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[ 1 ]

# Media Organize: Persons

Reinhold Martin

Media organize. By this I mean that, as intermediaries among persons and between persons and worlds, media construct patterns and relationships that pose the question of order. They ask us to ask, is there order here? If so, what is its form? What is its source? Thus, insofar as persons operate media, media also help to organize those persons into active, relational bodies. This circularity opens the fields of media archaeology and media studies beyond their now-classical subject matter—gramophone, film, typewriter, their precursors and their descendants—to such an extent that we must risk tautology and say that the term “media” *itself* refers to the set of sociotechnical artifacts and processes that organize things into patterns and relationships. Sociotechnical rather than merely technical, not only to acknowledge the social production of technical things but also, and again risking tautology, to acknowledge the technical production of social relations.

This view modifies—but also ratifies—the decontextualized Kittlerian aphorism that “media determine our situation” (Kittler 1986). For it is not a question of linear, mechanistic determination; rather, it is a question of differentiating among degrees of reciprocal determination. Expand the term *media* in this way and you get something that more plausibly “determines our situation,” in the sense of material processes, such as organization, out of which those social relations emerge, and vice versa.

2 “Media organize” is also the thesis of *The Organizational Complex* (Martin 2003), a media history that doubles as a history of corporate architecture. There I defined the “organizational complex” emergent in the post–World War II United States as the aesthetic and technological extension of the military–industrial complex and mapped its contours at the intersection of architecture, cybernetics, and corporate sociability. *The Organizational Complex* aimed to rearrange the assumptions of my disciplinary home by arguing that architecture, understood as one among many media, evinced a feedback-oriented, modular, pattern-based “diagram” (in the Deleuzian sense, on which I will elaborate below) comparable to, but quite different from, Jeremy Bentham’s much earlier panopticon. Ultimately, this diagram belonged to the affective “societies of control” that Gilles Deleuze argued had, by mid-century, begun to displace the disciplinary societies studied by Michel Foucault (Deleuze 1995).

Terminology like this is common in “new materialist” thought that speaks, as I also do, of Foucauldian *dispositifs* or apparatuses. In a more Deleuzo-Guattarian vein, such thought might contrast hierarchical treelike organizational patterns with less hierarchical rhizomelike ones. But organization is more than just a question of vertically oriented trees versus horizontally oriented rhizomes. Nor does it merely entail, to continue in the Deleuzo-Guattarian idiom, a sociospatial typology that runs from “smooth” (gaseous or fluid) to “striated” (geomorphic or crystalline). To make deeper sense of the verb *to organize*, and to get closer to the “material” of materialism by examining critically the premise of a material substrate to the social order, I want to return to certain concepts that Deleuze and Guattari elaborated by way of two instances of what is sometimes called “immaterial production.”<sup>1</sup> One of these is a precursor to the mid-twentieth-century organizational complex; the other is among its descendants.

The first of these instances involves a contribution made by the early nineteenth-century residential college to the birth of corporate personhood, wherein the corporation becomes an entity

capable of eliciting human emotions. The second, which I will summarize with a brief literary exposé prefaced by a theoretical excursus, derives from the first. It involves the circulation of affect as both capital and interpersonal social bond within a neoliberal media complex, the diagram for which is less treelike or rhizomatic than it is circular. Though separated by two centuries, both of these instances refer to persons, whether corporate or individual, as organized bodies. In arguing that media organize, then, I am more specifically arguing that media organize *bodies*—discursive bodies, institutional bodies, social bodies, political bodies, and biological bodies. That is, they bind persons together, inside and out.

## Persons

To begin with, recall that when Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987, 158) wrote of a “body without organs,” they were quite specific: “The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to the organization of the organs called the organism.” The organism is what happens when the body enters the field of power, or what Deleuze and Guattari call, after Antonin Artaud, the “judgment of God.” From the perspective of the organizational complex, it is not accidental that the date of Artaud’s pronouncement “to have done with the judgment of God”—November 28, 1947, which titles the relevant chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*—is exactly coincident with the date, November 1947, with which Norbert Wiener (1948, 39) signed the introduction to his book *Cybernetics; or, Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, while a visiting faculty member at the National Institute of Cardiology in Mexico City. For, as Wiener’s institutional affiliation attests, cybernetics is nothing if not devoted to recovering the organism as its object of cognition, at the very moment that electromechanical technics threatened that object with dissolution.

Recall also that in that introduction, Wiener (1948, 18) defined organization negentropically, as follows: “Just as the amount of information in a system is a measure of its degree of organization, so the entropy of a system is a measure of its degree of disorganization;

4 and the one is simply the negative of the other." Encouraged at the Macy Cybernetics Conferences by Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead to extend this principle into the domain of social organization, Wiener conceded that "it is certainly true that the social system is an organization like the individual, that it is bound together by a system of communication, and that it has a dynamics in which circular processes of a feedback nature play an important part" (24). Still, he argued that available statistical runs pertaining to human affairs were insufficiently long and insufficiently constant to obtain reliable results. This and other limitations, however, could be overcome, or at least overlooked, and within a decade, the social sciences had absorbed the cybernetic hypothesis.

