

'Taking *Everything* in Hand': Managerialism and Technology

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1.

Managerialism and modern technology are closely connected. This is not merely because managerialism arises in conjunction with the development of accounting, actuarial, and audit practices in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nor even because of its frequent deployment of modern systems of surveillance, measurement, and control (though both are important points of connection). Rather, managerialism has to be understood as itself a part of modern technological ordering, as belonging essentially to it and as unthinkable without it. Indeed, one might even go so far as to say that not only is managerialism a part of modern technology, part of a technological system, but that in its modern form, technology, or perhaps we should say, *technologism*, is itself managerial. Understanding how this might be so, however, requires understanding something of the distinctive character of both managerialism and of modern technology.

It might be said, of course, that neither managerialism nor technology can be treated of in general, and that there is no single phenomenon that is 'managerialism' or 'technology' – merely different types of managerialism and many different technologies. This seems a rather complacent response, however, that involves turning one's eyes away from the self-evident commonalities that unite many different forms of contemporary managerialism and many different technologies as indeed instances of the managerial and of the technological. It is also to turn one's eyes away from the, perhaps surprising, degree of *convergence* among what might otherwise be thought of as indeed different phenomena (phenomena that are both very much determining and pervasively present elements of our contemporary situation). This chapter is both a response to the fact of such convergence, and to convergence as a phenomenon in its own right, as well as an

attempt to arrive at some critical grasp of it. Although my approach will be general and discursive, my aim is to sketch out a framework that allows a synoptic view of the contemporary managerial-technological landscape (a landscape that is deeply embedded in the structure of contemporary capitalism, and so is also fundamentally economic or economic), and, while it does not offer any immediate solution to the ills to which contemporary managerialism gives rise, nonetheless aims to provide some insight into its essential character.

2.

If management is understood as just the ‘taking of things in hand’ (as might be suggested by the Latin etymology of the term¹), then management is at work in any and every human activity – at least in respect of those activities that involve human manipulation, direction, and control. Yet while one certainly can talk of ‘management’ in this broad fashion, such talk tends to empty the notion of management of definite content – management and managing just become other ways of referring to any form of directed or purposive activity. For the most part, in fact, management is used more narrowly to refer to a distinct *kind* of activity – to a second-order activity, one that takes other activities as its object (we may sometimes talk of managing people or things, but usually this is shorthand for managing activities or processes in which people and things are implicated), and more specifically, to an activity that is directive, coordinative, or facilitative of other activities. If management is indeed a matter of ‘taking things in hand’, then it is a matter of taking in hand certain things, and not *everything*, and specifically of taking in hand certain activities with the aim of directing and coordinating them.

To illustrate the point at issue: neither the auto-worker involved in fitting parts to a chassis on an assembly line nor the teacher involved in explaining calculus to a mathematics class is involved in management – at least not in the activities of assembly or instruction taken on their own. This is so even though both activities are likely to be embedded with a larger set of activities that do involve management, and even though both activities will depend upon more basic management skills on the part of the auto

worker and the teacher in the organisation of their own life and work practices. The involvement in management comes about, not through being involved in just *any* activity, but through being involved in having to coordinate and direct different, but related activities – as the different activities on an assembly line or that relate to different parts of an educational curriculum are connected through the larger activities and purposes that they serve.

Because management is indeed a second-order activity, and because it typically concerns the coordination and direction of different but connected activities, management becomes more complex, and itself more distinctive and salient *as an activity*, when the activities to which it is directed form a more complex and differentiated structure that typically extends beyond what any one person may do (and for this reason too, the activity of management becomes more developed and more salient in organisational contexts). Craft production, for instance, is thus less managerially disposed than industrial production (even though both involve management), not primarily because of any difference in the relevant things produced (even though there are significant differences in those things), but because of differences in the processes of production, and the structures within which production is embedded, that give rise to those things in their differences. Industrialised forms of manufacture break down the process of production into different and separately undertaken activities, usually involving a differentiated workforce (whether human or automated), allowing higher levels of output, but this also requires more managerial control precisely because of the separation in the processes at issue. For the craft producer, whose level of output is lower, the process is more integrated and unitary, typically involving a single craftsperson across the entire process (whose work, by its very character, cannot be automated), but also less managerially demanding. This difference, and the way management becomes more important as one moves towards more industrial, and also more technologically complex forms of production.²

Since management is an activity among others, though an activity that takes other activities as its object, management has its own distinctive character that sets it apart from

other activities, and, so also, its own history. As the task of management has become more important, because the range of activities that make up human life become more complex and differentiated – in other words, as the organisational structure of society develops – management increasingly takes on a recognised character of its own, also developing into new and more distinctive forms. One such form is bureaucracy, which is not peculiar to modernity, but rather appears in various historical circumstances (as Weber famously documents³) in ways that reflect those circumstances and so the social and political contexts that belong with them. What is crucial to note here, however, is that even bureaucracy represents a specific form of management practice, one that is distinguished from other such practices, that has various forms of its own, and that is also distinct from other forms of practice and activity.

3.

The understanding of management as a second-order activity is a small, and perhaps obvious, point, but it provides the basis for recognising the distinctiveness of management as an activity in its own right. It is also the essential starting point for any investigation of the proper limits of management – the idea of limit itself being tied, in general, to the notion of that which is differentiated and distinct. Moreover, the idea of management as a distinctive kind of activity is central to the understanding of what separates management from managerialism, and so also to the characterisation of managerialism itself.

