

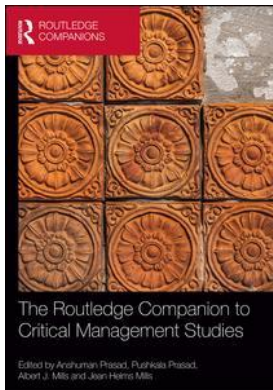
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Part II

Critique and its (dis-)contents

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Critical management scholarship

A satirical critique of three narrative histories

Albert J. Mills and Jean Helms Mills

Introducing a cautionary tale

To be perfectly honest, this essay did not start off as it is now. Our initial intent was to understand the emergence of the field of critical studies of management (csm) through examination of “its condition of possibility” (Fairclough, 2010: 10). Drawing “strategically” (Ferguson, 1984), on the work of Foucault, we set out to examine the discursive space that preceded the establishment of the field (viz. csm) and its institutional incarnation – Critical Management Studies (CMS): the former referring to everyone contributing to critical management scholarship, the latter to those who associate themselves, through their identity work and affiliations, with the term ‘CMS’. As we shall show, the distinction between csm and CMS is not always easy or meaningful. In any event, our aim was to gain a sense of the contextual influences that shaped the development of csm (Kieser, 1994; Booth and Rowlinson, 2006) in order to explain its viability as a field of scholarship. However, our attempts to gather insights into the history of the field confronted us with diverse accounts based on under-theorized notions and/or absence of reference to the problematic character of history and the past (Jenkins, 1994; Munslow, 2010). In the process, as we shall argue, such accounts end up privileging certain (Anglo-American and Eurocentric) voices, marginalizing others; grounding arguments in embedded factual claims (e.g., resting on “the past” as ontologically real – see Munslow, 2010); and failing to reveal the politics of the constructed historical account (Durepos and Mills, 2012b). In the end, we were more impressed by the narrative form of each account rather than what it had to tell us about the development of critical studies of management. It reminded us of Hayden White’s (1973; 1984) analysis of history as more about narrative form than telling of facts. It is to White that we turned for analysis of three selected accounts.

Narrative forms and history: Three weddings and a funeral

The starting point for this study is three scholarly works published between 1994 and 2006. The choice of these works arose out of an extensive review of the literature in preparation for our original focus on the discursive conditions and the development of critical studies of management. In the process, we stumbled across two articles and a book chapter that are useful for

illustrating different ways of conceptualizing the development of the field (including *Organization*). Each, in its own way, involves an attempt to reflect on the discursive space out of which the field emerged. As such, each contributes to a sense of the history of the field and the events that preceded its development. And each provides a strong and contrasting narrative to the other two. In our own efforts to analyse these works, we drew on White's (1973) notion of genres of historical writing.

White (1973) contends that history is not so much about capturing the "facts" of a situation (e.g., specific events that led to the establishment of csm) as about the way those "facts" are assembled into a narrative (e.g., a tale that pulls together selected events for its storyline on the development of csm). He argues that history is about "emplotment," achieved through the utilization of well established forms of expression, or tropes (White, 1985). Tropes include metaphor (metonymy, synecdoche, irony) and are linked to narrative forms that include *romance* ("a focus on the heroic qualities of an individual"); *tragedy* ("a focus on the impact of fate on events, usually with a bad ending"); *comedy* ("a focus on human beings as part of a greater organic whole, not subject to fate so much as resolving things through harmonious relations"); and *satire* (a focus on absurdity and a questioning of "such things as the role of individual attributes, the fates, and harmony in the resolve of organizational problems") (Bryman, Bell, Mills, & Yue 2011: 430–431). Our use of White is as much adaptive as adoptive to account for postmodernist (as well as modernist) ideological impulses and notions of the individual (Nord & Fox, 1996) that can be found embedded in narrative forms.

