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For Management?

Abstract *Over the past decades there have been persistent radical critiques of management. Previously the goal was to apply forms of Marxian analysis to the world of management and organizations, usually seeing it as a sphere of false consciousness, distorted and unreflective practices, and three-dimensional power or hegemony. Surprisingly, even after the Marxist scaffoldings that supported such claims have been deconstructed—both practically and theoretically—there are still current contributions to management thought that seek to resuscitate the same critiques, often under the rubric of Critical Management Studies. These representations seem increasingly bizarre, given the theoretical currents emanating from post-structuralist and postmodern thought that have been emergent in recent years, associated ideas such as polyphony, difference, deconstruction and translation. In this article we draw on these sources to produce a different representation of management—one that we would argue acts as an effective counter-factual to that which provides support to some of the central tendencies manifest in critical approaches to management. Rather than seeing modern management as necessarily a totalitarian practice, one that should necessarily be subject to a negative critique, we would argue that, at its best, it enables polyphony rather than tyranny, and the possibility to be both critical and for management. **Key Words:** Critical Management Studies; critique; performativity; polyphony; strangers; translation*

Perhaps one of the most interesting features of management and organizational scholarship is the relationships it has with the practices it studies. For some, the possibilities for such relationships rest in one or other of two dominant camps—either one can be ‘for management’ or one can be ‘against management’. Such

dichotomizing is particularly evident in both the theory and the culture of what has come to be known as Critical Management Studies (CMS) and its members' various attempts to define themselves and their scholarly enterprise in relation to management and organizations. Indeed, CMS is a body of knowledges that, while diverse, is increasingly institutionalized (Zald, 2002) and popular (Fournier and Grey, 2000). These developments are reflected in the broad range of scholars who use the term to identify their theoretical concerns and location as well as through the bi-annual CMS conference held in the UK and CMS's own division within the American Academy of Management. The dominant voices within CMS are researchers who devote their interests to dismantling the power that management exercises over employees and other stakeholders in a way that is anti-oppressive and emancipatory (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a). Celebrated contributions include Willmott's (1993) critique of organizational culture as an instrument of domination, Townley's (1993) critique of the disciplinarity of human resource management practices, and Knights and Willmott's (1989) critique of power relations and subjectivity. This development of CMS continues longstanding radical critiques of management, initiated by writers such as Clegg and Dunkerley (1976) (see Fournier and Grey, 2000; Zald, 2002), which self-consciously opposed managerial views of management with critical perspectives.

Despite the differences and debates that reside within CMS, one of the most obvious ways that CMS can be identified is through the non-performative intent of its scholarship, as Fournier and Grey argue (2000). Following Lyotard (1984), performativity is taken to be a means–end rationality where what is valued is the maximization of outputs for minimum input. A specific demarcation is made: non-critical management study (often disparaged as mainstream or orthodox) is governed by performativity and the desire for knowledge and truth to be subordinated to the production of efficiency, whereas CMS questions this by invoking concepts such as power, control and inequality. On this basis Fournier and Grey argue that CMS works to denaturalize and question existing organizational and managerial arrangements as being both problematic and changeable. In a Lyotardian sense, this places discussions of management firmly in the realm of ethics because 'performativity involves a system logic that reduces questions of justice to questions of efficiency' (Jones, 2003: 512). For critical management this means drawing attention to and discrediting management based on instrumental reason; it is seen to be marked by an absence of practical reason based on politically and ethically informed judgement (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Alvesson and Willmott, 1992b).

In terms of distinctions, the focus of being critical and developing critical theories often rests on dissatisfaction with what has come to be seen as a homogeneous mainstream orthodoxy where 'many deep-rooted features of organizational life—inequality, conflict, domination and subordination, manipulation—are written out of the script in favour of behavioural questions associated with efficiency or motivation' (Thompson and McHugh, 1995: 14). The consequence of this writing out is that 'organizational analysis remains consciously or implicitly management oriented' (Thompson and McHugh, 1995: 16). In contrast, the role of the critical management scholar is to point to the 'reproduction of inequalities of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, age and socio-economic class' (Parker,

1995: 560). As a result, some form of 'micro-emancipation' might ensue (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a).

In this article we wish to both provide a critique and engender a discussion of the implications of CMS for organizational theorizing and for critique more generally. In particular we take issue with the tendency of much self-avowedly critical organization studies to be 'against management' or 'anti-management' as a matter of theoretical predisposition and academic identity. In so doing we point towards the possibilities for a more politically influential and ethically responsible way of being critical without being so resolutely opposed to management. This is a form of critique that seriously entertains the possibility of being both critical and being 'for management'. In pursuing this line of argument our article is organized into five parts. First, we discuss and critique CMS in terms of the active work that it does in positioning the scholar in opposition to management and organizations. Second, we discuss the notion of the 'polyphonic organization' as a means to understand organizations beyond the oppositional assumptions common to CMS. Third, we discuss Bauman's notion of the stranger as a way of critically understanding the relationships between people and polyphonic organizations. Fourth, we introduce the practice of 'translation' as a way of understanding the role of management discourse in relation to management practice. We conclude by pointing to the implications of our discussion for the critical study of management and organizations.

