

Classics in Critical Management Studies

Edited by
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Introduction

Mats Alvesson

Many researchers and students in management and organization studies hold the assumption that companies and other organizations are institutions working for 'the common good', that the outputs are making things better for customers, employees, owners and the general public. Organizational structures and management practices are understood as, in normal cases, functional for the accomplishment of organizational objectives, which then serve various stakeholders. This means that management is basically seen as a positive function, although in constant need of improvement: better management ideas and practices, better managers or – as it is increasingly popular to label them – leaders. Management as a function, as a practice and as a social group (managers) are legitimate and important targets for knowledge development with the aim of supporting management.

Such assumptions are not unchallenged. Some researchers look at management and organizations in a more sceptical way, acknowledging other forces than efficiency and market demands (public service) influencing organizations. Managerial actions and organizational arrangements and objectives are viewed in the light of power and sectional interests (Pfeffer 1981) or are viewed as reflecting popular societal myths or standard recipes for how things should look, and for cognitive or normative reasons organizations mimic each other or follow fashionable trends in the structures and practices they develop (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Meyer and Rowan 1977). A different, less sociological, take on this is represented by economic theories on organizations, pointing at managers being driven by their own interest and, when possible, giving priority to their own objectives at the expense of shareholders, i.e. wanting corporate growth and/or maximizing power and prestige at the expense of the shareholders.

Compared with these somewhat diverse theories promoting modest scepticism to managerial and economic ideas on organizations, there is a set of approaches to management and organization that are more radically critical and intrinsically suspicious. These approaches take a broader look at the subjects and raise questions of a wider set of arrangements, objectives and logics.

Organizations do not merely contribute to people's needs through producing goods and services, but have many other implications on humans, nature and society, including the exercise of power, creating disciplinary effects on customers and subordinates but also on managers and professionals. They also include constructing 'needs', i.e. a focus on wants and orientations that various organizations claim to be able to satisfy. Companies operating on the market of consumer goods are, as indirect consequences of product promotion, often contributing to the creation of consumerist orientations, linking self-esteem to the purchase and consumption of goods, which often overlaps with or fuels egoism and envy (Pollay 1986). Commercials frequently emphasize youth, beauty and perfection, which is creating feelings of insecurity, imperfection and frustration (Lasch 1978). A general increase in consumption does not seem

to increase the life satisfaction of a certain population, at least not in 'affluent societies' (Kasser 2002). This of course raises doubts about the value and meaningfulness of a lot of organizational activities. Organizations as a significant source behind environmental problems are another key topic for critical work (Jermier and Forbes 2003). While no one would argue that management and organization are only fulfilling productive functions, most people would see these problems as marginal or as something to be dealt with by the state through regulations or as themes for business ethics, not as key concerns to be addressed at the organizational level. For critical studies the mentioned issues would be seen as significant concerns, being part of normal practice rather than exceptional cases, and therefore worthy to be brought to the forefront of attention.

Both internally and externally – realizing that such a distinction is not unproblematic as organizations and their impacts are everywhere – it is important to hold management and organization accountable not only in terms of value-creation but also a broad range of visible and less visible negative effects.

Within organizations, life is far from always positive. Of course organizations contribute to material survival and affluence, job satisfaction and positive social relations, a sense of meaning and personal development. They also contribute to stress, bad health, they mean subordination and exploitation, they may encourage people to conformism, prevent them from 'free thinking' and free speech, erode moral standards, create or reinforce gender inequalities, etc. People working in organizations are subjected to, and formed by, administrative demand for adaptability, cooperation, predictability and conformity. We live in a thoroughly organized society and this creates particular kinds of subjects in a variety of subtle ways.

All areas of life – work, play, consumption, civil discourse, sex – are becoming more 'organized', that is subject to the dictates of regimes of instrumental rationality, whether originating from government, management, or craft standards. It is a measure of the pervasiveness of this ideology that it is difficult to describe in public discourse how 'becoming more organized' can be anything other than a good thing. (Batteau 2001: 731)

Management in this way is legitimized as a function and set of practices having colonializing effects on citizens – as workers, consumers and as citizens general. There are thus good reasons to encourage also critical perspectives on management, organizations and working life and not to assume, as in perhaps the majority of research and even more in textbooks, that organizations are mainly in the business of good-doing and that management and business only in exceptional cases deviate from the norm of fulfilling positive social functions in the interest of most stakeholders. The assumption that problems can be resolved through 'better management' as defined by management scholars and other experts calls for deep scepticism. Also, what is by gurus and media understood as better management, often in highly fashionable ways, may create harmful social effects. Often seemingly excellent ideas are a mixed blessing and it is important also to explore the more negative aspects.