Managerialism is not identical with management, just as it is not identical with the bureaucratic either (though it is commonplace to treat managerialism, mistakenly, as just another form of bureaucracy⁴). What characterises managerialism is a tendency effectively to ignore the second-order character of management, and even to treat management, not always consistently, as if it were itself a first-order activity or to efface the very distinction between activities as first- or second-order. Moreover, inasmuch as managerialism itself tends to efface the difference between managerialism and management, so it also effaces the very idea of management as a distinctive kind of activity – which also means, to draw upon the term Weber uses, that contemporary

managerialism can have no sense of its own 'vocation' (nor, indeed, of any other 'vocation' either).⁵

The way this effacement of distinction occurs is not through any simple denial of the second-order character of management or the straightforward affirmation of management as a first order activity – managerialism does not deny that there are activities, like auto assembly or teaching, that are, ostensibly the objects towards which management is directed. Yet it nevertheless also tends to appropriate all activities to the sphere of the managerial, effectively extending managerial practice into even those activities that would ordinarily be the object of such practice. This does not occur merely through taking activities that may otherwise have escaped the managerial gaze and making them into objects of management – although part of what characterises managerialism is indeed the encompassing character of managerial attention: nothing is so minute or so seemingly irrelevant that it cannot be made part of the managerial project (something reflected in the concern of so many contemporary organisations to manage their 'brand' down to the smallest detail of organisational operation and presentation). The managerial extension of managerial activity occurs both through the extension of managerial practice to encompass a greater range of objects or activities and through the extension of that practice to encompass a greater range of actors (which means that managerialism is primarily an organisational form that it will generate organisational structures even where it may appear none may have existed). The result is effectively that any and every activity is seen as having a managerial component at the same time as any and every agent becomes, to some extent, a manager or, at least, is seen as having managerial responsibilities (something strikingly in contrast with older conceptions of management⁶).

The way this occurs within most contemporary organisations is through increased reporting, compliance, and audit requirements that are imposed across the organisation as a whole, usually in generic fashion, and that are most strongly felt at the lower levels of the organisation, sometimes significantly changing the character of activities at that level. This is most obviously the case in those organisations whose primary focus is on activities

that involve high level of human interaction with hospitals, schools and universities being obvious examples, but all organisations oriented to the provision of services are hugely affected in this way, and very few organisations are exempt. Typically the extension of managerial demands across all activities and with respect to all agents occurs alongside constant processes of 'structural readjustment' that almost invariably lead to reduction in managerial support at the same time as there is an increase in managerial demands, and that serve to reinforce managerial control through maintenance of a constant state of uncertainty and challenge. This is often experienced by employees within organisations in terms of the need to do 'more with less' and so to increase levels of performance at the same time as both resources and genuine autonomy in the workplace are significantly reduced. The increase in compliance and audit systems usually brings with it a commensurate reduction in levels of trust and even respect within organisations, as 'systemic' organisational structures supposedly take over from collective commitments, shared values, and the cultivation of more fundamental inter-personal relations.

The introduction of automated and online systems has made possible such an imposition of administrative and managerial work in a way that it would not have been before (and this is one of the most obvious ways in which managerialism and technology draw together). The way this is experienced for many members of contemporary organisations is through an increase in electronically-mediated managerial activity – in more online forms and processes, and systems of authorisation and notification. Online delivery has also become the standard, and often stand-alone, way to meet various compliance requirements in many areas of staff training and information. The shift to online systems has invariably been promoted as increasing efficiency and reducing costs (including staffing costs). Yet there is very little independent evidence that online management has the beneficial effects claimed for it, and some evidence that such systems actually operate to proliferate and extend managerial activity.

The extension of managerial practice into all activities and areas of organisations inevitably gives rise to whole new areas of managerial work that did not exist previously

– managerial activity typically begets more managerial activity. It is this that gives rise to what has been called empty work or, in David Graeber’s phrase, ‘bullshit jobs’⁷ – areas of managerial activity that have no object apart from their relation to other managerial activities, and that themselves generate further such activities, but seem entirely disconnected from any end other than the managerial. Although there is an increasing focus on the loss of employment opportunity due to increasing automation and the rise of more sophisticated forms of ‘artificial intelligence’, the reality of managerial work over the last half century or so is that it has not exhibited any reduction in administrative and managerial jobs, but actually an increase. Indeed, it is hard to see how jobs that have no real content – Graeber’s ‘bullshit jobs’ for instance – are likely to be threatened by automation, since, one might argue, there is nothing much to automate in the first place. More significantly, it is important to note that many of these jobs have themselves arisen as a result of automation, or at least, of new forms of managerial activity that are themselves created by the rise of online and automated systems. In this latter respect, online systems do not, as a general rule, automatically reduce managerial work. Instead they change its character, including where that work is done and by whom. In this latter respect, online management systems are perhaps best understood as cost-shifting mechanisms (which is why they can give the appearance of being cost-reducing), since they allow managerial work to be moved away from those specifically designated as ‘managers’ and onto those ostensibly filling other, non-managerial, roles (and here is one of the ways in which online systems reinforce the managerial tendency for managerial tasks to become more widespread and pervasive across organisations).

The rise of managerialism has sometimes been associated, particularly in the last quarter of the twentieth-century, with ‘flatter’ management structures as organisations have sought to increase centralised managerial control by removing those middle-level managers who are often seen as a barrier to organisational change (that they are a barrier is directly related to the ways in which, in the past, they represented the key lynch-pins between the activities of management and the ‘productive’ activities at more basic levels of the organisation. One might see this shift as part of the historical development of

managerialism, since there was a point at which middle-level managers, because of their communicating and mediating roles, effectively served as a buffer and barrier to the imposition of managerial systems across organisations in their entirety. The shift to flatter structures was thus one of the mechanisms by which organisations became more amenable to a more extensive system of managerial control, but such flatter structures can be seen as merely the preliminary stage to what are often more proliferated and hierarchical managerial systems. And that does indeed seem to be the case: contemporary organisations seem characterised by the proliferation of managerial roles and positions at all levels, but often within more tightly constrained line management structures. At the same time, *ad hoc* managerial positions now seem also to be more numerous, often in the form of outside consultants, but frequently through the creation of one-off advisory or other special purpose positions.

4.

In general terms, the rise of managerialism has meant that organisations are increasingly driven by highly generic, determinative, and invasive managerial processes and systems that are imposed onto organisations by decision-makers who are typically removed from the operational context – removed physically, but also, in virtue of the generic nature of managerial practice, behaviourally and conceptually. In spite of its obvious drawbacks, the advantage of such an approach is that it centralises control while decentralising and depersonalising responsibility. Since the processes it imposes are indeed generic, and amenable to generalised descriptors such as ‘quality’, ‘excellence’, ‘efficiency’, and ‘accountability’, managerialism has rhetorical advantages that make it especially useful in a political context. Managerialism removes the emphasis from the management of the activities that make up the real operational work of the organisation, and the values that underpin those activities, shifting the focus onto processes and systems that are themselves more amenable to manipulation (because more removed from the activities themselves), and that also allow managerial work to be more easily and abstractly represented – thereby reinforcing a sense of control and direction.