The three works we focus on are (1) "Why Organization? Why Now?" (Burrell, Reed, Calás, Smircich & Alvesson, 1994), written as the introduction to the launch of *Organization*; (2) "Critical Management Studies: Premises, Practices, Problems, and Prospects" (Adler, Forbes & Willmott, 2006), written for the *Annals of the Academy of Management* to introduce and explain to readers the philosophy of the CMS Interest Group of the Academy of Management; and (3) "From Labor Process Theory to Critical Management Studies" (Hassard, Hogan & Rowlinson, 2001), written as a reflection on the "intellectual trajectory" of CMS and its potential as a force for radical change. All three works provide historical "traces" (Jenkins, 1991) of the reflections of "founding" participants associated with the "conditions of [csm's] emergence" (Adler, Forbes & Willmott, 2006: 21); in the first case it is the founding editors of *Organization*; in the second case, it is a combination of organizers of the early CMS workshops at the Academy of Management (1998) and the first international CMS conference (1999); the third case involves three leading activists associated with CMS. We would note that the term 'traces' is far from unproblematic in its suggestion that real aspects of the past can be uncovered. We use the term more loosely to refer to examples of things said (or constructed) in a given period of time. We do not surface these examples as evidence of what *really* happened so much as indications of discursive thinking (Foucault, 1979).

What follows are three narratives based on our reading of the selected works. In each case, we try to identify a dominant narrative form and discuss the implications for understanding history and the past and their relationship to the field, in particular to *being* in CMS (the focus of two of the studies) and the future of *Organization*. In the two former cases, we have not tried to define CMS and its relationship to *Organization*, viewing the definitions (plural) as outcomes of processes of knowledge production (Latour, 2005) and, as such, more flexible than fixed definitions would imply. We are more interested in what the selected narratives have to say about csm in general and CMS in particular. This will allow us a greater grasp of the role of discursive thinking in the (re)production of something called CMS. While the first two accounts (along with our own critique) focus on the viability of CMS as a marriage of different critical communities, the latter account provides a more pessimistic view that envisions the eventual demise of CMS.

The writers' tale: Satirical critique

Satire – a focus on absurdity and a questioning of “such things as the role of individual attributes, the fates, and harmony in the resolve of organizational problems.”

Bryman, Bell, Mills & Yue 2011: 430–431

Drawing on White (1973), we characterize our approach as satirical critique: critique because we adopt a critical stance to the analysis of different understandings of CMS and its history; satirical because it involves a strong sense of parody or caricature in the reduction of complex positions to fairly simple narratives. Through humor we hope to engage rather than close debate. Satire allows the authors (us!) some sense of distance from the object of humor while simultaneously including the authors in the joke (we have been associated at some point or other with each of the narratives critiqued).

Distancing is also attempted through an amodernist approach (Latour, 1993) where we understand CMS as the outcome of several communities of scholars – at once, and fleetingly, a unified community and, at once, a series of disparate knowledges about what constitutes CMS. In short, we have avoided the temptation to privilege unity over fragmentation, and modernist over postmodernist thinking by focusing on the relational aspects of knowledge production. Finally, following White (1984: 7), we view our approach to narrative “as simply one discursive ‘code’ among others, which might or might not be appropriate for the representation of ‘reality,’ depending only on the pragmatic aim in view of the speaker of the discourse.” Ultimately, our critique is intended to reveal the problematic use of the role of history and the past not only by mainstream (Booth & Rowlinson, 2006) but also by critical management scholars. In that vein, we surely recognize that the authors associated with each narrative are not reducible to the narrative forms we highlight and that the thinking of the people involved is far more porous than we have suggested.

Tale one: Romantic fragmentationism

Romance – “a focus on the heroic qualities of an individual”

Bryman, Bell, Mills & Yue, 2011: 430–431

Narrative form: We have designated the first narrative (the 1994 introduction to *Organization*) as romantic fragmentationism. At first glance, this may seem misplaced. Strictly speaking, it is an account that lacks a focus on “heroic qualities,” let alone on selected individuals. However, we argue that there is a sense throughout the piece that the fragmentary aspects of an emergent postmodernist world have opened the possibility of greater potential for human emancipation and that fragmentation (in a postmodernist sense) stands as the (individual) subject.

From the opening line we get a tremendous sense of the emancipatory potential of a new era: “The context in which *Organization* is launched is one which few academics could have envisaged a decade ago” (Burrell, Reed, Calás, Smircich & Alvesson, 1994: 5). It was a decade that saw the termination of the “bipolar balance of terror,” the “demise of 19th-century God surrogates” (Gellner, 1993: 3, cited in Burrell, Reed, Calás, Smircich & Alvesson, 1994: 5), the destruction of “older ideological equilibriums and ingrained intellectual habits” and the “severe fragmentation and decay of 19th- and early 20th-century meta-narratives of liberation, freedom, progress, order, and control” (p. 5).

