The file: agency, authority, and autography in an Islamabad bureaucracy

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Abstract

This article develops an approach to contemporary governance as a communicative practice fundamentally organized by ''graphic artifacts''—materials such as files, maps, letters, reports, and office manuals. The empirical focus is the role of graphic artifacts in bureaucratic institutions in Islamabad, Pakistan. Departing from functionalist accounts of bureaucracy and from approaches to governmental writing centered on reference and predication, the article describes the use of graphic artifacts, particularly files, in the ritual construction of collective bureaucratic authority and agents. This authority protects individuals and allows particular projects to be collectivized. The article highlights the relationship between, on one hand, the material qualities and dispositions of artifacts and, on the other hand, the semiotic processes they mediate.
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Bureaucratic organization is a social form designed for collective action, a social technology for aligning the efforts of a large number of people so that they act as one. And yet the mechanisms by which this done is the precise individuation of action—defining appropriate actions for individuals and identifying them with particular acts—to a degree not known in any other kind of social organization. The historical development of bureaucratic organizations and theoretical reflections upon them are part of the larger history of individualism in modern political institutions and thought (Foucault, 1977; Giddens, 1984). Bentham, to cite one of the earliest proponents of an organization of institutions that we call bureaucratic,

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based his proposals for efficient collective action on the basis of a thoroughgoing individualism and nominalism which denied the reality of all but individual persons, acts, events and experiences (Bentham, 1932; Hume, 1981). Bureaucracies are among the most consciously materialized of social collectives—painstakingly fabricated in the layouts of offices, the writings of functionaries, the stampings of clerks, the movement of files—because they are designed to unify and control individuals conceived as either naturally independent and refractory or entangled in other collectivities.

The construction of collective agency from the agency of individuals (no less than the individuation of action) is a central task of bureaucratic activities. Sherry Ortner (1984) has observed much anthropology concerned with agency presumes that the individual is the fundamental locus of agency. Such an approach to bureaucratic agency would lead us to a reductionism, to debunk the bureaucratic myth (the belief in reified structural order) by showing that bureaucratic discourse and action are in fact the result of the actions of individuals. However, from the point of view of both the organization and the individual, successful bureaucratic processes result in action that is not dissolvable into the agency of distinct individuals. Our objective should not be to debunk the legitimating actions of individual bureaucrats, but rather to describe how and why in bureaucratic processes corporate agency is realized in any sense in which we can talk about collective action being real. The challenge is to understand collectivization and individualization as simultaneous functions of the same bureaucratic processes, taking neither the agency of the individual nor the organization as given.

In Islamabad bureaucracies, written administrative materials are the main semiotic technology (Kelly, in preparation) for, paradoxically, both the individualizing and the collectivizing of agency. As in the historical development of bureaucracy in Europe and its colonies, the functional end of precise specification of authorship is to fix individual responsibility for actions. And yet bureaucratic writings in Islamabad are often not attributed to the agency of its authors; or, to put it more simply, functionaries are often not judged responsible for what they write. This empirical fact cannot be explained through an analysis of the formal features of an isolated piece of writing. The collective voice of a newspaper editorial, for example, is achieved mainly through the use of an anonymous first person plural. In contrast, in Islamabad bureaucratic writings, this collective voice is built progressively through the documented participation of different actors; correlatively, attributions of responsibility for authorship of a piece of writing are based upon the dialogic process through which it was generated. As I will show, bureaucratic agency is at once individualized through autographic writings and ritually collectivized through the dialogic discursive and circulatory construction of those writings.

Written bureaucratic discourse is often characterized as anonymous on the basis of lexical and semantic features—the prevalence of passive verbs, abstract nouns, and the like. As one observer puts it, "The effect is to create an impersonal tone, and to eliminate information about who is responsible for what" (Charrow, 1982, p. 183). This view of bureaucratic discourse corresponds to the common image of bureaucracy as the epitome of collective social organization, the authority of which

depends in part on its representation of itself as a collective agent. While there is some validity to the characterization, it is only half the story, an outsider's perspective based on analysis of published or publicly distributed documents. Things look different from the inside. Written materials circulated within the Pakistan bureaucracy share these lexical and semantic features. But many pragmatic features of this discourse and its material medium precisely index the individuals who write every word and make every mark. While analysts of bureaucratic discourse, taking the outsider's perspective of the client, complain of authorless bureaucratic discourse, for functionaries of the Pakistan bureaucracy, the authorship of written discourse is all too precisely specified.

The precise specification of authorship is a source of considerable anxiety in the uncertain political arena of the Pakistan bureaucracy. This anxiety is linked to long term processes affecting the position of the bureaucracy in the political order of the Pakistan state. Prime Minister Zalfiqar Ali Bhutto's "reforms" in the 1970s, designed to trim the wings of the bureaucratic establishment, were the first attacks on an institution which had carried the power and autonomy of the colonial government into the post-colonial era. From the late-1970s President Zia-ul-Haq allied himself with the bureaucracy and undid some of Bhutto's reform measures, but he made no attempt to restore the bureaucracy to its former power (Kennedy, 1987). During the past 15 years of civilian government in Pakistan, the bureaucracy has been buffeted by less-institutionalized political and military interventions. Succeeding civilian governments have sought to purge the bureaucracy through the transfer, early retirement, or dismissal of officers and staff tied to the former ruling party. Similarly, on a more local scale, personnel changes within the senior ranks of the government divisions menace functionaries with transfer to unfavorable posts or outright dismissal. Investigations of official activities, such as those of the Federal Investigative Agency, the *Ehtesab* (Accountability) Commission in 1997–1998, and most recently the National Accountability Bureau (known by its frank acronym, NAB), are almost always underway. Important or controversial issues bring official activities under the scrutiny of contending official and private parties who often try to shape outcomes by undermining opposed functionaries. Such events sometimes generate a kind of paranoia about writing in many functionaries, but even the most uncontroversial writings are accompanied by routine anxiety.

While official sanctions and criminal punishments are linked to politics (inside or outside the bureaucracy) and usually motivated by more than a concern for official propriety, written records of actions provide the main evidence for them. Through routine acts of writing, functionaries submit themselves as individuals to the opacity of the present and the vagaries of the future. They well understand the potential for their writings to be radically recontextualized. In the bureaucratic arena, dissimulation is pervasive and interested actors often rely on several links of mediators to pursue their projects. What we, with our empiricist and democratic vision of socio-political process, would call conspiracy theories are common explanations of ordinary events, explanations that frequently prove accurate. Functionaries are often troubled by the question of who is really "behind" a proposal. Written materials are notoriously peripatetic and might encounter an unrecognized interested party, opportunist, or

malefactor who will turn them against their author. Even when the present is clear, the future is cloudy. File discourse is never finalized in Bakhtin's sense (1986, p. 76). Files may be maintained for decades and functionaries never know when the propriety of their actions will be called into question by later unforeseen events. Instability is a fact of Pakistani social life that all sorts of people, including government officials, used to explain their actions to me. "Who knows what will happen tomorrow?" is a refrain I often heard. The physical perdurance of files beyond the circumstances of their creation situates them within a horizon of uncertainty. As one functionary put it to me, "Files are timebombs."