Vital, therefore, is a concern to interrogate and challenge received wisdom about management theory and practice. This wisdom is deeply coloured by managerialist assumptions – assumptions that take for granted the legitimacy and efficacy of established patterns of thinking and action. Knowledge *of* management then becomes knowledge *for* management in which alternative voices are absent or marginalized. In contrast, critical studies of management share the aim of developing a less managerially partisan position.

Rather than take a pro-management or even seemingly and often misleadingly neutral perspective, the idea is then to take an anti-management or at least primarily problem-focused view on corporations and other organizations and how they are managed. This means that there is strong encouragement to see what otherwise may appear as self-evident and rational phenomena in a quite different light. This of course opens the way for a variety of knowledge projects with different foci. Threaded through such variety is an interest in the 'underbelly' of organizing, typically viewed as dark or negative aspects of management and organization. Critical work management and organizations tend to call into question established social orders – dominating practices, discourses, ideologies and institutions. The idea is to contribute to the disruption of on-going social reality for the sake of rousing resistance to relations of constraint and domination. Typically, critical studies place a local object of study in a wider cultural, political and economic context, relating a focused phenomenon to broader discursive and material formations like class, late capitalism, affluent/postscarcity society, and male domination. While there are also more micro-oriented critical studies, these too tend to consider societal context, even if it does not take centre stage (e.g. Rosen 1985 (Chapter 12), who places a company-sponsored breakfast in a luxury restaurant within the context of capitalism and class relations).

Critical Management Studies: Social Theoretical Inspirations

A commonly used umbrella term for orientations with a rather strong focus on critical inquiries of management as theory and practice is critical management studies. The word 'critical' has, of course, a number of meanings. All research is critical in the sense that the researcher is intolerant of weak argumentation, speculative statements, erroneous conclusions, etc. In the context of critical theory and critical management studies 'critical' is understood as the stimulation of a more extensive reflection upon established ideas, ideologies and institutions in order to liberate from or at least reduce repression, self-constraints or suffering. Critical research aims to stand on the weaker part's side when studying or commenting upon relations of dominance. Corporate and other elites are resourceful and typically have many allies willing to reproduce or support a top managerial interest. Arguably, there is a strong need for well-informed counter-positions. Critical theory is referred to as a tradition of social science, including the Frankfurt School and related authors and lines of thought such as Foucaultian ideas, critical poststructuralism, neo-Marxism, certain versions of feminism, etc.

Earlier critical works on organizations mainly derived their inspiration from Weber, from moral philosophy or from Marx's analysis of the labour process, and make limited reference to Critical Theory. Examples of such work included Anthony (1977), Braverman (1974) and Edwards (1979). Yet, work in the spirit of the Frankfurt School and like-minded scholars (and here Foucault 1983 locates himself) can be said to have strong broader relevance (Scherer 2009). In setting out his vision of Critical Theory in the 1930s, Horkheimer (1976) contrasts it with a view of scientific study that assumes a seemingly objective, instrumental relationship to its 'objects' (e.g. managers), and that contrives to reserve the exercise of value judgements for conduct in other spheres (e.g. politics). Critical Theory (CT) proceeds from an assumption of the *possibilities* of more autonomous individuals, who, in the tradition of Enlightenment, in principle can master their own destiny in joint operation with peers – possibilities that are

understood to be narrowed, distorted and impeded by conventional managerial wisdom. CT aspires to provide an intellectual counterforce to the ego administration of modern, advanced industrial society. CT apprehends how employees in large bureaucracies and consumers of mass goods are affected by corporations, schools, government and mass media; and how personalities, beliefs, tastes and preferences are developed to fit into the demands of mass production and mass consumption, thereby expressing standardized forms of individuality. CT challenges the domination of this instrumental rationality, which tends to reduce human beings to parts of a well-oiled societal machine (Alvesson 2003; Steffy and Grimes 1992). The principle strength of Critical Theory resides in its breadth which offers an inspiration for critical reflection on a large number of central issues in management studies: notions of rationality and progress, technocracy and social engineering, autonomy and control, communicative action, power and ideology as well as fundamental issues of epistemology. In comparison to orthodox Marxism, CT has been rather more alert to the cultural development of advanced capitalistic society, including the growth of administration and technocracy (Alvesson and Willmott 1996) and offers an incisive perspective for the understanding of consumerism and ecological issues.

During the 1990s, other streams of critical and disruptive thinking – many of them collected under the umbrella headings of ‘postmodernism’ and ‘poststructuralism’ – have emerged and developed within the field of management to complement and challenge analyses guided by Critical Theory. Notably, the thinking of Michel Foucault has been important in providing an alternative, critical voice – in both style and substance – to the vision of Critical Theory. So is in particular Foucault’s work on power and knowledge (1977, 1980). His ideas have, for example, questioned the humanist concept of autonomy ascribed to subjects and questioned the assumption that knowledge can be cleansed of power. There has also been a growing recognition of the serious neglect of gender relations in management and organization studies. Feminist voices have been increasingly heard, but for a long time and even now they have not seldom been restricted to issues of access to existing professional/managerial career tracks. To an increasing extent, broader issues are being addressed and deeper critiques of management theory and practice are part of the agenda (see e.g. Alvesson and Billing 2009, Calás and Smircich 2006).

