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Geographic Mobility as a System of Power Relations Inside Business Networks

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Abstract

This article focuses on the capacity of business élites to be ubiquitous—present on different scenes, geographically far from one another, simultaneously through the means of the mobility (and immobility) of other people who replace them. Based on interviewers with a sample of 52 people from three French multinationals we find that for many business managers, mobility appears to be more an imperative dictated by their role than a choice. For them an ambiguous interpretation of mobility occurs that fluctuates between it being viewed as a resource and a cost, a reward and a trial. At the same, time their mobility facilitates differential accumulation of informational capital and social capital for their superiors.

Keywords

ubiquity, mobility, business, multinational, management, élites

Introduction

This article is focused on mechanisms of maintenance and accumulation of social relations by the élites in business networks (Clegg *et al.* 2006), those having the capacity to be present on different scenes, geographically far from one another, simultaneously through the means of the mobility (and immobility) of other people who replace them. These élites in networks are ubiquitous; they overcome the common distinction between mobile and sedentary individuals (whom we call *mobiles* and *immobiles*), because they obtain the gift of simultaneous presence by displacing other peoples who contribute to their accumulation and maintenance of social capital (Granovetter 1982; Coleman 1988; Gulati 2007).

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An attempt has been made to develop a framework for the analysis of professional geographic mobility of managers and executives in large corporations (Gherardi 2008; Gherardi and Pierre 2008; Gherardi and Pierre 2010). Professional geographic mobility, defined succinctly as the mobility of an individual within physical space due to a change in the place of work, can usually be divided into two types: (1) migration, which means a definitive change of the place where one lives; and (2) flows, which concern temporary movements and have been our main field of work (Pierre 2003; Gherardi 2010). This latter type represents a largely unexplored field, in spite of the fact that higher speed potentials—related to improvements in transports and spread of information communication technologies—give rise, within contemporary Western societies, to a proliferation of objects and fields of study linked to geographic mobility within globalization (Harvey 1989; Urry 2000; Dos, Santos and Williamson 2001).

In fact, studies that examine the power differentials related to the internal hierarchies of companies and the logics of mobility of their employees inside business networks are extremely rare. This lack of analysis is particularly evident in the current phase of spatial restructuring of capitalism, where its internationalization is supported by transnational mobility of employees following the flow of investments. If previous centuries saw the birth in Europe of mobilities of apprenticeship where the most moneyed youth were sent to foreign trading posts within the network of friends, allies or clients of the family (Wagner 2007: 15); and later professional mobilities with tight links to the state and its industrial policy; our era seems noteworthy for the geographic mobility of the salaried middle social classes and their involvement in business management (Lazarova and Taylor 2008).

1. Methods and Outline of Analysis

The results of our investigation are based on interviewers[1] with a sample of 52 people from three French multinationals. These interviews included 20 semi-directed interviews with middle-management experiencing transnational mobility (executives located in France, expatriated or international) and seven interviews with members of the senior executive team (from the CEO to senior vice-presidents) in the same multinational firm whose head office is in Paris and which we will call "Multinational 1."

We also conducted 12 interviews with managers in two other multinational firms of the same size as the first (when measured in terms of turnover) whose

[1] The duration of these interviews varied between one and three hours.

head offices are also in Paris and which have not cut expenses for business travel in the last five years, which we will call "Multinational 2" and "Multinational 3". We conducted eight interviews with members of middle management, and four with senior management. We had access to the travel diaries covering three calendar years of several executives and managers.

We conducted eight interviews with heirs of great fortunes, of which three had operational responsibilities in the family business. And finally there were five interviews with first-generation entrepreneurs who had built up large businesses (three of whom were Italian). To this can be added four interviews with privileged informants, working in commercial and management supervision, on the subject of corporate mobility practices.