This article has two objectives. The first is briefly to develop an approach to contemporary governance as a communicative practice fundamentally organized by what I call "graphic artifacts"—discourse-mediating materials such as files, maps, letters, reports, and office manuals (Hull, 2003). Second, the article examines the role of files in the fabrication of collective agency and authority in two government bodies, the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and the Islamabad Capital Territories Administration (ICTA). The ethnographic argument is that bureaucratic actors in this setting use the rationalizing regime of written documentation to ritually constitute a collective agent.[1] I relate a greater ritualistic use of procedures to a historical decline in the power of the bureaucracy in Pakistan and to more restricted events that threaten functionaries involved in them. I argue that the rationalization process is not driven by some kind of intrinsic logic but by the effectiveness of using particular kinds of graphic artifacts to ritually diffuse the agency of individuals. This diffusion of agency as officially interpreted provides some functionaries with job security and others with cover for questionable or outright illegal activities.[2]

1. Graphic artifacts and bureaucratic process

Latour argues that we should replace the study of social institutions with that of collectives of humans and artifacts, what he calls "corporate bodies" or "object institutions" (1999, p. 192), in which artifacts are not merely the passive instruments of social agents but active in the creation and maintenance of those agents. Such an approach to bureaucratic activities is supported by Saumarez Smith's account of the different functions that the genres of record, report, and manual had in the

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[1] I use the term ritual to refer to action with particular formal properties and not as a label to exoticize or "anthropologize" bureaucratic practices in the manner of *Tribes on the Hill* (Weatherford, 1981), an anthropological study of the US Congress. Two decades ago Sampson (1983) observed a persistent tendency of anthropological studies to transform formal institutions into "something exotic."

[2] The research on which this article is based was conducted in Islamabad from 1996 to 1998 and was completed before the Pakistan army again assumed direct control of the government in October of 1999. There are indications that direct military oversight of civilian bureaucracies has once again increased the insecurities of bureaucrats and intensified the bureaucratic practices that generate collective responsibility. Newspapers have reported, for example, that many CDA officials began to refuse altogether to provide opinions on large development projects.

British Indian colonial administration (Saumarez Smith, 1985). He characterizes the mid-nineteenth-century British colonial administration not as an organization simply employing various written genres, but as an organization whose overall structure and practices are constituted in part by the varying functions of these different genres. I follow him in arguing that graphic artifacts are not simply the instruments of already existing social organizations; rather, they precipitate the formation of shifting networks and groups of people inside and outside the bureaucracy.

Most scholars of bureaucracy, following Weber, identify the file as the central technology of bureaucracy (Blau, 1955; Weber, 1978; Goody, 1986). However, we rarely find descriptions of government files: what genres of writings they include, what physical form they take, who produces their contents, how they are assembled, how they are controlled and so forth. Files are seldom empirically investigated as a semiotic technology used differently in varying socio-cultural situations.[3] Writing in organizations is typically described within the orality/literacy frame, as a basis for a sociological distinction between organizations using writing and those limited to oral communication. A homogeneity to ''writing'' as the vehicle of files is assumed. The variable role of different written genres is neglected because writing is characterized simply as a perduring form of representation that enables organizational extension and control not possible through fleeting oral representation. This functionalist approach emphasizes official writing as an instrument for stable reference and predication, a means to establish and communicate a stable relation between discourse and things in the world.

My approach to writing shifts the focus from writing as a mode of communication to graphic artifacts, written genres as artifactualized in particular material forms. The term ''graphic artifact'' is intended to have the same theoretical meaning as Silverstein's ''text artifact,'' a perduring object that is the ''mediating instrumentality of communicative processes for its perceiver'' (Silverstein and Urban, 1996). The ''text'' of ''text artifact'' does not describe the composition of the artifact itself (inscribed with graphic forms functioning semiotically more or less like oral linguistic forms), but rather the kinds of semiotic process (entextualization and contextualization) which the artifact mediates. In that sense, every sort of artifact is always potentially and, at some point in its existence, actually a text-artifact in so far as it can mediate semiosis (Keane, 1997; Parmentier, 1997). At the risk of obscuring this important point, I use the term ''graphic artifact'' rather than ''text artifact'' to define a certain class of artifacts, written materials, and to emphasize the non- and para-linguistic semiotic functions of this type of artifact.

Studies of writing within the literacy framework have aimed to describe literacy either generally as a mode of communication (e.g. Biber, 1988; Finnegan, 1988; Goody, 1977, 1986; Jahandarie, 1999; Olson, 1994) or as a heterogeneous phenomenon varying with different social domains in which a variety of written genres are

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[3] The ''document'' as an undifferentiated category of artifact has received more attention. Among recent treatments are the excellent studies of Harper (1998) and Latour (1990), whose conclusions parallel my own, and Riles (2000).

used (Besnier, 1995; Street, 1984). While different genres have been the empirical focus of research, the concept of genre has not been central to literacy approaches to writing. In contrast, as Briggs and Bauman have described (1995), genre has long played an important role in the anthropological study of speech. Following Bakhtin, Hanks describes discourse genres as forms of practice that are historically constituted by contingent and motivated, but not deterministic, relations between linguistic forms, ideology, and practices (Hanks, 1995, p. 242). The socio-cultural significance of writing, no less than speech, varies with genre. Within the Pakistan bureaucracy there is a great variety of written discourse genres which might be characterized as products of "bureaucratic" literacy: files, office registers, minutes, organizational charts, plans, elevations, visiting cards, "chits," petitions, powers of attorney, memos, letters, revenue records, regulations, reports, policy statements, and office manuals. There are some commonalities in the use of and ideological constructs related to most genres within the Pakistan bureaucracy. However, each genre has its own pattern of use, distinct formal discursive characteristics, orienting frameworks, interpretive procedures, temporality, and sets of expectations through which readers produce and make sense of it.

Another important aspect of written discourse, often neglected by linguistic and literary approaches, is its material form. In his studies of the history of the book in Europe, Chartier has shown how the significance of literary works is shaped by the form of their presentation and the production and distribution practices conditioned by the material form of the book. "The significance, or better yet, the historically and socially distinct significations, of a text, whatever they may be, are inseparable from the material conditions and physical forms that make the text available to readers" (Chartier, 1995, p. 22). We can distinguish two broad, related dimensions of the materiality of graphic artifacts: first, the material qualities that function as semiotic vehicles in discursive processes; and second, the non-discursive processes involving artifacts.

In considering the material aspects of graphically-mediated discourse, the tendency has been to emphasize the qualities of material mediums of writing that differ from those of (unrecorded) speech: perdurance and visuality (Chafe, 1986; Goody, 1977). These qualities are of great importance. However, beyond the material qualities shared by all forms of writing, different artifacts have many other varying material qualities which shape their significance and use (Harris, 1995; Pellegram, 1988). I give here simply a laundry list of such qualities: the size, qualities, costliness of the paper; whether it is handwritten, printed, or typed; the typeface of the text; pencil vs. ink; organization of graphic space; the structure of the artifact—what is placed relative to what, how are they attached or enclosed; uniqueness and quantity; age and wear.

In addition to graphically mediated semiosis there are also non-discursive happenings and events involving graphic artifacts, what Keane describes as "the vicissitudes to which material signs are prone" (1997, p. 31). Anthropologists have long recognized that things are signs, but have often ignored that signs are things. Keane observes that "representations exist as things and acts in the world...A medium of representation is not only something that stands 'between' those things it mediates,

it is also a 'thing' in its own right'' (Keane, 1997, p. 8). The study of writing must attend not only to communicative practices but to the social life of things (Appadurai, 1986). The two are closely intertwined but they are never identical. As in the case of files, it is often precisely the disjuncture between communicative processes and the life of the artifact that supports them that shapes the significance of the graphic artifact for its producers and audience. The production and circulation of graphic artifacts are conditioned by technology and the social organization of physical access. At different points in its social career, a graphic artifact may be duplicated, bound to other artifacts, supplemented, abridged through the removal of parts, transported, locked up, defaced, destroyed, stored, misplaced, lost, forgotten, stolen, and bought. Such non-discursive events shape the social organization of communicative events involving the artifact and often leave traces upon the material disposition of the artifact that can function indexically in semiosis. They can become ''contextualization cues'' of discourse in Gumperz's sense (1982). Events involving graphic artifacts as material entities are neither isolated from nor subordinated to the semiotic processes they mediate. The material disposition of artifacts and the semiotic processes that involve them are mutually conditioning.

