



**THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA  
COMMONWEALTH EXECUTIVE MASTER OF BUSINESS/PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION  
FINAL EXAMINATION - 2012/13  
MCP 1602 - MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONS  
DURATION: THREE (03) HOURS**

**Date: 31.07.2013**

**Time: 9.30 am - 12.30 pm**

**Answer Question Number ONE (01) and TWO (02) in Part A and  
any TWO (02) Questions from Part B**

**(Question Number ONE (01) and TWO (02) are compulsory)**

**Part A**

**At the Critical Moment: Conditions and Prospects for Critical Management  
Studies**

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**Abstract**

We have recently witnessed a growing, if still arguably marginal, interest in 'Critical Management Studies' (CMS). Our aim in this paper is to reflect upon the popularization of CMS; more specifically, we propose to examine the various factors that have contributed to its emergence, and to review the significance of its project. We start by exploring the conditions of possibility for CMS and point to a combination of political, institutional and epistemological trends. In the second part of the paper, we consider what constitutes 'CMS' and suggest that whilst it draws upon a plurality of intellectual traditions, CMS is unified by an anti performative stance, and a commitment to (some form of) denaturalization and reflexivity. Finally, we articulate the polemics around which CMS politics have been contested, in particular we review the debates between neo-Marxism and post-structuralism, and discuss the issue of engagement with management practice.

01. Question Number One (01) is based on the above paper by Fournier and Grey a copy of which is provided with this question paper. Answer all parts of this question drawing on your understanding of this paper.

- a) What do you understand by the term 'critical management studies' (CMS)? Briefly explain your answer.

(04 Marks)

- b) State the various conditions that have contributed to the emergence of Critical Management Studies (CMS) and briefly explain each.

(09 Marks)

- c) Critical Management Studies (CMS), whilst drawing upon a plurality of intellectual traditions, is said to be unified by an **anti performative stance, a commitment to denaturalization and reflexivity**.

What do you understand by the terms:

- (i) anti performative stance, (ii) commitment to denaturalization and (iii) reflexivity.

Explain your answer.

(09 Marks)

- (d) As articulated by Fournier and Grey there are **two conflicting positions** from which the issue of engagement/disengagement of Critical Management Studies (CMS) with management practice can be seen:

... The **first position** is that CMS should contribute to the promotion and development of more humane forms of management; from this perspective, CMS is not 'anti-management' but rather aims to transform it, to promote less irrational and socially divisive forms of management theories and practices.

...The **second position** adopted by CMS is one of more or less complete disengagement with managerial practice. Here, a refusal to engage in sympathetic conversations or to propose 'better models of management' constitutes the very force and integrity of CMS politics. The argument is that management is irredeemably corrupt since its activity is inscribed within performative principles which CMS seeks to challenge. Thus, CMS is expressly 'anti - management': its task is not to reform management towards some more humane or ethically minded activity, but to undermine it (and maybe ultimately, if naively, to dethrone it) through critique.

In '**your**' opinion which of these two positions should be adopted by Critical Management Studies (CMS) in its engagement/disengagement with management practice? Justify your answer.

(10 Marks)

02.

**'Extreme work/normal work'**

"Intense work and long-hours cultures are increasingly understood as 'the norm' in contemporary workplaces. Discussions of excessive hours, exhaustion, and burnout are far from new, but it seems that notions of 'extreme jobs' have recently become central to our conceptualizations of the world of work (Hewitt and Luce 2006). Many people take long hours and very intense work for granted, believing it to be inevitable; an unspoken part of the employment contract. ... For many in the twenty- first century workforce, extreme has become normal, normal has become extreme".

"What drives this normalizing of intense – even extreme – work? Part of the explanation is structural. ... Large organizations are notoriously greedy with salaried employees' time, but those working in SMEs and the self-employed are also forced to work long and often antisocial hours in order to maximize their incomes. While high-end software developers face 'crunch time' as deadlines loom, workers in international export-processing zones are put under intense pressure to meet orders or face fines for missing delivery target times. Staff at all levels are pressured by arrays of targets, KPI dashboards, bullying from above, and the standard ideological line that shorter time horizons and higher competitive demands are the 'tough new reality'".

Critically examine the extent to which such thoughts are reflective of ***your own work experiences*** as you engage in your multiple work roles in contemporary organizations of the global south.

(18 Marks)

**Part B**

03.

*'Advances in Technology, Threats to Security, Emphasis on Ethics and Increasing Competition'* has a tremendous impact on the different *'roles'* managers are expected to play in *'new forms of organizations'*. In this context managers are compelled to continuously enhance their *'skills'* if they are to effectively engage in the different *'management functions'* driving their organizations towards stated goals and objectives.

Elaborate the above statement. Your answer needs to be supported by related classical theories of management *and* illustrated by examples of changing trends and patterns impacting management and organizations at present.

(25 Marks)

04. "Job Characteristics Model (JCM) is a conceptual framework used for designing motivating jobs that creates meaningful work experiences and satisfies employees' growth needs".

Elaborate the above statement outlining the theoretical notions underpinning the 'Job Characteristics Model' (JCM) *and* its practical validity in job designing.

(25 Marks)

05. "Effectiveness of interpersonal communication is subject to perception associated with decoding".

Explain the above statement emphasizing the 'process of communication' *and* the way(s) in which perceptual errors undermine the effectiveness of interpersonal communication in work organizations.

(25 Marks)

06. Write short notes on the following.

- a) Boundary-less Organizations.
- b) Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB).
- c) Holland's Personality - Job Fit Theory.
- d) Emotional Intelligence (EI).
- e) Social Learning

(5x5 = 25 Marks)



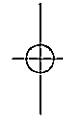
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## At the Critical Moment: Conditions and Prospects for Critical Management Studies

*Valérie Fournier and Chris Grey*



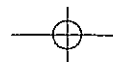
### Introduction



**T**he 1990s have seen the emergence of a new conjunction of the terms 'critical' and 'management', and even the birth of a new sub-discipline dubbed 'critical management studies' (CMS). Alvesson and Willmott (1992a) took this term as the title of their widely cited edited collection, and there has since been a proliferation of publications, conference streams and academic networks devoted to discussions of 'critical management'.<sup>1</sup> We have even heard the term 'critters' used to denote the people involved in critical management – implying at least the attempt to build an identity based upon the field.