The rest of this article is the analysis of the data gathered in these interviews. In the first section we recall those elements of our general approach, which are useful to introduce the unconventional hypothesis that we discuss in section 2, according to which mobility benefits the ubiquitous élites in the division of work who, through delegation and according to circumstances, take the shape of *mobiles* or *immobiles*. Within networks and work teams made up of internationally mobile employees, domination is based on power to mobilize or immobilize chains of others in order to accumulate social capital. In the same section, we follow the theory of mobility as a factor of exploitation by Boltanski and Chiapello (1999), which shows how some *mobiles* exploit *immobiles* or local individuals. We will add to it the following corollary: it is also possible for ubiquitous élites, be they mobile or not, to exploit some *mobiles*. This leads us to consider mobility as an *atout* only under certain conditions.

Our example will be a real bimonthly time schedule, presenting the linked international displacements of a work team. We explore the power differentials at the heart of the mobile population (introduced in section 1). In section 3 we consider the implication of the analysis on power, which is the capacity for action at a distance, for the theory of exploitation within and of international social networks, and more generally for social theory. Introducing the groups of comparison, we detail the topic of freedom of choice to move in networked capitalism sustained by accumulation of social capital. Mobility will appear as a relational concept embedded in the division of work and linked to the rhythm of production, contemporaneously as a factor of exploitation and as an expression of time-space discipline for management. This is because mobility makes production and accumulation possible in a business world where the realization of profit occurs through organizing economic operations in networks.

2. New Outlines on the International Geographic Mobility of Management

Our general approach identifies three different forms of mobility (Gherardi and Pierre 2008), which we will return to in section 3. Each one of them—by its direction, justifications, rhythms, and duration—implies power differentials in terms of unequal possibilities to accumulate social capital (as detailed in section 2) and a different articulation of the human costs incurred for the expatriates (and nationals), international executives, and top managers. These three different forms of mobility are defined below.

2.1 *Expatriation of Expertize for Winning Market Share*

Expatriation consists of a movement from the headquarters in the parent country towards a subsidiary in a foreign country for a period of typically between two and five years. These expatriates are chosen principally on the basis of their loyalty to the parent company[2] and/or for their potential for professional development (Beaverstock and Boardwell 2000). In this sense mobility is a test to upgrade, but their departure can also occur when the senior executive wishes to alter its management team, its organization or its internal processes. Expatriates are most often sent following a merger with or an acquisition of a foreign company or alternatively following the establishment of a subsidiary abroad, in which case the task of staking out or conquering a new market is given to a trusted employee (Findlay 1996; Pierre 2003). Over the course of the interviews we conducted with the expatriates, they told us of having to face real problems of coherence between the host milieu and their universe of ingrained values and norms. Expatriation, as well as movement within the home country, constitutes an experience that removes the subject from familiar surrounds and throws him/her into a milieu where he/she must deal with different codes, adapt by bringing together places and partners (who might either be physically present or merely remembered).

Management tracts hardly deal with these difficulties, and prefer to emphasize the notion of "cultural competence" (Kealey 1990) when faced with a reified "cultural shock." When these cultural and personal dissonances are mentioned at all, they are at most presented as a disruption to everyday habits, which are best compensated for by identifying all the more strongly with the culture of the corporation. Thus we tend towards Wagner's position that "the

[2] There is a tendency to select men and women whose national and cultural profiles are homogenous: "Even though the corporations studied here obtain 80% of their turnover outside Germany, where 61% of their employees are likewise located and where 53% of their shares are held, the degree of internationalization of their management is less than 23%. Management is thus significantly less international than the firms it manages," notes Schmid (2006).

international does not eradicate the national" in the sense that, in transnational spaces, one's country of origin is a first element serving to "stratify" populations. Thus, the professional transnational space for executives remains strongly hierarchical, and global color does not erase local color.

2.2 *Reticulated Mobility on a Single or Double Base*

We apply the term "international" to executives whose mobility, in contradistinction with expatriate populations, requires frequent movements (generally lasting from a few days to a few weeks) to many different foreign countries. These international executives may be directly responsible for managing active projects that cross borders, for supervising a given geographic area (a logistical or commercial director for a zone comprising five European countries, for example) or for coordinating multinational teams, which may not necessarily be hierarchically subordinate to them. Both the number of these movements and their direction varies from one international executive to another; and even for a single individual over different calendar periods, since these very movements, in this configuration, generally follow the launch or implementation of international projects. Some international executives speak of double mobility occurring within another, distant operational unit for a significant part of the year, with shorter trips to other countries or units within the corporation.