Adapting Silverstein's concept of linguistic ideology (Silverstein, 1979) to graphic artifacts, we could say that the semiotic function and non-discursive uses of graphic artifacts are partly shaped by graphic ideologies, sets of beliefs about graphic artifacts held by their users. Graphic ideologies are obviously tied closely to linguistic ideologies, but include notions specific to graphic semiosis, such as conventions for the interpretation of graphic forms, views about how artifacts are produced and circulated, as well as more general beliefs regarding the authority of graphic artifacts and their capacity represent truth, spirit, presence, and so forth (Clanchy, 1979; Derrida, 1974; Messick, 1993). A graphic ideology can be seen as a particular form of what Keane (2003) describes as a ''semiotic ideology,'' which defines what is to count as a sign and how signs are understood to function in the world.

2. The social life of files

The file system of the CDA dates back to the *Kaghazi Raj* or ''Paper Rule'' of the British colonial administration. British officials were frequently transferred among different posts in India. Lacking knowledge of the permanently-posted native functionaries upon which they helplessly depended, British officials maintained a profound and often well-founded distrust of native staff. Building on the elaborate written procedures of the Mughals, the major Muslim dynasty in north India, the British fashioned a graphic regime of surveillance and control. This was an attempt to make discourse a part of a more trustworthy material order. It was precisely the materiality of graphic signs that made them useful. Normative procedures were laid down in hundreds of manuals produced for every sphere of administration in the late nineteenth century (Saumarez-Smith, 1985). In much the same fashion, succes-

sors to these manuals define normative procedures in contemporary Pakistani bureaucracies.[4]

An official or normatively standardizing graphic ideology is implicit in these manuals. I characterize this ideology as official not only because it is backed by the force of rules and law, but also because bureaucratic actors understand that this official ideology often does not accord with actual use. At the risk of exaggerating its systematicity and the role that artifacts themselves play in defining their interpretation in practice, we could call this understanding of artifacts in practice an unofficial graphic ideology. The interplay between official and unofficial interpretations, of course, is central to the way actors make use of official procedures. This is a complex issue, which I won't explore now in detail. However, we can note some basic elements of the official ideology.

The key concept is the identification of autographic authorship with agency. Autographic writing is supposed to accompany, produce, or be action. Many actions, such as commanding subordinates, approval of proposals, and communication of information and opinions, are normatively accomplished through writing. This contrasts, for example, with early late-Medieval European and "pre-modern" Islamic uses of writing, which was seen as a means of recording acts accomplished in speech (Clanchy, 1979; Messick, 1993). When actions are not performed through writing, they are supposed to be autographically documented. A person who is an agent but not an author, who causes things to happen without writing (or being written about), is a kind of witch from the bureaucratic point of view. Official procedures of file production are designed to determine agency (and therefore responsibility) absolutely by comprehensive documentation of authorship. Through autographic writing the actions of individuals within an organization are made visible.

The requirement that official writing have an autographic component is part of the practical attack on the problem of words and things found in these manuals. This approach to the problem is based upon the notion that certain kinds of graphic signs anchor discourse in the world because they are the causal result of physical events involving the file. Official recognition of graphic forms like signatures and stamps as the visible, perduring, physical result of unique (types of) events makes them officially sanctioned indexes of one or more elements of those events, such as the person, place, or time.[5] Only discourse anchored through the use of such signs has the official status that authorizes its use in official proceedings.

The main such sign, of course, is the signature. The convention of the signature (including initials) establishes a semiotic relation between a specific individual and a

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[4] Beyond the procedures, there are countless phrasings, lists, topical organizations, and even whole paragraphs in contemporary manuals that have been carried forward from British manuals published in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. Every British manual borrowed heavily from other manuals, so a procedural innovation quickly spread throughout the subcontinent. Interestingly, despite the political antagonism between India and Pakistan, this pan-subcontinental borrowing process is still at work. Numerous references to Hindi are found in the sample letters and forms of a poorly-edited manual on office procedure recently published for Pakistani government employees (Malik, 1999).

[5] Not all graphic forms that might be judged to be the physical result of particular kinds of events are officially sanctioned as indexes. For example, the qualities of a particular handwriting are not official signs in routine business, though they become so in the hands of criminal investigators. Thus, even within government arenas the official graphic ideology can vary.

specific graphic form, produced, crucially, by an ostensibly inimitable biomechanical act of signing. Other graphic forms of identification, like the *tughlaq* of the Mughal emperor (a calligraphic image) or the seals of Chinese imperial officials, index an individual, but this relation is based upon the political control of the image (unauthorized production of the imperial *tughlaq* was a capital offence) and/or, as in the Chinese case, the physical control of the artifact capable of producing the image. Ideologically, the signature is unique not in indexing an individual but in establishing this relationship on the basis of physical causality. The images produced by office stamps, the traces of movement of graphic artifacts among offices, normatively function through the same mechanism of physical causation: the image is produced by a stamp physically controlled by a group of functionaries in a particular physical location. In recognition that the stamps can be reproduced or removed from their rightful place in an office, stamp images are supplemented by writing which establishes an inter-artifactual relation between the stamped graphic artifact and a diary book.

The file is the workhorse of the Pakistan bureaucracy. The vast scope of planning and administrative activities of the CDA is reflected in the variety of file subjects. Land acquisitions, mosques, squatter eviction proceedings, private houses, the demolition of illegal structures, CDA employees, prosecution of food adulterers, control of the wild boars that nightly descend from the hills behind the city—all of these and more are consecrated in paper shrines of varying thickness and consequence.

Extending Bakhtin's distinction between primary and secondary speech genres to graphic genres (Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 61–62), the file may be characterized as a complex graphic genre.[6] Despite his theoretical concentration on "concrete utterances," Bakhtin was not concerned with the material form in which written genres were presented. In describing how the novel, a complex genre, absorbs primary genres such as letters, diaries, everyday dialogues and narration, Bakhtin focused on linguistic devices such as dialogism, direct quotation, and reported speech (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 259–422). However, in addition to the linguistic devices he described, complex graphic genres use a variety of non- or para-linguistic graphic and non-graphic spatial means to incorporate other graphic genres. The graphic form of the file is essential to its mediation of discourse: the irreducibly graphic semiosis of the file necessitates circulation of the actual file.

The file is the most complex graphic genre in use within the Pakistan bureaucracy, incorporating most other primary and secondary graphic genres, including sometimes portions of other files. Pakistan government files are made up of three sections: first, a "notes" portion, comprising official serial entries of different functionaries, including commentary on the matter at issue, directives, responses, documentation of actions, accounts of conversations, reports of petitions, and so forth; second, a collection of copies or the originals of all the internal and external correspondence (including drafts) issued or received that pertain to the subject of the file; and third, a section containing maps, plans, lists, schedules, reports, newspaper clippings and any other kind of relevant document. Papers are secured within folders by a

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[6] This distinction between primary and secondary (or complex) genres is, of course, relative, intended to characterize how some genres incorporate others. Even what I here call primary genres, such as letters, incorporate a number of recognizable genres, for example, signatures, salutations, and so forth.

single string with a metal catch on both ends that is fed through the papers and the holes punched in the upper corner of the front and back of the folder, allowing items to be added and removed easily. The folders and plans of a single file are tied together with a string attached to thick, cloth-reinforced off-white band, a descendant of the infamous "red tape" which became the symbol of bureaucratic inefficiency under the British.

Bakhtin observed that the significance of a primary discourse genre is mediated by its recontextualization in a more complex genre (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 62). Similarly, when simpler graphic genres are absorbed into complex ones, through physical attachment or enclosure, they support different kinds of discourse and become involved in different practices. Both the discourse supported by a graphic artifact and its pattern of circulation are altered when it is placed in or "on" (as Pakistani bureaucrats put it) a file. Only through incorporation into a file can other graphic genres become part of the process through which official decisions and actions are taken. In the disposal of a case, whatever materials that are not referenced by or placed on a file do not exist as far as officials are concerned.

