The panopticon, an emblematic concept in management and organization studies: Heaven or hell?

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Abstract

The well-known metaphor of 'panopticon', derived from Bentham's project and popularised by Foucault (1977), has long informed scholarly conversations in management and organization studies (MOS). Herein, we question the power of this emblematic metaphor. Through an in-depth literature review specifying its *form, principle* and *goal*, coupled to an investigation of Bentham's original writings, we identify *two readings* of the panopticon. First, we disentangle the uses of this concept in MOS literature, and highlight a rather uniform and negative interpretation of the panopticon as a mechanism of social control and surveillance (*first reading*). Beyond this dominant interpretation, we contend that the panopticon is a richer concept than MOS literature acknowledges. Going back to Bentham (1995/2010)'s initial project, entailing not only one but plural types of panopticons, we propose a more comprehensive conceptualization of the panopticon (*second reading*), as (1) a rewarding functional dispositive based on freedom and autonomy (*form*); (2) relying on information sharing, transparency and visibility (*principle*); and (3) striving for harmony and efficiency as ultimate ends (*goal*). In doing so, we generate a new way of seeing the panopticon in MOS

research. We also reveal an inherent tension between both readings, interpreted as dystopia and utopia, and show that their combination allows grasping the ambivalence of *panopticism in practice* in ways that can inform further research on liberal management. As a practice of freedom, *panopticism in practice* might indeed turn into an instrument furthering control. To conclude, we highlight some analytical paths to help MOS scholars disentangle such ambivalence.

Keywords: Panopticon; Jeremy Bentham; Michel Foucault; Surveillance; Control; Governmentality; Liberal management; New ways of organizing

INTRODUCTION

The 'panopticon' is a key emblematic concept in management and organization studies (MOS) that has long fuelled scholarly conversations. The panopticon (which etymologically comes from the ancient Greek *opticon* for 'observe' and *pan* for 'all') designates a prison design originally developed in the 18th century by the utilitarian thinker Jeremy Bentham (1995/2010, 1997) in which the observer (the guard) can watch all prisoners without the prisoners being aware of this surveillance. Since its popularization by Michel Foucault (1977), the panopticon has been used as both an artefact and a metaphor of social control and surveillance. The panopticon is generally conceived of, in its *form*, as a supervision dispositive, relying on the *principle* of constant visibility, with the *goal* to control people, materially or symbolically, to produce docile bodies. The Foucauldian interpretation of the panopticon, known as 'panopticism', has largely inspired MOS research on control, nearly becoming a synonym of surveillance (Lyon, 2006; Zuboff, 1988). This concept has become extremely popular particularly to investigate contexts in which work is performed with computers and information technology (IT), which grant reality to the panopticon by supporting the potential for continuous surveillance (Burrell, 1998; Zuboff, 1988). However, some observers highlight the limitations

of the panopticon metaphor in making sense of recent societal and technological evolutions (Bauman & Lyon, 2013; Hafermalz, 2021; Munro, 2000). They note that the evolving premises of human involvement in organizations require a 'post-panoptic' and even an 'anti-panoptic' approach that renews or goes beyond the panopticon's principles (Deleuze, 1992; Haggerty & Ericson, 2000; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte et al., 2014; Martinez, 2011; Munro, 2000).

As the panopticon is increasingly used, but also discussed and debated, praised and contested, it seems advisable to question the nature and use of this metaphor in MOS research, in which it remains an iconic concept. Considering the power of metaphors for making sense of organizations (Weick, 2001), such questioning is particularly critical. Despite its longevity and centrality in MOS literature, and though conversations on the panopticon seem exhaustive (Galic et al., 2016), we open a discussion on the power of the panopticon metaphor in MOS research by asking the following research questions: How has the panopticon metaphor been interpreted in MOS literature, and for what purposes? Is it still a relevant metaphor in MOS research? and To what extent can (or should) the panopticon inform MOS research in ways that go beyond its initial interpretation?

To address these questions, after presenting the classic metaphor of the panopticon, based on Foucault's interpretation of Bentham's prison panopticon, we conduct an in-depth literature review of the mobilization of the panopticon in MOS research. By disentangling the interpretations of this concept, we show that what has been developed is a rather uniform and negative interpretation as a mechanism of social control and surveillance (*first reading*). Then, following the London-based Bentham initiative (Brunon-Ernst, 2013a) and a recent trend in parallel disciplines (law, language studies and information security) that have begun to recognise the larger value of the panopticon, we revisit Bentham's (1995/2010, 1997) writings to understand his original project, which entails four types of panopticons. We build on Bentham's project about the development of a liberal mode of government, further developed

in Foucault's (2008) theorizations on governmentality (Brunon-Erst, 2013; Galic et al., 2016; Tusseau, 2004), to propose a more comprehensive conceptualization of the panopticon. In sharp contrast with the first, common reading of the panopticon, we suggest a *second reading* as (1) a rewarding functional dispositive based on freedom and autonomy (*form*); (2) relying on the principle of information sharing, transparency and visibility (*principle*); and (3) striving for harmony and efficiency as ultimate ends (*goal*).

By doing so, our contributions are threefold. First, we generate a new way of seeing the panopticon and argue that Bentham's conception of the panopticon could represent an effective tool in the management of a whole range of organizations. In particular, we go beyond what we conceive as a wrong interpretation of the panopticon in MOS research (as a dark disciplinary technology of control) by restoring Bentham's conception in ways that can inform future MOS research. Second, beyond a mere critique of this dominant 'negative' interpretation, we show that the combination of both readings, between dystopia and utopia, allows grasping the panopticon's ambivalence and complexity and can be usefully harnessed in MOS research on novel forms of organizing and liberal management. As a practice of freedom (*second reading*), *panopticism in practice* might indeed turn into an instrument furthering control (*first reading*). Third, we highlight some analytical paths to help MOS scholars disentangle such multiplicity and ambivalence and invite them to build on this line of argument to further problematise questions of control and freedom as new forms of work develop.

FROM THE PANOPTICON TO PANOPTICISM

The panopticon, which is one of the most emblematic and powerful metaphors in MOS research, has become particularly famous since Foucault (1977) developed the concept of 'panopticism'. Panopticism is grounded in Bentham's (1995/2010) project relying on the architectural design of a prison, comprising a central tower in a circular building divided into individual cells. Through the prison panopticon, Foucault (1977) illustrated the function of

‘discipline’ as an apparatus of power. In a meticulous analysis of how political power has been structured in Western history, Foucault indeed explored the evolution of ways to govern people and drew the contours of what he conceived of as the ‘disciplinary society’. The panopticon, whose *form*, *principle* and *goal* we describe herein, serves as a metaphor to analyse the ‘disciplinary power’ of modern institutions.

Form: supervision, control and punishment of disciplined objects of power

In its form, panopticism relies on supervision, control and correction and translates a vision of the subject as a passive actor who can be disciplined and moulded. According to Foucault (2002, p. 70), panopticism designates

> a type of power that is applied to individuals in the form of continuous individual supervision, in the form of control, punishment, and compensation, and in the form of correction, that is, the modelling and transforming of individuals in terms of certain norms.

Foucault showed how various institutions (e.g. school, army, hospital, factory) have been progressively invaded with ‘discipline’. In the modern age, societies have indeed moved from ‘sovereign societies’, in which the sovereign was the key decider and holder of power, to ‘disciplinary societies’, in which power is dispersed, ramified and hidden in processes of conformity present in different places and in various institutions of society. The sovereign power has become less visible, with power structures relocated and replaced by different institutions exerting disciplinary power. The resulting ‘disciplinary society’ relies on specific architectural forms, instrumental uses of space and planned configurations, epitomised by the panopticon design. It is implemented as a new form of political power through the ‘confinement’ and ‘partitioning’ of people in dedicated spaces of enclosure. Foucault’s observation of these institutions led him to identify what he calls ‘micropolitics of spaces’, or a specific allocation of people in both space and time and use of functional space (defined as

the ‘art of distributions’, the ‘control of activity’ and the ‘division of time in disciplinary authorities’).

In doing so, Foucault (1977) explains how, in disciplinary societies, individuals have become ‘objects of power’, whose conscience and thought have become the primary objects for punishment, correction, normation and rehabilitation. In disciplinary societies, modernity results from the development of scientific methods of registration, record-keeping, punishment and normation (Galic et al., 2016). These methods, coupled with division and classification practices, enable distinctions between modern subjects and render bodies and minds obedient, docile and useful. Discipline thus produces subjected, practiced and ordered ‘docile’ bodies that become units or objects of information, not subjects in a conversation (Foucault, 1977). Discipline governs behaviours, moulds bodies, and constitutes specific forms of disempowered subjectivity.