Since the level at which managerialism focuses is a level that is already highly discursive or rhetorical, and since managerial practice has almost complete control over the discursive and rhetorical structures that function within organisations, managerial activity can be advanced, and managerial success can often be achieved (or so it readily appears), simply by manipulation of discourse and rhetoric. It is thus no surprise that managerialism has been so productive in its constant generation of new discursive and rhetorical strategies, forms, and vocabularies – and with this, as many commentators have noted, an emptying out of real meaning and significance from the language so employed.⁸ Managerialism thus makes use of language as part of the larger structure of managerial activity, and as a key means by which managerial systems become part of the very structure of all activity, through both the appropriation of non-managerial language into a managerial vocabulary (so even evaluative concepts that might seem to be antithetical to a managerial frame become themselves ‘managerialised’⁹), and through the extension of managerial terms and concepts into all other contexts and domains (reflecting the broader extension and expansion of the managerial itself).

Since managerial practice tends towards the generic in its character and application, including in its discursive and rhetorical operation, so it also tends to reduce organisations to processes and systems, often represented in abstract and generic discursive forms that have little engagement with the basic activities or the underlying end values and *ethos* of an organisation. As a result, those individuals who gain managerial advancement within organisations need not have any commitment to those organisations’ end values, since managerial effectiveness will come increasingly to depend purely on a mastery of generic managerial forms. The separation of managerial practice from any distinctive organisational values or a distinctive *ethos* makes it more likely that those who do gain advancement within an organisation will have no commitment to that organisation or its values (no interest in what the organisation does as a *distinctive* institution), but will be wholly focused on the management of the processes and systems that are seen as underpinning the organisation’s activities – processes and systems that will indeed be largely generic. Such an orientation will also be in keeping with the only

values that any longer seem to be operative in the managerial context, those of individual, usually *monetary*, self-interest (something reinforced by the contemporary dominance of agency theory). Consequently, just as managerialism, is corrosive of any conception of management as itself a distinctive kind of activity, and also tends to be corrosive of the distinctive character of other activities, it is also corrosive of any distinctive character that may belong to an organisation. This is especially problematic for public institutions that have traditionally been constituted around a distinctive organisational ethos – universities and schools, for instance, increasingly have difficulty articulating any sense of educational or research values and commitments that might over-ride or constrain the requirements of the managerial, and the same is true of the structures of government and law. Even businesses may find it more and more difficult to hold on to a sense of organisational purpose and integrity beyond a set of narrowly and purely managerial objectives, and this may even reinforce the already existing tendencies that favour the success of those businesses that are themselves oriented to purely managerial services (notably those businesses within the audit and finance sectors).¹⁰

The genericisation that is so characteristic of managerialism is itself related to the managerial tendency to give preference to quantitative over qualitative modes of evidence, assessment, and analysis. Indeed, it is partly the focus on the quantitative – and so also the numerical – that enables managerial genericisation. Quantity and number become the universal currency into which everything can be translated; a currency that enables the more effective release of managerial practice from any need genuinely to engage with the first-order activities on with which such practice ought properly to supervene. Not only does the emphasis on the quantitative give priority to that which is countable and measureable, but it effectively leaves out of account, and actively excludes, what cannot be counted or measured. The exclusion is not merely a setting of certain things aside as beyond the horizon of the managerial – thereby recognising a limit to managerial practice – but precisely because managerialism refuses the idea that anything can escape managerial control, such exclusion is effectively an effacing of that which falls outside its grasp. Managerialism takes everything hand, or so it presents itself, and so

what it cannot take in hand is nothing at all. This remains the case even when managerialism plays lip service to the idea that there are some things it cannot encompass – the hegemony exerted by managerialism within contemporary organisations and across much of contemporary, and especially Anglo-American, society means that what falls outside of the managerial is effectively rendered irrelevant and valueless.

In the end, the managerial emphasis on the quantitative draws everything within the orbit of one specific form of quantity, namely the monetary, and it does so because this is the one quantitative measure that does indeed appear to be applicable across the board. Of almost any and every activity that is to be managed, one can ask: what does it cost and how much income does it generate? It is thus not merely the quantification of activity that is characteristic of managerialism, but its monetization. This shift to the monetary brings other important shifts in its train. It allows the implicit (and sometimes explicit) repositioning of the values framework within organisations, already hollowed out by the distancing of managers from any more fundamental end values, around purely financial and monetary considerations. This is reinforced by, as well as reinforcing of, the tendency for those at the centre of managerial structures, the executive managers themselves, to have their own worth defined in purely monetary terms (although, as noted earlier, this also happens more broadly across organisations, and is tied to both the individualising as well as monetising tendencies of managerial practice¹¹). Even the language of “corporate social responsibility” does little to counter this monetizing tendency,¹² often serving actually to strengthen it, since invariably the justification of such approaches is in terms of the monetarily or financially advantageous or prudent. Thus “ethical business” is routinely touted as being “good business”, which is to say that it is to be recommended, not primarily because it is ethical, but because it is in the monetary and financial interests of organisations.¹³

The emphasis on the quantitative here is not countered by the continued use of qualitative language within managerial practice. “Excellence”, “creativity”, “agility”, “resilience” are all qualitative terms, among many others, that are deployed by contemporary managerialism. Yet their employment does not demonstrate any

qualitative commitment that goes against the emphasis on the quantitative, since these terms typically operate, not as giving primacy to some real and irreducible quality that is the focus of managerial practice, but rather (and in line with what was said earlier about the nature of managerial language) as rhetorical devices used to endorse and so to promote certain organisational outcomes that are themselves understood largely quantitatively. Indeed, when terms like “excellence” or “agility” function as more than empty signifiers, and are instead tied, even if indirectly, to real outcomes, those outcomes are invariably quantitative in character.¹⁴ Similarly, the dominance of quality assurance processes and mechanisms within many organisations in Britain and Australasia does not demonstrate any concern with the quantitative over the qualitative. Part of what is distinctive about quality assurance is indeed its focus on systems for measuring and tracking quality by means of what are essentially quantitative means. Within the context of quality assurance circles, this is made most evident by the constant demand to justify qualitative claims and the assumption that such justification can only be achieved by reference to quantitative data or to processes that can give rise to such data.