As for expatriates, this form of mobility has hard implications on family life; interviewees mentioned it is difficult to conciliate with others for their displacements. A significant proportion of the middle management whom we met made a clear distinction between voluntary and involuntary mobility, between mobility that is experienced as a resource (a "career accelerator") and mobility that is imposed (a necessary "investment" and something one "has to do"). This is an important point, because it suggests that mobility can be an imposed as a necessity and not a totally positive event as management literature presents it (Gherardi and Pierre 2008). This brings to question the idea of free choice of mobility discussed in section 3.

2.3 *Internal/External Circulation of Senior Management*

The international form of mobility of senior management that we encountered is composed of short regular trips (Faulconbridge *et al.* 2009) lasting one or two days but occurring up to three times a week. This mobility, made up of brief, rapid movements, does not appear to require any "effort at professional repositioning imposed by migration or resettlement" (Kaufmann 2005: 124). While middle management, as we have seen, experiences the human costs of mobility in terms of adaptation to cultures that are very different from one's home country, the articulation of costs by senior management are of a different order, emphasizing instead the physical and psychological toll. On top of the fatigue that accrues from this rate of travel, top managers also experience fatigue produced by the intensity of management activity required during these trips (Gherardi 2009), and by the necessity to remain permanently contactable. Over half the middle management, and three-quarters of the senior management we met lament the way the mobility of their professional lives undermines their family lives and talk about freedom in terms of possibility not to travel but, on the contrary, to disconnect in order to be available for one's children or spouse. Mobility appears to be more an imperative dictated by their role than a choice, more an index of time-space discipline in terms of subordination of top management to rhythms of production than an index of freedom.

By showing the human costs of these different forms of mobility (Gherardi and Pierre 2008) we challenge the idea spread through management literature that geographic professional mobility is associated to freedom and personal achievement, and that the existence of a homogeneous transnational élite within business sweeps aside questions of unequal power relations between middle managers and management spheres. In fact, for the spatial restructuring of capitalism in its current phase, mobility is considered a value itself in management literature and proposed as a totally positive choice. The choice/obligation distinction is of less importance when geographic mobility is the norm for certain socio-professional categories, and when the managerial literature presents it as an obligatory rite of passage and a decisive factor in the selection of future management-level executives. To speak of mobility as a choice insufficiently distinguishes between the rhetoric of imagined mobility and reality. In section 3 we will return to the topic of freedom of choice to move in a networked world, sustained by accumulation and maintenance of social capital.

The most striking characteristic of the mobility of top managers comes from it being both a constraint and at the same time also a highly sought-after distinguishing feature and a vector of inequality when compared to the immobility forced on those who are the most deprived of resources (Gherardi 2010). In the words of most of our interviewees, an ambiguous interpretation of mobility occurs that fluctuates between being viewed as a resource and a cost, a reward and a trial. It's the dark side of mobility not mentioned in management literature where the international geographic mobility of the staff is constructed as a source of personal development. For the populations we have studied, geographic mobility remains, in the final analysis, a privilege and continues to constitute a social differentiator rather than a contributor to the easing or leveling of social relations. The forms of international mobility, in a corporate environment, do not compress the scale that separates mid-level executives from senior executives or management. Geographic mobility is therefore a distinguishing factor between these social groups within multinationals, which present themselves as "horizontal" and networked but in reality do not reduce the disparity in salaries, power and social prestige.