Principle: centralised mechanisms of constant visibility

The underlying principle of panopticism is constant visibility, in which ‘panoptic’ refers to ‘seeing everything, everyone, all the time’ (Foucault, 2006, p. 52). The panoptical idea of ‘being watched’ is the prevailing mechanism enabling continuous individual supervision and, consequently, disciplining power. The particularity of the prison architecture is that observers can watch all prisoners without the prisoners being aware of them doing so. The prison panopticon is thus based on the principle of ‘permanent visibility’ of prisoners, whose behaviour becomes constantly observable, thus ensuring the automatic functioning of disciplinary power. Prisoners have no idea whether they are being watched. However, they are aware that they may be watched, encouraging internalization of a disciplinary gaze. The panopticon architecture conveys the sentiment of invisible omniscience and encourages self-discipline (Foucault, 1977). The panopticon thus provides a theory of surveillance that is physical and spatial in nature. Through panoptic architectures and technologies, disciplining

power can be exerted both directly and indirectly through disciplining and self-disciplining of the watched subjects.

More broadly, the panopticon appears as a 'political technology' describing the functioning of a society traversed by diffused disciplinary mechanisms and constant visibility (Foucault, 1975/1976). Panopticism appears as the theorization of a surveillance society, derived from Bentham's (1995/2010) prison project relying on an 'all-seeing inspector'. Foucault analyses how institutions constituting a disciplinary society have increasingly involved centralised mechanisms of watching over subjects that materialise power relations. Thus, the Foucauldian panopticon is a generalizable model that has been adopted by various organizations in which activities require supervision and constant observation. In such institutions, visibility is crucial to the emergence of discipline and the normalization of behaviours (Cowton and Dopson, 2002). Beyond an architectural design, 'panopticism' thus reflects a metaphor for the whole disciplinary society and its pervasive inclination to observe, scrutinise and normalise (Foucault, 1977).

Goal: production of docile bodies to constitute more predictable and plannable societies

The main effect of the panopticon is to induce in the prisoner a conscious and permanent state of visibility that ensures the automatic functioning of power guaranteeing self-discipline. The panopticon makes surveillance permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action. The ultimate goal of the panopticon is to make inmates internalise the mechanism of surveillance (Foucault, 1977) and to teach them appropriate behaviour to maximise the aim of the institution. The goal is to manage and discipline individuals, by modelling and transforming them in terms of certain norms. The disciplinary process indeed occurs through 'normation' (i.e. the production of norms of behaviour) (Munro, 2012). Inmates and, more broadly, all people under surveillance internalise control, obey and adopt morals and values. The panoptic architecture helps the watcher scrutinise behaviours to identify abnormalities, compare

individual performances and induce normation. In particular, a behaviour is considered normal when it conforms to a behavioural norm. By contrast, a behaviour is deemed abnormal when it does not conform (deficient or inferior) to the pre-established norm, which is then considered a standard and an ideal to be achieved. Foucault considers prisons, similar to other disciplining institutions (e.g. psychiatric hospitals), 'heterotopias' of deviation (Bazin & Naccache, 2016) in the sense that people whose behaviour is outside the norm are placed in such institutions. In this disciplinary process, individual bodies are continuously evaluated and measured against the norm. Through the application of these 'disciplinary technologies', individual bodies get disciplined, with the objectives to produce docile and productive bodies and to constitute more predictive and plannable societies (Foucault, 1977).

In the end, Foucault (1977) showed through panopticism how modern institutions have spatially organised power relations to control people, materially or symbolically, to produce docile bodies. Foucault viewed the panopticon as a diagram, projected onto other parts of society to analyse power relations and models of governing (Brunon-Ernst, 2013a, 2013b). The Foucauldian interpretation of the panopticon has thus become resonant and evocative (Galic et al., 2016), especially in MOS research (Bloomfield & Coombs, 1992; Bloomfield et al., 1997; Knights & Murray, 1994; Knights et al., 1997; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998). Foucault (1977) indeed explores ways to govern, manage and compare people, such that the panopticon has quickly appeared as a concept with a strong heuristic slant in the field of MOS research (Burrell, 1998; Hatchuel et al., 2005). To analyse the power of the panopticon metaphor in MOS research, we conducted an in-depth literature review with the aim to disentangle its main interpretations.

PROCESS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

It is not possible to do justice to the richness of MOS research inspired by Foucault's philosophy on disciplinary society (Ball, 2005; Ball et al., 2012; Bloomfield & Coombs, 1992;

Bloomfield et al., 1997; Burrell, 1998; Hatchuel et al., 2005; Knights & Murray, 1994; Knights et al., 1997; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998). Instead, our goal in this literature review is to more specifically analyse the uses of the 'panopticon' concept. To review how MOS scholars have operationalised it, first we performed a systematic literature review (Engelmann et al., 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021; Okoli, 2015; Tranfield et al., 2003) by using the most well-known databases in business and management (i.e. Business Source Complete, SCOPUS, and Web of Science). We queried the words 'panopticon', 'panoptic', 'panopticism', and 'panoptism' and searched across text, titles, abstracts and keywords of articles in double-blind peer-reviewed journals in the MOS field. Before elaborating on the content, we applied formal criteria for exclusion (language other than English and proceedings, working papers, announcements, dissertations, books, and book chapters) and found 1068 articles.

In a second step, after reviewing the names of the journals and article titles, abstracts, and keywords, we excluded articles in which the panopticon was not at the core of the study or was used superficially. The sample of the remaining articles was manually refined. We analysed the full texts of these articles and found that many were from other subject areas (e.g. computing, information security, jurisdiction and legal compliance, marketing business models), leading to their exclusion. We cross-checked our searches against the different databases to avoid redundant entries. After merging duplicates, we decided to justify the quality and relevance of our sample by keeping only the articles published in academic journals ranked in the ABS list (2, 3, 4 and 4*), leading to 72 articles (included in the references list with an asterisk symbol*).

We analysed the content of the selected articles (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021) by means of in-vivo coding (Saldana, 2009) (Table 1), relying on inductive reasoning. We identified two main ***categories*** of uses of the panopticon: those that refer to the 'panopticon' as a mechanism of surveillance and control; and those that refer to 'post-panopticon' or 'post-panopticism' as a

way to criticize or go beyond this concept. In each category, we identified two main ***dimensions***, illustrated by various ***descriptive themes***. In the first category ('panopticon'), a large part of studies interpreted the panopticon as a physical artefact of control, while others interpreted it as a symbolic metaphor of control in organizations and societies. In the second category ('post-panopticon' and 'post-panopticism'), we distinguished limitations addressed to the panopticon concept and calls for renewal (i.e. various ways to go beyond or extend the panopticon metaphor) (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Synthesis of Nvivo thematic coding of selected articles relying on inductive reasoning

Main categories	Dimensions	Descriptive themes (codes)
Panopticon *Mechanism of surveillance and social control*	***Artefact of surveillance:*** *Interpretation of the panopticon as a physical artefact of surveillance*	***Form: supervision and control of self-disciplined subjects*** - Disciplinary practices at work in the factory and modern organizations - Conceptualization of the modern organization as a panopticon - Ostensible forms of discipline - Spatial management: spatial and architectural aspects of control; architecture of surveillance, specific distribution of individuals in space and time; spatial enclosures; 'partitioning'; 'functional sites'; 'classification'; 'ranking' of individuals - Material aspects of control, materialization of power relations ***Principle: constant visibility*** - Continuous individual supervision - Application of the principle of constant visibility; constant visual contact - Hierarchical observation at work, direct supervision ***Goal: production of docile bodies*** - Classification and ranking of individual bodies - Normation of behaviours - Invisible omniscience and internalization of control - Control of the workforce through the production of docile bodies, (self-)discipline of behaviours
	Metaphor of control: *Interpretation of the panopticon as a symbolic metaphor of control in organizations and societies*	***Immaterial and symbolic forms of control*** - Opaque forms of control ***Control enabled by managerial innovations*** - 'Horizontal' forms of control (teamwork and peer surveillance) - Control in just-in-time manufacturing and total quality control regimes - Disciplinary power of discursive practices ***Accounting systems of control*** - Constitution of virtual or idealised spaces of control - Management control systems as new 'digital enclosures' - New analytical spaces for control ***IT-enabled forms of control*** - Surveillance society - Electronic control, long-term IT-based control (recording and analysis of data), IT-based panoptic gaze - 'Panopticon without walls'; abstract, symbolic spaces of organizational control - IT impact on power–knowledge relations - Control at distance; remote forms of surveillance via modern IT - Virtual aspects of surveillance: 'Information panopticon'; 'electronic eye' or 'carceral computer'