Although, as we shall explore later, there is quite a range of ways in which the linkage of 'critical' and 'management' is invoked and understood, it does seem to us that its apparent proliferation is worthy of analysis. And we should declare an interest here: we have ourselves been involved, no doubt in relatively minor ways, with attempts to articulate critical management studies. But our purpose in this paper is not – or not primarily – to advance that cause. Rather, it is to step back from it and to try to understand the ways in which critical management has come about. Indeed, we have some misgivings and concerns about it, so that this is also an occasion to be a little critical of critical management itself.

**Source:** *Human Relations*, 53(1) (2000): 7–32.



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We will pursue three broad themes in the paper. First, we discuss the emergence of critical management studies: after briefly pointing to the fact that some criticism has attended management practice for as long as it has existed, this discussion takes the form of an outline of the conditions of possibility for critical management. These conditions include 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. The second part of the paper considers in more detail what kinds of things might be meant by 'critical': we point to the plurality of critical management studies whilst also identifying certain unifying features. These include an anti-performative stance and a commitment to (some version of) denaturalization. In the third main section of the paper, we consider the politics of CMS, paying particular attention to the debates between neo-Marxism and post-structuralism, and to the issue of whether and how CMS should engage with managerial practices.

### The Emergence of Critical Management Studies

Since management emerged as a social practice in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Pollard, 1968), it has been subject to various sorts of criticism. For example, as long ago as 1776, in a famous passage in *The wealth of nations*, Adam Smith argued that:

The directors of [joint-stock] companies, being the managers rather of other people's money than of their own, it cannot well be expected that they should watch over it with the same anxious vigilance with which the partners in a private copartnery frequently watch over their own.

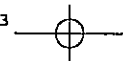
(Smith, 1776/1904: 233)

The historical evidence of joint-stock companies in the early eighteenth century (Pollard, 1968: 25–6) confirms that deliberate fraud and incompetence played a significant part in the failures of such companies.

Mant (1977: 9) argues that, by the early nineteenth century, the term manager was often used pejoratively and, at best, management was seen as a servile occupation. Writing of this period, one survey concludes that:

Judging by the early literature, the salaried managers, that is, those in the layer of management below entrepreneur, were usually illiterate workers, promoted from the ranks because they evidenced a greater degree of technical skills or had the ability to keep discipline. Typically they were paid only a little more than the workers and more often than not were attracted to the managerial position because it gave them the power to hire their spouses and children to work in the factory.

(Wren, 1994: 45)



Of course, dishonesty and inefficiency were, to a large extent, seen as problematic from the standpoint of owners of, or partisans for, capital. But there has been no shortage of criticisms of management based upon its role in the discipline and control of labour – indeed, much labour process writing has been explicitly concerned with this (e.g. Marglin, 1974/1980). And, throughout the twentieth century, there have been many attempts to explore and problematize the growing social power of management as a practice and as a social grouping (e.g. Burnham, 1945; Mills, 1956; Enteman, 1993).

Given that management is enmeshed with social and political power, it is unsurprising that it has always been subject to some critical analysis. However, it is really only in the 1990s that any attempt has been made to unify such analysis by drawing it together under one name, i.e. critical management studies. Of course, such badging may reflect no more than an exercise in academic entrepreneurship, explicable partly in terms of the marketing of ideas, partly in terms of the career-building efforts of individuals. Yet this scarcely explains the apparent eagerness of some individuals and institutions to embrace critical management and, we would argue, pays scant attention to the more interesting issue of the conditions under which the conjunction of critical and management became possible. It is these issues that we now explore. Before doing so, we should make it clear that we do not see these conditions as having 'caused' or determined the emergence of critical management studies. Nor do we see the different issues we identify as working independently of each other.



### CMS, the New Right and Managerialization

Although CMS emerged in the UK in the 1990s, we need to go back a little way to understand it – certainly to the 1980s. In the 1980s, under the influence of New Right politics, management became a hot topic and, according to some commentators, a 'second managerial revolution' was effected (Clarke & Newman, 1993). One of the rationales for anti-union legislation was that it would restore the managerial right to manage. The removal of 'restrictions' would open the way for efficient and innovative management. But the New Right preoccupation with management went deeper than that. The public sector, in particular, became the site for a massive effort at managerialization (Pollitt, 1993; Clarke & Newman, 1997). Conducted in the name of efficiency and accountability, the managerialization of the public sector can also be read as a sustained, although not always successful, assault on arenas of professional power and, for many neo-liberals, socialist dogma. Particularly in relation to local government, education and social work, managerialization seemed to be as much about a project of ideological restructuring as about cost control.



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Management was lionized, even glamorized, in more diffuse ways too. Managers were seen as having some special insight which qualified them to pronounce upon a broad range of issues. In education, senior industrial managers were drafted in to help construct the National Curriculum, as they were in the health service with the newly created hospital trust boards. Although such developments were often seen as 'party political', in the sense of bringing in Tory sympathizers, they were perhaps more importantly ontological in the sense that managers were perceived as having a privileged knowledge of the *real world*. Managerialization, inscribed in techniques of accountability and market simulation, was to bring the public sector to the reality of the market by translating the problem of the provision of public services into questions of calculability and efficiency (e.g. 'value for money').

Nor was this confined to the Tory administrations. New Labour has the same touching faith in managerial competence. They have continued the processes of managerialization in the public sector (in terms, for example, of a continued preoccupation with 'quality' and league table measurements, or the call for 'modernization' – equated with managerialization – of local government). They also tend to see political issues as amenable to 'technical' solution through expert management, a proclivity indicated by the use of industrialists to chair policy reviews such as those relating to pensions; the appointment of David Sainsbury to ministerial status; the love affair with Richard Branson; the placement of interest rate decisions with the Bank of England and so on. Thus New Right and New Labour have joined forces in constructing the iconic status of management, a status legitimized on ontological grounds (managers as the bearers of the real world), epistemological grounds (management as the embodiment of expert knowledge), and moral grounds (managerialization being equated with greater justice, public accountability, democracy and quality in public services).

