



ephemera: theory and politics
in organization

Crawling from the wreckage

What is *ephemera*: theory & politics in organization?

ephemera is an independent journal, founded in 2001. *ephemera* provides its content free of charge, and charges its readers only with free thought.

theory

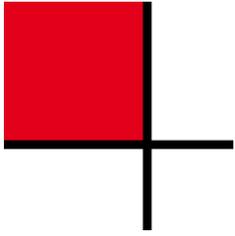
ephemera encourages contributions that explicitly engage with theoretical and conceptual understandings of organizational issues, organizational processes and organizational life. This does not preclude empirical studies or commentaries on contemporary issues, but such contributions consider how theory and practice intersect in these cases. We especially publish articles that apply or develop theoretical insights that are not part of the established canon of organization studies. *ephemera* counters the current hegemonization of social theory and operates at the borders of organization studies in that it continuously seeks to question what organization studies is and what it can become.

politics

ephemera encourages the amplification of the political problematics of organization within academic debate, which today is being actively depolitized by the current organization of thought within and without universities and business schools. We welcome papers that engage the political in a variety of ways as required by the organizational forms being interrogated in a given instance.

organization

Articles published in *ephemera* are concerned with theoretical and political aspects of organizations, organization and organizing. We refrain from imposing a narrow definition of organization, which would unnecessarily halt debate. Eager to avoid the charge of 'anything goes' however, we do invite our authors to state how their contributions connect to questions of organization and organizing, both theoretical and practical.



ephemera

theory & politics in organization

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Peter Fleming, Lena Olaison, Mie Plotnikof, Justine Grønbæk Pors and Alison Pullen

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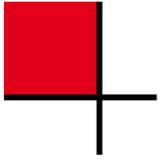


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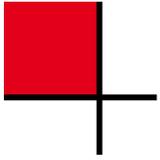
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Crawling from the wreckage

Peter Fleming, Lena Olaison, Mie Plotnikof, Justine Grønbæk Pors, and Alison Pullen

The future of critique in the business school is the future of the business school

This Special Issue emerged from an *ephemera* workshop questioning how critique continues to have a role in contemporary business schools. Hosted by the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia, in February 2020 and organized by Peter Fleming and Alison Pullen, the workshop brought together interdisciplinary academics, some working in business schools, to ask whether and how critique would enable ‘us’ to crawl out of the wreckage caused by neoliberalism and the increased marketisation of universities and business schools. Only a month before the event, a series of severe bushfires raged across New South Wales, spread by strong winds and heat. The bushfires were large in scale and devastating in consequence. Nature reserves, forests and the homes of people and animals went up in flames, leaving long stretches of ashes as reminders of nature’s might. These fires came in the wake of floods that left rural communities decimated, and a mere few weeks after the fires were extinguished, heavy rain pummeled the state again. River banks burst, roads flooded, dams and bridges collapsed, and more homes were destroyed. Soon after, the Covid-19 virus struck, proliferating around the globe. Sickness and chaos reigned, healthcare systems came under extreme pressure, and societies had to shut down. The vulnerability of humans and non-humans became felt as we started living in ‘pandemic times’.

As we write this editorial, we find ourselves in so-called post-pandemic times, although the pandemic continues to infect and affect populations around the world. Although the media and politicians have abandoned reporting about the pandemic, Covid-19 lingers, even for the privileged with resources like healthcare. Neither have universities been immune. Institutions cannot return to ‘the old normal’, and neither can society at large. Before the pandemic we lived in times that normalized ongoing crises (Berlant, 2011) – climate changes, unstable financial markets, extreme structural inequalities, poverty, and war. The pandemic has exacerbated these crises and inequalities, with each species and body affected differently by the intensifying ‘new normal’ (Bapuji, Patel, Ertug and Allen, 2020; Butler, 2020; Plotnikof and Utoft, 2022). Although commentators have been claiming ‘business as usual’, we are less confident about this possibility. We are confident, however, that we need to keep questioning the macro- and micro-dynamics of crisis, precarity, and risk while simultaneously developing new ways of thinking, sharing, caring, working, organizing, and collaborating through the politics of everyday (work)life.

The contributors to this Special Issue developed their papers during challenging circumstances, and, as we put the finishing touches on this editorial, we are again witnessing extreme conditions imposed by climate change, warfare, and economic struggles, all of which are affecting populations. We are constantly reminded that our daily practices cannot be separated from the ever-transforming life conditions arising from (intended and unintended) human interactions with a more-than-human world (Haraway, 2016; Whatmore, 2006). Thus, when we explore the wreckage of the business school and the role of critique in knowledge, research, and teaching in this Special Issue, we understand the business school as entangled with the more-than-human world (Nyberg, Wright and Bowden, 2022). This includes its inseparability with a variety of agencies and materialities, such as climate systems, climate change, and biodiversity loss, not to mention new technology, algorithms and artificial intelligence, and economic markets. Moreover, the business school has a part in the rising inequality and precarity unevenly distributed across the global North and South (Özkazanç-Pan and Pullen, 2020).

This issue creates a space for diverse conversations about the role of critique. The contributions explore the wreckage of the business school and discuss possibilities for crawling out of the rubble in different ways. This could be seen as a difficult task, given that during this issue's production, one editor was forced to apply for her [own] job, and three others were threatened with redundancy. However, rather than staying with the wreckage and the despair and pain it causes those involved in such contexts, we insist, like many *ephemera* contributions before us (e.g. Böhm, Jones and Land, 2001; Böhm and Spoelstra, 2004) on finding hope through discussing, contouring, and sensing how we might reimagine the role of critique in the business school differently.