Precisely because management operates as a second-order activity, there will always be a tendency for management to operate abstractly or formally and in a way somewhat removed from the activities and that are its objects. On this basis it might be argued that the tendency towards the generic and the abstract that characterises the managerial is simply a tendency inherent in the practice of management as such – that such tendencies are inevitable and necessary. There is, of course, a degree of continuity between management and managerialism, just as one can also find points of continuity between managerialism and bureaucracy, but continuity does not rule out difference, and managerialism does indeed apart from other forms of management practice. This is true even in respect of the managerialist tendency toward genericisation and abstraction. What marks out the way these appear within a managerialist frame is their completely unconstrained character, and this evident in the very dominance of the quantitative and the numerical within managerial modes of operation. Moreover, as will be seen in the discussion below, both the genericisation of managerial practices, and the associated

tendency to quantification and numericisation, are closely connected (as are quantity and number as such) with a spatialized thinking that itself effaces any sense of boundary and limit (and so also difference). This also means that even though managerialism has a systematic character about it – systematic because of the way it draws everything together – that systematicity nevertheless lacks any integrity beyond that of mere subjection to an otherwise arbitrary spatialized, and so also numericised, ordering. The constraints that have defined and governed past forms of management, especially bureaucratic management, thus tend to disappear in the face of managerialist practice, since such constraints cannot even be represented within the form of systematicity that operates managerially, and are often erased by it.

It is for these reasons that contemporary managerialism frequently has the appearance of inconsistency, even of irrationality (why too, it is often antagonistic to notions of formalised process and procedure¹⁵), and why, once again, it is corrosive of any form of practice, including the genuinely ethical, that depends upon more substantive notions that would limit, constrain, and differentiate.¹⁶ The genericisation that managerialism brings to its activities and objects – effectively a levelling out of everything in which all differences becomes essentially arbitrary – affects managerialism itself. Not only does managerialism obscure its own character as a distinctive practice, but any attempt to delineate the character of managerialism has to attend to managerialism's own generic and often shifting character, its tendency towards the arbitrary and the ad hoc. Thus the very attempt to separate out the managerial as a distinctive mode of management practice has to contend with the fact that part of what is distinctive about managerialism is its resistance to any such attempt and its own blurring of the boundaries between managerialism and other forms of management practice. This means that the critique of managerialism will always have a certain awkwardness about it as it seeks both to reassert the need for distinction and differentiation at the same time as it must also attend to the way in which part of what is essential to managerialism is its own tendency to efface such distinction and differentiation even in its own self-formation.

5.

Generic and sometimes diffuse though it may be, managerialism can nevertheless be understood as itself a technology, and an especially pervasive and ubiquitous one. Although it draws upon a range of more specific technological systems and devices, managerialism also provides a very particular framework within which such systems and devices operate and are directed, as well as shaping the development of new such systems and devices. Managerialism is thus a specific form of technology, and yet its character as a system of ordering reflects the character of technology more generally: technology just is a system for the ordering of the world, and increasingly, for the ordering of the world *in its entirety*. In this respect, technology is not reducible to any specific device or even any single technique – it is indeed an ordering or assemblage or ordering, and as such, it is essentially *systematic* in the specific sense that it operates at the level of the encompassing structure rather than being identifiable with any element or component within that structure.

That it is systematic thus does not imply any sense in which the technological structure is ‘well-fitted’ to some purpose or that it is more ‘rational’ or ‘efficient’. Such notions have no absolute or neutral meaning, their content always deriving from a specific context of evaluation, and strictly speaking, such evaluative frameworks lie outside of the technological, do not belong to it, and are effectively ignored by it. Similarly, it is a mistake to treat technology as primarily ‘instrumental’ – such a notion of instrumentality implies a sense of a non-technological ‘end’ that the technological serves, but any such instrumental relationship is accidental to the character of technology as such (and this is so even though the economic and social context in which technology is embedded is one in which the technological is almost always represented, or *misrepresented*, in instrumental terms). The sense of systematicity that applies to technology involves nothing more than the idea of the constantly expanding operational connection and connectivity of the technological structure as a whole, and this is completely indifferent to any extra-technological standards or ends, and indeed, precisely

because of its ever-expanding and encompassing character, it actually tends to overtake, and so also to obliterate or to efface any such standards or ends.

The character of technology as systematic in this way is more significant and salient as technology is more developed – the more developed, the more its systematic character is evident. The simplest technologies reveal themselves as systematic in only a rudimentary fashion – the stone tools used by Palaeolithic peoples are part of a fairly simple system of tools and practices, and any single tool can still function effectively even when the rest of the system of tools breaks down (so a Paleolithic stone tool can still be used today even if there is seldom an occasion for such use) and in spite of the removal of the tools from their original context. Compare this with a mobile phone or any other sophisticated contemporary device which is utterly useless when removed from the systematic structure of which it is only a part. Significantly, the same points about systematicity also apply to managerialism and its mechanisms: managerialism emerges as a technique or technology only to the extent that management develops in a similarly systematic and ramified fashion, and only amidst the larger system of contemporary technologies on which managerialism necessarily draws, to which it also contributes, and of which it is an integral part. The technological character of managerialism is thus directly tied to its essentially encompassing and connecting character – and the systematic character of managerialism, already briefly discussed above, is not a systematicity subordinated to any end that lies outside the managerial system, in spite of the rhetorical positioning that might suggest otherwise (such rhetoric operating here as merely another of the means by which managerial systems maintain and extend themselves). There is no end to that managerial than its own expansion nor to the technological either.