It is the growing use of management as a 'value'<sup>2</sup> in the political domain, and the increasingly unrestrained managerial power in the private and public sectors, which constitute the first part of the background to CMS. As management became elevated to a more significant and visible position, it also became the object of increasing attention from those concerned with the analysis of work and organizations. Of course, not all, or even most, of this growing interest was of a 'critical nature' and much of the analysis of management conducted in the 1980s and 1990s simply reproduced the iconic status of management. By definition, to depict management as being in the ascendant is to posit a largely uncritical apprehension of its worth. But, at the same time, the enmeshment of management with highly contested changes (e.g. public sector restructuring, downsizing, cultural re-engineering) offered a fertile ground for a more critical appreciation of management. Certainly, management could always have been read as a political practice, rather than simply as a neutral set of administrative techniques, but the status of management within the context of the New Right rendered this much more visible.



However, the relationship between management and the New Right was more complex than a simple elevation of the status of the former by virtue of the influence of the latter. For, at the same time as management became constituted as the *solution* to a disparate range of problems and issues, it also itself became a *problem*. First, in a very simple way, it became clear that the erosion of trade union rights did not usher in a new age of managerial effectiveness. Indeed, it may well have removed only one of the excuses that previously existed for managerial incompetence. Second, as we explore in the next section, management seemed to go into a kind of internal crisis at the same time as it was gaining in prominence.

### The Internal Crisis of Management

Locke's *The collapse of the American management mystique* (1996) illustrates this crisis well. Whereas US management practices (which were and are the template for management practices in the West generally) had been held as responsible for US post-war dominance, Locke argues that it became increasingly clear that this had not been the case. In particular, he suggests that from the 1970s onwards US management was seen as ineffective in the face of international competition and as inferior to that of Germany and Japan. The influence of Japanization is of course well-known (Oliver & Wilkinson, 1992), and it might be argued that rather than indicating a crisis of management it shows how management was re-constituted in ways which, if anything, enhanced its prestige and power: the denunciation of western management for its failure to compete with Japanese organizations enabled an uncoupling of management and administration/bureaucracy. Thus, while the 'bureaucratic administrator' has been demonized, the manager has been depicted as a mythical figure requiring a rare blend of charismatic flair which cannot be routinized and codified in rules transferred through scientific training. This aura of mystification and glory with which managers (of the right kind) have been sanctified by the popular literature has served to increase the potential power and status of management and has provided a fertile ground for critical study (e.g. Willmott, 1993; du Gay et al., 1996). Nevertheless, Japanization also heralded the beginning of an ever more rapid spiral of fads and fashions (Kieser, 1997). Far from emerging as a stable, confident and established set of techniques, management knowledge and science appeared as fragmented and unstable. To put it a different way, if the dream of postwar management was the establishment of a recognized managerial science, by the 1980s and 1990s that dream was not only unrealized but, with increasing obviousness, unrealizable.

For managers themselves, this may not have been a burning issue. But, nevertheless, the fads and fashions of recent decades have been a potent stick with which shareholders, fund managers and consultants have been able to beat managers. Managers can always be criticized as being insufficiently

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well-versed in the latest technique and, without the legitimacy of an established scientific knowledge base, are vulnerable to such attacks. However, management's lack of scientific status has probably been more problematic for academics than for managers, but, since CMS is, primarily, an academic phenomenon, it is reasonable to claim this internal crisis of management as the second of the conditions of possibility for CMS. Although, to be sure, there are still those who claim that the emergence of a true science of management is just around the corner (Koontz, 1980; Kay, 1994), this has become a minority claim of faith rather than a widely shared expectation. A more sceptical view suggests that:

... the goal of an integrated, coherent and relevant 'science of management' seems, if anything, further away than it did in the halcyon 1950s.  
(Whitley, 1984: 331)

It is the collapse of certainty and self-confidence which makes managers and management researchers if not receptive to critique then at least mindful of the deficiencies of their own knowledge base. As we shall suggest later, this has led to some bizarre engagements with critical ideas amongst management academics.

### Positivism, Functionalism and Social Science

The way in which the managerial dream of science failed is part of a wider issue related to the weakening of the position of positivism and functionalism in social science. Plainly, this is a large and complex issue which has broader implications than the study of management. From at least the 1950s, the notion that social science could or should replicate the natural sciences (in terms of methodology, the provision of covering laws and predictions) was called into question (e.g. Winch, 1958). The positivist position was dealt a further blow by developments in the philosophy of science, most obviously those associated with Kuhn (1962) which problematized the supposed objectivism of natural science itself. This heralded the 'linguistic turn', with a revised interest in phenomenology, especially following the publication of Berger and Luckmann's *The social construction of reality* in 1966. More generally, it paved the way for the fragmentation of the social sciences into a series of competing perspectives (Bernstein, 1976) and, ultimately, for the emergence of the widespread influence of postmodernism.

These themes, which we have sketched in only the most cursory way (since they are surely very familiar), affected the social sciences generally, and sociology in particular. In general, the study of management and organizations has drawn upon social science traditions but with a considerable time-lag. Thus qualitative methods have only fairly recently gained

even a foothold of legitimacy (Morgan & Smircich, 1980) but there has been a steady growth in the engagement with non-positivist social science and, somewhat belatedly, postmodernism (e.g. Hassard & Parker, 1993). Although a rejection of positivism is not automatically a move towards critique (just as to be a positivist is not automatically to be devoid of critical concern), there is some linkage. At the very least, a recognition of the socially constructed nature of social arrangements points to their contingency and the possibility of their reconstruction along different lines.

### The UK as a Site of CMS

The engagement with non-positivism and the related moves towards CMS have been much more strongly felt in the UK (and some other European countries) than in the US, even though many of the conditions of neo-liberalism were present in both countries. It is necessary, then, to consider some of the specific conditions of intellectual work in the UK. First, it seems that it is not just management studies which are less positivistic in the UK: the social sciences in general have been much more open to the anti-positivist debates. It is still the case that US sociology is dominated by positivistic methods and that publication in the top journals requires conformity to this. Given the rigours of the university tenure system, the capacity for developing critical sociology is limited. The same arguments apply, perhaps even more strongly, in the management field.