A label that has been increasingly popular to use and, for many researchers, to associate themselves with, is critical management studies (CMS). This is a broad label, used in different ways to refer to a somewhat varied constellations of approaches. CMS is interested in what are viewed as the oppressive aspects of organization and management, exercising strong constraints on people’s autonomy and ability to arrive at well-grounded ideas, values, objectives and lines of acting.

Apart from looking at organizations as machines, organisms, brains, etc., it is fruitful to depict them as psychic prisons and instruments for the exercise of dominance (Morgan 1997). Alvesson and Willmott (1996) suggest that management can be viewed as systematically distorted communication, the subordination of communication to an instrumental reason, mystification, selective creation of needs and conceptions, cultural doping or the company as an agent of socialization. These negative, even pejorative images may be seen as too ‘dark’, but given the strong dominance of positive, although sometimes camouflaged, understandings of management being (mainly, if not almost exclusively) in the ‘value-creation business’. Important is to broaden the range of viewpoints on management and then approach it in studies and practices

through the considerations of the ambiguities, varieties and multiple dimensions in terms of production/domination, control/development, value creation/value destruction, etc.

Having given a brief general overview of the broader social frameworks inspiring many CMS authors, I will give a review of the development and contemporary versions of CMS, discuss its characteristics – and some of the debates around efforts to establish these – before pointing at some interesting tensions and debates within the area, and then finally suggesting some lines of development and possible futures.

The Development and an Overview of CMS

There has, of course, always been critical work on business, management and organization, from leftist as well as right-wing positions (Fournier and Grey 2000 (Chapter 1), Scarbrough and Burrell 1996). It was with the Marxist interest in labour process in the early 1970s that a high-profiled trend of critical studies of work organization, and by implication, management started. The end of 1970s and the 1980s saw a steady flow of work studying the relationships between labour and capital at the point of production, inspired by Braverman (1974). Much of this work focused more on the workplace than on organizations, although it is of course difficult to make a clear distinction. The seminal work of Clegg and Dunkerley (1980) took a broad look at organizations from a Marxist position. At the same time the highly influential book by Burrell and Morgan (1979) explored organization studies in the light of sociological paradigms. They concluded that most work, despite considerable variation, was conducted within a functionalist paradigm, characterized by objectivist ideas and assumptions of consensus (or limited conflict) and an interest in some form of social engineering. Burrell and Morgan argued that this was far too limited and encouraged the organizational research community to explore other paradigms. Two radical paradigms were formulated, both oriented towards stimulating fundamental critique and radical change. One was radical humanism, in which the Frankfurt School, and to a minor extent Gramscian thought, included the major high theorists, implying critical studies of ideologies and forms of consciousness. It tends to depict organizations as a psychic or cultural prison, where people tie themselves collectively to certain constraining versions of the world, turning ideology into reality. The other was radical structuralism, drawing upon objectivist Marxist ideas and emphasizing labour processes and structural features. One assumption is that organizations in important ways are more similar to real prisons, with forms of control, constraints, suppression and political struggles based on interest differences as key characteristics.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the trend within critical work on organizations and management moved from the earlier, Marxist-based focus on labour process, over to a stronger interest in culture, subjectivity and meanings. Organizational culture became a hot topic and it offered two important venues for people of a critical bent. One was targeting the great hope attached by business and management writers to control through corporate cultures, in the more extreme nightmare versions turning employees into corporate dopes or slaves (Willmott 1993); the other was the anthropologically inspired cultural in-depth study of corporate life, which often revealed cracks, irrationalities and peculiarities in organizations and also showed management control in action (Knights and Willmott 1987 (Chapter 19), Rosen 1985 (Chapter 12)). Some semi-critical work, perhaps more ethnographic and interpretive than theoretically

privileging a 'negative agenda', have been quite influential and offer rich and enjoyable readings of organizations from a middle level rather than a shopfloor point of view (Jackall 1988, Kunda 1992, Watson 1994). In the 1980s and 1990s also feminist work started to appear in management and organization studies in some quantities, much of it critically oriented (Alvesson and Billing 2009, Ashcraft 2009, Calás and Smircich 2006, Martin 2003). An initial interest mainly in females was gradually supplemented by an interest, although a much more limited, in men and masculinities (e.g. Collinson and Hearn 1996).