If not the causal force of the new era, fragmentation is referred to throughout as characterizing the various processes through which the modernist worldview is dissolving. This includes

the fragmentation of the “supporting institutional base” of orthodoxy (p. 6) and with it “the field of organization studies” itself (p. 8). This somewhat flawed hero (fragmentationism) offers both a challenge but also a release. Fragmentation heralds uncertainties, contradictions (p.10) and “weaknesses leading to political insecurity” (p. 8). Nonetheless, it provides the spaces in which to “craft” new emancipatory agendas (p. 13) and a “return to a different ‘original story,’ where multiplicity and fragmentation – the road not taken by the ‘founding fathers’ – enrich organizational analysis” (p. 9).

CMS, history and the past: By asking, “Why Organization? Why Now?” Burrell, Reed, Calás, Smircich & Alvesson, (1994) draw on selected notions of the past to create a proto-history of CMS. The narrative form infuses the historical account, which is constructed in broad terms around the themes of modernity and postmodernity and the unity and fragmentation of ideas. Thus, the “context” in which *Organization* appears is portrayed as the interstices between the collapse of modernity and the emergence of postmodernity (p. 5): “[w]e are facing a new situation in which the old polarities of thought can no longer be applied, or at the very least require scrutiny. This clearly will be the central task of social thought during the coming years” (Gellner, 1993: 3, cited in Burrell, Reed, Calás, Smircich & Alvesson, 1994, p. 5). In this brief and fleeting “history of the present,” the past is quickly passed over and left to hang like a dead weight (e.g., as remnants of a series of outmoded meta-narratives) that appears detached and suffused with the ghost of Hegel. It is detached insofar as it reflects on a past filled with “bipolar forces of terror” and “God surrogates” but fails to reflect on the engagement of people in overcoming those phenomena and helping to create the fragmentary spaces before us; people whose anticolonial struggles, peace activism, women’s liberation, class warfare and the like may have served as impulses for the creation of critical studies of management. While the narrative encourages the idea of a fragmentation of history or multivocal versions of the past, the idea is indirect and unexplored, left open for anticipated debates in future issues of *Organization* (see, e.g., Calás, 1994). Nonetheless, this romantic narrative leaves us with the ambiguous idea that history (however understood) is in the past!

Implications for CMS: The narrative of romantic fragmentationism, we contend, placed an early postmodernist imprimatur¹ on the field that can be found in many, if not all, of the articles over the 20-year span of *Organization*² and, beyond that, some of the perceptions of those involved in or engaged with CMS (Rowlinson and Hassard, 2011; e.g., Ford, Harding & Learmonth, 2010; Tatli, 2012).

In terms of history and the past, almost one-third of all articles in *Organization* make reference to history, yet remarkably few are concerned with the socio-historical context of their research subject. Fewer still theoretically engage with issues of the past and history. For example, more by illustration than critique, Stokes and Gabriel (2010) utilize the idea of history to detail a number of discrete examples of genocide. They are not so much interested in socio-historical explanations of how or why such atrocities occurred so much as revealing the lessons involved for organization studies. In the process, history is referred to as a more or less factual accounting of the past (rather than, perhaps, a socially contrived narrative [Jenkins, 1991]), the implication being that a desired goal might be good, better, or more improved histories of the past – ones that account for genocide. This is somewhat surprising given the fact that the Introduction is centered on the “socio-historical” context (1994: 5), in which the journal was emergent, and the fact that a postmodernist imprimatur is associated with Lyotard and the deconstruction of meta-narratives (see, e.g., Lyotard, 1984) and the new historicism of Foucault (e.g., Foucault, 1979). Part of the explanation may lie in the fact that the Intro’s use of historical context is fleeting and introduced in a way that problematizes the past while privileging the (potentially postmodernist) present.

Tale two: Comedic integrationism

Narrative form: A review of PPPP suggests elements of comedy in the classical Greek sense of stage plays with happy endings, with the play being constructed around the idea of a (more or less) unified body of scholarship.