Behind this well-known story is a theory of organized social life that bears closer scrutiny. In 1947, Wiener indicated his sympathy for those like Bateson and Mead who, in "the present age of confusion," sought a cybernetic social science (Wiener 1948, 33). Several years later, he attempted as much himself in his beautifully titled ramble *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (Wiener [1950] 1954). To the extent that this later book has a focus, it is on the negentropic, homeostatic function of cybernetic feedback systems. Among its most lucid passages is a chapter added to the second edition devoted to "organization as the message," which observes that

we have already seen that certain organisms, such as man, tend for a time to maintain and often even to increase the level of their organization, as a local enclave in the general stream of increasing entropy, of increasing chaos and de-differentiation. Life is an island here and now in a dying world. The process by which we living beings resist the general stream of corruption and decay is known as homeostasis. (95)

Wiener extrapolates a pattern-based, informational type of homeostasis ("organization as the message") from a biological one, comparing the biochemical maintenance of body temperature

with the negative feedback devices of mechanical automata. It is not bodily tissue per se but “the pattern [i.e., the organism, in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense] maintained by this homeostasis which is the touchstone of our personal identity. . . . We are but whirlpools in a river of ever-flowing water. We are not stuff that abides, but patterns that perpetuate themselves” (96). Human beings and their societies are therefore, according to Wiener, transmissible messages borne on an ever-changing material substrate that tends toward entropy. The problem in translating cybernetics to the social sciences becomes one of converting the science of neuronal or electromechanical feedback into one of pattern maintenance based on statistical data (and computing capacity) adequate to the organizational complexities of large collective bodies conceived as homeostatic organisms. But if another name for “pattern” here is not just “body” but “subject,” how are such patterns produced and maintained at the sociotechnical level, that is, at the level of media complexes?

We can almost still hear Artaud shouting in protest against the organismic subject whose authority short-circuits the underlying libidinal economy circa 1947, quoted by Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 571):

When you will have made him a body without organs then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom.

Deleuze and Guattari’s version of Artaud’s body-without-organs (BwO) is hence neither organic nor inorganic but rather, as they say, anorganic. That is, the BwO is not exactly a disorganized, disorderly, or anarchic body; rather, it is a form of embodied subjectivity that experiments on itself, putting itself at risk to become hypochondriac, paranoid, schizo, drugged, or masochist. The theorists quote Artaud: “*The body is the body. Alone it stands. And in no need of organs. Organism it never is. Organisms are the enemy of the body*” (158, emphasis original). Repeating the title of Artaud’s radio play, they add, “*The judgment of God, the system of the judgment*

6 of God, the theological system, is precisely the operation of He who makes an organism, an organization of organs called the organism" (158–59). Organization and stratification, then, as primordial violence, the "judgment of God": "The BwO is that glacial reality where the alluvions, sedimentations, coagulations, foldings, and recoilings that compose an organism—and also a signification and a subject—occur" (159). In short, the BwO is Norbert Wiener's "river of ever-flowing water" from which patterned organisms arise.

As "glacial reality," the BwO is not a medium. Like background noise in a communications channel, it is constitutively premedial, if by "media" we mean any apparatus that organizes this noise into "alluvions, sedimentations, coagulations, foldings, and recoilings." Here I deliberately use the Foucauldian term *apparatus* (or *dispositif*) to be more precise about defining media not as communication systems but as organizational ones, in order to address from a media-theoretical point of view and in a highly attenuated fashion the emergence of the modern corporation as a political body—that is, as an organized body, a system subject to "the judgment of God."

Among the precursors to the latter-day corporations that would consolidate a cybernetic hegemony in the neoliberal world order, and especially what is known as the Google–Apple–Facebook–Amazon (GAFA) circle, are the research universities that developed and circulated the technoscientific knowledge out of and around which that hegemony was built. In the United States in particular, many of these universities grew out of older residential colleges founded under one of several Protestant denominations and therefore subject quite directly to "the judgment of God." As colleges became universities, the "Protestant ethic" by which they were governed was secularized, or so it is still often said, with the institutionalization of the scientific method, the authority of number and calculability, the rise of vocational training, and the delinking of the humanities and the social sciences from the explicitly moral program of the church.

By the 1920s, research universities seemed to be following the pattern of “incorporation” established by the great industrial concerns—railroads, mining conglomerates, auto manufacturers—by becoming multiheaded bureaucracies. The result was the abstraction and compartmentalization of knowledge into academic departments, specialties, and subspecialties, such that by 1947, Norbert Wiener could exclaim of his colleagues, “A man may be a topologist or an acoustician or a coleopterist. He will be filled with the jargon of his field, and will know all its literature and all its ramifications, but, more frequently than not, he will regard the next subject as belonging to his colleague three doors down the corridor, and will consider any interest in it on his own part as an unwarrantable breach of privacy” (Wiener 1948, 8). Hence Wiener argued for the interdisciplinary science of cybernetics on the basis of its institutional as well as moral necessity, and with these (despite his personal misgivings), integration into a sociotechnical organism that, by 1970, was renamed the military-industrial-academic complex.

What this teleology leaves aside, however, is not only the fact that the small denominational colleges were themselves among the nation’s earliest corporations but also the news that, as Deleuze put it in 1990, businesses—that is, corporations—had souls (Deleuze [1990] 1995, 181). Contrary to the neo-Weberian thesis and closer to the premises of the Turing test, where machine intelligence is measured by a human being’s inability to distinguish a machine’s communications from those of a person, corporations were like computing machines precisely to the extent that they acquired liberal human attributes, such as rights. These attributes, in turn, encouraged humans to regard the corporate body as a special kind of person, in a two-way street of subjectification that ultimately compels us to ask, what kind of human can love a corporation?