Poststructuralism and postmodernism reached organization studies on a fairly broad front in the late 1980s and attracted many people previously interested in a critical-interpretive approach. During the first half of the 1990s postmodernist thinking characterized many with enthusiasm for non- or anti-managerialist ideas, although with varying degrees of commitment to critical thinking, at least of the somewhat heavy nature indicated earlier in this introduction. With its in some ways quite extreme agenda and oppositional stance to other forms of thinking, postmodernism evoked strong feelings and there were intensive debates, e.g. around relativism and the political value of this approach (Parker 1992, Thompson 1993). Postmodernism has now passed its zenith, and there are probably relatively few people advocating the starker versions of it. Some of the interest has been channelled over to discourse studies. This label covers a very broad set of streams with little in common, from a focus on details in conversations and texts to broader, Foucauldian, work capturing systems and lines of defining a phenomenon guiding practices. Most of it tends to focus on talk and text, although this language focus can be rather narrow or combined with more or less 'extra-linguistic' elements part of the discourse. Discourse studies vary heavily in terms of critical intent, but the Foucauldian influence is strong so there is a fairly large body of more or less CMS-oriented work within the discourse literature.

Today, the overall field of CMS is difficult to demarcate and what is to be counted as critical or not is seldom clear and sometimes contested. It is probably fair to say that the field is quite pluralistic and varied; there are no dominant fashions or streams. The amount of work that may be included in the CMS umbrella has increased rapidly. Of all the research products appearing in management and organization studies, CMS work has a moderate but not insignificant market share. There is large international variation. It is in particular prominent in the UK for various reasons, including close affinities between management departments and social sciences (Fournier and Grey 2000 (Chapter 1), Grey and Willmott 2005). The CMS conference in UK attracts much attention and there are journals devoted specifically to critical work (e.g. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting and Organization*). It is, at least at the time when this text is written, a successful institution (Grey and Willmott 2005) and, as a somewhat less enthusiastic commentator expresses it, a popular brand (Thompson 2004 (Chapter 2)).

Branches of CMS

As said, it is very difficult to provide an overview of the field. The boundaries are very loose and it is quite arbitrary where to draw the line. Different groups perceive what is critical differently. As Fournier and Grey note in Chapter 1, 'psychoanalytic, and humanistic work in general, may see itself as offering a basis for critique and reform which poststructuralists dismiss as disciplinary' (p. 16). Postmodernism is often seen as a subversive orientation but

by some viewed as a conservative philosophy which leaves social reality intact and unquestioned and embraces a relativism that supports the use of various claims about how to represent the world that is well in line with contemporary capitalist institutions' preoccupations with, and exploitation of, representations, images and brands. Jackall (1988) sees strong parallels between PR specialists and postmodernists ('The truth?', 'Which truth?'), both specialists in undermining truth claims that one finds unfavourable. Further problems for the person interested in drawing a huge map of CMS include the fact that different authors and orientations can be divided up in various ways. As researchers change and move between positions – many are doing different kinds of work – it is better to talk about texts than authors in many cases. The following list of orientations is not intended to be exhaustive but to give a sense of the spectrum of approaches that could be incorporated or used in CMS projects. I start with orientations that, at least in some ways, are extremely non-objectivist and assume the unknowability of the social world and move over to approaches that tend to assume that there is an objective world out there that we can develop robust (if imperfect) scientific knowledge about.

- Critical deconstructivists, marrying Derridaian ideas with a political agenda (such as feminism) like Martin (1990) and Calás and Smircich (1991)
- Foucauldians emphasizing knowledge/power in various management subfields (e.g. Knights 2009, Knights and Morgan 1991 (Chapter 24), Townley 1993 (Chapter 28))
- Existentialist CMS people, studying subjectivity and how operations of power and human insecurity fuel various efforts of closure and compliance, although there always remains a space for uncertainty, anxiety and resistance (Collinson 2003, Knights and Willmott 1989 (Chapter 19))
- Critical theorists, drawing upon the Frankfurt School and/or Habermas and emphasizing the ideal and possibility of emancipation (Alvesson and Willmott 1996, 2003, Forester 2003 (Chapter 17), Willmott 2003), possibly in combination with postmodernist inspiration (Alvesson and Deetz 2000, Deetz 1992)
- Critical interpretivists, working with an ethnographic approach in which an interest in culture and meaning has a critical slant (Jackall 1988, Kunda 1992, Watson 1994)
- Gender studies people, emphasizing experiences of females and/or forms of domination of cultural ideas on masculinity. This camp thus includes both feminists and 'masculinists' (e.g. Alvesson and Billing 2009, Calás and Smircich 2006, Collinson and Hearn 1996, Martin 2003)
- Left Weberians; here the developments and mixed blessing of bureaucratic forms are being targeted, the oppressive and constraining organizational forms of hierarchy, division of labour and routines are critically assessed, but so is also presumably radical and progressive alternatives such as claims about post-bureaucracies (Adler 1999, Perrow 1986, Sennett 1998)
- Labour process theorists (gradually with a less pronounced Marxist view), critically studying work organizations and employer/employee relations (e.g. Ackroyd and Thompson 1999)

This list moves from extreme constructivist and language-focused versions to more objectivist, materially interested and realist ontologies and epistemologies, but of course one should not rely too heavily on a one-dimensional mapping.