Moreover, there is relatively little in the way of a radical intellectual tradition based upon Marxism by contrast with UK and European social science. Partly for general political and cultural reasons, partly because of the impact of the Cold War and McCarthyism, the American Academy, although certainly not devoid of dissent, has not exhibited the same kind of access to critical resources which were readily available to management scholars as they began to develop CMS. One illustration of this is the way in which the Weberian tradition in US organization theory has been utilized primarily in normative organizational design terms rather than in terms of the critique of rationalization with which it is often associated in the UK.

The argument, then, is that UK management schools had a ready-made critical tradition to draw upon in a way that was less true in the US. The impetus to draw upon those traditions is also partly explicable in terms of specific conditions prevailing in the UK. One of the impacts of the New Right in the UK universities was a radical cut back in funding for the social sciences. As with the issue of managerialism, this was partly because of cost-cutting but also because of a perception that sociology departments, in particular, were sites of left wing militancy. In those circumstances, many would-be social science academics in the 1980s found more funding and job opportunities in management schools, but they brought with them a

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commitment to the traditions of their erstwhile disciplines, thus complementing the already existing cross-fertilization of management studies and critically oriented social science. It should be said that this is more evident in organizational disciplines (e.g. Clegg & Dunkerley, 1977) than others, although, on the other hand, there has been a flourishing critical accounting discipline since the 1970s for much the same reasons. Additionally, many critical management academics have been amongst the most productive researchers in terms of publications in established academic journals and this gave a considerable boost to their legitimacy when this output measure became of key significance in the 1990s.

As well as existing in a climate where critical traditions were available, there were other specific circumstances within the UK which were particularly conducive to CMS. In the US, business schools had existed since the late nineteenth century. In the aftermath of the Second World War, there was a concerted attempt to re-create these schools as rigorous scientific undertakings and to raise management research to a higher (i.e. more scientific) level (Locke, 1989, 1996; Thomas, 1997). Many US business schools had only limited contact with social science faculties. In the UK, by contrast, there were no business schools until the 1960s – and then only two (Whitley et al., 1981). In the 1980s, however, most universities developed a business or management school, management became the single most popular undergraduate subject and MBA provision rapidly increased. These developments reflected the changing ideological landscape and view of what universities should be, and offered universities a source of income in the face of spending freezes and cuts.

One effect of this expansion was to create a demand for the academics to staff them – and hence the possibility, referred to earlier, of social scientists finding new employment in such schools. But the other point is that these new business schools were often configured as part of social science faculties so that there was much more of a sense of drawing on those traditions.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps crucially, the late date of management school expansion in the UK meant that the positivist orthodoxy of the 1950s, which had informed the growth of US business schools, had been questioned, so UK management schools were more likely to be able to draw upon non-positivistic social science of some hue.

Of course, we do not intend to paint a picture of UK management schools as seething hotbeds of revolutionary fervour, nor as being, in general, wedded to non-positivistic social science. On the contrary, the majority of research work undertaken in such schools draws upon positivist versions of economics or psychology, often in very crude form (Anthony, 1986). Quantitative methods remain dominant and, ideologically, there can be little doubt that a managerial orientation prevails. Our point is that, just as there existed at least some conditions which pointed in a different direction, so, as management practices in the 1980s took on the Janus character of

panacea and crisis, there were academics who had (by choice or necessity) an interest in management and were (by training or predisposition) inclined towards critical analysis.

### What is This Thing Called Critical?

So far, we have talked as if the meaning of being critical was self-evident. And in a certain way it is: to be engaged in critical management studies means, at the most basic level, to say that there is something wrong with management, as a practice and as a body of knowledge, and that it should be changed. But this does not take us very far, because much work on management would conform to this definition<sup>4</sup> without being critical in the way that those who subscribe to CMS would adhere to. It seems that we have no difficulty in practice in distinguishing a critical from a non-critical piece of work on management. But how? What grammar or identifiers enable such a delineation?

One obvious answer lies in the nature and the plurality of the intellectual traditions from social science which critical management academics invoke. This encompasses a broad range of positions including neo-Marxism (labour process theory, Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, Gramscian 'hegemony theory'), post-structuralism, deconstructionism, literary criticism, feminism, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, environmentalism. More recently, approaches such as post-colonialism and queer theory have had some (so far rather limited) impact upon management studies. CMS therefore is (partly) constituted through a process of inscription within a network of other inscriptions that serve to create obligatory points of passage in terms of work referenced and vocabulary or concepts used for analysis.

However, the theoretical pluralism of CMS and the fact that there is no unitary 'critical' position mean that there is no single way of demarcating the critical from the non-critical. For example, some labour process theorists regard various forms of postmodernism as being incapable of generating real critique (e.g. Thompson, 1993). Psychoanalytic, and humanist work in general, may see itself as offering a basis for critique and reform which post-structuralists dismiss as disciplinary (Rose, 1989). And, for these and other reasons, many who might be identified with CMS would themselves reject that label. Furthermore, the term 'critical' is deployed to articulate different divisions. For some, the term critical is reserved for work drawing upon the Frankfurt School and is contrasted with postmodern analysis (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996), whilst, for others, critical management studies is used (in a disparaging way) to refer to postmodern analysis (Anthony, 1998). Amid this confusion in badging different works under various labels, we should make it clear that we use the term CMS in a broad sense to encompass a plurality of conflicting intellectual traditions, including some authors who

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would reject the CMS label. Although the pluralism of CMS and the extent of dissent over inclusion suggest that there is no ultimate way of tracing boundaries between critical and non-critical work, it would seem that the boundaries are nonetheless drawn and recognized by, for example, the kinds of work referenced by authors. We suggest that the boundaries are drawn around issues related to performativity, denaturalization and reflexivity.