By 1800, in the early American republic, business, educational, and religious corporations were regularly formed to enable collective action like building roads or establishing cities semi-independently from the national state, which was (as now) viewed by many with



8 suspicion. Hence the decades immediately following U.S. independence saw the proliferating incorporation of towns, turnpike authorities, bridge companies, religious associations, colleges, schools, and many other institutions. During the long nineteenth century, these corporations shifted from being conceived under the law as mere vehicles for collective activity to being recognized as active agents with rights and responsibilities of their own. The basis of this agency is what is commonly called the “legal fiction” of corporate personhood.<sup>2</sup>

Corporate personhood gained formal recognition in 1886 when, in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Co.*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that corporations were entitled to equal protection under the law as provided to natural persons under the Fourteenth Amendment, which had been ratified in 1868 largely to secure equal treatment for freed slaves. This historical irony was reaffirmed when, in 1910, the Court concluded in *Southern Railway Co. v. Greene*, “That a corporation is a person, within the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment, is no longer open to discussion.”<sup>3</sup> Not long thereafter, in 1926, no less a figure than John Dewey theorized “corporate personality” as, essentially, a concrete performative. Legal historians have supplied partial explanations as to how this came about, but most of these presuppose (contrary to Dewey) an ontological distinction between natural and artificial persons that is abrogated by force of law and hence construe corporate personhood as a species of literary personification.<sup>4</sup> This is probably because nearly all such accounts are purely discursive, giving little sense of how the corporate person was or is materially constituted.

The residential college offers early entry into that process through the 1819 U.S. Supreme Court case known as *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, in which the Court ruled that privately chartered institutions held contract rights comparable to those of private persons. Dartmouth College had been incorporated in 1769 by means of a charter granted by Britain’s King George III, as was typical at the time (Maier 1993, 56–57).<sup>5</sup> Although its initial, largely

unfulfilled purpose was to Christianize Indigenous youths, the precariously founded new college was, like nearly all of its peers, actually devoted to the education of white Protestant men. In 1816, in the aftermath of a conflict between the college's president and trustees, the State of New Hampshire sought to revise Dartmouth's charter to place it under the administrative control of state government. The trustees objected, arguing that this violated the contract clause of the U.S. Constitution, which prevents the state from impairing the "Obligations of Contracts" among private individuals or among individuals and the state. The Court found that the charter amounted to such a contract and that the actions of the state were in violation of this constitutional clause.<sup>6</sup>

But if the U.S. Supreme Court thereby recognized the already incorporated Dartmouth College as bearing the contract rights of a private individual, the means by which that recognition was secured suggest that it entailed more than just a legal fiction. In his closing argument before the Court on behalf of Dartmouth College, the orator, attorney, and Dartmouth alumnus Daniel Webster exclaimed of his alma mater to the presiding justice, John Marshall, that it is "a small college. And yet *there are those who love it.*" At which point Webster reportedly choked up, tears filling his eyes (Shewmaker 1990, 168–69, emphasis original). Strategically successful as it was, we can regard Webster's declaration of filial love for his college as genuine, not because its apparent spontaneity testified to true feeling rather than calculation, but because, as the Court's decision bore out, the college had already become a body capable of eliciting human emotion.

The evidence for this at Dartmouth and the other early colleges is abundant but counterintuitive. By the time Daniel Chester French installed his sculpture of the goddess Athena on the steps of the new Columbia University campus in 1904, refiguring her as a proud but nurturing mother, it was unproblematic—expected, even—to declare not only loyalty to but love for one's alma mater. In Foucault's language, this too was discipline. Not only did it extrapolate the maternal domestic function, during the Romantic

- 10 and early Victorian periods, of training into literacy (what Friedrich Kittler mischievously called the “mother’s mouth”), and not only did it extend the residential college’s long-standing practice of in loco parentis into the whole university system, most importantly, it tolerated misbehavior, failure, and even delinquency, asking in return—demanding, really—only to be loved.

Remember that, as Foucault emphasizes, delinquency is a product of the carceral apparatus rather than its antithesis; failure is therefore among that apparatus’s prerequisites for proper functioning. In the sphere of education, a principal instrument for the distribution of failure is the examination, the inaugural instance of which is the entrance examination. Upon arriving in Hanover, New Hampshire, in 1797, the fifteen-year-old Daniel Webster therefore had his knowledge of English, Greek, Latin, and arithmetic tested before being allowed to enroll at Dartmouth (Remini 1997, 44). Such on-the-spot exams were common at the time, as was delinquent behavior once admitted. At Princeton (then the College of New Jersey), for example, Nassau Hall, the main building, which dates from the late eighteenth century, had all the trappings of a good disciplinary apparatus (Foucault 1995, 141–54): enclosure, or confinement; a system of cellular partitioning; distinctly marked “functional sites”; and “ranks,” both within rooms (rows of beds or desks) and among them (by year, etc.)—likewise class schedules; daily recitations; the teaching of proper handwriting, with proper posture; a student–pen–paper–chair–desk interface; and various prohibitions on time wasting, etc. More than simply a building, then, Nassau Hall was a media complex. As such, it was repeatedly the object of destructive behavior.

During the 1810s, for example, three students were expelled for exploding gunpowder in the building, another for unforgivably ringing the belfry bell at 3:00 A.M., while another vandalized a Bible by cutting a deck of playing cards into its leaves, and others set off firecrackers indoors and scrawled graffiti on the walls, a sequence that reached a climax of sorts when several students exploded a gunpowder-filled log inside the hall, only to be topped three

years later by a group who nailed all the building's doors shut and shouted "Rebellion!" and "Fire!" (Wertenbaker 1946, 156, 167).