As Mauss was among the first to observe, the significance of many artifacts from Persian carpets (Spooner, 1986) to Massim *kula* shells (Munn, 1983) are deeply embedded in their histories: how they were made, who has acquired them and how, how they have been used, and so forth (Appadurai, 1986). A Pakistan government file, however, is an unusual sort of artifact because signs of its history are continuously and deliberately inscribed upon the artifact itself. In fact, such signs largely constitute the file, a peculiarity that gives it an event-like quality. A file is a chronicle of its own production, a sedimentation of its own history. Specifically, a large portion of a file consists of explicit—if selective—documentation of its role in the social world—graphic representations of the relations between the file (or certain of its components) and people, spaces, times, other graphic artifacts, actions, and speech events. Unlike published books or even memos distributed in identical form to several recipients, files are unique artifacts. Portions may be copied (usually for insertion in other files), but only the original maintains its status as an official instrument of deliberations, decisions, and actions. While officially sanctioned access to files varies depending on the issue, even files concerned with the most uncontroversial and public issues are officially confidential and are not to be seen by unofficial people.

In the rest of this section I describe in more detail the use of files, including a trend toward greater procedural rationalization of activities from the early 1960s, when the CDA was established, to the present.[7] The process that generates a file begins with the receipt of a written communication on a subject for which no file in the

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[7] The following account is based upon examination of hundreds of active and inactive ICTA and CDA files of several directorates that were created and added to from the early 1960s until 1997. For the sake of brevity, I describe a contrast between 1960s and contemporary practices without an account of intermediary states. I should note here an inevitable imbalance between my accounts of earlier and later practices involving files, owing to the difference in the sources upon which they are based. For the contemporary period I was able to examine files, talk with functionaries about their use, and observe the role of files in ongoing bureaucratic processes. In contrast, my account of the earlier period relies almost exclusively on files themselves, supplemented by general observations of CDA staff who have worked there since the early 1960s.

directorate already exists.[8] The "diary clerk" places all the mail on a "*dak* pad" (mail pad) and several times a day presents it to the senior-most officer of the organizational division.[9] The officer reviews the mail and hand writes brief notes on the first page of each. Since the note of an officer on receipts is always followed by the notes of others, we could call it a turn at writing (De Rycker, 1987), a conventional graphic genre with several components arranged in three compartmentalized spatial units. First, there is a brief question, comment, or directive regarding the issue. Second, below his note and to the right, the official initials it, writes a slash, and dates it below and to the right of his initials.[10] Third, below his initials and to the left, as far as the blank space of the letter allows, the official "marks" the letter, that is, writes and underlines the title of the functionary to which the letter should be presented next. Before noting on a letter, every officer strikes out with a single pen stroke the mark designating himself, as a indication that he has received the letter.

Before passing on the receipt, the diary clerk first enters each letter into the office diary, a large book containing columns for a serial number, receipt date, letter number, the name and position of the author, the subject of the letter, and the designation of the person to whom the official marked the letter.[11] The letter itself is then stamped with a round or oval image including references to the section, directorate, and the CDA, over which the clerk hand-writes the receipt date and the diary number. Through the mute medium of stamps, clerks create a metatext which emplots the official career of the artifact in time, space, organizational order, and the order of other graphic artifacts.

In the 1960s, communications were usually marked first to either the person who had direct knowledge and responsibility for the issue or someone who had to be

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[8] The process by which a letter is written and eventually delivered to the CDA is very complex, often involving conversations with CDA officials and the mediation of officials and politicians in the senior ranks of the federal government, who are often the original recipients of letters forwarded to the CDA. The practice of submitting petitions to the highest authorities reflects a widely held conception that power is concentrated at the apex of government and that even the smallest actions of government are done at the behest of senior politicians and officials.

[9] The CDA is organized into approximately 50 "directorates" under the authority of directors, which are grouped under eight "wings" overseen by deputy directors general. Wings are placed under the authority of the corporation board constituted by a chairman, secretary, and four or five members (financial, engineering, planning/design, administration). Functionaries of the Pakistan bureaucracy, continuing the British system, are ranked in grades from 1 to 22. Sanitation workers and office runners ("peons") occupy the lowest grades, various levels of clerks, assistants, and technical staff the middle grades, and officers the grades 16 and above. The chain of command for a directorate, for example the Planning Directorate, is as follows: surveyors and other technical staff (grades 10–14), assistant (grade 15), town planner (TP, grade 16), deputy director [DD(P), grade 17–18], director [D(P), grade 18–19], deputy director general [DDG(P), grade 19–20], member [M(P), grade 19–20], chairman (grade 20–21).

[10] I use the pronouns *he* and *his* in reference to CDA and ICTA functionaries because the overwhelming majority are men. I explore the gender dimensions of the Pakistan bureaucracy elsewhere (Hull, 2003).

[11] All government and many unofficial letters are numbered. All government correspondence and most English and Urdu letters from even unofficial parties adopt the form of the bureaucratic letter which includes a metapragmatic characterization of the letter in the form of a subject entry above the body of the letter. English letters without such a subject entry are often considerably delayed because the English of many of the diarists is so poor that they have difficulty in determining the subject. They often resort to reviews of previously diarized letters with similar verbal formulations in order to make this determination.

consulted regarding it. Marking was flexible with respect to the organizational chain of command, often skipping a level or two going up or down. While the formal procedures haven't changed since the early 1960s, the handling of receipts in the contemporary CDA is a much more elaborate process. Few decisions are made before the receipt has become a properly established component of a file. The basic components of the genre of the note have not changed, but the comments and directives have become attenuated. Receipts are almost always marked to the officer's immediate subordinate, neither moving up nor skipping levels of the organizational hierarchy. The letter continues downward as each officer perhaps adds a word or two echoing that of the senior-most officer of the organizational hierarchy, initials and dates the letter, then marks it to his immediate subordinate. The downward movement of the letter continues along the organizational hierarchy until it reaches the lowest officer—a town planner, engineer, or architect. This grade 17 officer writes a note to return the letter to him after it has been incorporated into a file (e.g. "Put up on the file.") and marks it to his assistant. If there is no current file on the subject of the letter, the assistant opens a new one.

Note sheets and correspondence are contained in separate legal-size folders of thick, brown, gray, green, or blue paper, with "CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION" printed in black across the top. Below that the file number and year the file was opened are written by hand. When a receipt is placed on file, it is inserted at the end of papers in the correspondence folder. These papers are all serially numbered and a "flag" (a small slip of paper) with "PUC" written on it is pinned to it, to designate the letter as the "paper under consideration." The receipt is then "docketed" on the notes pages, legal size off-white or light green paper with a thin line at a margin of 1–3/4 inches. Docketing is the process through which the official writings on the letter are extracted from the surface of the letter and transcribed to the notes sheet. The docketing procedure is unchanged from the early 1960s, though nowadays a much greater percentage of receipts—virtually all of them—are docketed and with fuller documentation.

The original inscription of notes on the letter is a spatial index that establishes the letter as the referent of the notes. In docketing, this spatial index between official writings and the letter is replaced by a linguistic graphic reference to the letter, or more precisely, to the physical position of the letter in the file or the author and date of letter. Below the receipt date, name of the letter's sender, and the page of the original in the correspondence section, the clerk transcribes on the note sheet—in type or handwriting—all the notes on the receipt. The spatially compartmentalized segments of each officer's note on the receipt are transcribed as paragraphs which are numbered as a series continuing through all the notes.