Post-panopticon & Post-panopticism *Critiques of panopticon/panopticism and invitations to go beyond this metaphor*	***Limitations:*** *Identification of various limitations of the panopticon*	***Form (criticisms of the panopticon as a pure dispositive of supervision, control and punishment of disciplined subjects)*** - Criticisms of panopticon's ontological underpinnings, privacy of liberty, and subject-less perspective - Criticisms of the disciplinary practice negatives - Criticisms of the limited spatio-temporal frame of the prison-panopticon - Criticisms of Foucault's vision of agent's freedom, failure of the Foucauldian lack of agency ***Principle (critique of the panopticon's principle of constant visibility)*** - Unsuitability of the panopticon for making sense of recent evolutions of control (transition to liquid modernity, a network society, and new forms of control and technology) - Critique of the monolithic and exaggerated and totalizing vision of IT-based control - Recognition of new circuits of power, IT-based networks, absence of enclosure and visual surveillance, disappearance of time–space constraints - Control of 'data doubles' (more than physical individuals), data bodies - 'Qualitative and quantitative turn' in the conceptualization of surveillance ***Goal (critique of the panopticon's goal of production of docile bodies)*** - Changes in the goal of surveillance: post-panopticism (surveillance as a daily routine in individuals' lives) - Post-panopticon: a 'cultural tool' internalised by individuals - Monitoring of the behaviors of the governor by governed people, 'sousveillance' - Modulation principle
	Calls for a renewal: *Specification of various ways to go beyond/extend the panopticon metaphor (in line with abovementioned limitations)*	***Renewal of the classic, panoptical conceptualization of control*** - Move to 'rhizomatic' model of control, 'assemblages of surveillance', 'surveillant assemblage' - Distant, mobile and free-floating forms of control - New, distributed forms of watching over people, implying increasing distance to the watched ***Extension/adaptation of panoptic-based control*** - Sophistication of control mechanisms - Contemporary forms of surveillance, as emergent, malleable, fluid, unstable, deterritorialised - Datafication and surveillance capitalism - 'Synopticon'; 'omniopticon'; 'oligopticon'; 'heautopticon' ***Challenges to the dynamics of classic panoptical surveillance, new attributes of control*** - Paradoxical forms of control, combining more autonomy and more control - 'Control societies' escaping the panopticon logic - Anti-panoptic features: enjoyment associated and pleasure associated with surveillance - Experience of watching/being watched as a pleasant entertainment activity playing a role in identity formation - Participatory surveillance and 'panopticommodity', Chosen surveillance, User-centric approach of surveillance

Then, to enrich our analysis, we combined our literature review with an investigation of Bentham's (1995/2010, 1997) original writings on the panopticon. In line with an emerging trend in parallel disciplines (e.g. law, language studies, information security) that recognise the larger value of the panopticon (Brunon-Erst, 2013; Galic et al., 2016; Tusseau, 2004), we revisited Bentham's project of a democratic government and its elaboration in Foucault's (2008) theorizations on governmentality. In this end, this investigation, combined to our in-depth literature review, leads us to specify two main readings of the panopticon: on the one hand, we identify a dominant *first reading*, inspired by Foucault's (1977) interpretation of the Benthamian prison design, which conceptualizes the panopticon as a dispositive of surveillance and control, from which some studies wish to depart. On the other hand, we suggest a *second reading* of the panopticon, relying on Bentham's initial project, which implies an alternative and richer conceptualization of the panopticon that could inform further MOS research.

FIRST READING OF THE PANOPTICON: A MECHANISM OF SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL

Our literature review suggests a *first reading* of the panopticon, in which two main directions are specified: first, MOS studies interpret the panopticon as an artefact and a metaphor of control and surveillance; second, studies refer to the panopticon to better dispose of it, contesting its power and calling for a renewal of the metaphor.

The panopticon as an artefact and metaphor of control

The panopticon constitutes a pillar of MOS research that deals with control and surveillance, and it is clearly the most widely used metaphor for these topical issues (Lyon, 2001; Zuboff, 2015, 2019). It is difficult to find a MOS study on control and surveillance that does not rely on the concept of the panopticon and its broader principle, panopticism. The three main interrelated dimensions of panopticism—that is, its *form* (supervision and control of self-disciplined subjects), *principle* (constant visibility) and *goal* (production of docile bodies)—are

extremely powerful in making sense of control in modern organizations, thus explaining why this concept has become inspiring for MOS research.

First, our thematic coding indicates that the panopticon is conceptualised as a tool to understand the material, spatial and architectural aspects of control in modern organizations, especially in critical management studies (Barratt, 2004; Jermier, 1998). Many MOS studies epitomise Foucauldian panopticism, highlighting how disciplinary power in the form of continuous individual supervision and spatial management, as well as the principle of visibility, can be harnessed to understand current forms of control (Dale, 2005). MOS research has largely used the Foucauldian panopticon to explore the organised space and disciplining practices of the early factories that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century and uncovered their capacity to produce 'docile bodies'. The panopticon primarily serves here as a materialization of power relations (Taylor & Spicer, 2007): it is interpreted as the perfect artefact to describe the disciplinary practices at work in the factory and modern organizations, which rely on the principle of constant visibility, coupled with a specific distribution of individuals in space and time (Dale, 2005), that allows supervisors (e.g. managers) to exert extensive control over the workforce. Factories and companies are described as consisting of specific 'enclosures' (i.e. specific and circumscribed defined spaces for labour), 'partitioning' (relying on the specific allocation of individuals to easily locate them and control their movements and communications), and 'functional sites' (individuals are grouped into similar operations for better comparison) (Dale, 2005). Micropolitics of space favour the 'classification' and 'ranking' of individual bodies, thus enforcing a 'normation' of behaviours. Managers strategically use the panoptic organization of space design to control workers and discipline their bodies (Halford, 2004). Such spatial arrangements convey a sentiment of invisible omniscience and lead to better control of the workforce through a discipline of behaviours (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2013). Thus, the panopticon helps conceptualise how control and surveillance

are embedded in the 'social materiality' of organizations (Dale, 2005) and the embodied dimensions of the organizing process. Control processes are increasingly 'built into' the organization's physical environment and incorporated into its spatial arrangements, with the material technologies 'constructed and negotiated in ongoing social processes' (Delbridge & Sallaz, 2015, p. 1453). As such, architectures, space and material artefacts are all being conceived as means to exert panoptic control over people and things (Dale, 2005; Dale & Burrell, 2008), thus raising crucial issues pertaining to human relations with space, time and materiality (Brocklehurst, 2001; Dale, 2005; Hardy & Thomas, 2015).

Second, the panopticon is used as a metaphor to grasp more immaterial and symbolic forms of control, as well as virtual aspects of surveillance and discipline, in line with Foucault's (1977) analysis of panopticism as a broader metaphor to discuss societal evolutions. Although Foucault initially explored microphysics of power in physically built architectures, his conceptualization of the panopticon also offers a means to grasp more 'open' processes of control and the combined effects of material, social and ideological controls (Dale, 2005). While the 'spaces' to which individuals are assigned have long constituted 'material domains erected for the purpose' (Cousins & Hussain, 1984), such spaces can also be abstract, symbolic, virtual or idealised (Cowton & Dopson, 2002; Miller & O'Leary, 1987). The concept of panopticism enables consideration of how the principle of visibility becomes incorporated in specific work practices and managerial innovations (Bardon & Josserand, 2018), discursive practices and power–knowledge relations at work (Townley, 1993, 1997). For example, organizational discipline operates through hierarchical observation and normalization (Townley, 1993). Foucauldian panopticism has also been incorporated into more 'horizontal' forms of control (Deetz, 2003), such as teamwork and peer surveillance (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992). Other research investigates the panoptic mode of control developed in the context of just-in-time manufacturing and total quality control regimes (McKinley & Starkey, 1998;

Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992). In the same vein, a large body of management and accounting research draws on Foucauldian 'panopticism' to identify management control systems as new 'digital enclosures' that constitute analytical spaces for control (Carmona & Gutiérrez, 2005; Covaleski et al., 1998; Hopper & Macintosh, 1998; Hoskin & Macve, 1986; Macintosh, 2002; Miller & O'Leary, 1987).

'Panopticism' also helps understand immaterial, virtual and remote forms of control that emerge through the use of digital IT (Dandeker, 1990; Lyon, 1994, 2003; Zuboff, 1988) enabling visibility and discipline at a distance and introducing what Webster (2002, p. 222) calls 'a panopticon without walls'. The 'panoptic technology' traditionally found in disciplinary functions indeed arises in the expanding incarnation of digital technologies, which are materially instantiated in tangible objects but function as means of intangible control (Delbridge & Sallaz, 2015). The panopticon notably epitomises the emergence of surveillance in society (Lyon, 2001, 2003; Zuboff, 1988) and resonates particularly well with control enabled by CCTV cameras: the observer cannot be seen, and there is a constant mediated gaze that might see everything (Galic et al., 2016). The omnipresence of cameras enforces the principles of 'normation' that individual citizens, who appear as objects of observation and information, can be (self-)disciplined and moulded to behave according to the norm.