Understanding mobility in terms of "spatio-temporal configurations" has allowed us to uncover the links between the activity of our subjects, the direction of their travel, and the demands of the company.[3] Our approach stands in opposition to the idea of identical *mobiles*, citizens of the world adaptable to all circumstances, which appears to be more a normative model in a networked world than a reality. Our approach also stands in opposition to the idea of repeated and intense international geographic mobility contributing to the creation of a homogenous élite of managers and executives within businesses (Harris, Brewster and Petrovic 2001; Welch *et al.* 2007; Mayerhofer *et al.* 2004).

Contrary to common perceptions, in the following sections we highlight a social space of differences where power gaps among *mobiles* create a hierarchy among them. We will recall these forms of mobility in this article in order to understand what they give individuals in terms of resources with a view to occupying positions at the heart of competitive space, and in what way this mobility can be linked to the power of influence on the mobility or immobility of other competing individuals.

3. Rethinking the Link between Geographic Mobility and Power in Business Networks

Geographic mobility of people in the global age is an extremely important factor of stratification (Bauman 1998). It marks a first dividing line in the social space—which has on the one hand the mobile élites, and on the other hand those trapped in their local area. Or as Castells says, "élites are cosmopolitan, people are local" (Castells 1996: 446). Compared to theories of mobility as a

[3] Travel planning consultants speak of "travel patterns" linking their reasons for travel and its direction, "Most of the time, the multinational client asks us to conduct questionnaires to understand why people travelled and what proportion was internal or external, to better understand the 'travel pattern,' which is to say the scope of the voyage. Where do people go? That's already held by the multinational. They already know it, but why they go is extremely important because, once you know that, you can decide whether to cut it or not" (Business travel optimization consultant).

factor of stratification, the theory of Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) on mobility as a factor of exploitation constitutes an advancement, because it shows the link between the mobility of one actor and the immobility of another, as a new form of extortion of surplus value. In a "connexionist" world,

> Great men do not stand still. Little people remain rooted to the spot . . ., the specific contribution of little people to enrichment in a connexionist world, and the source of their exploitation by great men, consist precisely in which constitutes their weakness in this framework, that is to say, their immobility. (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007: 361)

In fact, the role "little people" play, not acknowledged as merit, is to maintain social capital of "great men" while they accumulate new relations and explore new networks. Inequalities deriving from diversity and extent of networks over which people circulate may introduce new inequalities, particularly when little men, because of their immobility, face a progressive loss of competence that can lead to their exclusion. In these authors' theory some people's immobility is the precondition for profits, in terms of gains in social capital, of great men's mobility. In a networked world, *mobiles* gain all the more from the immobility imposed on others.

The notion of ubiquity is a strategy of presence by an individual on different geographic scenes simultaneously. The distinction within the population dubbed *mobiles* between the *ubiquitous* and others illustrates the link between power and an individual's capacity to operate on stages that are geographically far apart, directly or by delegation. This multiple presence exists not only by means of new technologies but above all thanks to the mobility of other individuals who travel simultaneously for the benefit of the *ubiquitous*. This analysis of the resources and potential of geographic physical mobility highlights little known forms of exploitation and domination in globalized companies.

To better understand this capacity of certain individuals to multiply their presence on dispersed geographic stages, we refer to upper management's schedules, which we have been allowed to access. Here is an excerpt:

> I will show you my personal schedule (. . .), well, I was in San Francisco and in New York, no, who was it? It was someone from my team, I was in Los Angeles in February then we left for Madrid, Frankfurt, London, to London again; these are one, two or three-day trips maximum. I go to London two or three days a month, to Madrid again, we went to Scandinavia for two days, two days in the States, again in Scandinavia. There, my teams were in Switzerland; I sent them in my place as there are days where I have to be in two or three places at opposite ends of the world. I'm going to Portugal for two days; next week it's Brussels or Nicosia, you can see that each week here there are trips. (Director of Financial Communication, Multinational 1, Paris office)

Like the others, this bimonthly personal schedule includes, as well as the mobility of the director, an overlapping mobility: that of his colleagues and subordinates that make up the team. What interests us here is that one person travels to physically substitute for someone else on the stages where the latter cannot be simultaneously present. The members of the team are sent by the director to "two or three places . . . at opposite ends of the world" where some days he is expected simultaneously.