The transcription of initials is impossible since there is no speech act, representable in language, that corresponds to the signature. In the 1960s, when a signature was moved into the reported frame of the notesheet, in place of the actual signature or initials of officials the clerk would write the abbreviation "Sd./-" for "signed" followed by the name of the signing officer. In contrast, today signatures are transcribed as "Sd x" followed by the title of the signatory with no reference to the actual individual, obscuring the individual identity expressed by a signature.

The serial order established by the numbering of paragraphs is reinforced by the spatial ordering of the turns. The haphazard placements of the turns of different officials on the letter is translated into the spatial order of the notes sheet, where the direction from top to bottom represents prior to later temporal relations. On the letter, the interspersal of official notes with the text of the letter is a visual iconic representation of an unequal dialogue among officials and the author of the letter. The visual separation between official notes and the letter requires the substitution of a discursive and more mediate relation between the writing of officials and the letter to which they were responding. The official notes are extracted from their immediate dialogic relation with the letter and recontextualized in a wholly official graphic space. In the docketing process, the dialogue of officials with the letter writer and each other is graphically reconstituted on the note sheet as dialogue (mainly) among officials.

Notes written directly on files have the same components as those on letters, but they are more elaborate, as will be described in detail in the next section. Here I will just sketch the normal path of a file from this point to its "filing" in order to show the amazing amount of repeated engagement a number of officials have with the artifact of a single case.

Following docketing, the assistant gathers relevant facts and precedents in the form of documents and submits them with the file to his superior, a town planner, engineer, or architect, depending on the directorate. It is the task of this officer to summarize the "relevant facts and precedents" and suggest a course of action. Files usually spend a considerable amount of time here. In contrast to the offices of higher officials, these offices are heaped high with languishing files. From here the file is passed up the chain of the organization or laterally to other departments until an official passes orders on it, usually in the form of an approval of the original suggestion of the grade 17 officer, supported by the notes of the officials through whom it had passed. When a file goes out of a major office or directorate it receives a rectangular "despatch" stamp, including a date and diary entry number; when it comes in it receives a round or oval "receipt" stamp with the same information. When an official approves a proposal, the file changes direction and moves downward again to the grade 17 officer, beneath the pens (and, perhaps, by the eyes or ears) of all the officials in between. The grade 17 officer will then direct staff to carry out the action and/or draft a reply to the petitioner. Usually he dictates the draft to a typist and edits the draft before sending the file back up the chain to the officer who approved the proposal. If approved, the file descends to this officer to order a "fair copy" or "fair" for signing and issuance. Sometimes this officer will sign and issue the letter himself and sometimes it will be passed up the chain to the officer who made the decision. From wherever it is signed it descends again to the grade 17 officer who orders the assistant to issue the letter and "files the case" by returning the file to the record room of the directorate, where it remains until another receipt on that subject is received. While every file makes a minimum of three trips through the organizational hierarchy, a controversial case, which no senior official wants to decide on, may do several more cycles. Files tend to bounce back and forth between the highest and lowest officer-level posts in an organization because they have what we might

call a social momentum that keeps the file traveling in the same direction. Other than the initiative of an intermediary officer, only the boundaries of the organization force a reversal of direction.

3. Individual avoidance and corporate authority

Graphic artifacts are central to bureaucratic practices because they mediate the actions of individuals and the agency of larger groups, including that of the organization as a whole. The usefulness and authority of graphic artifacts arise in part from their mediating position between the corporate order and the specific event of writing. Translating Keane's observations on the mediating role of ritual speech (1997, p. 96), we can say that this mediation of graphic artifacts is dialectical insofar as it does not simply attempt to fit specific events into a preexisting template but also works to construct in concrete forms the very corporate order that it appears to reproduce. The use of graphic artifacts is thus both presupposing and creative (Silverstein, 1993). Through graphic artifacts, functionaries locate their actions within a presupposable social context and create a social context around their actions. The circulation of files and the use of linguistic and non-linguistic forms which weakly or obscurely index individual authorship are strategies functionaries use to escape the consequences of the precise specification of individual authorship. The objective of the circulatory and discursive strategies of functionaries is to pragmatically and metapragmatically construct their writings as authored corporately.

The effort to achieve corporate authorship and agency may be compared to ritual in its use of hypertrophied semiotic means to create self-grounding discourse. Kelly and Kaplan, following Valeri, observe that "rituals displace authority and authorship." They argue that the "special power in ritual acts, including their unique ability to encompass contestation, lies in the *lack* of independence asserted by a ritual participant, even while he or she makes assertions about authority" (Kelly and Kaplan, 1990, p. 140). The authority of ritual flows from the ability of the speaker to divorce speech from the immediate context of its production, to transform particular utterances made by an individual in particular circumstances into discourse which is autonomous, grounded in some order beyond the speaker's intentions. Correlatively, as Keane puts it, ritual speech constitutes "the participants, speaking and nonspeaking, as representatives of social entitites that exist beyond the time and space of the momentary context. *Semiotic* representation here functions as *sociopolitical* representation" (1997, p. 135).

I think we can see an analogous process at work in files in the Pakistan bureaucracy. When compelled to act on an issue, functionaries employ various circulatory and discursive strategies to divorce their writings from themselves by merging them with the broadest context of their production, so that autographic writings become grounded in the corporate order of the bureaucratic organization beyond the individual agency of their authors. In the use of CDA files, the rationalization and ritualization of procedures extend themselves together. As practices are rationalized from the point of view of organizational control (by subjecting actions to a regime

of written documentation), these practices are ritualized in order to generate a collective agent. The irony is that the more you try to pin responsibility to individuals, the more responsibility is collectivized.

Collective discourse results from the co-operative and competitive ritual efforts of individuals to escape the responsibility which rationalizing procedures link to authorship. It also has the concomitant effect of producing authoritative discourse, the discourse of the organization, but this is I think not the primary function (as a functionalist sociology would see it), but an important by-product of individual efforts to avoid individual responsibility. The contemporary emphasis on bureaucracy as an institution of domination has occluded the degree to which subsumption into the corporate organization protects the individual even as it controls him or her. As I will discuss below, in addition to protecting individuals, the strategic use of graphic artifacts can enable individuals to collectivize their individual projects, both legal and illegal.

In his treatment of bureaucratic writing, Goody focuses on the role of records as an instrument of stable reference and predication about states of affairs behind and beyond the office doors (Goody, 1986). Certainly this is a function of many official graphic genres in different settings, but in the Pakistan bureaucracy it is often not the main function of files. In the fertile discursive soil of the Pakistan bureaucracy, great flowering jungles of file-mediated discourse grow from the poor seeds of a few facts. Much of the denotational discourse mediated by files refers not to the matter under consideration but to the actions and statements of functionaries. Furthermore, denotational discourse on the matter under consideration always functions tropically as a representation of agency or, what is the same thing, the relations among functionaries in various official interactions.

The authority of bureaucratic discourse—that is, why it compels agreement and obedience—is not simply a function of referential correctness, official position, and the use of a certain linguistic register. Rather, this authority is a pragmatic discursive achievement that fabricates an artifactualized representation of a political alliance of functionaries (cf. Latour, 1987). This explains the paradox (from a referentialist functional perspective) that in Islamabad documents are widely seen as manipulable, but remain an essential basis for bureaucratic action. The authoritative agency of the organization is out of the hands of any single individual, constructed jointly (and usually unequally) by a number of individuals through their writings. Through compelled or voluntary alliances with graphic artifacts, functionaries are brought into willing or unwilling alliances with other functionaries. The effectiveness of this ritual is, therefore, an achievement, a semiotic process that can fail (Keane, 1997), rather than simply a mechanistic procedure or construction, as in the going-through-the-motions view of ritual. Furthermore, the achievement of corporate authorship is never secure. Functionaries never know when it will be called into question for some reason. A disciplinary investigation proceeds in the opposite direction as the ritual practices by attempting to dissolve corporate authorship and identify particular writings with individuals.