## (Non) Performative Intent

The most obvious boundary would seem to be between work on management which has a performative intent or premise and that which does not. A performative intent (Lyotard, 1984), here, means the intent to develop and celebrate knowledge which contributes to the production of maximum output for minimum input; it involves inscribing knowledge within means-ends calculation. Non-critical management study is governed by the principle of performativity which serves to subordinate knowledge and truth to the production of efficiency. In non-critical management study, performativity is taken as an imperative towards which all knowledge and practice must be geared and which does not require questioning. In other words, the aim is to contribute to the effectiveness of managerial practice, or to build a better model or understanding thereof. Management is taken as a given, and a desirable given at that, and is not interrogated except in so far as this will contribute to its improved effectiveness. Critical work is not performative in this meaning, even though it may well have some intention to achieve (e.g. to achieve a better world or to end exploitation, etc.). CMS questions the alignment between knowledge, truth and efficiency (a point to which we come back shortly) and is concerned with performativity only in that it seeks to uncover what is being done in its name.

One way in which the demarcation between the non-performative and the performative, the critical and the non-critical is mediated and may be recognized lies in the lexicon of concepts which are deployed within the different styles of work. For example, the invocation of notions such as power, control and inequality typically betoken some form of critical approach whilst efficiency, effectiveness and profitability do not. Of course, much depends upon how terms are then used. For example, recourse to a concept like gender might occur in both critical and non-critical work. In non-critical work, the issue might be one of harnessing diversity in the pursuit of effectiveness; here, issues of gender inequalities are translated into problems of wasted resources; and equal opportunity is promoted on performative grounds (e.g. Davidson & Cooper, 1992). Whilst non-critical work takes gender as a 'given' repository of differences, critical perspectives may concentrate on the making of gender differences and the ways in which organizational practices,

including equal opportunity practices, are implicated in the reproduction of gendered power relations (e.g. Acker, 1992; Halford et al., 1997).

The example of gender introduces a further boundary marker between critical and non-critical work; this relates to the commitment to denaturalization which in our view distinguishes CMS. We suggest that maybe what unites the very disparate contributions within CMS is the attempt to expose and reverse the work of mainstream management theory.

### Denaturalization

If we conceive of twentieth-century management theory as being involved in a double movement of constructing organizational reality and rationality while effacing the process of construction behind a mask of science and 'naturalness', we can see CMS as being engaged in a project of undoing this work, of deconstructing the 'reality' of organizational life or 'truthfulness' of organizational knowledge by exposing its 'un-naturalness' or irrationality; CMS is about 'denaturalisation' (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996).

Thus, whilst in mainstream management theories various 'imperatives' are invoked (e.g. globalization, competitiveness) to legitimize a proposed course of action and to suggest (implicitly or explicitly) that 'there is no alternative', CMS is committed to uncovering the alternatives that have been effaced by management knowledge and practice. Whether conceived of in terms of an ideology which reproduces certain 'ruling illusions' (Skillen, 1977), or in terms of discourses which are historically contingent, CMS is concerned with the proposition that things may not be as they appear, even if the reasons given for this differ both ontologically and politically. In the 1970s, when Stewart Clegg and others began to articulate a critical agenda for organization theory they pointed out that:

Our 'issues' – sexism, power, capitalist development . . . are not yet found in the indexes of most texts on organizations. We hope to remedy this state of affairs through posing this absence as problematic.  
(Clegg & Dunkerley, 1977: 2)

It is this concern with writing in what has been written out which would seem to link many otherwise diverse critical writings on management. To be sure, such a concern may be apprehended in different ways. First, critics may not agree on the relative significance of what is written out – for some it may be the degendering of management that is most important, for others the occlusion of class. Second, some critics (notably, but by no means exclusively, Marxists) argue that what is written out is reality, whilst others (most obviously post-structuralists) will be content to point to the possibility of alternative ways of apprehending management and organizations without

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giving ontological priority to these apprehensions. Yet, without wanting to soften substantive theoretical differences (and again we will return to these in a moment), it does seem to us that such projects have more in common with each other than they do with managerialist accounts which assume or seek to justify existing social and organizational relationships as natural and/or unavoidable.

This commitment to denaturalization suggests that CMS is not a static entity. It is subject to ongoing shifts and revisions both in relation to the range of traditions and theorizations which it invokes and in relation to shifts in the nature of managerial practices and knowledge. CMS commitment to critique through denaturalization places it continuously on the move, for critique has to follow the practices that constitute its target and to draw promiscuously upon a plurality of intellectual traditions to launch and perfect its attacks. CMS involves perpetual critique (Deetz & Mumby, 1990), including a critique of itself implied by its emphasis on reflexivity.

### Reflexivity

This leads us to a final line of demarcation between critical and non-critical work: CMS might be differentiated in terms of the extent of its philosophical and methodological reflexivity. For it is not just that mainstream management studies are positivistic where CMS is not, it is also that the positivism of the mainstream is rarely explicitly argued for and defended (see Donaldson, 1996 for a rare exception). In general, some (often rather weak) version of positivism is simply assumed, there is no explicit reflection on epistemology and ontology, and discussion of methodology becomes limited to restricted issues of method and statistical technique (Ackroyd, 1996).

### The Politics of CMS

At a basic level, CMS is a political project in the sense that it aims to unmask the power relations around which social and organizational life are woven. Furthermore, the notion of emancipation (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992b), however imagined, figures prominently in the various intellectual traditions that inform CMS (be they feminism, neo-Marxist theories, post-structuralism); there is a commitment to free individual subjects from the power relations within which they are inscribed, including their own subjectivity (Knights & Willmott, 1989). However, the ways in which these power relations are to be conceived, unravelled and overthrown have been the subject of much contention within CMS, contentions that mirror the fragmentation of the social sciences more generally.



CMS is torn by the different ontological and epistemological positions of the various intellectual traditions upon which it draws; but it is perhaps at the political level that these differences are expressed most ferociously (not that politics can be separated from epistemology or ontology). Instead of attempting to outline an elusive common political project, we articulate the issues around which the politics of CMS have been contested, specifically, the contestation over realism/relativism, and that over engagement with managerial practice.