In particular, MOS research shows how the enactment of modern IT in organizations introduces a 'panoptic gaze' over individual employees (Sia et al., 2002), as shown by the emergence of a so-called 'information panopticon' (Zuboff, 1988), 'electronic eye' or 'carceral computer' (Dandeker, 1990; Lyon, 1988, 2003; Willcocks, 2006) in which IT supports the potential for continuous surveillance. Computer technology is enacted as a real 'information panopticon' (Zuboff, 1988) by making work more visible, in that workers cannot tell whether or when they are being watched, while their manager can watch and check their work continuously. Technologies even make work more visible in the long run by recording statistics

about the work of employees and by their enhanced capacity to invisibly monitor personal details. Thus, IT and the virtual world it creates are often conceptualised as panoptic tools of managerial domination and exploitation. Garson (1988), for example, compares the office of the future, transformed by the use of computers, to an 'electronic sweatshop'. Similarly, IT appears as an extension of the Foucauldian panoptic discipline as it grants managers new powers of surveillance. The concepts of 'electronic panopticon' (Bain & Taylor, 2000) and 'electronic eye' thus refer to the imperceptible deployment of panoptic structures invisibly in society (Lyon, 1994; Poster, 1990). Research has drawn parallels between the panopticon metaphor and the intensification of surveillance through the application of a wide range of IT, such as surveillance technologies (Lyon, 1993, 1994), information and computer databases (Poster, 1990), and enterprise systems (Sia et al., 2002). People continuously produce surveillance data through their daily IT uses, leading to the emergence of a 'super-panopticon' (Poster, 1990) or 'hyper-panopticon' (Fraser, 1985). Even when computer-based technologies are not designed primarily for surveillance, they may increase the potential for panoptic forms of control (Brivot & Gendron, 2011) and play powerful roles in classifying and organizing reality (Willcocks, 2006). MOS literature thus develops a panoptic reading of the emergence of surveillance through digital means, which, because of their inherent capacities, create novel spaces of control.

In the end, our literature review shows the extent to which materialised, symbolic and virtual forms of surveillance can be grasped through the panopticon metaphor, which appears as the 'archetype' of control in the digital era (Willcocks, 2006). MOS research has used Foucault's (1977) panopticism to understand the interaction of the material, social, virtual, cognitive and symbolic with the construction of control systems, stemming from Bentham's (1791, 1995/2010) original prison architectural form. The strength of Foucauldian panopticism is that it allows for 'an analysis of the combined effects of material and social controls' (Dale,

2005, p. 663) and their link to materiality and organizational space. The latter is conceived not only as material space but also as idealised, symbolic, virtual and abstract spaces, oscillating between ostensible forms of discipline and more opaque forms of control.

From critiques of the panopticon to post-panopticism

Another strand of MOS research explores the panopticon to criticise its main dimensions (*form*, *principle* and *goal*), with the objective to depart from it and contest its heuristic power. First, the panopticon metaphor, often considered the epitome of disciplinary society at its worst (Brunon-Ernst, 2013a), has led to radical criticism related to its *form* (as a pure dispositive of supervision, control and punishment of disciplined subjects). Some scholars have contested its ontological underpinnings (Caldwell, 2007; Cowtown & Dopson, 2002; Giddens, 1989; Newton, 1998; Reed, 2000), notably the restricted vision of the freedom of the agent as an object of surveillance, and the limited spatio-temporal frame of the prison-panopticon: as an austere institution, the latter cannot be representative of contemporary organizations (Giddens, 1986, 1989; Reed 1997, 2000). Such criticisms have been particularly salient in MOS research theorizing subjectivity in organizations, which emphasises the failure of the Foucauldian lack of agency (Newton, 1998) and disciplinary practice negatives embedded in the panopticon (see McKinlay & Starkey, 1998).

Second, MOS research has noted the unsuitability of the panopticon for making sense of recent evolutions of control in contexts in which the *principle* of constant visibility is altered. Studies indicate that the panopticon, as a surveillance dispositive based on visibility, has become less relevant with the transitions to liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000), a network society (Munro, 2000), and new forms of control and technology (Best & Kellner, 2001). They criticise the overused metaphor of the Foucauldian panopticon to represent the control potential of modern IT, which, according to them, has led to a monolithic and totalizing vision of control (Cowton & Dopson, 2002). Munro (2000) emphasises the power of IT-based networks, which

no longer rely on visual surveillance or enclosure but on real time and connecting nodes creating circuits of power. Some studies show the existence of other forms of surveillance, including electronic layers of surveillance replacing internalization of control via one-directional top-down architectures of visibility, for which the panoptical model cannot account (Galic et al., 2016, p. 19). As Deleuze (1995, p. 174) explains, IT-based control societies 'no longer operate by physically confining people but through continuous control and instant communication, enabled by developments in material technologies'. This conception of control societies has found a strong parallel in MOS research, which has called for a renewal of the classic, panoptical conceptualization of control. Some studies note the move to a 'rhizomatic' model (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) based on 'assemblages of surveillance' (Bogard, 2006; Brivot & Gendron, 2011; Haggerty & Ericson, 2000), as well as global, distant, mobile and free-floating forms of control (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte et al., 2014; Martinez, 2011). Haggerty and Ericson's (2000) 'surveillant assemblage', based on specific combinations of humans and technology, exerts a novel form of surveillance. From this view, the Foucauldian panopticon is no longer an appropriate metaphor for grasping contemporary surveillance, which has become emergent, malleable, fluid, unstable, deterritorialised and without discernible boundaries, in contrast with the enclosed, relatively stable and physically contained discipline enabling permanent visibility. Similarly, Martinez (2011) notes that modern organizations exercise control through simultaneous and overlapping networks of digitalised information that go beyond their boundaries. MOS research thus emphasises that IT has enhanced the sophistication of control mechanisms while challenging the dynamics of classic panoptic surveillance. These evolutions reveal a 'qualitative and quantitative turn' in the conceptualization of surveillance, calling for a renewal of the panopticon (Galic et al., 2016). Increasingly, the focus of visibility and watching is no longer on individuals but on their 'data doubles' (Deleuze, 1992) through the traces they leave behind, which are then reassembled to achieve specific purposes. The

'datafication' of a networked society has raised a new, digitalised architecture of surveillance and triggered a shift in power structures, which have recently been christened 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2015, 2019).

Third, research suggests a broader change in the *goal* of control and surveillance. Since 9/11, the development of global risks and terrorism has vastly increased the size of the surveillance industry in content and appreciation by people (Bigo, 2006; Van der Ploeg, 2003). Such threats have led to the proliferation of control devices and surveillance practices at the level of society, often in conjunction with other institutions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Haggerty, 2006), such as commercial parties and service providers (Zuboff, 2015, 2019). As a result, some research highlights the move to 'post-panopticism', suggesting that surveillance itself has become a daily routine in individuals' lives with the aim to protect and care for them (Lyon, 2006). This post-panopticon era (Boyne, 2000) signals a shift from the Foucauldian panopticon by arguing that surveillance is no longer a power technique but rather a 'cultural tool' internalised by individuals. New forms of post-panoptic surveillance have emerged, with a variety of goals, such as the 'synopticon' (Eckersley et al., 2014), in which the governed monitors the behaviour of the governor (Mathiesen, 1997), also labelled 'sousveillance' (Mann et al., 2003; Sewell & Barker, 2006); the 'omniopticon' (Timan et al., 2017), which depicts the combination of panoptic and synoptic practices; the 'oligopticon' (Latour, 2005), in which the surveying gaze is applied to few things but from a detailed perspective; or, more recently, the 'heautopticon' (De Moya & Pallud, 2020), in which micro-surveillance practices of oneself contribute to individuals' simultaneous empowerment and disempowerment. Post-panopticism marks a shift in the *goal* of surveillance, in that control societies (Deleuze, 1992), characterised by the principle of 'modulation', no longer aim to make people's bodies docile (as in disciplinary societies) but to condition and mould them, so that the data they create ('data bodies') become more important than their real bodies. Control societies are characterised by a

shift in power towards controlling ‘access’ (e.g. airports and borders, conceived of as ‘access points’). These Deleuzian notions mark a clear post-Foucauldian direction, as they direct the gaze of surveillance not towards individuals as complete beings but towards individuals as entities with many roles represented in many different places (Galic et al., 2016).