The inter-implication of managerialism with technology occurs both at the level of a similar ‘systematicity’ of structure and operation and in terms of the same tendencies towards genericization and quantization – tendencies that are, indeed, at the very heart of contemporary technology across all of its different forms. To some extent, such tendencies derive from the character of modern natural scientific practice to which

contemporary technology is closely tied and by reference to which managerialism also attempts to legitimate its own practice. The great shift in the rise of modern natural science that occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the shift towards a mathematical, and hence numerical and quantitative, but also *spatial*, understanding of the world. The way space is implicated here is especially noteworthy. The shift from ancient to modern science – from the Aristotelian to the Cartesian or Newtonian, let us say – which is a shift from the qualitative to the quantitative, and from the organic and discursive to the numerical, is also a shift from a world of heterogenous places to a world of homogenous space.¹⁷

Place possesses a singularity (always amidst a plurality, since every place nests itself and nests within other places) that resists quantification and numericisation as well as genericization. Space, on the other hand can be understood purely metrically – in terms of what is measurable (the etymology of the term going back to the Greek *spadion/stadion* as a unit of distance), and so in terms purely of quantity and number. As such, space possesses neither singularity (nor plurality) other than as might arbitrarily be determined.¹⁸ The spatial, the quantitative, and the numerical belong essentially together – indeed, there can be no conception of number or of quantity without a conception of space. Thus Immanuel Kant argues that even the representation of time requires space and empirical psychological studies suggest that the understanding of number is dependent on space also.¹⁹ Inasmuch as modern scientific thinking is characterised by a tendency towards forms of *reductive* analysis – understanding things in terms of their discrete components – then spatialization is an essential element in such thinking, since space provides the necessary frame within which those components can be arrayed alongside one another. Unlike place, which always appears in terms of a plurality of different places, so that every *where* is different, space appears the same everywhere, so that every *where* is the same. Moreover, whereas place brings with an essential boundedness – implied by both the singularity and plurality of place and places (singularity being tied to irreducible difference) – space carries no such limitation within it. Just as every quantity allows of increase, so every space allows of further extension, at

least notionally, and there is nothing intrinsic to space, any more than of quantity or number, that implies its restriction – the very idea of a boundary *in space* that does indeed constitute the boundary *of that very space* seems incoherent.

The spatial understanding of the world that characterises modern science extends into modern technology – and is indeed exemplified by the all-encompassing and seemingly boundless reach of modern technological systems. The idea of the world as encompassing a multiplicity of places has nowadays been overtaken by the idea of the world as a single integrated space – a space of flows and connections in which borders and boundaries are increasingly irrelevant. Such an idea, and the rhetoric associated with it, has not only become ubiquitous within contemporary business and politics, but it now also suffuses theoretical and academic discussions from sociology and geography through to art and architecture. The contemporary world, understood as fundamentally determined by contemporary technology, thus appears as essentially characterised by its unbounded, spatial character – an unbounded spatiality that is the exact correlate of the systematic and encompassing character of the technological itself. There is thus no part of the contemporary world that stands apart from the rest, no part that is not drawn into the same web of connection and connectivity. The encompassing systematicity that is at issue here is especially evident in the phenomenon of technological *convergence*: the bringing together of functions and activities within or in relation to single devices and systems – most obviously in the mobile phone or other electronic device – and in the convergence of services and activities within single locations (the same locations that Marc Augé has referred to as ‘non-places’ and that he takes to be exemplary of ‘supermodernity’²⁰) such as the shopping mall, supermarket, airport, or gas station (the latter locations being themselves brought together even more through the use of mobile and online technologies).²¹ What technological ordering does, in fact, is increasingly to enable everything to be accessed and ‘managed’ in the same fashion and by the same means – allowing *everything* to be ‘taken in hand’ – to be positioned, measured, and manipulated *within and in relation to the same space*.

Yet it is not merely that technology *enables* such encompassing managerialism: just as managerialism is itself technological – is itself technologism – so also can technology be seen as managerial precisely in its systematic and encompassing character and in its reduction of everything to the status of something that can be the object of a specific technology, device, or application. Technology and managerialism are themselves *convergent* phenomena such that there is almost nothing to choose between them. Moreover, given the close relationship between managerialism and the contemporary prioritization of the economic, the financial, and the monetary (the dominance, in other words, of a certain form of capitalism), as well as the increasing convergence of the technological with the economic and financial (perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in the generation of wealth through the ‘mining’ of cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin²²), but also in the very conception of the market as itself a computational system or ‘machine’), then so one might also say that all three – technologism, managerialism, and ‘economism’ are not separate, but different faces of the same phenomenon. The convergence of these three might itself be seen as exemplifying the convergence that can be observed as so characteristic of contemporary technology, and so to be driven by technology as it extends into the managerial and economic. But the tendency to convergence – to the drawing together of everything within the same framework of control and manipulation – is just as much at the heart of the managerial and the economic as of the technological. In each case what we see is the same drive towards constant systematicisation, towards the same integration and connection, that occurs through spatialization, and through the genericization, quantification, and monetization with which spatialization is so closely implicated. Indeed, if it is indeed a single phenomenon that is at work here, then perhaps it is the drive to convergence itself.

The relation between convergence and spatialization requires some further examination, especially since spatialization might be thought to involve a setting of things apart rather than a drawing of things together. From the start, however, it should be noted that the very language at work here – of both setting apart and drawing together – is itself spatial, and the same point may be made about the language of connection and of

convergence. It is no accident that, over and above the tendency towards spatialization that is such an inevitable part of modern science anyway, contemporary social sciences have increasingly looked to more developed forms of spatial analysis to understand the developments of modernity itself – the ‘spatial turn’ in contemporary theory reflects the central role of the spatial in the way the contemporary world itself appears. Spatiality and spatialization are thus already operative at a very basic level, conceptually and linguistically. When we look to the operation of convergence within contemporary technology, then its close connection to spatialization is readily apparent. Convergence occurs through both connection and concentration, that is, in the ideal case, through connecting everything up within a single extended space that allows for the effective concentration of the entire space at any one point within it – entry into the whole space is made possible through any one point in the space. One can see how this works in more concrete terms in the case of smart-phone technology in which the phone not only allows access to an entire network of other phones (thereby also making itself accessible to that network), but it also allows access to a network of sites, information, functions and activities – and all via the one device. It is precisely the positioning of everything within the one network, which is to say, within the one connected space, that allows for the accessibility of things from within the network.