The Critic Against the Manager

The positioning of the critic in relation to the object of study and its practitioners is central to the identity work that goes on within CMS. For example, it has been suggested that the significant debates engendered by differences within CMS have led those involved to become preoccupied with the 'righteousness' of their critique, and thus be distracted from engaging with the people and practice of organizations (Fournier and Grey, 2000). Further, such righteousness reflects presuppositions in critical social science that there are essential conflicts between various oppressors and their victims (see Grice and Humphries, 1997). The claim is that management theory displays strongly embedded tendencies that express 'technocratic thinking that seeks to manipulate human potential and desire in order to bolster a falsely naturalized status quo' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a: 436). Vonorov and Coleman (2003: 172) argue, 'many organizational researchers tend to assume the universality of elite and managerial interests'. Such assumptions may well be just a rhetorical accomplishment, as Walsh and Weber (2002) demonstrate empirically: while fashions change, there has been a longstanding tradition of addressing topics beyond profits and performance even in the most established and orthodox scholarly institutions, such as the American Academy of Management (see also Zald, 2002).

As Fournier and Grey point out, in terms of engagement with actual management, the relationship between the critic and managerial practice can take different forms. Some focus on developing more humane forms of management, others disengage with managerial practice in any sympathetic way and view

management as ‘irremediably corrupt since its activity is inscribed within performative principles which CMS seeks to challenge’, where the task is to undermine management rather than change it (Fournier and Grey, 2000: 24). It would seem that what unites management is its conspiracy against the managed. Critical approaches to organization studies can thus be regarded as a political enterprise that foregrounds people with little institutionalized power in relation to the social stratification of organization (Lounsbury, 2003). It is perhaps not surprising that a concomitant tendency is to demonize those who are seen, however erroneously, as having institutional power—the managers.

One recent manifestation of this tendency can be seen in Parker’s (2002) book *Against Management*. Parker’s thesis is that the forms of knowing that management practices are false. Such management represents itself as being a universal and totalizing language game that holds a promissory note of universal exchange, for ‘managing everything’, but can only ever argue its presupposition to be such through a silencing of alternate discourses. Parker (2002) cites Whyte’s (1961: 11) ironic approbation approvingly: management is acontextual professional expertise. Because it belongs nowhere it can arbitrate anywhere. Now, if conspiracy is not at work here, a peculiar contradiction is at play. The practice of management would first have to be established as totalitarian, as ruling out alternatives—on this basis critics can assume that the management of organizations is a unitary suite of knowledge that is essentially problematic. Critique should commence with the aim of discrediting management before one has had the opportunity to experience any particular instantiations of its practice.

To produce knowledge means creating an order of things, in order to change that practice imposing distinctions on them that make a difference. Since Nietzsche the power of his exercise is evident (Foucault, 1977, 1980; Nietzsche, 1968, 1969). The body of knowledge that constitutes CMS is no exception: researchers engaged in critically studying realities have to cut and paste reality until it fits into their template. They make sense of their observation according to a certain template and they use concepts that prestructure their findings. Recently, Wray-Bliss (2003) offered valuable insights into the knowledge production within CMS. As he argues, through their research CMS-oriented researchers produce superior and subordinate subject positions (aligned with the driving philosophy of CMS) that reinforce the researchers’ assumptions as much as they shed light on what’s going on. Wray-Bliss (2003: 309) also questions the effects of research practices aligned with CMS in terms of their potential effect of ‘constructing an alienating “authoritative” researcher subject position’—that is, the CMS researcher. In a self-critical move, Wray-Bliss (2003: 313) analyses an interview ‘that formed part of my own socialization into CMS research practices’. What he shows is that through a series of discursive moves the interviewer constructs and moulds the interviewee as a reactive, familiar and ‘appropriable’ subject for CMS research interests. He constructs the interviewee ‘as a *recalcitrant subject* of the type valued by CMS’ (p. 315) where the interviewer ‘*needed* the subject of the reluctant or resistant worker’ (p. 315) in order to produce intelligible CMS research. Interpreting the interviewee’s words selectively, through a CMS frame, the researcher ‘had the momentum to continue this process and [he] began to read other “positive” responses by her [the interviewee] as attempts

at impression management rather than genuine expressions of a lack of conflict' (p. 316). Re-reading his own research practice critically, Wray-Bliss writes that:

CMS constructs management as an oppressive force in organizations, and tends to construct employees as aware of, yet not able effectively to completely resist this. This construction of subject positions thereby legitimizes further CMS research, and reinforces the authority of academics who can position themselves as knowing better than the workers what resistance is or is not effective. (p. 318)

Such CMS practice results in a subject position that renders the scholar superior and as one who is alienated from other (non-CMS-compliant) possible ways of understanding reality. The presupposed identity of the research subject results in research that reinforces the CMS view of organizations and simultaneously provides the legitimacy for more critical research. This look behind the scenes or at the 'director's cut' of CMS research demonstrates what we see as key problematics for much CMS—its taken-for-granted assumptions that managerial domination is abundant, that employees suffer from this domination, and that CMS researchers are needed to reveal this domination and devise strategies to undo it, since the employees are unable to do so by themselves.