### Realism/Relativism

Perhaps the most vociferous arguments oppose a materialist understanding of power based on Marxist analysis, to a discursive understanding of power relations drawing upon postmodernism. Both sides of the argument have been well rehearsed (cf. Thompson, 1993; Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994; Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995 vs. Knights, 1995), and here we provide only a brief outline of the polemic in order to examine its political implications. According to the neo-Marxist line, postmodern analysis<sup>5</sup> is politically inept, irresponsible and dangerous; its epistemological and ontological relativism inevitably leads to moral nihilism (Thompson, 1993). It is argued that, by seeing language as constituting rather than reflecting reality, postmodernism reduces all social experiences – including experiences of exploitation, exclusion and domination – to linguistic effects which can be ‘wished away’ by changing the discursive resources we draw upon. Postmodern analysis is accused of lacking any critical or political edge in that it denies that stories of exploitation are any more truthful, valid or real than the stories constructed by the abusers of power. Parker (1992) summarizes this criticism by suggesting that in postmodern writing:

The problems of (fictional) individuals in (mythical) organizations are safely placed behind philosophical double-glazing and their cries are treated as interesting examples of discourse.

(Parker, 1992: 11).

Authors more sympathetic to ‘postmodernism’ (e.g. Knights, 1995) have, of course, defended themselves against these charges. The key rebuttals are, first, that the dualism between the material and the discursive invoked in the Marxist critique is flawed because it reduces (and misreads) the postmodern notion of discourse to language. Discourse, it is claimed, refers to both linguistic and material practices, as illustrated in the work of, for example, Foucault (1979). Second, for some writers, the epistemological and onto-logical relativism of postmodernism offers a welcome refuge from the totalizing grand narratives of critical modernism (be it critical theory or labour process theory) which propose only to replace one type of absolutism

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(performativity) with another, and whose 'seemingly emancipatory discourses can be, or become, a form of normalising, disciplinary domination' (Willmott, 1996a: 115).

Increasingly, however, the debate has moved beyond these polarities, so that a number of critical writers have sought to construct or re-construct a form of critique which neither dogmatically re-asserts the primacy of neo-Marxist realism nor embraces the aesthetic irony and moral nihilism of some versions of postmodernism. The attempt to sever the logical link between epistemological and moral or political relativism has been a central motif for some writers seeking to re-infuse critique with some degree of political engagement (Willmott, 1994a; Parker, 1995; Grey, 1996a). Here, the endless 'fighting against' implied by permanent critique is considered to be insufficient; it should be augmented by some commitment to a 'better' order and to some 'micro-emancipation' (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992b; Parker, 1995) however local, small and modest these visions might be. The challenge is to find 'a provisional and contingent site for ethically grounded radical critique' (Grey, 1996a: 593). It should be said, though, that others argue that any such attempts to reconcile epistemological relativism with some moral visions are futile and hypocritical (Carter, 1995; Jackson, 1995); permanent critique, including a critique of any *promesse de bonheur*, is all we can do in the face of postmodernism, however painful this limitation may be.

These various polemics, between neo-Marxists and postmodernists, between those seeking to reconcile epistemological relativism with some form of ethical commitment and those arguing for permanent critique, have had some important implications not only in articulating the different politics that CMS can engage in, but also in encouraging a greater degree of reflexivity in CMS writing. These debates have led CMS writers to question the grounds for critique, their rights and ability to offer critique, and have alerted them to the paradoxical and even preposterous nature of their position as academic writers, condemned to provide critique that effaces or appropriates the voices of those in the name of whom they claim to speak. These debates have certainly been challenging and have served as a 'grinding stone to sharpen critique' (Parker, 1995: 562).

### Engagement vs. Disengagement

However, there is some impatience with these debates; and there are concerns that this preoccupation with the grounds and 'righteousness' of our critique is distracting us from engaging with organizational practices and participants (e.g. Anthony, 1998). This leads us to a second line of tension in CMS which divides those who would like to see critique as being pragmatically oriented from those charged of indulging in intellectual elitism. CMS, and in particular its postmodern version, is accused of reducing critique to some

cryptic exchanges between intellectuals, conducted behind the closed doors of academic conferences where researchers can parade their critique, and ponder upon its righteousness:

What form should this necessary [management] education take and what should be its purpose? These questions, where they are debated at all, are raised outside the official agendas of the business and management schools, off piste, in small but elite conferences and seminars which are unlikely to come to the notice of directors and their programme planners. The rather shady nature of the discussions contributes to a mildly dangerous excitement largely because they are enclosed in a consensus that management education must, at all costs, not be conceived as useful and, therefore, that it were best that the discussants' employers should not be privy to them.

(Anthony, 1998: 270)

There are also concerns that, as writers are agonizing over the terms of their critique and their own position within critique, the author is displacing the manager or organizational member as the subject of interest. The problem of the position of the author in the text and the concerns with reflexivity have tended to privilege the voice of the author whilst the subjects of organizational life are effaced, or kept at a distance by the esoteric jargon deployed (Clegg & Hardy, 1996). Thus, for some, CMS is in danger of disengaging itself from management and organizational practices, of becoming a forum for the exercise of academic indulgence.

However, in our view, it would be unfair and untrue to reduce CMS to some obscure intellectualism refusing to engage in anything other than hermetic exchanges with itself.<sup>6</sup> For one thing, it may well be that it is necessary for there to be an initial period of 'internal debate' amongst academics as a prelude to developing more engaged forms of practice. Moreover, and contrary to Anthony (1998), there has been an open and vigorous debate on how CMS can and should inform management education (e.g. Willmott, 1994b; Grey & Mitev, 1995; French & Grey, 1996; Grey 1996b; Reynolds, 1997; Thomas, 1997) which, after all, is the most immediate arena within which CMS might hope to influence managerial practice. And there can be no doubt from this literature that many critical management academics are actively developing teaching which is congruent with the critical project. Certainly, there are schisms here, with Grey and Mitev (1995) arguing for a complete de-coupling of management education from managers. However, as Thomas (1997) points out, this is unlikely to be achievable in the short term, and most of the literature seeks to identify a *rapprochement* between 'pragmatism' and 'purism'. In this respect, the debates about management education are a subset of the wider issues affecting CMS. Here, we paint a polarized and caricatured picture of two conflicting positions, recognizing

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that few would wholeheartedly embrace either of these positions, but would rather juggle uncomfortably with both.