Although it may be less immediately evident, and may also operate differently, the same relation between spatialization and convergence is evident within the managerial (and, one might add, within the economic also). Both Fordism and Taylorism, each of which can be seen as instantiating early forms of managerialism, rely very clearly on spatialised modes of organisation and analysis, whether in the form of the production line or the time-and-motion study, that themselves derive from the deployment of essentially reductive approaches. It is this reduction down to discrete components that allows otherwise diverse activities to be understood and organised as part of a larger connected systems – spatialised reduction allows connection which allows systematicity which allows convergence – in other words, the bringing of things into one frame, even a single location or device, for manipulation and control. Even if Fordism and Taylorism have

largely receded into the past, the general approach that they exemplify continues in contemporary managerialism. Successive managerialist approaches –Quality Management, New Public Management, Value-for Money – all exemplify the same tendencies towards reductive and genericising approaches that enable more encompassing managerial practice through similarly spatialized modes of analysis.

The way spatialisation underpins the expansion and concentration of managerial practice is not only apparent in terms of the overall style of analysis and approach, but also in the way managerialism is instantiated in the everyday operation of organisations, and in their concrete forms and structure. As already noted earlier, contemporary managerialism typically operates in a way that removes upper level managers almost entirely from the activities they manage – which means their physical removal from the spaces in which those activities take place – as well as increasing managerial intervention into all activities and so into any and every space (and so too the increasing genericisation of those spaces). Indeed, control over physical space itself becomes a key managerial tool. Nowhere is this more evident than in the tendency within some organisations to dispense with dedicated workspaces altogether and to replace them with open-plan areas filled with ‘hot desks’ that are available for use by any employee as needed. Equipped with laptop or tablet and phone, employees can work anywhere and in whatever way they prefer, but at the same time, they are also made more amenable to managerial surveillance and control, and their work roles made more generic and flexible. What occurs in such cases is, of course, a shift from a mode of spatial organisation in which there are many different spaces to a mode of organisation in which there is just one managerial space within which all employees are located.²³ This unifying mode of spatial organisation is one way in which convergence operates here ; and it shows the same character of reduction (in this case to the individual employee), connection into a larger systematic structure, and concentration of access, activity, and function that is evident elsewhere. The fact that such a mode of spatial organisation depends on new digital and mobile technologies merely underscores the way managerialism and technologism are

indeed closely intertwined, just as the increasing role of digital technology in the financial sector similar underscores the intertwining of technologism and economism.

6.

One of the key features of managerialism, a feature identified near the very start of this discussion, is its tendency to ignore the second-order character of management, and to treat management as if it were itself a first-order activity or to efface the very distinction between activities as first- or second-order. It is this that distinguishes managerialism from management, and so also from particular forms of management such as the bureaucratic, but it is also a feature that can now be seen to be closely tied to the spatializing and convergent tendencies that managerialism exemplifies. In this respect, it is not merely the difference between first and second order activities that managerialism effectively effaces, or even the character of managerialism as itself a distinctive form, but all manner of differences and distinctions that would otherwise stand in the way of the encompassing reach of managerial practice. Dave Eggar's novel *The Circle*,²⁴ usually read as a critique of contemporary social media and the Internet, also provides a striking exploration of this aspect of contemporary managerialism. The fictional company that is at the centre of Eggar's novel – a company that bears clear resemblance to companies such as Facebook and Google/Alphabet – exhibits many of the aspects the managerialism discussed here, albeit rhetorically positioned to appear benign and friendly, but it is a managerialism that extends beyond the space of the company alone to encompass almost all aspects of the lives of the company's employees and their families and, ultimately, even of the lives of those who use the company's products. In Eggar's novel any distinction between the managerial, the technological, and the economic fall by the wayside as everything is taken up into the same encompassing and essentially spatialized frame. At the same time as the focus is placed on the individual, the individual is completely opened up to the entire connected space of digitally mediated interaction and attention.

The basic ideas at work in Eggars' *The Circle* are not new – just as the analysis of the managerial, the technological, and the economic that has been drawn upon here is adumbrated in the work of many other writers from Adorno to Weber and Heidegger to Simmel, so Eggars' fictional depiction echoes ideas and themes present in the work of many other dystopian writers from Huxley and Orwell to Zamyatin and many others in between.²⁵ The phenomenon that I have described in terms of convergence, and its operation through modes of spatialization, is not always directly thematized in the way indicated here, but what appears in managerial terms as the erasure of difference – not only the difference between activities and kinds of activity, but between work and home, between public and personal, between the managerial and that which lies outside the managerial, between the human and the non-human, between truth and falsehood – is indeed a common and unifying theme across many of these different analysis and depictions. This erasure of difference can itself be seen as a function of spatialization, and as such it is also tied to the tendency to prioritize quantity and number (since the quantitative and numerical are also intrinsically tied to the spatial), but the erasure of difference is a direct consequence of the disappearance, within any purely spatial ordering, of any genuine sense of bound or limit. It is this that was noted earlier as a key element in the rise of modern science – and one might say that it is perhaps the key idea within modernity and certainly within the 'project of modernity' as that arises out of the Enlightenment. Modernity is precisely the desire to escape from limit.

In any specific case, the overcoming of limitation is not, in itself, problematic. It becomes so only when it is generalised, when the productive power of limit is not itself recognised, and when the desire to overcome limit lacks any sense of its own limit – in other words, when the very idea of limit has been set aside. In the case of the managerial, it is its inability to recognise any limit or bound to its range of operation or application that leads to its treatment of all activities as subject to it in the same way, and that can even lead to the sort of extension of the managerial into the realm of ordinary life that Eggars, perhaps unintentionally, presents to us. What is implied here, of course, is that the inability to recognise bound or limit, and even the seeming erasure of limit, does not

mean that all limits or bounds are thereby rendered ineffectual or that they are indeed erased. If managerialism could indeed achieve what it implicitly assumes already is the case – namely the taking of everything in hand in a way that can ensure complete and unfailing control or at least moves us significantly towards that end – then managerialism would have no limit to constrain it, and the question of its limits or bounds would not arise. Yet there can be no such all-encompassing managerial grasp, not only because the world itself always exceeds any and every attempt to ‘manage’ it, but because not even managerialism can extend to encompass its own situation, its own character, its own limits – managerialism itself will always lie outside of managerial control.