As we have seen, CMS can reside in the assumption that there is an asymmetrical relation between powerful managers and helpless, inarticulate workers/employees who need to be liberated by those critical researchers who are able to truly understand what is at stake. Such a relationship has been discussed within debates about CMS. It has been suggested, for example, if scholars 'believe that a new agenda is to be rooted in an antagonistic stance towards business practice, then the chances are slim that they will have much influence in setting this new agenda' (Walsh and Weber, 2002: 409). To this end we suggest that the rhetorical positioning that established the critic as the Other to those who provide managerial technologies to greedy managerialists is both misplaced factually as well as being practically detrimental to a critical project. In Foucauldian (1972) terms, CMS discourse's 'truth effect' seems to achieve mainly two things: first, it encourages other CMS researchers (including PhD students) to publish more critical research, since there is a market (other CMS researchers, jobs) and retail outlets (journals, conferences, edited books) for CMS products. Second, CMS research is a relatively closed system that does not interact empathically with others—it preaches to the converted and damns the heathen others (i.e. managerialists). As Grey and Willmott comment, the proponents of CMS 'should be alert to the dangers of becoming too introspective and self-regarding' (2002: 412). Such a discourse does not seek interaction with practice, rather it alienates itself from practice. However, we agree that those interested in critique 'must engage in serious dialogues with managerial audiences' (Walsh and Weber, 2002: 404) and suggest that the task is to be able to do so without being positioned by the black and white distinctions that decry management *tout court*. Rather we concur with Jacques (1999: 211) who identifies 'possibilities for engagement and resistance *within*, not *in opposition* to managerial initiatives'. Liberation—if there is such a thing—could come 'from within' (Atkin and Hassard, 1996). Indeed, in the revolution's absence, the 'rejection of managerial, market capitalist relations constitutes simultaneous rejection of the basis for engagement' (Jacques, 1999:

212). Put simply, you cannot hijack a plane by critically analysing its route from the distant ground. As Jacques suggests, CMS stays outside the game, captured in its comfort zone and niche, rather than necessarily seeking interaction with management.

While CMS might take as its project ‘the transformation of management practice in tandem with the transformation of B-schools’ (Grey and Willmott, 2002: 417) we believe that care needs to be taken that any process of change should entertain the possibility of a future that is not knowable in the present, and that the types of negative foundationalism on which much CMS rests might also require change. Theorizing that enables critique is possible without its being bound up in a CMS ideology and its concomitant tendency to assume the answers prior to having asked the questions. Indeed, when such an ideology rests on the assumption that the critic be predisposed to being against or anti-management the presumed certainties of its own position might jeopardize the possibility of being critical. If one regards critique as ‘a troubling of the certainties that underpin practices such that, at the very least, people are forced to consider in more depth the reasons for such practices’ (Grice and Humphries, 1997: 416), then reflexivity towards one’s own theoretical certainties should surely be included in the process. And this includes the certainties that hold management as being both totalizing and ‘bad’.

Polyphonic Organizations

Rather than following the critical canon outlined here, our intention is to explore the possibility of what it might be like to be ‘for’ management without being trapped in the limiting and problematic identity position that suggests any support of management is a support of technocratic desires for performativity. This means being ‘for’ management while remaining resolutely ‘against’ the ‘instrumentalism of management expertise’, ‘colonization’ by a ‘market managerial notion of organizing’ (Parker, 2002: 11). To put it a different way, we see the role of thought as to ‘supply the strength for breaking the rules *with* the act that brings them into play’ (Foucault, 1997: 244; emphasis added). This means breaking rules implies engaging with them—not criticizing them from the safe position of the self-declared critical researcher subject that lifts itself into a position of superiority. Indeed, we agree that ‘the world is more complex that capitalist ideologists would have it’ (Zald, 2002: 383) and we add that it might well be more complex than many critical ideologues would have it too. The view of management as a form of colonization that emerges in CMS is, in some respects, surprising given antecedents in the field and given that a central interest in language and discourse has been one of the major aspects of critically oriented studies of organizations since the early 1980s (Deetz, 2003; see also Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Westwood and Linstead, 2001). This interest in language and discourse enables us to provide a different account of management practice, organization theory, and their relation—an account that is less totalizing and determined and more open to the potential plurality of events.

Language-based approaches to organization studies, with their emphasis on meanings and differences, rather than canonical interpretation—the preserve of an older Leavisite tradition of, dare one say, textual interpretive managerialism—provide rich opportunity to understand management practice and organization theory and how they are enacted and played (Maguire et al., 2001; Phillips and Hardy, 1997). In management research, scholars such as Mintzberg (1973), Clegg (1975), Silverman and Jones (1976) and Pondy (1978) have noted the fragmentary and discursive nature of managerial work as discursive work (Boden, 1994; Gowler and Legge, 1996). Theoretically, the interest in language is reflected in Hazen's concept of the polyphonic organization (Hazen, 1993) and the heteroglossic organization (Rhodes, 2000, 2001a). Such conceptions of organization are incipiently democratic rather than totalizing and suggest that organizations need not be exclusively dominated by a 'market managerial notion of organizing' (Parker, 2002: 11). Indeed, such 'radical' views of domination have been criticized trenchantly by perspectives influenced by post-structuralist approaches to power, which argue that power is inherently less monadic and authoritarian in its practice and far more plural and potentially unstable (Clegg, 1989). Concepts such as the polyphonic organization cater for this fact: they start with a potentially open and diverse field of forces that might be structured, silenced or enacted in different ways at different points in time. Rather than assuming *a priori* that management dominates its subordinates we suggest understanding organizations as less clear-cut and more complex spaces. This suggests that the integration of overarching analytical concepts (e.g. domination, emancipation, etc.) as the foundation of a research enterprise is itself problematic. To be against management (in general) prior to engaging with management (in particular) might be a form of 'distal thinking' (Cooper and Law, 1995) where the price of the comfort of clarity is paid for by having to assume that one's object of inquiry is known prior to it being encountered.