We gain a sense of CMS as an integrated scholarly community from the opening paragraph, which announces an “overview of a *growing movement* in management studies” (p. 119; our emphasis). It quickly locates the development of the movement’s critical agenda in “contemporary developments beyond academia” (p. 121). In tracing those developments, the paper refers to the fact that while “CMS has been strongest in the United Kingdom . . . [the] United States side of the CMS movement first became visible as a workshop at the 1998 Academy of Management meetings” (p. 123). CMS is described as “broadly ‘leftist’ in leaning” yet attracting those who might normally be considered in the mainstream of management whose boundaries are no longer “fixed but the subject of contestation” (p. 125). CMS also “*accommodates* diverse theoretical traditions, ranging from varieties of Marxism through pragmatism to poststructuralism” (p. 125; our emphasis). But the integration does not stop there. Critical theory is seen as “an influential strand in the development of CMS” (p. 125); feminism and environmentalism are “new social movements . . . [that] have considerably enriched” CMS thinking (p. 130); and the work of “pragmatist symbolic interactionism, actor-network theory” and those drawing on the theories of Giddens and Bourdieu “are all important” aspects of CMS engagement with social theory (p. 130).

The narrative ends by stating, “As the preceding discussion has made clear, CMS is a catchall term signifying a heterogeneous body of work, a body that shares some common themes but is neither internally consistent nor sharply differentiable from mainstream analysis” (p. 154). It also concedes that a “major tension within CMS has been between structural/materialist streams, which are often Marxist inspired, and postmodernist/poststructuralist streams which place greater emphasis upon agency, language, and contingency” (p. 155). Nonetheless, it is predicted that these divisions are “interwoven with personal political biographies” that are likely to disappear over time with the ascendancy of younger scholars “more at ease with a less orthodox, more eclectic approach that favours rich diversity over rigorous consistency” (p. 155).

A sense of the play’s initial staging is glimpsed in the middle of the narrative, where it is stated that the “theoretical resources used by CMS can be usefully characterized using Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) matrix of approaches” viewed as distinctions that “can be heuristically useful as a way to locate varieties of CMS and their theoretical roots” (p. 130). At first glance, this is a strange staging choice given the fact that Burrell and Morgan (1979) originally conceived a framework composed of incommensurable scholarly communities. However, the heuristic value of Burrell and Morgan’s paradigms for staging an integrationist play becomes clearer as the plotting of the various cells becomes increasingly blurred. First, there are the addition of *new* (!) communities of scholars that include feminists and environmentalists. Second, recent years have seen the development of increasingly radical interpretivist strands of thought (including pragmatist symbolic interactionism). Third, “the line between order and change [has become] fuzzy insofar as CMS proponents leverage mainstream, regulation-oriented theories to critical, albeit reformist, purpose” (p. 130) – generating “radical core” and “reformist” variants of CMS.

In terms of the (potentially) global reach of CMS, the integrative approach, conceding that the core group of scholars originated largely in the UK, followed to a lesser extent by U.S. scholars, contends that “other geographic modes . . . have arisen too, notably in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, and Brazil.”

CMS, history and the past: The integrationist narrative is also evident in the construction of a history of CMS. The scene is set by reference to “the decline and fragmentation of the Left since around 1970,” which is accompanied by the development of “new social movements [and] . . . new critical perspectives” (p. 121). What then follows is more a listing of events than the outlining of a social-historical context to explain CMS through “the conditions of its emergence” (p. 121). The list includes such things as the “broader liberalization of advanced capitalist societies and their universities” (p. 122); “some relaxation of the grip of positivism in the late 1960s and 1970s” (p. 122); the “expansion of the European Community and the rise of China, India, and other emergent economies” (p. 121); and several things associated with the era of “Post-September 11, 2001” (p. 121).

Unlike romantic fragmentationism, the integrative narrative casts the historical context of CMS’s development in terms of changes due to “the cultural logic of late capitalism” (Jameson, 1984), in which “many certainties have been unsettled, even as others have been reinforced [and that a] succession of major and natural social crises has brought into sharp focus issues that previously may have seemed more peripheral, issues such as business ethics, environmentalism, and imperialism” (p. 121). In consequence, it is implied, there has been the rise of new forms of radicalism whose concerns are broader than those of the old “left” and have risen to meet new demands of a changing capitalist world. In the process, the blurring of capitalist lines of thought has the potential to build broader coalitions of critical thinkers, uniting the formerly radical left with conservative radicals or reformers (Perrow, 2008).