We shift our attention from any single trip made by a director to the multiplicity of stages on which he/she has the possibility of being present by "delegation." The mobility of co-workers thus functions to make the director present in the sense of making him/her present where he/she couldn't be physically in more than one place at the same time. The director is more mobile than the other members of his/her team—not necessarily because he meets more people, nor because he/she travels more frequently than his/her subordinates, but because their mobility functions to multiply his/her own without the opposite being true. The director can be present simultaneously, in the form of other people who replace him/her physically in several different places: playing the role of multipliers of his/her mobility, his/her subordinates confer on him/her the gift of ubiquity. We could call the mobile co-workers of the director "mobile doubles," reminiscent of the name "doublures locales" (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999) that we could attribute to a director's secretary or co-worker who stays permanently at the head office to hold his/her place and his/her contacts, but also to an assistant who remains in place in another country also contributing to the maintenance of his/her social capital and in the same way to his/her ubiquity. The mobility of the team members and the immobility of the co-workers permanently at head office (or in another place) who constitute the director's apparatus bring about the same result of giving him/her ubiquity such that the director is simultaneously here (at the head office), there (at his/her travel destination), or elsewhere (where he/she sends his/her team members). When we stop looking at the movement of an individual in physical space and start looking at the possibility of being present in different places, we understand how it is not geographical mobility (especially in purely quantitative terms) that has a linear link to power, but rather the power of presence that some enjoy.

And if the problem of power, which must be omnipresent to exert a form of surveillance, has always been that of controlling the person sent to represent, it is no longer necessary today to immobilize people to control them—thanks to new technologies and the imperative of always being connected, as well as to the acceleration of rhythms. The culture of the *link* (bringing together mobility and connectivity) of managers cannot function without a culture of *control* over people, (normalized) processes and social relationships (i.e., bringing together market oversight, reports via management indicators, traceability of decisions taken, and profits realized each month), where confidence is an essential element in the smooth functioning of this enterprise, but it cannot be simply assumed that this will improve simply with more frequent formal contact between its members.

The director can therefore simultaneously be present wherever he/she sends the members of his/her team. This is not a new phenomenon, as the organization of power as a presence especially through the mobility of other people is not a historical novelty;[4] the novelty concerns the rhythm of spatio-temporal compression—apart from figures and reasons of an international geographic mobility that fits into the division of labor. That is to say, what is unique here is the increase in the speed at which it is possible (to different degrees) to reach diverse places throughout the world today. Based on several of the diaries we have observed, an organization represents a kind of flotilla organized around the person of the manager, and includes one or several people who represent him/her overseas (and also in the home nation) for a longer duration depending on the sector. These flotillas are usually made up of subjects whose competences can be considered partially complementary with those of the manager. These flotillas multiply the "eyes" and "ears" of the director on the goings-on "over there" when movement is required, for example, to gather information on the context (such as the social climate).

The apparatus,[5] including people as satellites in the orbit of the director's mobility, reveal the organizational logics of built-in mobilities (and immobilities), which allow us to shift attention from individual movement in physical space to scenes that an individual can occupy simultaneously thanks to others who replace him/her. Whereas directors' subordinates are mobile (or immobile), greater than mobile is ubiquitous: the differentials that emerge are differentials of presence and it is one of the reasons why mobility apparatuses are power apparatuses. This fundamental inequality between the manager and the members of his team, just as much as between senior and middle management, can be considered to have several dimensions. Above all, it translates into a differential accumulation of informational capital and social capital, giving him an advantage over his team's members. As emphasized by Kachur (2009), he/she is in position to prevent his/her co-workers from constructing an effective network, and to maintain separation between different

[4] The gift of mobility thanks to the presence of others has a long and venerable history. Insofar as it constitutes a mobility strategy put in place in order to play several tables—or several scenes—at the once, it recalls the offices of representative and procurator.

[5] The notion of apparatus comes from pragmatic sociology. For an introduction, see Nachi 2006.

sections of the network in terms of projects, competences, and sharing links and information.