According to Foucault (1972, 1980) language neither naively mirrors nor innocently represents the world, but constitutes it powerfully. Organizational discourse is no exception: it enacts organizational reality (Hatch, 1997; Weick, 1995). Such discursive enactment of reality affects and is affected by organizational power relations, since the position of having voice is powerful in itself in that it can set the frame for how further arguments might be evaluated. Such performative engagement, as discussed by Rorty (1989: 9), is involved in a permanent struggle, 'a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises great things'. In this conceptualization, power is tied up with language that constitutes organizational realities. This leads us to the concept of polyphony as developed in Bakhtin's studies of Dostoevsky's novels (Bakhtin, 1984). For Bakhtin the notion of polyphony was not only important in terms of literary discourse but was a means of challenging an entire intellectual culture dominated by a monological conception of truth—a conception where truth is regarded as having a singular existence irrespective of who it is that enunciates it (Morson and Emerson, 1990). Thus concepts like polyphony can be taken not just as characteristics of novels, but also as being of value more generally to the philosophy of language and social thought (Holquist, 1986). Indeed, just as a polyphonic novel can be understood as one where the author is one of the characters who interacts with the other characters,

so can organizations be understood as not being the result of a singular authorial voice—whether that voice be that of the manager or the critic.

From a polyphonic perspective, for one person to conceive of an organization in a particular way implies that others might be able to create different yet equally ‘fully weighted ideological conceptions’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 23). What this means, however, is more than the simple assertion that everyone has their own point of view (Holquist, 1986); rather, it alerts attention to the play of multiplicities, the relations of power that operate between them and the unfinalizability of truth as it is enacted through different people. Thus we might regard organizations not as semantic unities ‘represented by a single consciousness and a single point of view’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 82) but rather as interacting, and possibly competing, representations that might engage in some dialogue with each other. For Bakhtin language is about the creative interaction of contradictory and different voices rather than their passive or receptive understanding (Morris, 1984). Of course power is present in these interactions as, using Bakhtin’s (1981) terms, there are ‘centripetal forces which aim at centralization and the production of shared meaning used by dominant groups to impose their own monological and unitary perceptions of truth’ (Rhodes, 2001a: 29). The managerial discourses that critical management rails about are a case in point. What is worth not forgetting, however, is that while such forces might attempt to establish stabilization on their own terms and exclude other possible realities, one can expect that alongside there will be centripetal forces (Gergen, 1995) that break up the unified image of the world into a multiplicity of linguistically created worlds (McHale, 1987). That which claims to speak from the centre cannot control the meaning of things merely by imperious pronouncement (Gagnon, 1992). Attending to this multiplicity and its productive potential, we suggest, might enable a perspective on management that is sensitive to power without discursively reifying it. It would be a position that does not mean being anti-management as a matter of positive identity but instead would be sensitive to the different possibilities that management might have—not excluding these that are not negative.

From a polyphonic perspective, organizations and the arenas within which they are constituted can be considered as discourses that manifest themselves in particular instances of voice. Building on this is a consideration of the relationships between the discourses, their uses and those who use them. It is about the translations between discourses enacting different worlds where power is at stake. In this regard, we can suggest that members of organizations engage in discursive moves—translations—in order to make sense of past events and to seek legitimacy for future action. Speaking practically, these processes of translation are ongoing organizational events unfolding both intra- as well as inter-organizationally. Externally, networks, alliances and project organizations (Castells, 1996) can be seen (to be struggling) with polyphonic realities. In their collaboration, they differ in terms of the language they use, hence the order they impose, the rationality they employ and the interrelation they maintain internally. Thus a polyphonic conception of organizations not only makes the relations between organizations problematic, but also problematizes relations within organizations, and neither the anti-management critic nor the manager has the final word. The boundaries between inter- and intra-organizational distinctions blur, as does the situatedness of

organizations within cultural discourse more generally. In fact, instead of the simple inside–outside divide, or the differentiation between management and employees, boundaries multiply and shift within an organization.

The difference between management and employees as analysed by CMS is but one of many lines that can divide and thus mutually constitute organizations. Analytically, there seems to be no reason why this difference should be an a priori object of the researcher's desire. Other differences such as between organizational departments, subcultures, people, shareholders and management, management and labour unions, organizations and the environment, and organizations and competitors, are equally and may be increasingly more important differences that constitute reality. The concept of polyphony takes these multiple and shifting zones of conflict into account. It suggests that organizations are differentiated and constituted through different languages and rationalities, which may or may not enter into dialogue with one another (Rhodes, 2000, 2001a), a point repeatedly reinforced by the Aston researchers with their stress on the significance of specialization (Pugh and Hickson, 1976). Organizational growth and development lead inescapably to distinct specialization (sales, marketing, design, finance, etc.). Whereas the Aston understanding of specialization was purely mechanical, we can now understand it as also constituted through culture, grammar, argot and style (Hofstede, 1998). The concept of polyphony acknowledges these differences and the possibility of others and suggests an analysis of who enacts them with what effects at a given point in time.

