Sujet des coups de griffe du destin.

MOTS-CLÉS
Psychanalyse, Sujet, consommérisme, choix, émotion, identité, défense de singularité du sujet.