Conceiving of mobility in terms of apparatuses leads one to a consideration of contextual variables such as the manner in which people are organized and the resources that are delegated to the subject who is moving. Making these interconnected logics of displacement apparent, the distribution of resources and people who surround the mobility of a subject, means making visible all the links that are ignored by a certain segment of the management literature, which only considers mobility as a line linking two points separated from one another in geographic space. The director we have studied as an example appears to us now as a subject placed in an apparatus that offers the possibility of being simultaneously present in more than one location, an individual granted the gift of ubiquity, in addition to being merely mobile thanks to the organizational machinery of collaborators, assistants, intermediaries, local representatives, guides, and representatives. The notion of apparatus stresses the interdependence between some mobilities and some immobilities, and uncovering links among them allows us to identify power differentials among those appearing in management literature as "mobile managers," "international business travelers," "road warriors," "globe trotters," or "frequent fliers."

Mobility holds networks together and permits the accumulation of social capital in favor of the *ubiquitous*, not always in favor of *mobiles*. If we make use of the concept of mobility apparatuses, as for example in the case of an expatriate whose mobility fits within the first form of mobility introduced in section 1, this individual appears as a dislocated subject "over there" (within an foreign subsidiary), disconnected from "here" (the head office in the country of origin), lacking a spokesperson or representatives.[6] For these salaried populations, it's often as if social conquest, even where successful, amounts to a sort of progressive encystation in whatever role is eventually attained, and a long-term risk is that their knowledge would become obsolete. It happens quickly, and "when you least expect it". These executives cannot transform what they learn in one part of the enterprise, here and now, into personal resources to invest in other professional fields. Their international capital is dependent on the field in which it is acquired.

Today, many expatriates find themselves outside the real channels of power in their organizations. This expatriate acts in only one location, and can only maintain a social network with difficulty given his/her local fixity as an

[6] At best he is in contact with a superior in the hierarchy of the home office, who requires results and actions but who may not necessarily think to inform him of positions available on his return, changes in strategy in other divisions of the corporation, or important promotions within the head office or in subcontractors.

expatriate. Nobody anywhere is in his/her place. This is also true of the international projects coordinator, who represents the second form of mobility (see section 1). This person travels essentially to check up on the progress of projects where they have commenced, and manages international teams who are not necessarily hierarchically subordinate. At the head office, nobody is responsible for replacing or maintaining contact during his/her absence. His/her networked capital is weak: he/she cannot easily obtain non-redundant information that he/she could repackage and verify in order to derive a competitive advantage. He/she cannot easily put people in touch who would not have met without him/her, and create "interpersonal bridges" linking disconnected parties in a productive manner, either within his/her organization or outside it.

4. Social Capital Accumulation and Time-Space Discipline

In the director's case presented in the previous section, mobility implies (perhaps above all else) power over the rhythms of others—and this is another reason why mobility apparatuses are apparatuses of power. His co-workers' mobility is a factor of exploitation within his network. But we also know from the previous section that ubiquity, in the case of our example's director, does not mean that he/she is free to choose his/her own rhythms. His/her purely functional international geographic mobility with very tight rhythms is itself necessary for the expansion of capitalism by network. His/her mobility—emblematic of the international circulation of senior managers—expresses his/her lack of power on the determination of his/her own time and space, his/her subordination to time and space links that are imposed on him/her by production. This mobility is a purely functional mobility with very tight rhythms at the service of obligatory goals and deadlines. Therefore, geographic mobility can be at the same time a source of value-added (via ubiquity) and an imperative. This because mobility makes production and accumulation possible in a networked business world, where the realization of profit occurs through organizing economic operations in networks; in a world subject to network logic, the gain is the accumulation of social capital that can be converted into economic capital, for instance from a new project arisen by exploring the network. Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) define project as a highly activated section of networks for a relatively short period of time, allowing more enduring links that will remains available.