As Hazen (1993: 16) suggests, 'if we conceive organization as many dialogues occurring simultaneously and sequentially, as polyphony, we begin to hear differences and possibilities'. Polyphony does not deny power, but it does not assume domination either—it proposes that questions can be raised from the auspices of different rationalities. As Gergen (1992: 222) put it, 'we can view organizations (or their sub-units) as varying in the degree to which they incorporate discursive forms of surrounding cultures'. One reaction to this situation emphasizes the necessity to talk big, to integrate, through a unifying narrative or 'centripetal' discourse (Bakhtin, 1981), to insist on those correspondences legislated. Lyotard (1984) suggests this may result in the homogenization and installation of one language game dominating all others, almost as a form of repression and 'terror'. From this perspective, all would be well 'if only people would shut up and listen while I tell them what's good for them'—here the 'I' might equally be the manager, the legislator or the CMS stalwart. In any case, this is the monological strategy against which Bakhtin's polyphony is counterposed. Necessarily, shutting up, listening and learning the new talk coincides with the elimination or marginalization of organizational richness, variety and possibilities silenced. Parker (2002) represents this as colonization by instrumental managerialism—for him, the normal state of corporate affairs. Such an absolute monologue, if achieved, would be pathological language, because it claims to be so compelling that no other discourse is necessary (Holquist, 1986). Every discourse, every rationality, needs as its precondition an Other—even God needs the Devil to get the message across. Similarly, instrumental managerialism seeking to dominate the world might be a fantasy that CMS takes more seriously than even its promoters do.

Strangers

What Lyotard (1984) calls a grand narrative is required to achieve monological power—a story that claims to account for everything for everyone. The price for an order erected and maintained through such a unifying grand narrative is the marginalization and silencing of the difference raised by other voices. Granted that the institutionalization of norms and behaviours might make such silencing possible, alternative possibilities are always immanent. Indeed, taking a theoretical position that at once claims to be critical while at the same time disparaging the possibility of change, other than at the hands of a distant critic, and regarding those who might need emancipation as being voiceless, appears to be a way of showing disrespect to those very people on whose behalf it claims to speak. Further, one would expect that when such a voice is realized, it is not likely to be done at the behest of negative critique or totalizing condemnation from those who hold management in disrepute as a matter of principle.

One fruitful way of understanding the relationship between polyphonic organizations and those people within them who make up the polyphony is through the notion of the stranger. Bauman (2001: 200) has suggested that societies each make their own strangers: we propose that the same is the case with organizations (in the following quote we have substituted ‘organization/organizations’ for Bauman’s ‘society/societies’):

All organizations produce strangers; but each kind of organization produces its own kind of strangers, and produces them in its own inimitable way. If strangers are the people who do not fit the cognitive, moral or aesthetic map of the world—one of these maps, two or all three; if they, therefore, by their sheer presence, make obscure what ought to be transparent, confuse what ought to be a straightforward recipe for action, and/or prevent the satisfaction from being fully satisfying, pollute the joy with anxiety while making the forbidden fruit alluring; if in other words, they befog and eclipse the boundary lines which can be clearly seen; if, having done all this, they gestate uncertainty, which in turn breeds discomfort of feeling lost—then each organization produces such strangers, while drawing its borders and charting its cognitive, aesthetic and moral map. It cannot but gestate people who conceal borderlines deemed crucial to its orderly and/or meaningful life and are thus charged with causing the discomfort experienced as the most painful and least bearable.

Such a focus on strangers might take polyphony beyond debates over inclusivity or efficiency towards one of disruption as ‘the stranger carries a threat of wrong classification, but—more horrifying yet—she is a threat to classification as such, to the order of the universe, to the orientation value of social space—to my life-world as such’ (Bauman, 1993: 150). Perhaps a critical question for studying organizations relates to how they both create and treat strangers and how strangers are allowed in, or banned, from what is heard amid the polyphony. Note that strangers are not necessarily workers from the bottom of the organizational hierarchy: strangers might well sit in boardrooms. (Top) managers can be alienated from their team, just as workers can be from management. That does not mean we have more sympathy with them, but it emphasizes the fact that lines of conflict do not follow the organizational chart vertically but emerge rhizomatically throughout the organization. Being a stranger is not a matter of class but, as Bauman writes,

‘the stranger is someone of whom one knows little and desires to know even less . . . [and] . . . someone of whom one cares little and is prompted to care even less’ (Bauman, 1993: 167) yet who might still be in close physical proximity. On this basis, the nature of the strangers created might tell us much about an organization. The problem of modern society and of organizations might be cast as being not how to eliminate strangers, but ‘how to live in their constant company’ (Bauman, 1993: 159).