Within the boundaries set by these individuating official discursive requirements—and in response to them—functionaries use a variety of discursive and non-discursive

strategies to distance themselves from their writings and collectivize them. The simplest and most obvious response to the predicament of authorship is not to write at all. The Llewellyn-Smith Report reviewing the office practices of the British Government of India, published in 1920, observed disapprovingly that government departments "have developed a type of organization more suited for criticism than for direct initiative" [Llewellyn-Smith, 1963 (1920), p. 35]. The report attributed the reactive character of departments to the artifactual foundation of official work. Work was rarely initiated from within because casework proceeded as a response to an initiating petition or written representation from another department.[12] This is as true today as it was then. In the hundreds of files I examined, not a single one had been opened on the initiative of an officer in the same directorate. Officials are often informed of issues through oral discussions with other officials or unofficial parties, but they will not begin official procedures on the basis of this knowledge, preferring to wait until they receive some written representation.

The most basic practice in the construction of corporate authority is the circulation of the file. Circulatory practices are central to the construction of corporate authority because a file is the sole graphic embodiment of an issue. That is, a single file contains all the graphic representations that reference a particular matter, at least during the period when the matter is under consideration. This contrasts with CDA reports, which are printed and distributed in an ill-defined field of both internal and external readers.[13] In fact, artifacts with more general circulations—such as reports and memos—are often channeled into networks by being placed on file.[14]

Files are kept moving up and down the chain of command, through the cooperation or competition of functionaries. As described above, the file is normally moved on the established vertical paths of the organizational hierarchy. The file is even marked to officers on leave, who are known to be absent. Files on minor matters routinely reach the office of the chairman, as officers pass files up the chain to avoid having to make a decision. Officials also extend the scope of those involved by circulating files to other departments who might be affected by the matter. And almost every file can be "referred for comments" to the departments of administration, law, finance, and personnel, which are always "concerned". Even when an issue is dealt with in speech rather than writing, the movement of the file may structure and

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[12] Interestingly, the recommendations of the Llewellyn-Smith Report to resolve this problem of initiative implicitly recognized that inscriptional practices rather than organizational role definitions were more fundamental determinants of bureaucratic action. Rather than trying to change the inscription practices within a particular organizational structure, the reforms recommended changing the organizational structures to fit the inscriptional practices. Both of the report's proposed solutions amounted to an organizational doubling that formally redefined a part of the department as external so that correspondence from this division would be treated as external, and therefore would require a response.

[13] Similarly, memos, distributed by what we might call narrowcast system, cannot provide the basis for an artifactualized representation of an alliance among officials. Graphic evidence of who has read the memos and how they responded to them is dispersed in different artifacts. To reconstruct the authorship of a decision developed through memos is a complex task which would demand gathering separate artifacts dispersed in different locations.

[14] I sometimes found whole reports inserted in a file—becoming the captured speech of the case file.

document participation, as when the file is used to issue instructions to "discuss". Consider the following exchange:

TP-I
> *14. Pl discuss*
> > *Sd- TP-I*
> > *16-3-82*

ATP
> *15. Please discuss with TP-I*
> > *Sd- ATP*
> > *18-3-82*

Surveyor
> *16. After discussion the file is submitted on 28-3-82*
> > *Sd- Surveyor*
> > *28-3-82*

TP-I
> *17. Please discuss.*
> > *Sd- TP-I*
> > *6-5-82*

ATP
> *18. Discussed.*
> > *Sd- ATP*
> > *7-5-82*

The circulation of the file precipitates a multi-party interaction through which authorship and therefore agency, as constructed in official ideology, is distributed over a larger and larger network of functionaries. The contingent achievement of movement up and down the chain of command and laterally to other departments produces on the notesheet a representation of collective agency. In cases where circulatory and discursive events are successful, individually authored notings are transmuted into corporate discourse. Typically, no decision will be taken until this transmutation has almost been achieved. When a decision is taken, usually under the mere initials of the senior-most functionary, the transmutation is relatively finalized through its repeated circulation to all the functionaries who had commented on it before—and they merely initial it.

The most subtle tactics for distributing responsibility, while usually depending on circulation, are fundamentally discursive. We can distinguish two broad categories of linguistic devices that represent the writer as a constrained, passive, or uninvolved agent. First, those that accomplish this through representation of the writer's non-discursive actions and, second, those that do it through representation of the writer's written discourse. In particular written utterances, of course, these devices are often used in concert. The first category includes particular lexical forms, evidentials, tense-aspect, passive verb forms, imperatives, and metapragmatic characterizations.

In deliberations on applications, functionaries use a variety of lexical forms which portray themselves as subject to external control. Such locutions deny agency of

writers by representing them as willing but unable in view of official compulsion. The best example of this is the use of "regret" to mean "deny," which is a contracted metapragmatic characterization of denial ("regret to deny").

> 20.   *Another of those cases which have to be re-considered as applicants*
> *are never satisfied with a "NO". 21. Yes, we may regret, once again.*

> 5.   *We may maintain our earlier decision for regretion vide para 13/N.*

In reporting the facts of cases, evidentials, which express the writers subjective orientation to a proposition or its evidentiary grounds, are almost never used. Propositional discourse is always in the simple declarative, the "epistemically unmarked" form with which a speaker "presents [a proposition] without actually signaling commitment" though it will be assumed that he/she thinks it is true (Palmer, 1986, pp. 86–87). Lexical evidentials such as "maybe," "probably," "certainly," are completely absent.

In her study of the relation of tense and narration, Fleischman (1990) shows how the use of tense not only shapes the portayal of events but constructs a narrative subject as well. Summarizing her findings on the use of the perfective, Lee writes, "the perfective past, or preterit, is a nonexperiential grammatical form that objectively reports situations as they unfold in the past. As opposed to all the other tenses used in narration, it is the only one that does not imply an experiencing self as the reporter of the events it chronicles" (1997, p. 291). In narration of past events in CDA files, the overwhelming prevalence of present perfect reflects the interest of officials in representing past events without implying an experiencing subject, and in representing past events as relevant to, even determinative of, present action. The subject of narrative file discourse is one whose actions are shaped by an objective past beyond the control of the current actor.[15]

Given that the CDA is a planning agency, concerned with determining future developments of the city, we might expect to find the future tense used in reference to proposals. But the future is never used because it invokes the will of the writing subject (usually an individual) and commits him to action, for the execution of which he might be held accountable. This bureaucratic ethic converges with an Islamic evaluation of the use of the future tense. In ordinary conversation it is rarely used without *inshallah* (God willing). Without such an invocation, the use of the future is seen as hubris or even as an impious assertion of oneself over the will of God. In fact, the virtual absence of the future tense in official writings was pointed out to me by a town planner when I asked him if planning conflicted with the Islamic notions of God's omnipotence and therefore ultimate control of the future. "In planning," he replied, "we are not talking about the future." This surprising observation is accurate; plans for the future are represented through the performative approval of a proposal.

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[15] I should emphasize that this subject is peculiar to file narratives. In oral autobiographical narratives, functionaries often cast themselves as highly agentive heroes doing battle against other functionaries, politicians, and the system as a whole.

The prevalence of passive verbs, which obscure or minimize the agency of officials by allowing deletion of agentive subject specification, is a commonly identified feature of written bureaucratic discourse (Charrow, 1982; Srikant and Slembrouck, 1996; Shuy, 1998). However, the specificity of the functionary–client interaction is not taken into account when the use of passive verb forms is described as a general feature of bureaucratic writing. Most studies of oral discourse in formal institutions have focused on the interactions between representatives of the institutions and clients. This is also the emphasis of the work on written bureaucratic discourse, which is based upon analysis of genres through which organizations represent themselves to clients or the public at large: letters from institutions to individuals, forms for gathering client information, and published documents and reports. In CDA letters to petitioners, functionaries almost always use passive forms to represent the decisions or actions of the Authority. However, in internal written discourse, that is, in discourse addressed to other functionaries, the use of passive forms is more complex. The passive is, in fact, the most common verb form for the representation of action in internal writings as well, but it would be wrong to conclude that the passive is simply the generic verb form for the representation of bureaucratic action. The passive voice is prevalent because functionaries are so often describing their *own* actions or actions that have involved them. But they use active forms to represent the actions of other officials and non-official actors. Consider the following example.