In delineating the core communities of scholars involved in the development of CMS, the integrative approach talks in terms of the additive effect of a growing movement that begins in large part with Labor Process Conference (LPC) and Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS) scholars in the early 1980s, where critical scholarship is honed with the move into the 1990s. Scholars from these (largely European) groups will eventually fuse with groups of U.S.-based scholars with the development of an Academy of Management CMS interest group. In the latter case, an interesting claim is made for pragmatism as “an important inspiration for CMS, especially US proponents” (p. 139). It is argued that “pragmatism plays a background role for much U.S. CMS similar to the role played by Marx for U.K. CMS work” (p. 139). The works of Sidney Hook and John Dewey are cited as important pathways for CMS in the U.S. This history, however, strangely leaves out of account the role of Hook and Dewey during the Cold War and their commitment to the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, a CIA-funded body that was associated with attacks on the left (Lasch, 1970): Hook went on to support the U.S. war in Vietnam and a number of other conservative political stances.

Implications for CMS: The comedic integrative narrative presents an interesting paradox. In seeking to explain the increasing institutionalization of CMS (Adler, 2008), it suggests several grounds of harmony across differing paradigms (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) and traditions (Prasad, 2005). In the process, it may well contribute to a strong sense of commitment from those who feel the need to be part of a dedicated critical management scholarship. Indeed, there are a number of examples where people express an emotional commitment to CMS. Cooke (2008: 913), for example, states that “people working within CMS have been one of the central pillars of comradeship and collegiality in my life.” Cunliffe (2008: 936) states that during her time in academia “it was the CMS community . . . who frankly kept me sane.” And Ford (Ford, Harding & Learmonth, 2010: s72) “found in critical management the language that allowed her to articulate the feelings of unease she had experienced when working as a manager.” Thus, the idea of a harmonious CMS community, no matter how intellectually ridiculous or far-fetched, is attractive to many, and it may be that various efforts to stage that illusion serve to enroll participants and black box (Latour, 2005) the idea of Critical Management Studies. An allied part of the

process can be seen in the 2008 issue of *Organization* on “Speaking Out on the Future of Critical Management Studies,” where almost all of the participants argue for a broad, rather than a narrow, definition of what should constitute CMS: “I am uncomfortable with some representations of CMS as politically left wing and critical of the shortcomings of others. This can lead to a narrow view of critically-oriented work that might exclude scholars who don’t see themselves as political activists [and those] managers and academics engaged in mainstream work” (Cunliffe, 2008: 937).

On the other hand, the enrollment process seems to be achieved not only by a blurring of the ideological lines (and history) of CMS but also by a philosophical commitment to blurred lines. This, if nothing else, has led to a series of reflections on CMS over the years, with participants repeating the oft used phrase that “we need to be clear about who are we, what we stand for and what resources we have” (Stookey, 2008: 923). Enter stage left Hassard, Hogan and Rowlinson (2001) and the narrative of tragic modernism!

Tale three: Tragic modernism

Narrative form: We have called the narrative in IT tragic modernism for three reasons. First, the various points of analysis throughout the piece reference and seem nostalgic for a time past (modernism), a time when being critical seemed to have a greater clarity than it does today. Second, discussion centers on the problematic nature of CMS, including a failure to clearly delineate its political agenda and a tendency to incorporate disparate forces that include scholars that are mainstream and reformist. Third, in the absence of a detailed historical account of the loss of certain modernist concerns from CMS (e.g., class struggle), we are left with the fates as an explanation.

The narrative quickly moves to explain the development of CMS (and its attendant problems) through an historical account that focuses on the “political context of the historical defeat of the Left since its high point in 1968” (p. 339) and the role of labor process theorists who played a role in that defeat and who constituted an important tributary of CMS in the period following. These two elements are immediately characterized as contributing to a failed project, as a move from (modernist) concerns with the revolutionary role of the working class to (postmodernist) deconstructions of Marxism as an outmoded meta-narrative: the “potential of the working class to fulfill its Marxist destiny to lead a revolutionary transformation of society [and] any such confidence in the second coming of communism has long since evaporated from critical management studies. Instead of adhering to Marx’s or Braverman’s historical visions critical management studies have increasingly turned to Foucault or critical theorists such as Adorno or Marcuse, who provide the basis for a deconstruction of Marxian eschatology” (Hassard, Hogan & Rowlinson, 2001: 339). Ultimately, the move from labor process theory to Critical Management Studies is seen not as “an intellectual progression” but rather as “a manifestation of the defeat of the Left and the need to temper our radicalism in the context of neo-liberal hegemony.”