In this context, research even highlights increasing *anti-panoptic features* in new forms of surveillance, which exacerbate the challenging questions of power, knowledge and morality (Bauman & Lyon, 2013), sometimes with paradoxical consequences. Observers note that recent forms of surveillance find increasing legitimacy among ‘watched’ people and even appear as an enjoyable experience. The wide use of social media shows that both watching and exposing oneself can be experienced as a pleasant entertainment activity at times or even play a role in identity formation (Galic et al., 2016). People increasingly and paradoxically provide data entries (seemingly) happily and voluntarily on social media, thus inverting the classic panoptical roles of the watcher and the watched and leading to more ‘participatory surveillance’, also called ‘panopticommodity’ (Lyon, 2006). These practices, which imply that visibility is now chosen, make power relations in society more diffuse (Lyon, 2006) through social media that appear as new arenas of surveillance. They renew the classic ‘watching and being watched’ principle of ‘panopticism’ (Lyon, 2007) towards a more participative role of the subject, or user-centric approach of surveillance (Whitaker, 1999).

Synthesis: The panopticon, always the same interpretation as a dispositive of control

Whether it praises the panopticon metaphor or contests its power, MOS research regards the panopticon as an emblematic reference, a gauge to make sense of surveillance practices, or a starting point to develop new insights. The panopticon has crossed MOS history as a monumental, powerful and inspiring dispositive to grasp control. Despite the plethora of MOS articles referring to the panopticon, strikingly the majority have developed the same

interpretation of the metaphor as the foundation of control and surveillance in organizations and societies through ‘disciplinary power’ and a ‘surveying gaze’.

Our literature review shows that the panopticon and its broader philosophy—panopticism—constitute the primary perspective with which to conceptualise social control, surveillance and their evolution in modern societies. MOS research may focus on different aspects of the panopticon, such as a panoptic architectural design; the illusion of constant (but invisible) surveillance; the depersonalization of power; the perception by the watched individual of an all-seeing, omniscient and omnipotent watcher, thereby creating strong (self-)discipline; and the effects of normation and individualization on behaviours. By contrast, MOS research may attempt to break away from the well-known metaphor, highlighting the evolution of more distributed and networked forms of surveillance, based on various assemblages geared towards moulding and reforming the minds of individuals to modify their behaviours and make them more predictable. Despite such variations, however, the premise of both panoptic and post-panoptic studies is based on Foucauldian theorizing to analyse how modern organizations have organised power relations to control people, materially or symbolically, and produce docile bodies. With few exceptions (in the field of information security and piracy, see Galic et al., 2016; in law and political sciences, see Tusseau, 2004), the same old song has been sung again and again, interpreting and constituting the panopticon as the (almost) perfect surveillance artefact and ultimate metaphor of control in modern organizations.

This *first reading* of the panopticon, popularised by Foucault (1977), has contributed to extend the traditional vision of its founding father, Bentham, often presented and stigmatised as the promoter of a mercantile and authoritarian philosophy. Bentham’s doctrine is often criticised for reflecting a pathological obsession with absolute social control that neglects the integrity, freedom and agency of the human person (Tusseau, 2004). According to Foucault (1977), the panoptic principle directly acts on the minds of people, through self-discipline and

normation. Such a reading of the panopticon, as a potential confining and oppressive mechanism of power, explains why this concept has rapidly led to the emergence of a spectre of social control and criticisms related to possible 'utilitarianization' of individuals in organizations (in line with the Benthamian 'productivist dimension' of the utility principle). In this way, the dystopia of enclosed institutions and confinement, by transposing the principles of the prison universe to the level of political society, has quickly appeared to social critics as the forerunner of a potential totalitarian state. Beyond this relatively uniform, unanimous, negative interpretation of the panopticon, however, we contend that a *second reading*, translating a more comprehensive view that is more faithful to its inception in Bentham's thought (Brunon-Ernst, 2013a, 2013b), could inform future MOS research.

SECOND READING OF THE PANOPTICON: TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION

Revisiting Bentham's panopticon project

We develop another interpretation, which we label a *second reading* of the panopticon stemming from Bentham's philosophy. The 'Panopticon Writings' is a series of letters written in 1786 and two 'postscripts' written in 1790 and 1791 (Tusseau, 2004), in which Bentham develops a programme on 'Democracy and Information'[1]. The panopticon is, for Bentham (1995/2010), a 'political project'; it is both a carceral and a constitutional agencement, whose initial theorization must be put in the context of England at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. The panopticon design imagined by Bentham (1995/2010), in the frame of his broader liberal political project, aimed to solve the growing social and economic problems encountered by England in the 18th century (Tusseau, 2004, p.23) (e.g. the rapid increase in the number of convicts and indigents), whose implications for society went beyond the state's capabilities

[1] 'Jeremy Bentham's Political Panoptism'.

(Schofield, 2009). Bentham (1995/2010)'s project should be considered in the broader intellectual climate in which he operated, marked by important developments in European intellectual history. As a precursor of liberalism, Bentham expressed himself in favour of freedom (individual freedom, freedom of expression, economic freedom). His belief that the panopticon could operate on the conscience of the individual is predicated on a recognition of the importance of human agency and autonomy developed in Renaissance Humanism and, later, the Enlightenment. As a reformist and utilitarian economist, Bentham (1995/2010) identified the efficient causes of human action (i.e. the search for pleasure and the escape from pain) and specified a criterion with which to evaluate the results of human actions (i.e. the propensity to increase happiness) (Tusseau, 2004). Bentham's utilitarian philosophy aimed to achieve the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. The principle of 'utility' is thus at the heart of Bentham (1991)'s reformism and project of a 'Constitutional Code', in which he developed the basis of a 'utilitarian democracy'.

It is in this intellectual and political context, which emphasises individual freedom and the relationship between surveillance and the autonomous human subject, that the panopticon concept must be understood. The panopticon is embedded in a broader political perspective in which the constitutional and carceral parts (as both intellectual creations and political fights) are constitutive of each other. To that end, Bentham (1995/2010) conceived of the panopticon, or 'panoptical paradigm' (Brunon-Erst, 2013), as a general dispositive that would guide the behaviour of people in a variety of institutions by combining a principle of economy and a principle of security. The panopticon is for Bentham (1995/2010, 1997) a functional device, a 'governing apparatus' applicable to a variety of institutions, from prisons, asylums, and hospitals to working houses and schools.

In that regard, scholars in parallel disciplines (e.g. law, language studies) have developed a more comprehensive analysis of Bentham's panopticon, shedding light on its

complexities beyond the prison archetype (Brunon-Ernst, 2013a, 2013b; Galic et al., 2016; Semple, 1987; Tusseau, 2004, 2013). Beyond its uniform interpretation, Bentham (1995/2010) imagined not one panopticon, but four types of panopticons (Brunon-Erst, 2013b; Galic et al., 2016; Tusseau, 2004) that present insightful amendments to the classic panopticon metaphor. Along with the well-known 'prison panopticon', Bentham (1995/2010) distinguishes the 'pauper panopticon' (or 'industry house', designed for the housing of indigents but also for reformation and work); the 'chrestomatic panopticon' (a panopticon-shaped day school where one inspecting master could supervise approximately 600 pupils per room without being seen); and the 'constitutional panopticon' (in which it is no longer the few watching the many but the many watching the few, as citizens can watch their governors). While the pauper panopticon is the most similar to the prison panopticon, the chrestomatic and constitutional panopticons have fewer disciplinary features and even rely on anti-disciplinary features (Galic et al., 2016). For example, in their in-depth analysis of Bentham's panopticons, Galic et al. (2016) identify that, for the last two types of panopticons, the principle of constant visibility is considerably weaker or simply does not apply. In the chrestomatic panopticon, children were observed only while in school, and in the constitutional panopticon, the governors were observed only when performing their public duties. Another major difference from the prison panopticon is that the paupers, pupils or citizens entering their respective panopticon did so voluntarily and were not forced to do so. In the pauper panopticon, most indigents could leave the 'industry house' when they wanted, while in the chrestomatic panopticon, children were not assigned to a fixed class structure. Furthermore, in the constitutional panopticon, the gaze is even reversed to oversee the rules and scrutinise the governors. The panoptic surveillance principle ('watch and being watched') is thereby reversed, thus leading to the idea of a 'reversed' or 'inverted' panopticon (Leroy, 2013; Semple, 1987). In addition, surveillance is no longer exerted solely through architectural design but through the dissemination of information. Inspection is no longer

central, as in the prison panopticon, but dispersed. Finally, the inherent 'act of watching is no longer described in sinister terms such as central inspection, but in positive ones such as transparency and publicity' (Galic et al., 2016, p. 7), thus disqualifying the panopticon as a uniquely disciplinary machine.