Anyone even remotely aware of the sexualized emotions that simmer beneath the surface of collegiate life, sometimes violently, will recognize this ritual misbehavior as more than just boys testing the patience of their surrogate parents. It may indeed be that, like Artaud, these student-subjects, wanting to be "done with the judgment of God," or at least of their parents, are experimenting on the body of the college, looking for ways to defeat it, to dismember it, even to make it into a "body-without-organs." But in so doing, *they also affirm that body's personhood*, its organic-machinic subjectivity. This violence belongs to the order of "male fantasy," which, as Klaus Theweleit ([1987] 1989) showed, mixes desire, fear, hatred, and love with a will to power focused on and through the technologically produced corporate organism. In the process, that organism becomes a real subject, organized by media in the expanded sense of a material environment like the all-purpose Nassau Hall or its northern relative, Dartmouth Hall. As Daniel Webster said of Dartmouth College, the institution embodied in the building, there are necessarily "those who love it." Like the news that businesses have souls, this is enough to make us shudder.

When we say that media organize, then, and go so far as to assert that the term *media* is even defined by this organizational function, we are actually speaking of an intermediality that runs, in this case, from paper to candlelight to recitation room to courtroom, and well beyond. And if to organize is to distribute the background noise of a "glacial reality," a "river of ever-flowing water," into a nonfictional organism capable of bearing rights, being hated, and being loved, the field of practices that recognize this organism and make it into a subject runs in a highly modulated continuum from oral examination (or job interview, as the case may be) to nocturnal outburst. That field's organization—into patterns of power, knowledge, and desire—is not legible outside the ensuing interactions. Arising from all of this, the corporate person warrants our closest attention.

## Machines

As I have argued, media organize social and political life, as well as the social and political imagination, through a variety of channels that extend well beyond the communicative functions traditionally ascribed to technical devices like Kittler's celebrated triumvirate of "gramophone, film, typewriter." In treating things like buildings as media, we are extending analytic techniques developed to understand these more classical media formats into areas that have analytical languages of their own. The methodological challenge, then, is to translate the one into the other without flattening either into unrecognizability. For this, an intermediary language is helpful. Therefore the following excursus continues in the Deleuzo-Guattarian idiom, in an effort to be both theoretically and descriptively specific.

Consider the term *machine*. There is a long tradition in architectural studies that treats buildings as machines. Among that tradition's most eloquent representatives is the American cultural critic Lewis Mumford, whose intellectual project was, in many respects, to secularize what he called in his later work the "myth of the machine." By this Mumford meant the metaphysical power attributed by the mid-twentieth century to mechanization, the chief example of which was the social and political order inaugurated by nuclear weaponry. The "machine," in Mumford's sense, was much more than the weaponry itself; it was the entire social and political system to which nuclear weapons belonged—the military, the corporations, the universities—a system, or in Mumford's terms a "complex," that closely resembles one of Foucault's "apparatuses."

But where do these apparatuses come from? In the chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* immediately prior to that devoted to the "body without organs," Deleuze and Guattari address this question by rethinking semiotics in a manner that culminates in the elusive concept of the "abstract machine." An abstract machine is, in their language, something like the operating system of a corporeal "assemblage" (or sometimes a "machinic assemblage"), which we

can understand as Deleuze and Guattari's answer to Foucault's sociotechnical "apparatus." In the background runs an effort to rethink communication by recasting the sign-signified relation as merely one of many possible semiotic systems, or "regimes of signs." Of these many regimes, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 135) identify four: a "presignifying semiotic," to which they somewhat dubiously link certain premodern societies; a "signifying semiotic" centered on the signifier-signified relation, which they identify with the despotic state or the Judeo-Christian God; a "countersignifying semiotic" operated by a revolutionary nomadic "war machine"; and a "postsignifying semiotic" governed by what they call "passional" forms of subjectification. Despite appearances, these are not evolutionary stages. In the Deleuzo-Guattarian idiom, they are strata, or organizational levels, that coexist in impure mixtures in any given historical situation. Nonetheless, any given situation will favor one stratum or the other, or one particular admixture over another. Historical change entails a move from one stratum to the other through semiotic recombination or reshuffling.

Each stratum also takes a specific organizational form. Presignification is plurivocal. It proceeds along discrete segments, or pathways, in which signs do not refer to other signs but rather belong to particular ritual-lived domains where expressions do not translate from one to the other. In contrast, signification is concentric. Signs refer to other signs in a semiotic spiral, with each new ring corresponding to a new form of interpretation governed by priests, psychoanalysts, and other "despots" paranoically orbiting an empty, metaphysical center, whereas countersignification is numerical, where number does not represent or signify anything; rather, it arranges and distributes, or organizes. A countersignifying machine is like a nomadic military system distributed numerically "into tens, fifties, hundreds, thousands, etc." that aims to abolish the sedentary state but is also adopted by it. Finally, postsignification is punctual. It operates around what Deleuze and Guattari call "points of departure" that mark two forms of subjectivity, the "subject of enunciation" and the "subject of the

- 14 statement," joined by a line that brings both into being. Postsignification is active rather than ideational. It is, they say, authoritarian rather than despotic, proletarian rather than bourgeois, and monomaniacal rather than paranoid, more like Franz Kafka's linear bureaucratic "proceedings" than the jurist Daniel Paul Schreber's "radiating paranoia" (117–21).