Brief, time-space discipline of actual capitalism needs mobility of some as well as immobility of some others, the most deprived of resources. In our approach, capitalism is (in technical terms) a mode of production based on the precise regulation of time and space of groups who, to different levels and degrees, fit into the division of labor.[7] This is in accordance with David Harvey, for whom capitalism is a question of rhythms. Reading capitalism in terms of the rhythms and demands of production allows us to understand its accelerations and expansions by linking them to the strength of the links in space and time that it dictates, and to their manifestations, which can change for different social groups and for the same group in time, according to structural transformations intervening in production. This is precisely the situation in the case of functional international geographic mobility, controlled by businesses at their own rhythm, which accompanies the flow of investments and is imposed on senior management during the transition to post-Fordism, because it is necessary for the support of the organization and for the expansion of capitalism by network—by geographically dispersed, internationalized and highly financial units. Disciplinary mobility becomes a norm for certain socio-professional categories.

If we enlarge the mobility apparatus, we see that the director is at the same time a representative. He/she represents the shareholders, and it is to the reach of the large shareholders, or because he/she serves them, that he/she travels or that he/she makes his/her team members travel. The shareholders therefore keep the gift of ubiquity,[8] independently of whether they decide to travel or not. Pure financial capitalists, such as heirs of great fortunes and the few who have succeeded in personally building up a private income (becoming heirs of themselves after having undergone years or decades of subordination to networks' rhythms before being set free from them) give today for the possibility of freedom over time, and the absolute freedom of movement in physical space. And it is precisely because financial capital does not limit those who have it to any place that we are seeing today a separation of power and responsibility without precedent in history, even for the so-called absentee owners of the nineteenth century who had a spatial link (even if weak) created by land ownership (Bauman 1998). The privilege of independence from the rhythm

[7] The mode of capitalist production has always been founded on a precise regulation of the time and space of the groups who are part of, to different levels and degrees, the division of labor. From the point of view of power over rhythms, capitalism has been, indeed, a disciplinary force from the beginning, when mobility was a transgression of rhythms, of unchangeableness and of the order imposed by production, thus of freedom expressed by artistic criticism (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). The effort of regulating rhythms appeared, in a complete way, through the rationalization of production in the Fordist era, aided by the introduction of the assembly line, through which production times were made four times faster, which implies a daily spatial concentration of a certain number of individuals (and means) in a big factory, laid out according to an ordered sequence and under the control of supervisors, in a given time.

[8] Independently of the position they may occupy, or not, in the world of work.

of production signifies the possibility of choosing mobility or immobility: "The essence of power is to be able to take care of one's own affairs, so if some people like to sit in front of their fireplace, power lets them stay seated in front of their fireplace, it is clear that the more I can do that, the more I can also decide if I want to travel or stop," declared one interviewee, who having sold the big family business started a career in politics and is today president of several associations. Nevertheless, this affirmation (if thought of in relational terms of configurations and in social forms) is only partial, as this group also holds auto-direct power, and its members can therefore, over and above being able to decide if they want to travel or not, decide the rhythms of others and thus the time and mobility or immobility of others.

This example introduces the figure of the *immobile ubiquitous*, where in literature the exploiter is always mobile. The capacity to exploit mobility to the fullest extent does not entail frequent movement but rather being ubiquitous, being present in multiple dispersed geographic locations, which it is today possible to occupy at the same time. In this case, the exploiter is the one capable of acing at a distance to mobilize others, combining the gift of ubiquity with the freedom to determine his/her time and space. Among our comparison groups, heirs of great fortunes are the only group that reserves the possibility to have the greatest degree of freedom over its own rhythm (understood as self-determination of their own time and space) with a higher degree of power over the rhythm of others.