This is both the strength of managerialism and its weakness. It means that any critique of managerialism is almost impossible to mount in terms that managerialism will itself recognise, since any such critique depends on being able to understand what managerialism itself is as distinct from other forms of discourse or organisational formation – which is to recognise the limits that define and determine managerialism – but this is precisely what managerialism refuses. Yet because managerialism lies outside of managerialism’s own grasp, so it cannot recognise its own inevitable tendencies to failure and incompleteness.²⁶ Exactly the same point holds for contemporary technologism and economism, and is reflected in the almost complete inability within contemporary discourse to mount effective counter movements to the dominance of any of these. Managerialism, economism, and technologism seem able constantly to reorganise and reposition themselves even in the face of the crises that they themselves engender. How they may realise themselves may thus change – different technological devices or systems may appear and disappear, different managerial structures and discourses may displace others, different economic instruments or vocabularies, different modes of calculation, even different markets, may come and go. But these are indeed changes merely in the modes by which the underlying phenomenon at issue – the tendency towards convergence that itself operates through contemporary technologism, managerialism and economism – is instantiated.

Just as the convergence at issue here is directly tied to spatialization, so the seeming erasure of limit and bound in the face of the connection and connectivity that such convergence entails is also tied to the erasure of place. To invoke place in this context is not to engage in any form of metaphorization, but rather to take seriously the genuine role of the spatial and the topographic in the constitution of the world and in any and all forms of human engagement with the world.²⁷ This means that what we see in managerialism, in technologism, and in economism is a reconfiguration of the way the world appears and so of the places and spaces of such appearance. The idea of the world as an interconnected spatial domain – a field of network and flow – is fundamental to the operation of the managerial and technological structures and systems (as well as the economic) that have been the focus for this discussion. In contrast, the idea of the world as constituted in and through the singularity of places, a singularity that is complex and pluralistic even as it is also singular, brings a very different mode of world conception and appearance – one that draws attention to notions of limit and bound, including the limits and bounds, and to forms of *divergence* as well as convergence. In terms of the practice of management, such a topographical rather than spatialized conception requires attentiveness to both the placed character of the activities that are the objects of management (and so to the distinctive singularity of those activities even as one also attends to their generality), and to the placed character of management practice itself. Indeed, the Weberian idea of vocation, taking this as representative of an alternative conception of management to the managerial, can be seen to bring with it just such a conception of place: in both the English and the original German term (*Beruf*) we can still hear the sense of that which *calls*, and any such call is always a call to something from somewhere, a call that is possible only within the bounded realm that allows such a call to sound, to be heard, and to be responded to.

7.

The critique of managerialism, and of technologism and economism, that has been briefly sketched in this discussion is not intended to imply any wholesale rejection of the activity

of management, nor of any particular economic device or system, nor even of economics as a discipline or field of inquiry. Rather the aim is to understand the importance of retaining a sense of the proper limits – *the proper place* – within which each of these operate, and by which each is also constituted. This is also why it is so important to recognise the legitimacy of the very inquiry into what these each might be – why the question as to the nature of management and the managerial, the nature of the technological, the nature of the economic, cannot simply be set aside as either too general or too ‘essentialist’. To refuse such an inquiry is also to refuse to engage with the limits of things, including our own limits and so our very selves, to refuse to recognise the actual place .in which we find ourselves.²⁸ The inquiry into limit, which is also an inquiry into place, is itself the most fundamental, perhaps the only genuine form, of critique, and it is precisely the loss of any ability to understand limit, or indeed, to allow room for its articulation, that underpins the weakness of much contemporary critical discourse. Thus although managerialism has been the focus for much of this discussion, the underlying issue at stake here is not managerialism, nor technologism, nor economism, but rather the refusal of limit, of bound, of place that these each exemplify, and that is part of their own essential limitation.

¹ The Latin noun *manus* "hand" is at the root of the term, but it derives more immediately from the Italian *maneggiare*, meaning ‘to handle’, and especially ‘to handle a horse’, and the French *manège* meaning ‘horsemanship’. Its extension to the handling of business matters occurred in English in the 16th Century.

² There are craft activities that rely on sophisticated technology, but typically those activities remain craft activities because the technology is still secondary to the skill of the individual craftsman who remains individually responsible for all or most of the process of production. It is precisely the role of the craftsman over and above the technology (whether it be the technology involved in the form of potter’s wheel or a laser-cutter) that makes a certain type of production into craft production. On the character of craft production, see Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Allen Lane, 2008).

³ See Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).

⁴ This is commonplace in much of the critique of contemporary managerialism, and as a consequence it often tends to overlook the distinctive character of the managerial and the bureaucratic – see Paul du Gay’s discussion in ‘Is Office a Vocation in “Post-Bureaucratic” Public Management?’, in Anna Yeatman (ed), *Neoliberalism and the Crisis of Public Institutions, Working Papers in the Human Rights and Public Life Program No 2*: (Whitlam Institute, Western Sydney University, 2015), pp.36-55.

⁵ See Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, tr. Rodney Livingstone, ed. David Owen and Tracy Strong (Illinois: Hackett Books, 2004). This Weberian idea is largely what underpins Paul du Gay’s critique of contemporary public management as he develops it in relation to the notion of ‘office’ – see du Gay, ‘Is Office a Vocation in “Post-Bureaucratic” Public Management?’.

⁶ See du Gay, ‘Is Office a Vocation in “Post-Bureaucratic” Public Management?’

⁷ David Graeber, 'On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant', *Strike*, 3 (August 2013), available <https://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs>; see also Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (New York: Simon & Schuster, forthcoming, 2018).

⁸ See for instance Don Watson, *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language* (New York: Vintage, 2004), or, more recently, André Spicer, *Business Bullshit* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018). See also Marnie Holborow, *Language and Neoliberalism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

⁹ The general phenomenon here is one that I have referred to elsewhere as the 'subversion of the good' – see "'Good Government Starts Today": On the Death of the Public, the Triumph of Private Interest, and the Loss of the Good', in Anna Yeatman (ed.), *Reclaiming the Public*, Working Papers in the Human Rights and Public Life Program, No 3: (Whitlam Institute, Western Sydney University, 2016), pp.1-23.