The two postsignifying subjects, of enunciation and of the statement, can be distinguished from the punctual "sender" and "addressee" of mid-century communications theory in two ways. First, they do not preexist the signifying act but rather are constituted by it. Second, from the point of view of the "abstract machine" governing the entire system, these two forms of subjectivity ultimately belong to one and the same subject, who is not so much split but doubled up into a subject that obeys its own commands.

Constantly changing places, these "points of departure" for subjectification are always multiple not only within a given society but within a given individual.<sup>7</sup> Hence subjects—in our opening example, corporate persons, meaning both the colleges and their students—are not just speaking subjects, determined in the legal context from which they emerged by a capacity for (or a "right" to) political speech. Like all other subjects, corporate persons arise from a constant movement from point to point and from speaker to receiver, always doubling up enunciation and statement. They speak and are spoken to at once, in an internalized feedback loop: *"The subject of enunciation recoils into the subject of the statement, to the point that the subject of the statement resupplies [a] subject of enunciation for another proceeding"* (129, emphasis original). Deleuze and Guattari refer to the line along which this process occurs as a "passional line" that originates with, or departs from, a point of subjectification, which can be anything in the world. For someone in love, for example, this point can be what they call a "faciality trait" (let's say, a building facade, or a sculpture of Alma Mater), where "faciality" no longer refers to an embodied signifier but rather acts as a trigger for—again in the Deleuzo-Guattarian idiom—"deterritorialized" associations along a "line of flight" (129).

Under the sign of corporate personhood, I am suggesting, this line ultimately becomes circular.

An assemblage governed by an abstract machine comprises both sides of this doubling. On one side is enunciation, which “formalizes expression,” and on the other is the field of contents, or embodied, normalizing statements like those issued by teachers under strictly delimited speaking conditions to organize a “machinic assemblage or an assemblage of bodies” in the sense that Foucault attributes, for example, to the carceral or disciplinary apparatus. But the causal relation between the two is nonlinear; forms of content (bodies organized into/by statements) cannot be derived linearly from modes or structures of enunciation or expression. That is, students cannot be derived from teachers or teachers from students; nor can either be derived from the educational institution. Rather, teachers, students, and schools are joined in a circular abstract machine, which I have called above a “person,” and which “operates by *matter*, not by substance; by *function*, not by form,” by way of what Deleuze and Guattari call “a diagram independent of the forms and substances, expressions and contents it will distribute” (141). Abstract machines do not communicate, in the sense of transmitting messages or expressions; rather, “writing now functions on the same level as the real, and the real materially writes” (141).

Abstract machines, which we can still call media, are therefore neither infrastructural nor transcendental; rather, they are immanent to semiotronics, where they play a creative “piloting role.” To specify the type of abstraction they have in mind, Deleuze and Guattari add another category to the Peircean semiotic triad of indexes, icons, and symbols, which they call (again after Peirce) a “diagram.” Not exactly a visual map or code, a diagram is, in this sense, more like a coherent set of techniques for, as they put it, “conjugating matter and function” (143). In the case of the corporate person, “love,” in my argument, is one such technique.

Circumscribed as it may be by an idiosyncratic philosophical system, the set of concepts derived from Deleuze and Guattari’s



16 pragmatic semiotics is useful in sketching the rudiments of a media theory of organization to the extent that it expands that term's—"organization's"—referents. Among the examples with which Deleuze and Guattari conclude their revision of semiotics is a brief analysis of the proposition "I love you." They ask to what regime the proposition might belong. For us, this is principally the passionate or postsignifying regime, mixed with the oedipal, patriarchal signifying or despotic regime. They ask what translations it enables. For us, as we will shortly see, it entails among others a translation with the countersignifying war machine. They ask what is its diagram, what are its abstract machines? For us, it is postpanoptic but still circular. Finally, they ask to what machinic assemblages it belongs. For us: the "megamachine" (147–48).

Still bearing in mind the example of the corporate antebellum college but now moving the genealogical needle significantly forward to the modern (and postmodern) corporation, we can understand the proposition "I love you" as harboring a set of organizational techniques that are hardly limited to those from which the set of legal-judicial statements associated with corporate personhood eventually derived. Among these techniques, the organization of subjects into bodies deserves further elaboration. Having described passionate love as an intense form of intersubjective doubling, a "cogito built for two" that is also always a betrayal, a turning away of faces, Deleuze and Guattari repeatedly point out that with every opening, there is a closing. The open field of promiscuous, polysemic coupling closes down into conjugality (the nuclear family), and the polymorphous cogito becomes a bureaucracy (the office) where the bureaucrat, or we could add, the student-teacher, says "*I think*" (131–32). Impassioned declarations of love, then, are double sided. On one hand, they operate the abstract machine and the diagram—"love"—to produce new, uninhibited couplings, bodies-without-organs in which we discern remnants of the "desiring machines" of the *Anti-Oedipus*. While on the other hand, these declarations of love domesticate desire in a bureaucratic assemblage of nucleated, signifying couples mixed with a war machine.

In recent times, the name of that bureaucratic assemblage has been the state. To explain, Deleuze and Guattari borrow from Mumford, whom they summon alongside Marx to chart the longue durée of “capture,” or state formation, by what Mumford calls a “megamachine.” Associating what Mumford describes as the despotic “megamachines” of the ancient empires with Marx’s “Asiatic” or imperial–agrarian mode of production and exchange, Deleuze and Guattari trace a genealogy of the state as a system of capture that converts territory into land, property, and credit through a series of techniques including rent, profit, and taxation (443–44). Today, the governing paradigm of capture is the corporation.