Practically, one can imagine the difference of strangers being responded to through one or other of three typical approaches within organizations. First, there is an *anthropophagic* strategy. Organizations devour strangers to annihilate them, making them metaphorically indistinguishable from the body of the existing organization. *This responds to difference, literally, by incorporation.* Some of Goffman’s (1961) total institutions, those based on an overarching normative frame, such as boot-camps, barracks, boarding schools, and nunneries, typically seek such annihilation of any difference that pre-exists those that the organization will shape, devising appropriate degradation rituals to achieve this eclipse of identity. Much of what anti-management CMS rails against clearly belongs to this category: under the spell of instrumental managerialism organizations become culturally, calculably and contingently totalitarian, sucking the life-worlds out of their subjects, making them McTeam members incapable of agency or resistance. For management scholars, the issue here is how not to be *sucked in*. Where organizations cannot incorporate through rituals that devour difference, then, once membership prevails, the second, *anthropoemic* strategy can come into play: the organization can vomit strangers out, ‘banishing them from the limits of the orderly world and barring them from all communication with those inside’ (Bauman, 2001: 201). Excommunication, expunction and rustication push strangeness outside the orderly inclusive words of an organization that refuses to address some as members, excluding and ‘expelling the strangers beyond the frontiers of the managed and manageable territory’ (Bauman, 2001: 201–2). *This responds to difference, literally, by dismembering.* The risk is of being *spat out*.

The previous strategies are authoritarian: they can deal with membership only on terms that the organization, as an aspirant total institution, prescribes. A third strategy is more appropriately democratic. The *anthrorepublican* strategy realizes that a mature political *demos* means individual citizenship betokens membership of a public space of civic equals, despite differences. Individuals, at least in part, choose and make for themselves their organizational identities as corporate citizens rather than have the tyranny of the rulers exclude them for their estrangement from the established ways of power. *This responds to difference, literally, through dialogical translation.* In this strategy, as we shall go on to elaborate, *translation* between identities is used in order to build organizational communication and attest to organizational polyphony. Strangers are members whose potential identity is contingent on flows through the linguistic circuits of discursive power in and around organizations and their networks. Because identities are in the process of emergence and becoming in different projects, mingling and intercepting with identities already in being, they are oriented to ‘conditions of overwhelming and self-perpetuating uncertainty’ (Bauman, 2001: 208). Members are thus the by-products, as well as the means, of production of the incessant and never conclusive process of identity building that organizational discourse, in its

different projects, sustains. A key part of the uncertainty relates to how boundaries are blurred and how normal divisions and gaps of complex organization are eclipsed by variable experience in projects that enable people to wander across boundaries, becoming metaphorical strangers in terms of previously fixed organizational identities. Such strangers pose problems for organizations because they actively transgress the boundaries of sensemaking to the extent that management power uses certain legitimated discourses within which strangers cannot be contained. Thus to be involved in an exploratory project that takes one out of the ordinary and into other realms is to pose problems not only for one's organizational identity, but also for one's membership. Potentially, exploring other spaces leaves one exposed to arbitrary authority that judges one by rules derived from a genre of discourse that is not those of one's judged genre or genres of discourse (Lyotard, 1988: xi): what Lyotard calls the *différend*. The risks here are neither of being *sucked in* nor of being *spat out* (see Parker, 2002) but of *connecting*: is one making sense in terms of the range of recognized, institutionalized and powerful ways of making sense?

In relation to polyphonic organizations, the researcher might fruitfully engage in a discursive practice that does not regard management as a known entity that one is positioned against a priori. Such practice could involve a type of *deconstruction* of strange language games and the language games of strangers; those foreign to the strategic intent of the organization as defined by its top management team. If we agree with Zald (2002) that contemporary critical theory emerges out of the conjunction of 'left ideology and methodologies derived from hermeneutics and deconstruction' (p. 376), then deconstruction might be taken more seriously and ideology brought into question. Such a deconstruction focuses on procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and ways of world making (Chia, 1996) and question the differences on which order is based. Deconstruction is a form of *intervention* through maximum intensification of a transformation in progress (Derrida, 1992: 8), including the imposed order of the critic. It questions the taken for granted in order to demonstrate that it has an institutionalized history (Kallinikos and Cooper, 1996: 5). Deconstruction can make us aware that the stories through which we organize our thinking, which make organization thinkable, are, in Nietzsche's terms (1990), a sum of human relations poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred and embellished, which, after long usage, appear to be fixed, canonical and binding. They are metaphors whose metaphoricality we have forgotten to remember. Deconstruction questions 'truths' split off from the conditions and context of their production rather than seeking to establish concrete Critical foundations, from where, at its worst, wowers and whingers pontificate. Deconstruction tries 'to identify internal contradictions in systems, to exploit the conflicts and absences present in the interplay between representations, using nominally stated arguments of those with voice (...) to create openings for those without' (Jacques, 1999: 216). Deconstruction might be a strategy for change that does not rest on the false comfort of knowing in advance what should be changed, and how it should change, an approach without the hubris of making oneself a hero and engineer of that change. Such change 'is the consequence of the coming together of a unique set of multiple forces at a particular place and time . . . [and] . . . knowledge should be concerned with these local and specific occurrences, not with the search for context free laws'

(Polkinghorne, 1992: 149), immutable truths or assumptions that refuse to be questioned.

An organization regarded as polyphonic is an organization constituted by narratives and stories that guide the lives within them and speak to those identities they constitute. Such an organization constantly talks itself into existence—an existence we make sense of through narratives and stories (Boden, 1994; Weick, 1995). The discourses imbued in those narratives shape organization through their ‘truth effects’ at the deepest levels (Foucault, 1972). Practically, deconstruction is not a method to be applied as much as a political act (Rorty, 1996). It is way of questioning truth effects and analysing the language games that shape reality, opening up space for different concepts and perceptions. Deconstruction might thus show how the world is accomplished linguistically and its status quo maintained discursively. Even more important, it might provide the space for things being different without the a priori demand that that difference be of a particular kind as defined by the person investigating it. As organizations (including the academic organization of research) are powerfully constituted and constantly enacted through languages, deconstruction can act as a catalyst for change and show that any such organization was established at a very particular moment in history.