The mainstream or most typical CMS position is probably inspired by a kind of mix of Frankfurt School/Habermasian (or Gramscian) and Foucauldian ideas and some 'medium-radical' incorporation of general postmodernist thinking. Many people routinely put Foucault with postmodernists in the same camp against critical modernists like Habermas, but there are probably more similarities between Foucault and the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer) than between Foucault and e.g. Derrida or Lyotard. At least so is the case according to Foucault himself (e.g. Foucault 1983, 1994). Honneth (1994) draws attention to the fact that both Adorno and Foucault

... see the process of technical rationalization as culminating in the 'totalitarian' organizations of domination of highly developed societies. Both theoreticians conceive its stability solely as the effect of the one-sided activity of administratively highly perfected organizations. (p. 178)

This CMS mainstream or middle position – which is my own stance and the one expressed in those writings that launched the CMS label (Alvesson and Willmott 1992, 1996) – represents a moderate version of constructionism, some interest in 'reality out there', some in ideologies/discourses and subjectivity plus some interest in the specifics and details of language, but without driving it too far (a linguistic half-turn, perhaps). This could be seen as radical humanism with a clear postmodernist (poststructuralist) bent. This representation is a bit different from Thompson (2004 (Chapter 2)) who thinks that postmodernists have hijacked the CMS label and reserved it for researchers with strong constructivist convictions.

Much work loosely associated with CMS, e.g. presented at conferences under this umbrella, is moderately non-managerial, interpretive, taking the views of non-elites seriously, pointing at some irrationalities in management/organization, wanting to be close to the empirical material and/or is playful, ironic, expresses 'esoteric' interests (like aesthetics, science fiction) and can perhaps be categorized as 'CMS light'. It expresses a moderate to mild questioning or stirring-up of mainstream thinking, but does not embrace emancipation or resistance as the major goal, nor use the heavy CT thinkers or hard-core vocabulary such as power, domination, oppression, prisons, etc. to any great extent.

The existence and expansion of CMS – irrespective of exactly how it is defined – is probably seen by many as surprising, perhaps even a contradiction in terms. Many people would view management and critical theory as each other's opposites, the former being the incarnation of instrumental reason – and sees its role as further optimizing means for mainly given ends (efficiency, profit-maximization) – while many critical theorists would be in the business of attacking this domination as a source of problems rather than a solution to them.

Fournier and Grey (Chapter 1) argue that a set of specific historical conditions gave rise to CMS. These included 'the New Right and New Labour; managerialization; the internal crisis of management; shifts in the nature of social science as well as specific factors concerning UK business schools' (p. 8). In the UK the reduction of many areas within social science and the expansion of management in higher education simply meant that some intellectuals with critical orientations simply had to go to management to get university jobs (or benefited wage- and promotion-wise from doing so). But it is perhaps even more an outcome of the heavy expansion of management studies in education and consequently also a rapid growth in faculty. With these large numbers a degree of pluralism easily follows and a proportion of all management scholars then will have leftist leanings or otherwise find critical thinking appealing. So given the army

of management academics, it is not surprising that there will be some troops deserting from conventional views on how the battle for better understandings of management is to be fought. The proportion of all management academics that are into CMS – in one version or another – is small, but still it makes a fairly large, expanding and heterogeneous academic field.

Characteristics of CMS

Having offered an overview of the different traditions and orientations of CMS I will move over and try to give a suggestion for what is the core characteristics of this direction, i.e. point at some significant features of ‘true’, ‘heavy’ or ‘mainstream’ CMS. A dilemma here is between wanting to police and monopolize the field versus being so broadminded and open that the label tells us nothing and that the critical intent of CMS becomes blurred. As I have no chance of controlling how others are using labels, I am not worried about the policing side. Identifying characteristics is not easy: any effort will lead to debate and opposition. There are efforts to nail down a series of common threads or themes that run through work that is argued to be widely regarded as most central to or exemplary of CMS. According to Fournier and Grey (Chapter 1), trying to find a minimalistic characterization, CMS has the following features:

- denaturalization (constructivism)
- non-performativity
- reflexivity

Denaturalization refers to what is crucial to any oppositional politics. Whatever the existing order may be, it becomes taken for granted or naturalized and often is legitimized by reference to nature and necessity. It’s just how things are, the way of the world: *of course* men dominate women, whites dominate blacks, capital dominates labour; economic growth leads to increased happiness, and there are two kinds of people: leaders and followers. Whether based on evolution or social function, the answer is the same: There Is No Alternative to the natural, self-evident conditions and logics. In management, naturalization is affirmed in the proposition that someone has to be in charge, that of course they know more, or else they would not be in charge, so of course they deserve more money. As Child (2009) addresses, hierarchy is taken as natural; the idea that co-ordination implies superiority is taken as natural; the idea that hierarchical co-ordination licenses higher rewards than production is taken as natural. Markets are also seen as natural, as self-evident efficiency-producing givens, which only foolish people would try to prevent from dominating; greed and competitiveness are natural and so on. CMS questions these kinds of assertions and thereby denaturalizes them.