The rhythms of first-generation entrepreneurs who founded large businesses seem to resemble those of senior management—an observation which also springs from research into the social interactions of this social group (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1999). This is due, for a large part, to the fact that they must begin by creating wide-ranging apparatuses, unlike heirs of great fortunes or large companies, who can take advantage of pre-existing apparatuses, whose members have often demonstrated considerable loyalty over time in the management of family affairs—or more often, the affairs of several families belonging to the commercial aristocracy who therefore enjoy cumulative benefits.[9] The figure of the *immobile ubiquitous* shows why "those who move the quickest and the furthest are not necessarily the freest" (Kaufmann 2008:100). The freest are those who can choose either mobility or immobility while still retaining their power, not only because they can distribute monetary and considerable symbolic rewards (among which the most sought after is probably entry into the group itself), but particularly because they dispose of apparatuses preventing them to do the relations-building work, which is not

[9] French: retours croisés.

the case for salaried executives nor for the new bosses who must personally acquire and develop national and international social capital.

As shown elsewhere (Gherardi and Pierre 2010), the long-standing economic élite (those who have inherited great fortunes), to whom financial capitalism provides the opportunity to overcome ever more readily the spatial and temporal constraints imposed by economic production, mobilizes a set of resources linked to belonging to a group that assures permanent and useful international links, which takes the form of exclusive clubs, balls, circles, receptions, and other institutions maintaining *l'entre-soi* of this group. In that sense we sublimate the different forms of mobility, more often linked to self-realization, with self-determined rhythms occurring within spaces[10] separated from the managerial operations of corporations. This ought to lead us to a greater appreciation of the complexity of the opposition between the internationalism of salaried executives who particularly deploy capital consisting of physical mobility (which rests on knowledge accumulated over long periods of time and membership in networks such as those for alumni of prestigious schools), and the cosmopolitanism of the old-money economic élite in pure financial capitalist situations (Wagner 2007).[11] Urry (2000) writes that different mobilities are materially rebuilding the "social-as-society" into the "social-as-mobility". For him, these kinds of mobility are a substitute for the preferred concept of society latent in the social sciences. The structure of these networks—their size, density, and degree of hierarchy—is supposedly revealing of social structure. What we are interested in here is that the example of the *immobile ubiquitous* interviewee member of this group confirms the possibility of being ubiquitous without actually moving—and this not only thanks to technology, but first of all by virtue of the movement of others who constitute its mobility apparatus. This uncovers the link between international geographic mobility and the power over one's own rhythm and that of others, which in part is understood intuitively, but remains unexplained by existing works.

Concluding Remarks

The notion of ubiquity made it possible to develop, on the one hand, a suitably-nuanced theory of exploitation of the *immobile* by the *mobile* within existing networks drawing attention to the power of action at a distance unequally

[10] On diversity between corporate spaces thought of for international business travellers and spaces passed through by the economic élite, see also Beaverstock, Hubbard and Short (2004); Wagner (2007); Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot (2000).

[11] For implications on social stratification, see Gherardi (2010).

distributed within internationally mobile work teams. Our research has led us to conceptualize mobility as a system of power relations, of temporally-bound institutionalizations resembling flotillas (the mobility apparatus) linked to the greater capacity of some individuals to exist simultaneously in several contexts at once—that is, to his/her ubiquity. It is not the distinction between *mobile* and *immobile*, but rather between *mobile* and *ubiquitous* that is most revealing of the asymmetries in the degree of freedom and power within business networks. We have shown by examples both the case of *mobile ubiquitous* (section 2) and the *immobile ubiquitous* (section 3). Mobility is a relational concept if thought in terms of power; suggesting the power to move or to be moved, to immobilize or to be forced to be immobile within business networks, is linked to work coordination and to rhythms of production. Particularly in the case of the international circulation of top management, mobility appears to be an expression of time-space discipline necessary for the support of the organization and for the expansion of capitalism by network, by geographically dispersed and internationalized units.

The future research agenda that emerges from this study includes the analysis of the division of labor inside transnational networks in not strictly industrial domains—such as the art market and the academic field. If conducted on a large scale, this kind of analysis could bring important results to those theories concerned with the composition of the top of the social ladder at a national and international level, including transnational capitalist class theory (Sklair 2001). In particular, the analysis could stress the eventual power differentials among and inside the different social groups composing the transnational élite group.

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