Translation

By considering organizations as being constituted through different language games enacted by different stakeholders, including strangers, the idea that there could be a single acontextual language that could cope with all the complexities, a management that is for all seasons, which is working everywhere but at home nowhere, seems bizarre. The incipient claim is that management as a discourse is capable of assuming a position of omnipotence that matches its position as emergent from the mouths and minds of senior personnel and perhaps their paid advisors and educators. Yet, while it is likely that one could fool some of the people some of the time, it is highly unlikely that anyone would fool all of the people all of the time—the possibility of polyphony might always be immanent. The dominance of a given managerial discourse might be a convenient critical straw person, but the assumption that multiple instantiations of management practice might be determined by a unifying managerial discourse seems naive, if not just convenient for the critic’s argument. It might be a delusion of hubris to think the contrary, but management as a practice, not least because of its performative ethos, has a habit of chopping down those imbued with an elevated sense of their own importance in relation to actual practice.

Rather than presume that management is a global discourse, roaming and nomadic equipped with an Esperanto that all could comprehend, we suggest that it is discourse that seeks to translate. While for some management may seem to be everything (and thus nothing, as Ritzer, 2004 elaborates), against seeing managers as ciphers of an all-encompassing discourse, we suggest that organizations are polyphonic and that managers, rather than being one-dimensional dummies speaking the lines that structural ventriloquism allows them, are talented and creative players in many simultaneous and complex games. The main moves in

such organization games involve translations. The concept of translation was brought into play by several theories, including Actor Network Theory (ANT) (see Brown and Capdevila, 1999). For our purposes, we take a linguistic focus on the concept of translation. A little thought experiment demonstrates translation at work. If you go to the website for dictionary.com, it has a section that will translate from one language to another on-line (see <http://dictionary.reference.com/translate/text.html>, visited 22 March 2004)—you simply identify the language to be translated from and the language to be translated to, type in some text, press a button labelled ‘translate’ and the text appears translated into the second language. As the product advice says on the website, however, ‘The translator will not produce a perfect translation. In most cases it should adequately convey the general sense of the original; however, it is not a substitute for a competent human translator.’ Machines or the strict application of rules accountable in an instrumental form can do translation, but it cannot be done very well in these ways. The same seems to be the case for the translation of management discourse—universal, rule-bound management can effect translations but their quality is not likely to be very good either. Using translation as an adequate means of understanding and conceptualizing management work means being concerned not with one language but with the differences between languages; it is not about elaborating one single language but moving from one to the other; it is not about speaking in one’s own tongue but about understanding the other. In short, translating is a constructive way of understanding the polyphonic condition of organization and the gaps between the glosses. Translation takes place in between existing formations, it explores the gap between the same and the other, the new and the old, the strange and the familiar (Cooper and Law, 1995). It follows the multiple lines of differentiation that occur while organizing (Cooper, 1990).

Translation is a complex move that combines difference and repetition at the same time (Deleuze, 1994). It allows one to think about stability and change simultaneously. According to Benjamin (1982: 69), the ‘essential quality’ of translation ‘is not statement or the imparting of information. Yet any form of translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information—hence something inessential.’ Rather, translation seeks to communicate the underlying feeling beyond the surface of the written and spoken word. Translating is mediation between yet unconnected things, comprising ‘what exists *and* what is created’ (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1995: 182). Like improvisation, translation helps us linguistically ‘to maintain the images of order and control that are central to organizational theory and *simultaneously* introduce images of innovation and autonomy’ (Weick, 1998: 548). It ‘involves reworking precomposed material and designs in relation to unanticipated ideas conceived, shaped, and transformed under the special conditions of performance, thereby adding unique features to every creation’ (Berliner, quoted in Weick, 1998: 544). Translation is always provisional (Benjamin, 1982: 74), on the way to making sense, constituting the ‘organization’ from different perspectives. In doing so, translation comes closer to the understanding of the plurality of languages than any single language: while they remain in conflict, during the process of translation underlying harmonies, rhythms and differences recur between strange tongues. This has important *ethical* implications: understanding management means listening carefully to the voices of others, and mediating between different language

games rather than assuming one knows what management is and what it says. Translation never results in a final text, in a truly accurate account of reality: it is always a 'provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages' (Benjamin, 1982: 75). The language of translation never fits perfectly; rather, it moves, folding and unfolding, enveloping and developing, and, with every single move, there (dis)appears a new, yet hidden reality. Translation pragmatically keeps its ears open for differences that emerge where CMS might get lost in itself by looking for confirmation of a canonically crafted universal explanatory scheme.