Non- or perhaps even anti-performativity, which is perhaps a special case of denaturalization, denies that social relations should (naturally) be thought of as exclusively instrumentally: in terms of maximizing output from a given input. This feature is important because most knowledge of management presupposes the over-riding importance of performativity, the capacity to produce effects through knowledge supporting the use of optimal means. It is taken to be the acid test of whether knowledge has any value. So, knowledge of management has value only if it can be shown how it can, at least in principle, be applied to enhance the means of achieving established (naturalized) ends. The term ‘anti-performative’ emphatically does

not imply an antagonistic attitude towards *any* kind of 'performing'. Rather, 'performative' is used in a somewhat technical sense to identify forms of action in which there is a means–ends calculus that pays little or no attention to the question of ends. In effect, ethical and political questions and issues are unacknowledged or assumed to be resolved. It follows that issues of a fundamentally ethical and political character – such as the distribution of life chances within and by corporations or the absence of any meaningful democracy from working life – are ignored or if not ignored then only marginally adjusted through, for example, 'involvement' and 'consultation'. Efforts are then directed at the matter of how limitations and 'dysfunctions' within the established system can be ameliorated without significantly changing or disrupting the prevailing order of privilege and disadvantage. CMS challenges the monocular focus on performativity.

Finally, 'reflexivity' refers to the capacity to recognize that accounts of organization and management are mediated by those, typically researchers, who produce these accounts, and who themselves are embedded in particular conditions and traditions of research. It also incorporates a willingness to challenge one's own framework and favoured vocabulary (Alvesson et al. 2008). In this way, CMS presents a methodological and epistemological challenge to the objectivism and scientism of mainstream research where there is an assumption and/or masquerade of neutrality and universality. Under the guise of the production of value-free facts, such research is inattentive to (i.e. non-reflexive about) the assumptions which guide both its choice of what to research and the manner in which that research is conducted. Little encouragement is given to students or other research users (e.g. managers, policy-makers) to interrogate the assumptions and routines upon which conventional knowledge production is founded or to question the commonsense thinking (e.g. about what counts as 'scientific') and disciplinary paraphernalia (e.g. tenure, control of journals, etc.) that safeguard their authority. CMS sees such questioning as mandatory, it is even a key task for social science (Habermas 1972).

This characterization of CMS has been quite influential – at least the paper is frequently cited – but it is far from uncontroversial. It can be criticized for being both too general and for being biased in favour of a particular sub-branch (or set of directions) within CMS. Reflexivity is increasingly a standard feature of large parts of social research, some say of our entire culture (Giddens 1991). Whether CMS can claim to score better or be more ambitious in this respect than other traditions is hard to say. Denaturalization, in the sense of seriously considering the historical and socially produced nature of contemporary phenomena, is also common outside critical work. Large groups of researchers favour constructionist thinking – being open to the possibilities of constructions or representations of social reality in different ways than those being materialized and/or textualized at present. Performativity, the 'aim to contribute to the effectiveness of managerial practice' (Fournier and Grey 2000 (p. 17)) only guides parts of organization studies. Non-performativity is again not unique for CMS but is characterizing many interpretivist researchers. It is also debatable within CMS.

I agree with Fournier and Grey that a prioritization of means–ends calculations and an emphasis on knowledge facilitating managerial effectiveness is anti-CMS but on the other hand one can't say that there is something wrong with efficiency and effectiveness per se, nor with knowledge wanting to facilitate it. Most researchers and other users of computers certainly appreciate the degree of managerial effectiveness that is behind the development, manufacturing and distribution of the computer and making the writing of texts a (technically) smooth exercise.

Of course, this is not only or even perhaps mainly a fruit of the work of management, but without management structures and practices and the work of managers, the delivery of inexpensive and well-functioning products and services for large groups of people would be impossible. Sometimes there is a kind of hypocrisy or cynicism in critical research in the sense that people attack what they really enjoy and benefit from, like most examples of instrumental rationality creating material wealth and comfort (including for critical scholars). The problem is that a particular kind of performativity is too often the only significant criterion and that it frequently means the neglect of other values and is accomplished at the expense of other ideals, such as autonomy, democracy, gender equality, ecological balance, etc. Sometimes effectiveness is accomplished at the expense of other values and sometimes the outcome means something negative, e.g. a degree of control over the minds and preferences of customers or employees or environmental problems. Bearing these negative features often associated with effectiveness closely in mind, and taking conflicts seriously, is not, however, the same as celebrating non-performativity as a guiding principle. Arguably, there are different ways of being performative and different relationships between (economical) effectiveness and other values. Most people in and around organizations probably often benefit from a higher degree of effectiveness of organizations. The costs may be high but there is variation here and the downside of arrangements for increased effectiveness needs to be investigated and assessed in individual cases, not assumed as an essential feature. Within CMS, there may be a point in considering also the positive functions of management. In addition, critique can be seen as a means to facilitate emancipation (an end) – one can here talk about critical performativity as an ideal for CMS (Spicer et al. 2009 (Chapter 3)).