The first position is that CMS should contribute to the promotion and development of more humane forms of management; from this perspective, CMS is not 'anti-management' but rather aims to transform it, to promote less irrational and socially divisive forms of management theories and practices (e.g. Watson, 1994; Alvesson & Willmott, 1996; Grey, 1996b; Anthony, 1998):

It [critical theory – CT] is not inherently or relentlessly 'anti-management'. The intent of CT is not to indulge in the Utopian project of eliminating hierarchy, removing specialist divisions of labour or even abolishing the separation of management and other forms of work. Rather, its aspiration is to foster the development of organizations in which communications (and productive potential) are progressively less distorted by socially oppressive, asymmetrical relations of power.

(Alvesson & Willmott, 1996: 18)

Although there is some disagreement as to how management can/should be transformed, there is some shared emphasis on engaging in dialogue with management practitioners and mainstream theorists (Watson, 1994; Anthony, 1998). According to this line of argument, management is enmeshed in moral relations, decisions and activity, and managers should be morally educated. However, for some at least (e.g. Anthony, 1998), this moral education should suspend critique, or the preaching of emancipatory values, and start with a sympathetic understanding of management practice:

If moral relationships are to be found embedded in the management process we must learn from those who practice it. This suggests an engagement in an exchange . . . Such an exchange depends upon the sanction of the learner as much as it does on the authority of the learned.

(Anthony, 1998: 279)

The second position adopted by CMS is one of more or less complete disengagement with managerial practice. Here, a refusal to engage in sympathetic conversations or to propose 'better models of management' constitutes the very force and integrity of CMS politics. The argument is that management is irredeemably corrupt since its activity is inscribed within performative principles which CMS seeks to challenge. Thus, CMS is expressly 'anti-management': its task is not to reform management towards some more humane or ethically minded activity, but to undermine it (and maybe ultimately, if naively, to dethrone it) through critique. Maybe the main point of critique here is to shock, provoke and be offensive, or 'piss in public' (Burrell, 1993). This reluctance to engage in dialogue with managers or mainstream management researchers is not a mark of intellectual snobbery but a political act: 'Dialogue is the weapon of the powerful' (Burrell, 1996: 650), and

exchange with management practitioners and theorists carries with it the risk of corrupting critique as CMS concepts and concerns are appropriated by the performative gaze of what Burrell (1996) calls NATO (North American theory of organization). It is feared that engagement, far from offering the potential to displace orthodoxy, will transform CMS into just another 'tool kit' for managers, who, equipped with their better understanding of power relations in organizations, can deploy discursive resources to further their domination with the added legitimacy and intellectual credos provided by the reference to high theorists from Frankfurt or Paris:

Managers currently in charge of organizations have an interest in preserving current hierarchical relations. As they learn more about how discourse acts as a source of control, their abilities to distort communication to legitimise and advance their own advantages within organizations are apt to be increased. In fact CSS [critical social science] may be especially useful in this regard.

(Nord & Jermier, 1992: 214)

Although the 'anti-engagement' position rightly identifies the dangers of colonization, it seems to assume that 'management' is united in a conspiracy against the 'managed'. Such an assumption overlooks the various (organizational and social) divisions that fragment 'management' (Parker, 1997), and that may bring some managers closer to the emancipatory claims of CMS than others. Certainly, it would be incorrect to envisage managers as a homogeneous group, and there is a danger that CMS, in envisaging managers in this way, merely projects all that is 'bad' on to managers. Yet to do so ignores not just the heterogeneity of managers but also the fact that managers are themselves managed (Watson, 1997) and the capacity of managers for moral agency (Watson, 1994).

Although the latter comments would seem to suggest that engagement is to be preferred to disengagement, it remains the case that engagement poses some real dilemmas. It readily lends itself to the enrolment of the resources of CMS in the search for 'better management', albeit in a modest form. CMS, or just the term critical, is increasingly being invoked as a kind of new approach to management studies and is being utilized with little regard for the complexities or intentions of its theoretical underpinnings. We might be accused, perhaps with some justice, of implying a line between what is 'really' critical and what is 'sham' critical. Although there are some grounds for this, such a separation is secondary to our more analytic concern: is it not of interest and significance that criticality should be being invoked in these ways?

To give some indication of this 'infiltration' of the concept 'critical' in mainstream management, consider the 1996 British Academy of Management (BAM) conference. This boasted, for the first time, a 'critical thinking' stream which included, among other things, various papers examining the

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effectiveness of competence-based management development and NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications). One paper aimed to enlighten the academy on the ways in which 'vocational management qualifications can encourage the development of transferable skills through experiential learning' (Bedward & Rexworthy, 1996). Another proposed 'to disseminate best practice in undergraduate education' on the basis of the findings of the Teaching Quality Audit (TQA) exercise (Gennard & McKiernan, 1996).

In terms of the issues of performativity, denaturalization and reflexivity which we identified earlier as indicative of CMS, it is hard to see much in these papers which is critical. Moreover, it is noteworthy how commonplace it has become to invoke the patina of postmodernism in ways which bear scant resemblance to the work of, say, Baudrillard, Lyotard or Kristeva. For example, one of the 1996 BAM papers claimed that Mintzberg, Peters and Ohmae represent 'postmodernist theoretical positions' that serve to reconceptualize strategic management as an artful blend of spontaneous and chaotic actions (Joyce & Woods, 1996). Another draws upon a post-structuralist analysis of language to suggest that managers should improve their awareness and use of language in order to develop their cultural understanding (Tietze, 1996).

We can expect this still modest deployment of CMS concepts and theoretical resources to become more widespread as the pressure to publish and build academic reputation draws mainstream management researchers to these relatively 'unexplored' and unexploited resources in larger numbers. This in turn is likely to lead, at least to some extent, to the smothering of CMS critical concepts and emancipatory projects, as is already evident in, for example, attempts to claim a *rapprochement* between Marxism and 'post-bureaucratic' styles of management (Aktouff, 1992) or in textbooks on post-modernism and management (e.g. Boje et al., 1996).