But what happens when the ruled says to the ruler, “I love you”? At first glance, this would seem the simplest of interpellations with transparently pastoral origins, wherein the ruled willingly responds to a command to submit. This, however, decodes the exclamation only at the level of the signifying regime, with its spiral of interpretations spinning around an empty, metaphysical void. “Hey, you there!” says Louis Althusser’s state apparatus. You turn to face the police, thereby closing the circle and inaugurating the hermeneutic inquest: Are you a criminal? Are you hungry? Are you mad? Are you married? Whereas, on the “passional” level, state and subject trade places in the semiotic system, doubling up into temporarily unstable chimeras—Donna Haraway’s ([1984] 1991) cyborgs—switching uniforms and recoding bodies. This is the level on which corporations, as organs of capture derived from and supporting the capitalist state, become persons capable of loving and being loved.

It is no accident, then, that Mumford’s rage against the modern, nuclear-armed “megamachine,” which threatens to recapitulate the cruelties of ancient despots with an exponentially enhanced efficiency, returns repeatedly to communications technologies. Standing opposite the ordering systems of the military–industrial complex, he argues, are Marshall McLuhan’s “trancelike” predictions of “an electronic anti-megamachine programmed to accelerate disorder, ignorance, and entropy.” “In revolt against totalitarian

18 organization and enslavement," says Mumford in 1970, "the generation now responding to McLuhan's doctrines would seek total 'liberation' from organization, continuity, and purpose of any sort in systematic de-building, dissolution, and de-creation. Ironically, such a return to randomness would, according to probability theory, produce the most static and predicable state possible: that of unorganized 'matter'" (293).

All of this appears on pages referenced by Deleuze and Guattari, and we would not be wrong in noticing a relationship between what Mumford calls "unorganized matter" and the "body without organs." Recall, however, that a key attribute of the abstract machine is that it is material but insubstantial. The anorganic body (the BwO) is an intermediary operating in the no-man's land between substance and matter, form and formlessness, out of which the paranoid idealizations of absolute organization and absolute entropy spring. The diagrammatic abstract machine, which I am still calling a "person," is immanent to the sociotechnical assemblage of the megamachine without being identical with it; a pure yet always emergent functionality distinguishes this "person" from an "ideal" form or a universal axiomatic (like, say, the "human" of humanism), while its sociotechnical diffusion makes it more real than formal abstractions like "sender" or "receiver." So can there be a media theory of abstract machines? Yes, when we correlate the two poles of organization and entropy with a deterritorializing (or disorganizing) and reterritorializing (or reorganizing) movement between semiotic levels and between "apparatuses of capture," meaning regimes of power, within which diagrams become legible and operate.

Mumford (1970, 378–93) responded to the totalitarian organization of the Cold War megamachine (which he also called the "Power Complex") by calling for an "organic world picture" embodied in a "new organum." Calls like this, which in Mumford's case sought a biotechnical homeostasis understood ecologically rather than mechanically, were a commonplace of the "new humanism" that dominated antitechnocratic thought during the mid-century, of

which Mumford's, like Norbert Wiener's, was a representative voice. What he, Wiener, and many of their contemporaries missed, however, was that, in posing as a form of organized life—in Mumford's case, decentralized, face-to-face, communal—that escaped both the rigid, institutional powers of the military-industrial complex and the entropy of a technophilic counterculture, this humanist organicism (what Wiener called “the human use of human beings”) belonged to a new machinic assemblage and a new diagram of power in its own right: the corporation-as-person and the person-as-corporation.

We can call this diagram “organizational” in a sense that translates the paranoid, modular signifying systems of an indifferent “megamachine” into the intimate, “passional” domain of corporate personhood with which we began. Mumford encapsulates the long-term transition between what Deleuze and Guattari call “apparatuses of capture” with a comparison between the Egyptian sun god, Re, and the modern megamachine, or as his subtitle calls it, the “Pentagon of Power.” What the sun god enunciates with sublime monuments, the modern state insinuates:

In more devious symbolic ways these same awe-inspiring creatures still stand at the portals of the Power Pentagon today, though the god they represent, whose secret knowledge cannot be challenged and whose divine commands cannot be questioned, turns out actually to be, when one tears aside the curtain, only the latest model IBM computer, zealously programmed by Dr. Strangelove and his assistants. (Mumford 1970, 403)

Perhaps, however, in his eagerness to decode Dr. Strangelove as a sign of the times, Mumford forgot the ironic subtitle of Stanley Kubrick's 1964 antinuclear send-up: “How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.” What the film satirizes as willing interpellation into the megamachine's logic of “mutually assured destruction” (MAD) was, in fact, its means of production: if not exactly love, then recognition, as in a mirror.

20 The Cold War megamachine is a bureaucracy piloted by what we might call, in a Deleuzo-Guattarian manner, a “Strange-glove abstract machine.” In such a machine, both syntagmatically and paradigmatically, the “I” that loves “the bomb” is the conjugal and bureaucratic double of the organizational complex, in whom a passion for the self as a thinking–feeling subject (as consumer and as corporation) combines with family values and corporate conformism. On the conjugal–bureaucratic normalization of passional love, Deleuze and Guattari write (1987, 132),

Conjugality is the development of the couple, and bureaucracy is the development of the cogito. But one is contained in the other: amorous bureaucracy, bureaucratic couple. Too much has been written on the double, haphazardly, metaphysically, finding it everywhere, in any old mirror, without noticing the specific regime it possesses both in a mixed semiotic where it introduces new phases, and in the pure semiotic of subjectification where it inscribes itself on a line of flight and introduces very particular figures.