Thompson (2004 (Chapter 2)) is critical of Fournier and Grey partly because of, as he sees it, a failure to indicate what is distinctive about CMS as a broader tradition. He draws attention to the fact that much contemporary social theory and methodology are based on ideas of denaturalization and reflexivity is an ideal embraced by large group of researchers, with a variety of specific perspectives. Also politically 'neutral' (or non-distinct) social constructionists and interpretivists emphasize how people can invent different social realities and the ideal of acknowledging one's own involvement in the research project and the implications of this is not something that CMS can claim monopoly of. But for Thompson it is more problematic that the characteristics proposed by Fournier and Grey actually exclude or marginalize some key critical traditions in management and organization studies from the CMS umbrella. Some parts of CMS – if this defined more loosely and broadly – like critical realism, labour process theory and left-Weberianism would not say that denaturalization and reflexivity are the strongest ingredients in their view of what constitutes good critical research on management. They would also be hesitant in emphasizing anti- or non-performativity, viewing this principle as seriously weakening the chance of CMS having any practical impact. These orientations differ significantly from poststructuralism – the orientation that is perhaps best fitting into the suggested characterization and the one that Fournier and Grey themselves adhere to.

Spicer et al. (Chapter 3) also disfavour non-performativity as a key characteristic or principle for CMS. Instead, they suggest that *critical performativity* is a more 'constructive' direction for CMS. They argue that critical performativity involves the active and subversive intervention into managerial discourses and practices. This is achieved through affirmation, care, pragmatism, engagement with potentialities, and a normative orientation. Focusing on engagement with theories of management provides a way for CMS to create social change through the practice

and productive engagement with specific theories of management. Finally, critical performativity moves beyond the cynicism that pervades CMS. It does so by recognizing that critique must involve an affirmative movement alongside the purely negative and critical ones which seem to predominate in CMS today.

The various positions here are partly 'substantive' in nature, partly also reflecting different understanding of what 'performativity' means (Alvesson et al. 2009). Worth noting is, however, that it is possible to see CMS as a potentially performative enterprise, where critique should aim to influence practice and here it is difficult to get away from considering and investigating what may be an efficient intervention or a form of knowledge that is useful in accomplishing some results beyond intellectual consideration. Critique with a potential to influence and change needs to incorporate a degree of 'pro-performativity' (Spicer et al. 2009 (Chapter 3)).

An alternative way other than pointing at fairly general and vague principles of a mainly epistemological nature, could be to define CMS from its aims of accomplishment. This is central in a suggestion for a working definition of CMS published in Alvesson (2008). Here there are four key ingredients:

1. The critical questioning of ideologies, institutions, interests and identities (the 4 *I*s) that are assessed to be (i) dominant, (ii) harmful and (iii) underchallenged
2. Through negations, deconstructions, revoicing or defamiliarizations
3. With the aim of inspiring social reform in the presumed interest of the majority and/or those non-privileged, as well as emancipation and/or resistance from ideologies, institutions and identities that tend to fix people into unreflectively arrived at and reproduced ideas, intentions and practices
4. With some degree of appreciation of the constraints of the work and life situations of people (including managers) in the contemporary organizational world, e.g. that a legitimate purpose for organizations is the production of services and goods

These ingredients point at a possible set of answers to the question what is, how to do and why should one conduct CMS plus some recognition of the unique context of this orientation compared to critical studies more generally, most common in fields like sociology and philosophy that are more 'intra-academic' and unconnected to specific set of practices and expectations of involving a strong dose of professional/vocational preparation.