These three less known types provide amended and enriched versions of the panopticon and reflect its adaptation to various organizational or societal contexts. Bentham (1995/2010) imagined the panopticon as an ideal instrument of government, a universal dispositive intended to ensure the correct 'management' or 'government' of the people (Galic et al., 2016; Tusseau, 2004), according to his liberal project for society (e.g. the 'chrestomatic' and 'constitutional' panopticons). He defined the panopticon as a normative model in the management of a whole range of institutions (Schofield, 2009), which he amended as his thoughts on 'good government' developed. The panopticon should thus be taken first as a political ideal, a 'programme' (Foucault, 1980, p. 847), a 'template' (Galic et al., 2016), or a 'paradigm' (Brunon-Erst, 2013a) that aims to adapt to the specific circumstances of institutions.

The 'panopticon paradigm' (Brunon-Ernst, 2013a) is reversible and can actually be adapted to and used in a variety of social contexts and for different purposes (Galic et al., 2016), far from the generally truncated and uniform interpretation that has been popularised throughout history, particularly in MOS research. Surprisingly, despite the abundance of research referring to the panopticon, MOS scholars have not appropriated this more comprehensive and faithful view to Bentham's thought. As our literature review attests, in general panoptic-based MOS research does not go back to its very origins and does not embed it into Bentham's broad conception of the panopticon project, leading to a somewhat distorted interpretation of Bentham (1995/2010)'s prison design, which represents only one type of panopticon in a larger paradigm (Brunon-Erst, 2013a, 2013b).

A richer interpretation of the panopticon

From a re-reading of Bentham (1995/2010)'s philosophy, we suggest amending the classic dimensions (*form*, *principle* and *goal*) of the panopticon and provide a more comprehensive view of it. Table 2 details and compares the two readings of the panopticon.

Form: a rewarding functional dispositive based on freedom

Far from the spectre of totalitarian discipline, the panopticon paradigm, in its *form*, relies on reward, not repression. While the traditional interpretation involves punishment, correction and normation, Bentham (1995/2010)'s panopticon is a functional dispositive that takes the form of benefit, advantage and recompense, guaranteeing a certain security and the subsistence of individuals (Tusseau, 2004, p.26). Punishment is an evil in itself, allowed only if it prevents an even greater evil (Bentham 1970, p.158; Brunon-Ernst, 2013b). Far from the notion of imprisonment, for Bentham (1995/2010) the panopticon should be a dispositive that is able to free human beings or at least encourage them to free themselves. Counterintuitively, the panopticon is a 'practice of freedom', making people more autonomous and responsible. In line with the important recognition of human agency in European intellectual history, Bentham's panopticon is inseparable from the desire to restore in individuals a sense of freedom and autonomy. Thus, while in the *first reading* of the panopticon, discipline produced passive, subjected and practiced 'docile' bodies, the *second reading* translates a renewed conception of human agency, in which individuals are deemed active subjects, made responsible and empowered. Bentham (1995/2010)'s panopticon paradigm indeed aims to restore in individuals a sense of dignity (Dube 1991, p.316), as industrious and honest human beings capable of self-control and naturally striving and working to find their place in society (Tusseau, 2004, p.25). Panopticism ensures that everyone, at their own level, is an agent of promoting their own security and happiness. The democracy envisioned by Bentham (1823) (similar to the prison), while nourishing itself on a certain science of behaviour, intends, if not to reform human beings,

at least to rely on their intelligence to educate and free them (Tusseau, 2004). Bentham (1990, p.25) ultimately dreamed of a universal democracy based on the panopticon paradigm, in which every citizen, regardless of gender or race—which was visionary for that period—should be respected as a full member of the 'Public Opinion Tribunal' and be made a censor of those who hold power (Tusseau, 2004, p.12).

Principle: information, transparency and visibility

While the *first reading* of the panopticon suggests centralised mechanisms of constant visibility as a prevailing principle, the panopticon paradigm, in Bentham (1823)'s initial project, relies on the *principle* of information sharing, transparency and visibility ('all-seeing') intended to be universalised in diverse institutions, thus leading to the metaphorical universalization of panopticism (Tusseau, 2004). The panopticon paradigm promotes an ideal transparency of power and an imperative of information, which are found, to different degrees, in the four panopticons. For example, Bentham (1990) argues that means of communication and information should play a key role in delivering information and ensuring transparency, such that citizens themselves would benefit from 'power–knowledge' relationships. In the 18th century, Bentham (1990) imagined a vast system of information carriers that could guarantee the omniscience of both the governors and the governed, such as the newspaper (which can diffuse information through multiple copies) or the electoral system (to allow everyone to express what maximises their utility). Transparency is the essential remedy of misrule, the only effective instrument at any level, and the basis for democracy. Withholding information or lying is thus the most serious crime, as it may compromise the achievement of his liberal project and democracy (Bentham, 1991).

The panopticon paradigm therefore suggests reversible, double-information dynamics with top-down and bottom-up logic: on the one hand, data on a population need to be collected to ensure utility; on the other hand, safeguards against potential abuses of power and misrules

are based on the publicity or transparency of political actions (Tusseau, 2004). Thus, a great variety of information must be collected and statistics must be compiled and interpreted to help the government deal with any eventuality (e.g. natural disasters, epidemics, famines), but the activity of governors should itself be the subject of popular surveillance, so that the governed can control the governors. The idea of transparency of information and communication makes it possible to link the different aspects of Bentham (1990, 1995/2010)'s oeuvre that are intended to put into practice the principle of utility and the willingness to reform society for the general interest.

The ideal of transparency implies that the need for the inspector, the watching itself, would eventually be exhausted. Contrary to Foucault's (1977) early view, Bentham's (1995/2010) idea was not to create a complete controlled society, where nothing would escape the gaze of the omniscient ruler (Brunon-Ernst, 2013b). While the *first reading* of the panopticon suggests the need for continuous individual supervision and constant watching, the *second reading* implies that truly continuous and all-seeing inspection would, in the end, not be desired at all (Brunon-Ernst, 2013b).

Goal: harmony and efficiency as ultimate ends

Panopticism has long been considered a type of power intended to produce docile bodies and create more controllable, predictable and plannable societies. By contrast, Bentham's vision is not to create a society of control and supervision, but to achieve an ideal of harmony and efficiency, inscribed in his political reformist program, which aims to develop 'utilitarian democracy' (Tusseau, 2004, p.4). The objective of the panopticon, as a normative model, is to create autonomous individuals who coordinate harmoniously with one another, without any centralised supervision, in various societal institutions. Bentham (1995/2010) imagined the panopticon as a remedy for misrule, not as a tool for inspection and discipline (Leroy, 2013). In doing so, he progressively envisioned the contours of the modern 20th-century state, whose

basic features are the generalization of representative democracy, universal suffrage and political responsibility, and fundamental rights guaranteed to citizens. The ultimate goal of the panopticon paradigm is to establish democracy at all levels.

In this regard, a parallel can be drawn between Bentham's and Foucault's (2007, 2008) later writings on 'governmentality' (Brunon-Ernst, 2013a), which were inspired by Bentham's project of a liberal government (Engelmann, 2003). A shift exists between Foucault's (1977) earlier thoughts on discipline and punishment, epitomised in the *first reading* of the panopticon, and Foucault's (2007, 2008) later thoughts on governmentality, in which he considers Bentham not only the inventor of disciplines but also the theorist of governmentality (Brunon-Ernst, 2013a, p.7). Governmentality, or the 'art of government', designates the study of government and involves 'conducting the conducts' to structure possible fields of action by others. Foucault (2007, 2008) describes government as an attempt to produce citizens who are best suited to fulfil its own policies as well as an attempt to develop organised practices to govern them. Governmentality thus differs from discipline in that it no longer seeks to manage individual bodies but rather to manage whole populations, in an attempt to optimally regulate social behaviour (Galic et al., 2016).

As previously introduced with the idea that no constant visibility would be necessary, Bentham's panopticons are conceptualised in such a way that eventually no more panopticons would be needed. (The 'panopticon age' should be considered only a stage in the transition to a 'non-panoptic utilitarian era', combining a minimization of misrule and a maximization of pleasure; Galic et al., 2016.) In the same way, Foucault's evolution from discipline to governmentality implies that the main question for the state and various institutions is no longer how to govern more (i.e. by [self-]disciplining all conduct through disciplinary techniques) but rather how to govern less (i.e. by accounting for the costs of regulation relative to its gains for society). Such logics are dedicated to the protection and promotion of the life of populations,

driven by the desire for and pursuit of individual interests. The milieu that the government creates should enable the interaction of individual interests to produce what is in the general interest, with the aim to promote democracy at all levels of society. It is a generalizable framework (Bentham refers to the 'universalization of panopticism at the metaphorical level') that adapts to various types of institutions.