¹⁰ Also associated with this tendency towards the corrosion of organisational integrity and organisational values is the corrosion of genuinely ethical practice and commitment. Indeed, even ethics itself has been assimilated to managerialist practice through various audit and compliance mechanisms that often serve to enable unethical behaviour rather than prevent it – in part, because such mechanisms have no grounding in any developed concept of the ethical as such, nor in any form of genuinely ethical culture, but are indeed underpinned by what is effectively a reduction of all value to monetary value. On this general issue of the corrosion of ethical practice and commitment, see my 'The Demise of Ethics', *Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*, 8 (2012), pp.29-46, and also my "'Good Government Starts Today": On the Death of the Public, the Triumph of Private Interest, and the Loss of the Good'.

¹¹ See my discussion of the phenomenon of individualization in 'The Demise of Ethics', *Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*, 8 (2012), pp.29-46.

¹² It might be argued, in fact, that it is one of the means by which it is obscured or disguised – see eg. Margaret E. Ormiston and Elaine M. Wong, 'License to Ill: The Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility and CEO Moral Identity on Corporate Social Irresponsibility', *Personnel Psychology* 66 (2013): 861–893, and Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, 'Corporate Social Responsibility: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly', *Critical Sociology* 34 (2008): 51-79. The idea of the triple bottom line fares little better as a way of promoting more ethically attentive or socially responsible business practice – in part because the concept is more rhetorical than practical.

¹³ Even were this true, it would remain irrelevant to the ethical imperative as such. One might argue that this is blurred by the dominance of certain forms of utilitarian thinking (which might themselves be said to undermine any sense of the genuine distinctiveness of ethical practice), but utilitarianism aside, the idea that ethical practice in business can be justified or motivated by its efficacy as a business strategy is both to misunderstand the nature of the ethical and to run the risk of seeming to imply that ethical practice is only justified or motivated when it serves the interests of business (and not justified or motivated otherwise).

¹⁴ For a critique of the language of "resilience" in contemporary discourse, see Keith Jacobs and Jeff Malpas, *The Language of Resilience: Ideas and Action in Contemporary Policy-making*, *Housing, Theory and Society* (2017): 1-16.

¹⁵ See again Paul du Gay's work on the notion of 'office' (in eg 'Is Office a Vocation in "Post-Bureaucratic" Public Management?'), and the loss, within contemporary managerialist forms of public management, of the formalism that is associated with it.

¹⁶ This also means that managerialism can be distinguished, even while it shares some features with, forms of authoritarian bureaucracy. Such bureaucracies aim to exert a very high degree of control over all activities within a society, and not only within the organisational and productive sectors, often employing complex systems of compliance, coercion, and surveillance, and looking to quantitative measures as the means to manage many organisational activities. Such bureaucratized systems share some features in common with managerialism, but the mechanisms by which they function are different (as are the legal-constitutional contexts in which they arise and which also affect those mechanism of operation), and they retain a certain extra-managerial commitment to the maintenance and furtherance of the state apparatus itself that is lacking in contemporary managerialism. The managerialist focus on monetisation and on the mechanism of the market also brings a very different orientation and mode of operation.

¹⁷ See Alexandre Koyre, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957).

¹⁸ For this reason too there is no genuine nesting of space or spaces – space forms a unitary continuum in which there is neither any non-arbitrary divisibility of space and spaces nor any non-arbitrary sense of within and without. Interiority and exteriority, plurality and singularity, come to be attributed to space and spaces only when they are effectively treated topologically and so assimilated to place – such assimilation being both quite widespread and the fact of its occurrence often going unrecognised and unacknowledged.

¹⁹ Maria Dolores De Hevia, Luisa Girelli, and Viola Macchi Cassia. 'Minds without Language Represent Number through Space: Origins of the Mental Number Line', *Frontiers in Psychology* 3 (2012): p.466. *PMC*. Web. 14 June 2016

²⁰ See Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995). As originally formulated, Augé's 'non-places' are transitional places. Yet their character as transitional may actually be a reflection of their more fundamental character as indeed convergent spaces in the sense suggested above.

²¹ One might ask whether contemporary workspaces exhibit some of this convergence, and perhaps they do, though in a slightly unusual way – the very idea of the workspace as a distinctive space is itself starting to dissolve as the workspace comes to be identified with the space established by digital communication and computing devices in which all aspects of personal and work life are brought together. Eggars' *The Circle* (discussed below) itself provides a useful illustration of this tendency.

²² And even though such cryptocurrencies might fluctuate in value, the general tendency they exemplify remains clearly evident.

²³ In general, the character of human life and experience is heavily dependent on the character of the spaces and places in which life and experience is played out – a point I develop at greater length in my *Place and Experience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2nd edn. 2018). For this reason, any attempt to shape or direct human life and experience must operate at the level of space and place – and the way managerialism operates through the control of work spaces is a simple consequence of this basic fact.

²⁴ *The Circle* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013). In 2017 a film adaptation of the novel was released, adapted and directed by James Ponsoldt, and starring Emma Watson and Tom Hanks.

²⁵ Although most earlier dystopian novels typically focus on structures tied to the state or to large scale social structures, Eggars' focus on corporate dystopianism is an increasingly common tendency in contemporary fiction. It might be noted too, that the dystopian is itself an increasingly common theme.

²⁶ For more on the inevitability of failure in any and every managerial or 'governmental' (, but see especially or technological) project, see Jeff Malpas and Gary Wickham: 'Governance and the World: from Joe DiMaggio to Michel Foucault' (with Gary Wickham), *The UTS Review*, 3 (1997), pp.91-108, and 'Governance and Failure: On the Limits of Sociology', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 31 (1995), pp.37-50. The tendency to failure that is also inevitable within technological systems has also been the subject of considerable discussion, but see especially Paul Virilio who argues that "every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress", *Politics of the Very Worst*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1999), p. 89; see also *The Original Accident* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

²⁷ See the discussion of metaphorization in my *Place and Experience*, pp.36-37.

²⁸ The very nature of limit and of bound is itself brought to the fore here, but without being able properly to be addressed. The issue is, however, one that I have discussed elsewhere – see, for instance, 'Putting Space in Place: Philosophical Topography and Relational Geography', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30 (2012): 226-242.