> 161. *PUC at page 62/c is a letter from Director Co-ordination in which he asked the information regarding the mosques in Islamabad. A detailed mosque survey was carried out and requisite information were collected. Accordingly the plan showing the above-informations was prepared which was shown to D.D.G. Plg.*

Note first the typical narrative structure of this example. The action of the writer or a group including the writer is explicitly represented as a response to an initiating action of a superior officer. This portrayal of self as reactive is buttressed by the shift from active to passive voice. The functionary represents the action of the Director Co-ordination in the active voice, "he asked the information." In contrast, he represents his own actions and the actions of his subordinates in the passive voice," "was carried out," "were collected," "was prepared."[16]

File discourse is saturated with indexes of hierarchical relations between functionaries. One of the more interesting examples is a ubiquitous pragmatic pair part structure in which the syntactic placement of "please" indexes the relative status of writer and addressee. Superior-to-subordinate utterances begin with "please" and

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[16] Rather than the simple English contrast between active and passive, Urdu has a more elaborate grammatical system for the expression of the relationship between an actor and the action. In the files of the Auqaf Department, ICT, where noting of the lowest functionaries is often in Urdu, I found the same contrast between the use of relatively more active and relatively more passive verb forms. Also prevalent were the use of nominal forms that do not grammatically express an agent, which are quite natural in Urdu, e.g. "*Fair tayar ho gaya*" ("The fair [letter] became prepared.) and "*Masjid committee se bat hui thi*" ("[There] had been a meeting with the mosque committee.").

subordinate-to-superior ones close with "please," as in this exchange between a deputy director of urban planning and his subordinate town planner.

DD(UP)   *35. Pl put up draft.*
TP2   *36. DFA is submitted please.*

Such indexes play a familiar role in expressing the relative status of writer and addressee (Agha, 1994) and lay discourse into the frame of the bureaucratic order as a whole.

This order serves subordinates better than superiors when it comes to responsibility. It is easier for subordinates to shift responsibility up than for superiors to shift responsibility down, because superiors are giving the orders. But efforts of superiors to minimize representation of control of subordinates can be seen in the verb forms of written directives. When directing subordinates orally in English, officials almost always use imperatives and, in Urdu, various constructions indicating compulsion. In writing, however, the strong deontic English modal form *must* is never used and imperatives are used only where some purely procedural action is commanded. Most common is the weak deontic modal form *may* in the passive (Palmer, 1986), particularly if a substantive action is enjoined.

32.   *Dft may be issued & copy of letter may be sent to all concerned.*

In purely denotational terms the superior is simply giving permission to someone to take such action, licensing agency downward. Pragmatically, however, it is clearly a directive aimed at the addressee. In their notes, subordinates usually make this pragmatic implication explicit. An account of action (which is always addressed to a superior) almost always includes a characterization which casts the action as done at behest of a superior. In reporting actions, even simple things like making copies, there is a major amount of explicit reference to the directives of superiors. Consider this exchange between a town planner and his assistant:

TPII   *78. Case may be put up.*
Asst/UP   *79. The subject case file is submitted as desired in pre para 78/N*
            please.

In most cases, as in this example, these directives are contained in the previous note, so the reference is not simply a device to expedite reference to a directive buried somewhere in the note file.

Kuipers argues that ritual speech attempts to avoid or de-emphasize personal reference in contrast to non-authoritative, but contextualized speech, which is personal and individuated (Kuipers, 1990, pp. 64–65; Du Bois, 1986). *I* is commonly used in files from the 1960s but is rarely found in contemporary files. *We*, the collective inclusive first person, is the most commonly used personal pronoun. The most common form used by writers to refer to themselves as individuals is not the

deictic *I*, which directly indexes the writing situation, but a graphic sign that references the writer as a node in the chain producing a file, as in the following example.

> *However, the Member Planning, Director (UP) and undersigned visited the site in detail.*

The numbering of paragraphs places notes in series undifferentiated by author, time, department and so forth. The employment of a numbered paragraph scheme makes it possible to refer to the writings of others without referring to them as individuals, as would be the case in speech. The "metricality" index of numbering paragraphs places each turn in a poetic contextualization structure that substitutes for reference. References to other officials are, however, necessary when the discourse referenced was oral rather than written. In such cases, officials are generally referred to or addressed in the third person by title, as in the following example of a deputy director general addressing a member of the board.

> 7. *The Member Planning may kindly recall his visit to the site when it was agreed to permit plot size of 40′x32′ for the Madrsa close to the existing water tank*

Such references may actually refer to different individuals in narratives that cover a period in which one occupant of an office has succeeded another. In the rare occurrences of the second person pronoun *you*, it is used by superiors forcefully conveying their disapproval or annoyance at a subordinates' performance. The suppression of pronouns is also evident in the use of transitive verbs whose direct objects are ungrammatically dropped, particularly when the object refers to the writer. Note the omission of direct objects in the use of "inform," "confuse," "instruct," and "request" in the following examples.

> *The case…has been discussed with Director (UP) who informed [φ] that Member planning has informed that during Chairman visit, Chairman agreed to extend the mosque in such a way that it looks a component of mosque design.*

> *Plan at f 'A' confuses [φ]*

> *Chairman instructed [φ] to extend the mosque.*

> *Later on DDG (Design) requested [φ] to review the case.*

An informal ideology (elaborated from a simpler official ideology) of the signature, blunts the force of the signature's unavoidable reference to self. There is a hierarchy of signatures which differentially indexes the degree of involvement indicated. From most involved to least, they are: (1) full typed name and title, with full signature and stamp (2) full typed name and title, signature without stamp (3) full signature (4) initials (5) small initials. The graphic area occupied by

this self-reference is an icon of involvement. Small initials, the weakest index of involvement, are the most common.

Goody observes that in written form, commands and therefore responsibility are more precise, "personalized commitment 'in writing' also means that responsibility for giving and receiving orders is more highly invidualized" (Goody, 1986, p. 124). He contrasts this with a chain of oral messages where the identity of the originator gets lost. This view is nothing other than the official graphic ideology I described above. While it is true that written documents do identify individuals as the animator of particular writings (Goffman, 1974), this view fails to take account of the dialogical construction of writings which may diffuse authorship over a number of participants. In her discussion of performances of Wolof insult poetry, Irvine discusses how the structure of ongoing speech itself generates complex participant structure which diffuses responsibility for the insult among a number of participants in an historical chain of speech events "because the insult utterance can be presumed to be part of a sequence of utterance events (and of speech events)" (Irvine, 1996). The utterance sequences of files have the same pragmatic effect, though they are visibly documented rather than only presumed. While the formal organizational hierarchy lays down role-categories for all participants which exist independently of entextualization (Silverstein and Urban, 1996), the roles linked to responsibility for a particular "disposal" of a case emerge through that disposal. Classic treatments of bureaucracy, following Weber, generally underestimate the importance of these emergent roles or merely assume they are congruent with formal positions.

One of the basic discursive means through which functionaries construct their roles is through aligning their own writings with the speech and writings of others. As Bakhtin (1981) and Jakobson (1960) have shown, reported speech is central to such alignments. To account for the use of reports in files, we need to refine the general term "reported speech." First, reports of speech should be distinguished from reports of writing. Second, the graphic conventions and material qualities of files enable two other kinds of reports not possible in speech. The first is a reference to a paragraph of the notesheet. Such references are formally similar to citations in a book, which do not count as reports. However, they can be treated as reports because, given the physical structure of files and the visual medium of writing, the referenced writings are as much a part of the discourse as they would be if they were linguistically represented. The second type of report is what we might call exhibited writing, in which the writer exhibits some portion of another's writing through underlining or placing a sidebar and comments on it.