In the end, Bentham's thought, which inspired Foucault's entire oeuvre, suggests a complementary reading of ways to govern people that is far from the traditional vision, or *first reading*, presented in the panopticon in MOS research. More than a mere control and surveillance artefact leading to people's disempowerment (Sia et al., 2002), the panopticon, in the *second reading*, is conceived of as (1) a rewarding functional dispositive based on freedom and autonomy (*form*); (2) relying on the principle of information sharing, transparency and visibility (*principle*); and (3) aiming to increase harmony and efficiency as ultimate ends (*goal*).

TABLE 2 Two readings of the panopticon

Type of reading	***First reading***	***Second reading***
Definition	*'A type of power that is applied to individuals in the form of continuous individual supervision, in the form of control, punishment, and compensation, and in the form of correction, that is, the modelling and transforming of individuals in terms of certain norms' (Foucault, 2002, p. 70).*	*A rewarding functional dispositive based on freedom, individual autonomy and responsibility and relying on an 'all-seeing' rule fostering transparency, information collection and sharing as organizing principles, with the aim to increase harmony and the efficiency of collective activity.*
Form	Supervision, control and punishment of disciplined subjects Punishment, correction, normation Control	A rewarding functional dispositive based on freedom and autonomy Reward Responsibilization
Principle	Centralised mechanisms of constant visibility Hierarchical mechanisms of watching over subjects Continuous individual supervision, being watched permanently 'Panoptic' refers to 'seeing everything, everyone, all the time' (Foucault, 2006, p. 52).	Information sharing, transparency and visibility Ideal of transparency and imperative of information Reversible, double-information dynamics (descending and ascending all-seeing rule) Progressive exhaustion of the need for the inspector, the watching itself. Truly continuous and all-seeing inspection are not desired.

Goal	Production of docile bodies to constitute more predictable and plannable societies Tool for inspection and discipline Manage, discipline the individual; model and transform the individual in terms of certain norms	Harmony and efficiency as ultimate ends of the panopticon paradigm A remedy for misrule Regulate social behaviour to create a favourable milieu; protect and promote the life of populations Develop a 'good government' of people; create democracy in organizations and society
Interpretation	**Dystopia**	**Utopia**
Conception of human agency	**Surveillance without a subject 'Assujettissement'** Individual as a passive subject; an object of power and of conversation; a moulded, disciplined and disempowered body. Disempowerment.	**Government with the subject 'Subjectification'** Individual as an active subject; an autonomous and responsible actor, subject of a conversation; an actor who acts (mainly) voluntarily as a free and empowered individual. Empowerment.

ON THE COMPLEXITY AND AMBIVALENCE OF THE PANOPTICON

The panopticon, between dystopia and utopia

The two readings can be further analyzed as dystopia (*first reading*) and utopia (*second reading*) of panopticism, relying on radically different conceptualizations of the subject, freedom and responsibility (Table 2), and raising a fundamental question about the panopticon's ambivalence. The *first reading* implies a 'dystopian' view of the panopticon, interpreted as a mere surveillance machine, 'a diabolical machinery', 'an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust' (Foucault, 1977, p. 201) implying a form of surveillance without a subject. The panopticon entails here a real 'subjection' (*assujettissement*) of the subject as it operates at the level of the conscience of the penitent individual. It has given birth to the foundational assumption of surveillance theory and practice, according to which the more that is known about a person, the more one can modify their behavior.

By contrast, the *second reading* offers a more positive and idealist view of panopticism, in which individuals, as active, autonomous and responsible actors, are directly involved in their own government. Bentham imagined positive mechanisms of power embedded in the

panopticon, relying on an ideal of transparency of power and an imperative of information aiming to enhance mutual responsibility. Individuals are expected to act as free and empowered subjects via practices of 'subjectification' through which they constitute themselves as moral subjects (Foucault, 1983). By doing so, Bentham described the dream of a general system (Foucault, 1977, p. 202) and the normative project of a utopian society through an imaginary production promoting a universal utilitarist democracy (Foucault, 1980, p. 847).

This reflection raises a central tension, an inherent ambivalence in panopticism, between the dystopia of total control and the utopia of an idealist liberal society. Where can the panopticon in MOS research be positioned, between these two extremes (i.e. between its truncated interpretation in MOS Foucauldian studies and its Benthamian original inception as a political ideal)? Is the panopticon a place to go to or a darkness to flee, a heaven or a hell, an obscure reality or a utopian illusion?

Bentham considered the panopticon a normative frame to achieve the liberal utilitarist democratic project he was hoping for and identified what needed to be in place for this paradigm to work. In practice, the panopticon programme, as dreamed of by Bentham, turned out to be more complex than expected. Specific conditions needed to be gathered for the panopticon to function as expected by Bentham, such that it became extremely difficult to get the political ideal of the panopticon adopted. Bentham neglected to consider the difficulties he would encounter to ensure that his normative program took hold, such as the system opacity, the resistance of the material to be corrected, and the emergence of offensive and counter-offensive strategies (Foucault, 1977). Bentham did not consider the complexity and the different workings of '*panopticism in practice'* or the way the political ideals of panopticism (*second reading*) could actually turn into instruments furthering control and thus undermining freedom (*first reading*).

Thus, in light of this central tension, we suggest recognizing the multiplicity and ambivalence of the panopticon. We propose reconsidering the casual and often perfunctory use of the panopticon presented in MOS literature (*first reading*) and argue that this can be done through a reengagement with the work of Bentham (*second reading*). We contend that the combination of both readings allows grasping the ambivalence of '*panopticism in practice'*. To go further and illustrate our argument, we discuss the implications of the confrontation of both readings for MOS research.

Implications for MOS research: application to modern ways of organizing

Bentham was interested in ways to govern people, particularly in work settings (as he found inspiration in the naval shipyard his brother Samuel developed for Prince Potemkin) (Dinwiddy, 1988). He wanted to understand what a good government is (Brunon-Ernst, 2013) and developed the panopticon because he believed it would be an effective tool in the management of a variety of institutions (Schofield, 2009), including working organizations. A re-reading of Bentham's conception of the panopticon helps us identify the whys and wherefores associated with liberal projects of government, especially when the prerequisites of Benthamian panopticism are diverted or not addressed.

The world of work has radically changed in the past decades. A liberal spirit reigns in modern companies (Du Gay, 2000, p. 43), encouraging organizational subjects to take responsibility for their successes and careers as 'entrepreneurs of themselves'. Liberated companies (Carney & Getz, 2009), organizational democracies (Lee & Edmondson, 2017), 'holacracy' (Bernstein et al., 2016; Robertson, 2015), and 'self-managing' and 'adhocratic organizations' (Peters, 1992) are the watchwords of managerial literature (Foster et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2004), reflecting Bentham's liberal project in the organizational field. As a result of a crisis of disciplinary powers (e.g. 1968 events) and a rejection of bureaucratic hierarchy (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999), modern organizations have been forced to evolve to new ways

of working, giving more room to the autonomy, power, self-realization and responsibilization of employees. Questions remain, however, about what organizational democracy and liberal management imply, under which conditions they can achieve a satisfactory situation of harmony and efficiency, and what risks they entail. These questions are all the more problematic, as these features are often hackneyed and considered the vector of new dominations (Courpasson, 2000). The combination of the two panopticon readings offers an insightful lens to consider how such autonomy, empowerment and self-realization are incorporated into new managerial dispositives that frame the actions of employees, encouraging them to question their *form*, underlying *principle* and *goal*.

Form: liberal management and the traps of autonomy

Employees and organizations derive many benefits from liberal management (e.g. increased well-being, efficiency, productivity), but new stakes and risks come along with it. Liberal management indeed raises meaningful questions about employees' roles and responsibilities, as well as potential new constraints for them, when the initial spirit of such initiatives (*second reading*) gets incorporated into subtle coercive managerial arrangements (*first reading*). Horizontal project-based work, for example, often relies on procedures that are more centralised than expected, such that employees' autonomy often depends on the latitude they have been given to honour (sometimes contradictory) directives decided in higher places. Employees' empowerment, coupled with the permanent search for utility and efficiency, also leads to situations that hold them responsible for decisions that used to be out of their scope, as well as for their failures (as shown by the case of Netflix, which promotes an 'unlimited vacation policy', putting the pressure on the employees themselves). This reflection invites them not to fall into the traps of autonomy, not to confuse responsibility and constraint, empowerment and burden. It encourages us to question the very nature and meaning of 'being

an employee' in a liberal mode of organizing—granted not only greater autonomy of choice but also concomitant increased expectations and duties.