Each of the three words in the acronym CMS also motivate a brief additional explanation. Starting with the M, it is important to emphasize that although by far the strongest field of management in terms of critical work is organization studies (to the extent that it can be seen as a field of management), CMS is not directed at any particular management specialism. It can therefore include accounting, marketing, etc. rather than be confined to more overarching, generalist areas, such as organizational behaviour or strategy. Moving on to the S, it is concerned with *studies*, not *study* – which suggests that there is room for considerable diversity and fluidity. Even if the theoretical centre of gravity shifts – perhaps from Marxist or Frankfurt School conceptions of criticality to more poststructuralist approaches, not always involving so much studies in the sense of empirical explorations (as conventionally understood) – the catch-all label can still be used. One could perhaps hope for a greater emphasis on studies in the future, involving fairly open-minded explorations of various areas of corporations, management and work. Studies then imply some curiosity about the world out there, tempering inclinations

to go for the usual suspects (patriarchy, racism, managerialism, consumerism, disciplinary power, elitism, technocracy, etc.) and finding 'proof' of the value of specific theorists. The 'critical' in management studies may be directed at current manifestations of 'management' or it may be directed at its 'study'. But, of course, the two targets are linked, for if the object of the critique of the (mainstream) study of management is successful, i.e. this management idea is influencing practice, then a new, critical form of studying management develops – one which engages in the critique of management. Indeed, for it to be a critique – for CMS to mean something different to 'management studies' – it must necessarily seek to challenge and replace a dominant orthodoxy. Contributions to intra-academic debates and efforts to support reflexivity and critical scrutiny within the very large and rapidly expanding field of management knowledge are then vital.

The idea of CM studies motivates a few words about methods of study. Although empirical inquiry within CMS could conceivably be conducted through any number of techniques, most prevalent are qualitative forms of fieldwork entailing interviews and/or participant observation. In part, CMS's affiliation with qualitative, interpretivist methodologies can be understood to follow critical theories of social science, which serve to debunk images of objective researchers safely insulated in experimental environments, manipulating human dynamics and reducing their context-specific complexity into fixed and measurable variables, statistics and aggregates. For perhaps obvious reasons, critical theory cultivates deep suspicion of research motives like prediction and control, of research tools that mechanize human action and erase the inherent contingency of meaning. It is thus not surprising that critical scholars felt more affinity with research motives like understanding and research methods attuned toward hermeneutics, the preservation of participant voices and meanings, and the inherent vulnerability of both knower and known. Still in need of careful reconsideration, however, are the negative, even repressive/oppressive tendencies of qualitative methods presumed compatible with CMS aims, as well as the potential for creative critical adaptations of quantitative approaches assumed hostile to CMS agendas. In addition, there is a need for critical researchers to think through how they relate to their subjects of studies in terms of ethical commitments, at least according to critics finding critical management research sometimes not acting in line with their credo about supporting emancipation and solidarity with people (Brewis and Wray-Bliss 2008).

Whatever the method of seeking and analysing empirical material, some kind of denaturalization methodology tends to distinguish the overall interpretive approach of critical scholars. This could range from radical deconstruction and reconstruction to more subtle portrayals that reveal the partial and contingent character of phenomena. The key is to articulate an alternative position that challenges conventional representations and critically probes (rather than taking at face value) the reported views and experiences of research participants. This entails confronting the ways in which researchers as well as participants habitually naturalize, reify or in other ways freeze culturally dominant understandings. More specifically, this critical endeavour may be accomplished through such analytical practices as negation, deconstruction, revoicing or defamiliarization (Alvesson and Deetz 2000).

The Composition of Chapters for this Volume

Choosing and putting together a set of texts for a volume summarizing a broad, rich and dynamic field is never easy. What is included and excluded is to a considerable extent arbitrary, there are few if any self-evident classics, broadly respected, cited and informative for later work. Choices reflect the idiosyncrasies and limitations of scholarship of the editor. There is no point in explaining why each of the specific chapters has been chosen. Broadly, I have chosen studies that address management of organizations with a strong element of critical questioning of dominant assumptions and lines of reasoning. Critical studies on groups in workplaces/organizations and of broader economic or social developments have not been incorporated, although many of these may be highly relevant for a broader appreciation of management issues. But the spectrum of perspectives and issues covered in the volume is broad enough. The collection mainly focuses on organization studies, which tend to offer the overall framework also for advocates of accounting, marketing and other management subspecialisms. There are, however, also one or two articles from each of the areas of accounting, environmental studies, human resources management, marketing and strategy, most of them incorporating or relating to organization theory. I have tried to accomplish some variety between different perspectives and topics.

My major criterion, however, is that I have chosen articles that I think have been or can be expected to be influential and provide good illustrations to core approaches within CMS. I have given priority to relatively broad rather than specialized texts. I have to some extent checked with Google Scholar (measuring how many citations a particular publication has received), in order to get some indication of the impact. This measurement is mainly useful for publications appearing some years ago, so for newer works one needs to rely on one's judgement. I have, however, also included a couple of somewhat older texts that I strongly feel deserve more attention than they have received.

My hope is that the collection, despite arbitrariness of choice and reflections of various biases, still gives a good overview of major areas of critical management studies and offers a range of inspirational readings. Given the contemporary faith in and possibly overfocus on business schools and management knowledge as well as managerialism in organizational practice, powerful counter-voices are urgently called for and I hope that this collection will be of some use in raising and articulating these.

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