In the narrative that follows, we gain a growing sense of nostalgia for something preceding labor process theory (LPC). LPC is portrayed as rooted in forms of “managerialism,” and the increasing managerialism of LPC is seen as somehow responsible for CMS’s retreat from class politics: “As a consequence of his managerialism Braverman himself could be said to have opened the way for those labor process theorists . . . who began to evoke Foucault in the 1980s to argue that power rather than exploitation drives domination in the labor process” (p. 347). But at the heart of the managerialist turn in Critical Management Studies has been abandonment of the fundamental Marxist “law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, which predicts that economic crises are inevitable within capitalist economies” (p. 343): this abandonment is portrayed as having “inevitably [led] to reformist politics” (p. 343).

CMS, History and the Past: The modernist aspect of the narrative is achieved through a history dedicated to revealing the socio-political development of CMS. As such, it is the most historically engaged of the three narratives; that is, the emplotment is undertaken as a history. In the process, it provides a powerful trace of several of the important issues (e.g., class struggle) and debates (e.g., the revolutionary role of the working class) that informed many of the early adherents to CMS. Although it is far from a crude “historical commentary on the movement of leftist labor process theory into critical management studies” (p. 357), the narrative is accomplished through a mode of historical analysis that itself is rooted in modernist notions that tend to reify the past. The narrative ends with awareness that there are “problems with writing *such* history” and goes on to recognize that it includes “many omissions” (p. 357; our emphasis). Nonetheless, this continues to suggest that crafting a history involves an uncovering of facts (things that have happened in the past) rather than a construction of a particular narrative.

Like the comedic integrationist narrative, this account involves histories of the U.K. and U.S. contributions to CMS. However, while the former seeks out positive points of unity, the latter seeks to reveal the underlying reformist and managerialist philosophies across U.S.–U.K. scholarship that, while potentially unifying, threatens to undermine the idea of a critical project.

Implications for CMS: The narrative construction of a history of CMS may nonetheless provide the “alignment” (Crawford, 2004: 2) needed to fuel the identity work of those wanting to feel part of a critical *movement* (Adler, Forbes & Willmott, 2006: 119), rather than a “loose community that describes itself as ‘critical management studies’” (Hassard, Hogan & Rowlinson, 2001: 340). In other words, a “strong” history of intellectual engagement across the supposed modern and postmodern divides may contribute to a stronger sense of CMS as an established body of scholarship. However, in this particular narrative, the sheer weight of tragedy threatens to overwhelm the possibilities of a united movement of critical scholars (comedic integrationism) and fail to convince those deeply suspicious of the role of history (romantic fragmentationism), where that threatens to anchor discursive analysis to modernist notions of historiography. The latter may help to explain why an intellectual history of the modernist roots of CMS is largely missing from current CMS debates.

Observations and conclusions

Following a satirical critique of three narratives, we offer the following observations and “conclusions.”

First, CMS is not so much a “movement” or even a “loose community” as much as a contested actant (i.e., a strong idea that influences behavior; see Latour, 2005). Debates about the future of CMS (e.g., Adler, 2007; Cunliffe, 2008) should focus not simply on its *direction* but also its *translation* through specific narratives. It is a socio-political process rather than a theoretical debate! That this raises peculiar tensions between recognition of the discursive character of social activism and the need to engage others in processes of social change has long been identified (Calás and Smircich, 1992) but with little resolve. We can only repeat the suggestions of Calás and Smircich for critical researchers to engage in social struggles for change while recognizing the problems of developing new truth claims and meta-narratives. An understanding of the existence and significance of competing narratives and their rootedness in different communities may help to focus attention of where we (whoever we are) might form critical alliances and where, how and when (if at all) we might accept the notion of different communities to gain greater clarity within each.