But where, they argue, at the level of the signifying regime, these kinds of redundancies are most often described in terms of frequency (of signifier–signified, sign–sign relations), in the post-signifying or passional regime of subjectification, redundancy is a form of resonance, an echo, which transmediates mirror-optics into audio-acoustics (132–33). Thus, on the order of signification, in learning to “love” the megamachine, the organized corporate subject recognizes herself in the blankness of its reflective surfaces. While on the order of subjectification, megamachine and corporate subject bring one another into being along a resonant, passional “line of flight” distantly descended from the orator Daniel Webster’s impassioned voice arguing for corporate rights before the Supreme Court: “And yet *there are those who love it.*”

An emergent sovereign—the corporate “person,” as individual and as group—whose organic, organized body reterritorializes

the whole affair, blocks escape along this line. In a manner related to what the medievalist Ernst Kantorowicz described as the “king’s two bodies,” the new sovereign’s body is also doubled up, comprising on one hand living organs, in the bodies of its mortal human constituents and their sociotechnical apparatuses, and on the other a seemingly immortal being, the bureaucratic cogito (interpellated by the old IBM command: “Think”), whose life extends beyond that of any individual. Rather than remaining trapped, then, in a prison house of language or of concentric signifiers, as in Bentham’s panopticon, the prisoner, subject of the conjugal family and of the office bureaucracy out of which the “bomb” was born, builds a postpanoptic prison even as she is built by it, in a recursive process for which the Deleuzian term *assemblage*, with its echoes of the linear, mechanistic “assembly line,” is not entirely adequate. The term *complex* brings us closer, with its evocation of nonlinear networks and feedback loops. More literal still is the *circle*, which echoes in the mixed semiotic of the megamachine the redundant despotisms of signification spinning around an empty center (Artaud’s “judgment of God,” Strangelove’s paranoia), but actually comprises an amorous, feedback-based network: a network of circles. Of this, a brief concluding example must suffice.

## Circles

The most complete corporate body is circular. Today, both sociologists and entrepreneurs might describe what are known colloquially as “social circles” or “circles of friends” as networks, to emphasize the interconnectedness of their members as well as their seemingly inherent incompleteness and open-endedness. Organization, in this language, is pattern based in the sense that it entails the networked formation of social bodies, with different degrees and types of hierarchy, and different mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. But it may well be that the older colloquialism, “social circles,” captures something that the newer one, “social networks,” leaves out.

22 When, to assist fellow college students in recognizing one another on campus and, we can infer, as future alumni bound filially and financially to Alma Mater, more recent subjects of the megamachinic complex converted printed college “facebook” into an online platform, they conjugated the bureaucratic coupling of love and (re)cognition already present on campus under a watchful motherly gaze, into a new and properly circular being: the individual as a corporate person. This being’s diagram is satirized, incompletely, in Dave Eggers’s (2013) novel of passionate, tech-campus subjectification, *The Circle*. The obvious architectural reference (and Bentham equivalent) is not Facebook but rather the new Apple campus designed by the architect Norman Foster in Cupertino, California, as an enormous circular extrusion, with a minimalist, streamlined shell; a pleasantly empty, landscaped center; and a more or less continuous 1970s-style “office landscape” (*Bureaulandschaft*) interior. In Eggers’s novel, the narrative turns on the project of “closing” the Circle (the name of the corporation in question) by incorporating all of humanity into its networks, a quest led by an improbably earnest protagonist who begins her employment as a customer service representative at what amounts to an on-campus call center. Following a familiar Silicon Valley pattern, the corporation’s forever-new office complex grows rapidly into something resembling a residential college campus, with a full suite of leisure activities, medical services, and dormitories to complement the open work areas where “Circlers” communicate with one another and with their clients. Insubordination of the nineteenth-century sort is unheard of.

A central technique for achieving corporate closure is the customer survey, which plays a role comparable to that of the examination, the classic disciplinary instrument of educational institutions. In a parody of the social media system of ratings and reviews, Eggers portrays the quest for ever higher customer satisfaction as a form of recruitment into the social circles of the corporation. Employees, who are acutely aware of their various scores (including one for participation in on-campus after-hours social programs), build

ever-growing concentric relationships of sympathy, admiration, support, and—yes—love with customers who appear principally as names and addresses rather than faces. The technical systems including the buildings and the personnel that enable all of this are necessary but not sufficient for the organization, or, in Mumford's terms, the social organism, to survive and thrive. There must also be something like an abstract machine—let us call it a “love” machine—that all of these processes operate materially. If its diagram, like that of Bentham's panopticon, is circular, it is in a decentered rather than a centered sense, for in the Circle we are principally in Deleuze and Guattari's postsignifying regime. Where Bentham's concentric prison retained a ghostly, godlike referent at its voided center, Foster's (and Eggers's) circular form, like the data gathered by and about the Circlers, “means” nothing, nor does it ask us to decode its nonexistent semantics. In the novel, nearly ubiquitous, miniaturized audiovisual surveillance does play its part in eliciting social performances from customers that draw them further in, but it is a form of surveillance—and mutual recognition—in which everyone is watching everyone else without hierarchies of the teacher–student, parent–child, employer–employee, warden–prisoner variety. Rather, only relations of inside and outside obtain. Either you are inside the circle or you are not.