In trying to dissociate themselves from their writings, functionaries, like Bakhtin's novelist (1981, p. 299), play the ventriloquist to those writing after them and the dummy to those who have written before them. Bakhtin described how, in the representation of the speech of characters, the voice of the novelist infiltrates the reported frame. Irvine (1996) points to the opposite movement, what she calls "leakage" from the reported to the reporting frame, where the speaker bears some responsibility for the utterance attributed to another in the reported frame. In file discourse, the various kinds of reports index different kinds and degrees of the

authors involvement (both infiltration and leakage) with the reported utterance. On a scale from least to most involved, the order is the following: visual index, paragraph reference, direct quotation, and indirect quotation.

Limiting management of leakage is major concern for CDA officials as they try to align their own writings with other writings for which they wish to deflect responsibility. Writers play the dummy by trying to merge their own written contribution with the co-text produced by others, that is, to write through the words of others. It is not surprising, therefore, that the visual index, while less precise than the paragraph reference, is used in most cases where the text being referred to is on the same page, a conventional requirement for using this form of report. The visual index implies the least involvement of the writer because the writing is exhibited, literally Bakhtin's "word on display" (1981, p. 322) and is not represented in the writer's own discourse. The next most common reportive frame is the paragraph reference. Sometimes direct quotation is used when the document quoted from is not on file. The indirect quotation is used sometimes for reporting speech (where it is unavoidable, since direct quotation is not certifiable) but never for writing, for it most directly implicates the author in the reportive frame and thus identifies him to a greater degree than the previous three frames with the reported words.

Writers play the ventriloquist through a lexical choice and modalization of verbs that makes subsequent noters assume authorship of their writings. We could gloss the typical formulation "we may regret the request" as "In the range of possible responses, an expression of regret is one, of which you will be the author." In a sense, the functional goal of a noter in reporting speech is the opposite of that of a Bakhtin's novelist (1981). The novelist uses reported speech to differentiate, particularize, and dialogize a text wholly authored by him or herself. In contrast, noters attempt to transform multiply authored and dialogic text into a monologic one, for which the noter is least authorially responsible.

In contrast to the reporting strategies described above, others depend on the place of the writer in a hierarchy and the direction of file movement. Most of the substantive writing on files is found at the lowest level of officers—town planners grade 16 or 17—for they have no one to whom to delegate writing. This puts them in a difficult position, for they become the authors of definite proposals. As one Indian bureaucrat working in a similar system put it wittily, "Remember the mathematical formulation that responsibility is directly proportional to the size of one's written contribution to a file" (Kaw, 1993, p. 96).[17] Fortunately, they have recourse to "putting up" the file to a superior, who must reject the note or assume partial authorship of it through approval. The final numbered paragraph on a subordinate officer's note is usually a metapragmatic characterization of the note as a submission."

37. *Submitted for approval pl*

One strategy of a superior officer is to claim that he was not informed of the particulars and literally took his subordinates word for it. Superior officers are careful

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[17] Compare the same principle at work in signatures.

not to introduce new facts or change the modalization of their subordinates' propositional discourse. If circumstances demand this, they will often have the note typed and sign it without reading it, so they may attribute any liability to the typist. By signing their own typed note without reading it they attempt to turn their own note into a report (the typist's) of their speech (or writing, if the note was typed from written draft). Superior officers sometimes consciously and conspicuously use the tactic of making their assistants tell them what is in files rather than reading files themselves, so they are protected by yet another mediation.

4. Uses and abuses of corporate authority

In conclusion I would like to touch briefly on how files shape structural relations of influence in the CDA and provide opportunities for functionaries to pursue their own interests. Control over the speed and path of files is a means by which officials exercise power over people and things and is metonymic of power and influence (cf. Munn, 1983). A powerful person can move a "stuck up" file. Those without influence have to "put wheels on it," as an Urdu idiom for bribing puts it. Other clients face the opposite problem of not being able to stop their file from moving because no official has an interest in deciding the case. As a senior official remarked to me, "If you don't pay someone, they just send you up the chain." Money or political influence can affect not only the speed but the path as well, diverting a file from its normal trajectory. In my survey of housing files in the record room, I found dozens of files in which the final entry on the note sheet was a description of a building code violation. No further entries followed and the files had been returned to the record room without the requisite written orders. Now silent in locked cabinets, the files spoke to no one about the violations they documented.

The routing of files can reconstitute the relations of influence normatively established by the organizational hierarchy. One senior official, with a reputation for honesty, complained that files with irregularities are routed around him until everyone else has signed them. While his position in the formal hierarchy grants him authority over such matters, effective lines of control are constituted by the path of the file. If he opposes the decisions of earlier signatories, he goes it alone against a graphically manifest alliance of functionaries who have nearly achieved corporate authorship. Ironically, he stands out visibly, vulnerable to charges of impropriety.

Files may also circulate outside official circles and become the media that enable collusive networks of functionaries and interested parties. Investigators of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari, described how he ran his vast corruption empire through the diversion of files. In a shady facsimile of bureaucratic procedures, he would note on Post-its, and return them to the concerned department, where his notings would be removed but followed (Burns, 1998). To cite another instance of illicit file circulation, the head of the department in charge of a controversial land expropriation process estimated that 95% of the files dealing with expropriation cases are in the possession of interested land brokers, owners, and village leaders. These operators keep the files in their possession and

bring them in whenever any work is to be done on them, after they have prepared a favorable reception for them. They remove papers and note sheet pages with objections written on them and add required documents with signatures forged or paid for.

The powerful process through which corporate authority is generated allows particular projects to be collectivized and executed by the organization. A notorious case involving the equivalent of millions of dollars in fraudulent compensation for houses on expropriated land illustrates this point. Several strategically-placed officials and a surveyor generated thousands of false documents attesting that hundreds of houses had been measured and demolished by the CDA and that the owners had bought and removed the building materials. When presented with hundreds of impugned documents during the official inquiry into this fraud, the officials and the surveyor all denied having signed them, a likely false claim made defensible by the recognized existence of a forgery ring specializing in Land Directorate signatures. But this return to the individual conditions in which the documents were produced was not enough to disqualify them, for they had risen to the level of corporate authorship. The fraud survived court challenges brought by the CDA because, in their circulation, the documents had received numerous signatures other than those of the accused.

These examples points to the general issue of how graphic artifacts and the genres of discourse they mediate relate to socio-political processes. Graphic artifacts that do not circulate through networks have had dismal careers in the CDA. The only reports produced since the initial planning stages of the city in the 1960s have been the work of foreign consultants engaged by the highest levels of the CDA and its superior body, the Cabinet Division. The CDA has a powerful and expensive computer system, acquired to run a database on land holdings and compensation records. The dispirited manager of this idle system complains that no one will give him any information to put in the system. It is telling that successive chairmen of the CDA, at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, have been the main supporters of efforts to establish electronic databases to replace files and other more localized genres. These efforts have been thwarted by all the functionaries beneath the chairmen, from the members of the CDA board to the peons who carry files. Since a database, like a published report, would be accessed by a wide range of CDA officials and staff, this artifact would mediate organization-wide social processes that transcend bureaucratic divisions and networks. It would therefore undermine relations of influence organized through files.

The predominance of the file, the rarity of the report, and the defeat of the database suggest that there is no political alliance that corresponds to the CDA organization as a whole. The corporate agency and authority of the CDA is not based upon the organization as legally constituted, but upon the dialogic fabrication of the collective through the inscription and circulation of graphic artifacts.

Acknowledgements

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