Possibilities

The fact that translations cannot leave that which is translated unaltered is an important part of understanding the potentialities of management. To be against management and to regard managerial discourse as monolithic seems to forget this. A brief yet interesting example can illustrate our point. As reported by Adler (2002), the Critical Management Studies Workshop (CMSW) held at the annual American Academy of Management Meeting has what it calls a 'mission statement'. Indeed, this statement, in terms of its genre and rhetorical style, appears remarkably similar to the mission statements that commercial organizations produce. It talks collectively about 'our shared belief', 'our shared commitment', and so forth, and appears as a rallying call designed to create some sort of solidarity and unity. The CMSW mission statement is perhaps longer than those which many corporations produce but its purpose in answering the question 'What is our function in the larger scheme of things?' (Schein, 1985: 54) is very similar. The mission is also similar because an elite group of organizers devised it—just as executives across the globe do on a regular basis. It is a small but interesting example of polyphony at work. Inter-organizationally we have some sort of translation, as the managerial technology of the mission statement seems to have travelled and been adapted to both the corporate boardroom and a group of critical management scholars. There is internal polyphony too: as Adler (2002) notes, not all the people involved agreed with the particular mission statement that was finally inscribed, and some agreed with parts but not all of it. In critical terminology this might be referred to as resistance. Now, despite these apparent similarities, it is clear that the use of this particular management technology for the CMSW is not the same as the use that might be made of it in a corporate headquarters by managers seeking, for example, to set up factories in less developed countries. Similarly, we might question whether it is possible or even desirable to take for granted that management is an oppressive whole that is monologically secure and effective, and instead look to the differences and the possibilities. This might mean abandoning the aspirations for certainty and control of knowledge based on solid foundations of critique. If much management theory portrays simplistic and generalized representations of work without accounting for ambiguity, spontaneity and embedded practice (see Czarniawska, 2003) does critique have to do this also? Here 'the quest for certainty—even as a long term goal—is an attempt to escape from the world' (Rorty, 1999: 33) where what is urgently needed is engagement with the world.

The critique from much of CMS is concerned with being critical of ‘the oppressive character of the current management and business system’ (Adler, 2002: 388), as if such a character is an all-pervasive feature of management. Parker (2002: 184), for example, is not against management per se, but management conceived in ‘three forms’ as a ‘generalized technology of control’. These forms comprise the ‘increasing celebration of the managerial class, the application of managerial language to more and more “informal” areas of life, and the dissemination of particular forms of expertise by the B-School’, which he sees as all combining to produce a ‘hegemonic model of organization’. We suggest that to be ‘against management’ in this way is a strange, research-poor rhetorical representation of management discourse, one that seems to take some outlandish marketing claims more seriously than need be the case. Wherever these practices are occurring, they are not represented in the academic management articles that we have cited and discussed in this article, nor in the philosophical, sociological or literary sources on which these sources draw. They are, perhaps, as Parker (2002) suggests, to be found in the representations of management in radical protest movements against globalization, or in the carnivalesque representations of contemporary culture (see also Rhodes, 2001b). But none of these representational practices, we warrant, can account for the complex goings on in particular organizations. Of course, there are ‘the textbooks’, those insidious forms of transmission of received knowledge—in Parker’s terms the ‘authorized Bibles’—in their various versions—which are ritually consumed and regurgitated in the cycle of each fresh student semester (see Clegg and Ross-Smith, 2003 for a related critique). But shouldn’t we try to translate what the best and most creative management academics are actually doing into a better kind of discourse that captures the current literature more accurately, that will produce more polyphone students, rather than issue blanket condemnations ‘against management’? As Clegg (2002) has argued, the relatively unbounded, poorly framed and loosely classified discourse that passes for management knowledge is less a scandal than a social fact. But it is one that can be used as a double-edged sword. We, as management educators, do not have to teach the anodyne, the instrumental, the technical fool’s paradise. If one chooses only to concentrate on the *spin-meisters* of management one might come to the conclusions of a homogeneous and effective managerial discourse. However, if one roamed nomadically among the recent research on management discourses, one might come to a different conclusion. Contemporary understanding of management sees it as a discursive practice that is much more diverse. The work of people such as Mary Jo Hatch or Debra Meyerson provides living examples of this diversity: being critical and socially very well aware of the patterns of power in organizations, they publish in outlets such as *Harvard Business Review* (e.g. Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Meyerson, 2001; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000)—clearly an arena that is not against management. Instead of labelling themselves critical they engage in academic practices that take criticism much more seriously and ironically, in such a way as to imply both being for management and speaking to managers.

Such conceptions as we have reviewed here would point the way to more politically influential and ethically responsible ways of being critical without being against management. They would take us beyond *a priori* assumptions about what management is, towards new possibilities for what management might be. They

would not make strangers of those who err across the divisions. They would privilege discursive intercourse rather than one-way communication or confrontation at a safe distance. They would not assume who has the dominant role as necessarily ascribed even before the quality of the encounter is gauged. Thus translation can be understood as the key to understanding management in an age of polyphony, an age with a superfluity of different forms of expertise and knowledge, rather than an era of totalities, of organizations constituted in a total institutions mould. We would like to conclude with a remark by Foucault who once dreamt of a critique that:

would not try to judge, but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea-foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply, not judgements, but signs of existence . . . Perhaps it would invent them sometimes—all the better. All the better. Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep, I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. It would not be sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightning of possible storms. (Foucault, 1997: 323)

We don't have to go as far as Foucault suggests to imagine a criticism that would be more open, more fruitful and more productive than currently practised in CMS. And then, we think, there would be less for any of us to be 'against' or to 'judge': instead we might do some work that seeks to bring reality to life, seeded by the lightning of the possible discursive storms that might blow up and change it.

Notes

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