Principle: transparency and the traps of visibility

Transparency and information sharing (Albu & Flyverbom, 2019; Stohl et al., 2016) are important characteristics of modern organizations, in which IT makes processes and behaviours more visible. As Bentham regarded the ideal of transparency and the imperative of information as conditions of a successful government, liberal organizations similarly promote information dynamics and encourage transparency and visibility, with the goal to improve the organization's openness, communication and efficiency. However, as Bentham envisioned the possible deviances associated with an 'all-seeing' constant rule, calls for more transparency and visibility can also deviate from their objective, easily flipping and turning into a new form of 'tyranny' (Strathern, 2000). With technology, it has never been so easy to locate information at work, but also to know how people behave. IT makes it particularly easy to see what, how and when actions are performed, in ways that make subjects increasingly accountable for their actions. This even happens in remote contexts, as technology ensures visibility at a distance and may contribute to a subtle reordering of control (Sewell & Taskin, 2015). This indicates the emergence of new opacities (Stohl et al., 2016; Ter Hoeven et al., 2019) and risks inherent to what turns out to be an 'imperative of transparency', coming along with more pressure and perceptions of control. This reflection warns subjects not to fall into the traps of visibility, encouraging them to question the very notions of information, transparency and visibility in liberal modes of organizing.

Goal: harmony and efficiency goals and the traps of self-development

Aiming to produce harmony (e.g. employees' well-being and pleasure) and organizational efficiency, liberal organizations put emphasis on employees' emancipation and self-fulfilment and on managers' roles as coaches, facilitators or liberating leaders (Carney & Getz, 2009;

Hales, 2005). As Bentham envisioned the advent of a government that would strive to govern more by governing less, through the constitution of a favourable milieu, modern organizations aim to create a favourable environment for employees enabling them to self-fulfil while achieving efficiency. The constitution of an organizational environment that is conducive to the blossoming of employees goes along with the calls to 'personally self-develop' and to cultivate their 'emotional capital' for the benefit of the organization (Illouz, 2006).

This philosophy is concomitant of new conceptions of human agency that respond to new managerial strategies of involvement and motivation. Self-development and improvement of emotional capital are ways for employees to negotiate their place and manage their intimate relationships (Illouz, 2006). However, they might also turn into new imperatives acting as subtle modes of control. These injunctions are not very coercive, as they are based on employees' aspiration to self-fulfil and come closer to a behavioural model they deem desirable. But they remain powerful, in that they rely on the voluntary adaptation of individuals to what is expected from them (Casey, 1996). The instrumentalization of 'benevolent supervision' and the empathetic evaluation of manager-coaches appear as subtle ways for organizations to obtain the behaviours they expect from employees. Central supervision remains in a subtle and opaque way, such that the fear of a panopticon aiming to produce docile bodies might resurface. This reflection invites questioning the real goal pursued with the constitution of such a favourable milieu and not instrumentalizing initiatives of personal development and self-fulfilment from their initial spirit.

Our interpretation of these modes of organizing through the two panopticon readings sheds light on their very meaning and complexity, highlighting their advantages, stakes and implications, while helping us stay alert to their ambivalence and to the modern work intrigues. The liberal way of management indeed remains a way to govern people (Bentham, 1995/2010, 1997), a dispositive to conduct the conducts (Foucault, 2007, 2008), thus raising meaningful

ethical questions. As a normative model, Bentham's work helps us shed light on the conditions and prerequisites under which such a liberal organizational government can be achieved in ways that contribute to both harmony and efficiency (e.g. autonomy, transparency, self-fulfilment). However, it also helps us uncover the risk of a possible instrumentalization of its form, principle and goals; in doing so, it encourages us to highlight the possible deviances and threats this mode of management entails, prompting us to question, more broadly, the destiny of the modern liberal organizational project and its effect on social practices (Illouz, 2006).

Contributions, future directions and concluding remarks

Several lessons can be drawn from this reflection. First, our analysis shows that, more than an outdated concept dedicated to the analysis of surveillance that should be thrown onto the trash heap of history, the panopticon concept is richer and more diverse than acknowledged by classic panoptic-based MOS studies. Following a recent trend in parallel disciplines (Brunon-Ernst, 2013a, 2013b; Tusseau, 2013), we restore Bentham's conception of the panopticon and argue that the interpretation of the latter developed in MOS research is not only caricatural but also wrong. In this vein, paradoxically, what is often viewed as *anti-panoptic* features of new ways of working (e.g. autonomy and empowerment, contrasting with the disciplinary logic traditionally found in the *first reading* of the panopticon) is actually fundamentally *panoptic*, according to its initial spirit developed by Bentham (*second reading*). The *second reading* of the panopticon indeed suggests that these ways of working actually rely on strong 'panoptic' features as envisioned in Bentham's ideal: the notions of reward, self-management and well-being reflect the Benthamian conception of an empowered, autonomous and responsible subject.

However, our reflection also reveals the inherent tension between both readings of the panopticon. Thus, second, beyond a mere critique of a dominant 'negative' first reading of the panopticon, we argue that, as a practice of freedom, *panopticism in practice* might turn into an

instrument furthering control. Bentham's idealism and the promises of responsibilization and 'utilitarian democracy' obviously provide 'panopticism' with lure and power, such that the very notions of freedom, responsibility and empowerment in new modes of organizing can hardly be de-coupled from broader political reform ideals (as in Bentham's project). A closer engagement with Bentham is thus particularly useful to draw more explicit attention to the political ideals and aspirations implied by organizational reform quests, including quests for more transparency and accountability. We contend in particular that the combination of the two readings allows for grasping the panopticon's ambivalence and sheds light on the way the political ideals of panopticism might further control and undermine freedom. Achieving a 'good' organizational liberal government is a fragile equilibrium of autonomy and transparency, organised in a favourable milieu where each panoptic dimension (*form*, *principle* and *goal*) contains in itself the potential for excess and deviation, such that the line between the two readings of the panopticon remains thin. We thus invite MOS researchers to pay more attention to the political ideals expressed in novel forms of organizing, and we contend that a return to Bentham will help them in this endeavor. In particular, we invite them to join the two readings more explicitly and to highlight the ways they complement each other.

Third, we aim to make the Benthamian notion of panopticon more analytically useful for MOS scholars, as managerial innovations increasingly emphasise freedom and responsibility (Bardon & Josserand, 2018). To do so, we highlight some analytical paths that might help them disentangle such multiplicity and ambivalence. In terms of *form*, we invite MOS researchers and practitioners to question autonomy and responsibilization in novel ways of organizing and to ask when the panopticon is a real practice of freedom and when it might be instead an instrument furthering control. What does it truly mean to be employees in modern organizations? Should they simply be executors of company policies, with less responsibility but also less autonomy, or should they be granted greater autonomy of choice, which might

come with increased expectations and duties? In terms of *principle*, we encourage MOS scholars and practitioners to question issues of visibility and transparency and to ask to what extent information and behaviours should be made transparent and visible through technology. How exactly are notions of responsibility and empowerment mobilised in relation to quests for more information and transparency? In terms of *goals*, we invite researchers and practitioners to ask how organizational subjects can address these managerial innovations. How are actors implied in such projects as active subjects? What kind of counter-conducts are possible in these contexts, in which resistance is often encouraged, if not pre-constituted? We further invite MOS scholars to build on this line of argument to further problematise questions of control, surveillance and power, as well as freedom and responsibility, as new forms of work develop (e.g. digital labour, platform-based work).

This article has limitations, as the literature review is not exhaustive. Furthermore, we recognise that the panopticon remains a controversial and disturbing concept that is difficult to operationalise (Brunon-Ernst, 2013a; Schofield, 2009). Some opponents to Bentham criticise his authoritarian style (Bahmueller, 1981; Himmelfarb, 1985) and try to nuance the novelty and altruism of this thought by emphasising the utilitarist nature of his project. That Bentham initially developed his project in work settings suggests that his insistence on the reformatory aspect of the panopticon was mainly driven by his desire to pursue a business opportunity.

However, we hope to offer an important historical contextualization of Bentham's work in MOS research, which goes beyond the received reading of panopticism. We argue that Bentham's original conception of the panopticon could represent an effective tool in the management of a whole range of organizations, and can help us interpret liberal management. It would certainly be utopian and naive to call for a normative re-instilling of the 'democratic universalization' advocated by Bentham's 'panoptimism' in organizations. However, we believe that more attention should be paid to larger programs and political ideals in

organizations, to question the dreams, ideological underpinnings and schemes that are implicated in new forms of organizing and liberal management, so as not to accept them at face value. A return to Bentham's conception helps us highlight potential risks when the basic prerequisites of the panopticon (e.g. real autonomy, reversible information sharing) are threatened. Ironically, Bentham, who is more famous for his disciplinary notions of control and surveillance, regarded human agency and selfhood as living pulses throughout his oeuvre, and he was animated by the ultimate goal to recognise and generalise the panopticon as a 'condition of our freedom'.

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