Second, the process of translation crucially involves some attempt to historicize the notion of CMS, be it through problematization of the present (e.g., romantic fragmentationism), tales from the past (e.g., comedic integrationism) or modernist representation (e.g., tragic modernism). Yet,

in an area of scholarship where almost each and every concept and theory is problematized and contested, ideas of history and the past slip through hardly unnoticed (Weatherbee, Durepos & Mills, et al., 2012; Durepos and Mills, 2012a). This has led some, specifically Rowlinson and his colleagues (Rowlinson, 2004; Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Booth and Rowlinson, 2006), to call for a “historic turn” in management and organization studies through a thoroughgoing critique of historiography. Thus, we may not need to understand such things as the “political context of the historical defeat of the Left” (Hassard, Hogan & Rowlinson, 2001: 339) as much as the problem of history as a contested notion and how this contributes to the socially constructed nature and absence of “the Left” from current CMS debates.

Third is the level of confusion in the constitution of the different communities of critical management scholarship. In the various attempts to avoid a narrow and sectarian approach to the definition of CMS, people seem to have neglected the limits of a broad approach to the notion of “critical.” As all three narratives suggest, Critical Management Studies embraces scholars from the radical left to the mainstream, including reformists and even, at times, those normally associated with conservative social theory. This, according to Hassard, Hogan and Rowlinson (2001: 339), is reflective of a situation of tempered “radicalism in the context of neo-liberal hegemony.” We suspect that unless different communities of CMS scholars attempt to rein in the boundaries of critical (management) scholarship, the promise that is CMS will disappear as a *potential* force for change.

Fourth – and perhaps the most crucial issue – is that the various histories tend to reinforce the idea of CMS as an Anglo-American project. Clearly, romantic fragmentationism encourages a questioning of the whole project of modernity and with it issues of postcoloniality, but the latter is more implied than explored. Comedic integrationism also envisions a broader constituency that includes Brazil and potentially other national communities, but it is a broadening of the Anglo-American project. What are needed are postcolonialist analyses that not only deal with the core issues delineated by a supposed CMS project but that deconstruct the very character of the project itself. To that end, Ibarra-Colado (2008) offers a fifth narrative, a narrative of transdisciplinarity. As such, he starts off by questioning the absurdity of a project that does not locate its own knowledge generation in the context of colonialism, arguing, “It is essential to discuss the function of knowledge as a mechanism of colonization” (p. 932). This leads to the suggestion of a process of transdisciplinarity involving recognition and transcendence of the colonial condition. This ultimately “entails an encounter with a *trans-discipline*, understood as a corpus of knowledge that ‘transcend[s] the discipline’ because their knowledge is transversally built from one locale to another, considering different problems, experiences and solutions all over the world” (p. 934). In short, “the future of CMS must be imagined as a set of multiple dialogues and conversations . . . across different regions and cultures” (p. 934).

Notes

- 1 We use the term “postmodernism” as an umbrella term that includes “intellectual positions intended to offer a radical critique of the entire fabric of modern Western thinking” (Prasad, 2005), including poststructuralist accounts. Beyond that, we broadly agree with Prasad’s (2005) distinction between postmodernism (pp. 219–237) and poststructuralism (pp. 238–261).
- 2 Analysis of the 87 articles published in *Organization* as of March 2012 indicates that at least one-quarter specifically adopt postmodernist (including poststructuralist) frameworks. That number climbs when you include articles that don’t specifically refer to postmodernism (or poststructuralism) yet draw on so-called postmodernist theorists (e.g., Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard) to make sense of some aspect of social life. For example, Al-Amoudi (2007) engages with Foucault’s work, albeit from a critical realist perspective, and Bardon and Josserand (2011) undertake a “Nietzschean reading of Foucauldian thinking.” Indeed, works that utilize and otherwise engage with Foucauldian analysis account for a further 29% of all *Organization*

articles. By way of comparison, specifically feminist accounts can be found in roughly 18% of all articles, but more than a third of those adopt a postmodernist framework. Similarly, discussions of Marx and Marxism constitute about 9% of all articles, but a good half of those draw on/engage with postmodernist thought. Finally, the 9% of articles that are focused on postcolonialism constitute the more theoretically diverse group of papers, but even here a quarter of them (two articles!) take a poststructuralist position.

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