Whilst the issue of the desirability and possibility of engaging with managerial practice continues to be one of the principal cleavages within CMS, it may be worth concluding that much of the debate has been conducted in a peculiarly one-sided way. For engagement is typically presented as being with management (hence the fears of corruption, etc.). Yet CMS has barely begun to consider engagements with the managed,<sup>7</sup> with trade unionists, with women's groups and so on who might arguably be a more obvious constituency for such an endeavour. Breaking the link between management studies and management need not imply the kind of hermetically sealed, self-referential intellectualism which Peter Anthony and others have criticized.

### Conclusion

We have depicted CMS as a fragmented and slippery domain, fractured by multiple lines of division which to a large extent reproduce divisions in the social sciences more generally. It is important to emphasize that we do not

see these divisions as demarcating clear 'camps' or fixed positions within CMS, but rather as defining lines of movement, arguments and shifting alliances that constitute the very criticality of CMS, for it is these polemics that allow for the doubt, questioning and reflexivity that feed and sustain critique. We have also suggested that, whilst there are substantive arguments at stake between different kinds of CMS positions, it is also possible to see these differences as being less important than those between CMS and non-critical management. Certainly, if CMS is to have any future as a 'movement' – if such it be – then it would seem more important to create alliances between Marxists and post-structuralists (to name the principal cleavage) than to degenerate into recondite squabbles about differences.

We ended the previous section by examining the political significance of CMS and it is to this issue that we now return. Our analysis has painted CMS as being in a cleft stick. To summarize: should we keep our critique to ourselves and simply relish in the aesthetic pleasure that writing critically may provide us with (or suffer in silence at our inability to make a difference)? Or should we champion the cause of the oppressed at the risk of further contributing to their domination by having our critique appropriated and translated into 'performative knowledge'?

Neither of these alternatives appears particularly attractive, nor do they seem compatible with the emancipatory project of CMS. But, to some extent, it may be necessary for CMS simply to accept this irreconcilable tension which, in a sense, is an inevitable feature of all would-be political endeavours. Moreover, this is not a choice that we (as academic writers) have the power to make – for, as we indulge in debating these questions, other people 'out there' are in the business of measuring gender, 'greening', power, culture, etc. and harnessing these new contingencies for the production of greater profit, or 'value for money'. And, by the same token, there are also plenty of people 'out there' who have been concerned with conditions of oppression, exclusion and domination for far longer than we have and have voiced their concerns more loudly than we ever can – from trade unionists, to feminists, gay and lesbian movements, black activists, and even managers. Maybe all we can do is make sure that this cacophony, which mainstream management theory has treated as either irrelevant to the analysis of organizations or as a set of resources and constraints for the pursuit of performativity, is heard by students of management, 'undistorted' by the performative intent (hence the particular importance of management education for CMS). Thus, to return to a point we made earlier, we need to free the notion of engagement from the straightjacket within which it has become trapped by debates promoting or refusing dialogue with managers, and re-imagine engagement in terms of a broader organizational constituency.

But it remains an open question whether such a project requires, or is compatible with, the promulgation of critical management studies as a space or a 'home' from which critiques can be formulated and launched. If

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critique is always on the move, it may well be that the time has come to leave the temporary home that the CMS label has provided for critique. As we suggested earlier, the 'critical' label seems now to be used eclectically to encompass work which is both performatively oriented and inattentive to the social theory on which CMS is founded. Witnessing the spectacle of 'critical' being appropriated in ways which are so extensive as to make its meaning indistinguishable from that which was formerly the target of critique, it becomes tempting to regard CMS as defunct as a label. However, and labels aside, for all the difficulties that attend it, we would not wish to give up on critique as a worthwhile endeavour in management.

### Notes

1. In 1996, the British Academy of Management Conference contained a critical management track, repeated in 1999. In 1998, the American Academy of Management Conference contained a critical management studies workshop and a symposium on critical management education, again to be repeated. Since 1995, there has been a critical management studies e-mail network. There has been a two-year ESRC seminar series on critical management education. There is an MPhil degree in Critical Management Studies at Lancaster University, a Critical Management Studies course at Derby University and other programmes with a critical content, if not title. We are aware of at least one PhD in progress which is 'on' the critical management studies phenomenon. In 1999, the first Critical Management Studies Conference took place at Manchester University.
2. The elevation of management from a technique to a value has of course long been a central concern in critical writing drawing upon a Weberian tradition (e.g. Ritzer, 1996), where it has been seen as one of the mechanisms through which formal rationality and the search for technical solutions came to displace substantive rationality.
3. As one of the anonymous referees helpfully pointed out, here it is also worth noting that business and management schools in the UK were not only (loosely) integrated with the social sciences, but were also less dependent on commercial sponsorships than their US counterparts. Furthermore, there has not been the same level of exchange between management academics, practitioners and policy makers in the UK as in other European countries.
4. Much of the recent managerialist literature is extremely 'critical' of management; managers are urged to transform themselves and told that no less than a revolution will do if they wish to be in 'winning organizations' or to remain in the race for excellence. Although pronouncing a crisis in management and advocating a 'revolution' should be seen as part of a money-making enterprise for these writers-cum-consultants, it remains that simply offering a critique of management does not in itself earn one a place in the CMS 'camp'.
5. Within this kind of debate, those taking (roughly) a realist position tend to use the term postmodernism in quite a broad sense when compared to their opponents who often draw a distinction between postmodernism (Baudrillard, Lyotard, Kristeva) and post-structuralism (Foucault, Derrida).
6. It is also worth pointing out that it is not only CMS with its engagement with postmodernism which attracts such charges. Even the supposedly more politically robust realism of labour process analysis has repeatedly been criticized as obscure, elitist and failing to 'make a difference' (e.g. Jones, 1994).



7. We acknowledge that drawing a boundary between 'managers' and 'managed' is problematic because not only are managers also managed, but in the last decade or so they have also been increasingly subjected to the same forms of 'labour management' as 'workers' (redundancy, work intensification, etc.). However, we want to draw attention to the fact that the debate has been conducted primarily in terms of engagement with 'management', and has obscured forms of engagement with other interest groups represented in organizations.

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