Eggers, who appears uncomfortable with satire, limits his critique to one close to Mumford's: behind the Circle is a machine that distorts human relations into numerical ones. But lest we forget, the Circle is, like Apple, Facebook, and all the rest, a person. I deliberately do not enclose that term in scare quotes (“person”) to emphasize the reality of the abstraction. Neither in the novel nor in the film based on it do we find much evidence of the organon, or curriculum, from which the Circle might have derived when we remember its origins on the college campus. What we see instead is an evacuation of that curriculum, in the traditional sense of a medium of *Bildung*, or of personal growth, in favor of sheer face-to-face-to-face-to-face communication among subjects of enunciation-without-statements, content-free expressions of pure



24 recognition that, pace Mumford, do not tend toward entropy but rather toward tautological, circular organization. For the *person* is the real name for the diagram and the abstract machine that the modern corporation operates, as an institution that demands, with grim determination, our deepest affection, if not our undying love.

And yet, visible evidence of the military–security megamachine is mostly absent from *The Circle*. In its place are needy, vacant, rebellious consumer-humans, embodied parodies of the counter-culture (Turner 2006). At one level, the elision is straightforwardly ideological; the very term *social media* masks the historical relation, traceable to Norbert Wiener’s early servomechanisms, between feedback and targeting. Where there are targets, whether of missiles or of marketing, there are commanders ready to issue the command: “Fire!” In Silicon Valley as elsewhere, these commanders remain in abundant supply. But a media theory that considers only them remains a theory of signification devoted principally to demystifying the “judgment of God.” To touch what Deleuze and Guattari awkwardly call the “postsignifying” level, or better, the “passional” level, we must learn to see the circle itself as an embodied, sovereign being doubled up in the bodies of its subjects. In that sense, the organic social body incorporated by social media *is* the megamachine.

So yes, media organize. This does not mean that all forms of organization, networked or otherwise, tend toward domination. On the contrary, media enable solidarities of all kinds. Nor does the genealogy of corporate affection I have sketched herein simply and irresponsibly replace human agency with an allegedly impersonal system, or complex. Rather, my effort has been to recognize how, over time, that system has been personalized in a practical, performative sense. To replace the deadly megamachine with other, more just forms of collective life requires breaking the circle of corporate personhood. Among other things, this means unlearning how to love the bomb by refusing that circle’s disarmingly friendly, and sometimes amorous, advances.

But it also means learning to live with the ruins of past solidarities and their institutional forms while affirming their ghostly persistence. If my historical argument has suggested anything, it is that when it comes to the incorporation of subjects, our newest media forms or platforms are not entirely new. This perspective restates the problem as one of confronting what persists as well as what changes, both materially and conceptually. To conclude with another, seemingly incongruous architectural example: in the Circle, the most dedicated employees live on campus, in dormitories. An important counterpoint (but also silent partner) to the corporate organizational matrices of the 1950s and 1960s were the massive social housing programs associated with the welfare state and with state socialism, begun in the 1920s and continued around the world until about 1970. Their dismantling, often accompanied by spectacular, mass-mediated demolitions, is one of the hallmarks of the neoliberal era. The response on the Left has been ambivalent. On one hand, these “projects” were avatars of economic redistribution and, sometimes, of genuine collectivism; equally, however, they were the biopolitical instruments of paternalistic, racist, and imperialist state bureaucracies. Hence, in a signal instance of performative incommunicability, summoning their ghosts in an affirmative, nonnostalgic fashion has proved exceptionally difficult, if not impossible.

Can the question of organization, then, critically posed, be redirected away from claustrophobic corporate feedback loops and toward concerns as prosaic—and, dare I say, as universal—as housing? Rephrasing the housing question in this manner is well beyond the scope of what I have attempted here. I refer to it only to concretize the implications and open the frame of reference. Follow any network and you find that its edges fray. There, illuminated by the fluorescent light of history, the outside occasionally enters in.

## Notes

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- 1 On “immaterial production,” see, e.g., Hardt and Negri (2009, 132–33).
- 2 The following discussion of colleges and corporate personhood is adapted from my more detailed “Corporate Personhood: Notes toward an Architectural Genealogy” (Martin 2017). On the political and legal history of corporate personhood, see Maier (1993) and Winkler (2018).
- 3 *Southern Railway Co. v. Greene*, 216 U.S. 400 (1910), <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/216/400.html>. For a summary of this history, see Barkan (2013) and Sklar (1988, 49–53).
- 4 Barkan refuses this distinction, arguing instead that corporate personhood constitutes a *dispositif* or apparatus critical to “corporate sovereignty,” which, like the *dispositif* of the “person” more generally, as theorized by the philosopher Roberto Esposito after Giorgio Agamben, operates a “ban” whereby the corporate entity is granted exceptional legal status or rights in the name, paradoxically, of fulfilling its societal obligations under the law (Barkan 2013, 76–86). On legal personhood as a concrete performative, see Dewey (1926).
- 5 On the history of the corporate charter, see Handlin and Handlin (1945).
- 6 For a detailed study of the Dartmouth case, see Stites (1972). The “contracts clause” is to be found in article I, section 10 of the U.S. Constitution.
- 7 As Deleuze and Guattari put it (1987, 129), “the various forms of education or ‘normalization’ imposed upon an individual consist in making him or her change points of subjectification, always moving toward a higher, nobler one in closer conformity with the supposed ideal. Then from the point of subjectification issues a subject of enunciation, as a function of mental reality determined by that point. Then from that subject of enunciation issues a subject of the statement, in other words, a subject bound to statements in conformity with a dominant reality (of which the mental reality just mentioned is a part, even when it seems to oppose it).”

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