In what follows we first consider what it means to work in the wreckage, as we term it. Recognizing that business schools are diverse and that even within the same organization contradictory interests, forces, and agencies exist, we use the term 'wreckage' to investigate how neoliberal reforms, market-orientation, performance regimes, and increased precarity have transformed the business school. We then consider how it may be possible to crawl from the wreckage by hopeful practices of rethinking and creating new forms of critique. Finally, we present the contributions to the Special Issue.

Working in the wreckage

The Special Issue builds on critical scholarship that has exposed the contested spaces of the business school (Beverungen, Dunne and Sørensen, 2008; Bristow, Robinson and Ratle, 2017; Butler and Spoelstra, 2020; Butler, Delaney and Śliwa, 2017; Dunne, Harney, Parker and Tinker, 2008; Jones et al., 2020; Parker, 2018; Robinson, Ratle and Bristow, 2017). Scholars have illuminated the oppressive forces of increasingly precarious forms of employment, new types of managerialism, and unequal and discriminatory systems with racializing, gendering and social class effects (e.g., Ashcraft, 2017; Acker, Wagner and Mayuzumi, 2008; Contu, 2020; Śliwa, 2021). Such research has documented the wave of painful transformations that has turned business school academia into a veritable edu-factory (Hoofd, 2010). From this work we know much about the inimical effects of performance metrics, the consolidation of top-down management hierarchies, an obsession with

publication outputs, the institutional encouragement of a pathological careerism, and an administrative fixation on recruiting increasing numbers of fee-paying students (Parker, 2018; Sellar, 2015). The ‘measured university’ (Peseta, Barrie and McLean, 2019) is a reality that academics, from early career scholars to full professors, embody time and again to satisfy university demands.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic began, large-scale university restructuring and centralization, including compulsory redundancies, have swept through the education sectors. The corporatization of the university, if it was ever veiled, is now on full display. The crisis provided a pretext for consolidating the managerialization of corporate business schools, with a heightened emphasis on customers and performance metrics, even as the fiscal legitimacy for doing so was questionable. Mass (and often grossly mismanaged) redundancy programmes saw competitive individualism take centre stage, breaking down common values and collegiality, threatening autonomy and freedom of speech, and moving closer to centralized autocracy, all of which intensified work pressure and cultures of fear in the name of the ever more ‘greedy university’ (Plotnikof and Utoft, 2022; Pullen, 2023; Smyth, 2017). If the business school was in trouble before 2020, today’s situation might better be termed a scholastic catastrophe, as the nature and purpose of education becomes questioned, and the quality of academics’ working lives continues to be eroded. Yet, as Kavanagh (this issue) suggests, the solution may not be to abandon or demolish the business school entirely (albeit that could count as an act of self-sabotage), but instead to discursively and institutionally relocate it beyond the neoliberal political imagination.

Whilst the neoliberal hold on the business school reduces it to its capitalist function, many of this Special Issue’s contributions largely concern the business school’s entanglement with broader societal and ecological processes. From such perspectives, business education and career paths become much more than markets, organizational designs, employment relations, and classic forms of leadership. Regardless of whether this is acknowledged in classes and programme designs, all business education and work practices are inextricably intertwined with present and future livelihoods. With complicated global webs of unevenly distributed power

relations, collaborative dependencies and supply chains involving both human and many other kinds of agencies, the effects of these webs – and our critical engagement with them – cannot be limited to local, regional, or national human-centred concerns. As Nyberg and De Cock (this issue) contend, climate change is a gargantuan disruption that cannot and should not be domesticated by the customary business school language of risks and the concerns of new capital, opportunities, and markets. Instead, such momentous change calls for a radical decentering of the human as ‘The Rational Man’ in control of his [sic] destiny. Cator (this issue) also argues for the importance of acknowledging the role of business in the commonly shared world, stressing the embeddedness of organizations in natural environments. Tahiri (this issue) further offers a way of creatively reimagining ourselves in this monstrous mess by methodologically developing equally monstrous practices to understand and intervene in the neoliberal business school.

Another concern explored in this Special Issue is how to find spaces for critique within such webs of power. A key tension of working in the wreckage is the relationship between critical thinking and the performance demands coupled to journal ranking systems. Many scholars have analysed and critiqued the devastating effects of such academic performance regimes as journal ranking systems (Bristow, 2021; Steinþórsdóttir, Heijstra and Einarsdóttir, 2017; Svensson, Spoelstra, Pedersen and Schreven, 2010; Turner, Boswell, Harre, Sturm, Locke and da Souza Correa, 2017). Ironically, however, ranking systems have sometimes served to enable academic freedom, including critique. In a metrics-fixated work environment, the actual content of a research article came second to the empty, quantitative score it obtained in the latest journal rankings or impact factors. Even critical scholarship about the business school itself passed under the radar for this reason. University management may have cared little about the substance of an article as long as it generated the biggest numbers in the higher education metrics – a tacit agreement that most academics, including critical management scholars, accepted.

Still, plenty of reasons to remain critical of such quality measurements could and can be found. As scholars have elucidated, dominant quality ideals are ridden with masculine, competitive signifiers (Ashcraft, 2017; Bell and King,

2010; Cunliffe, 2022; Thomas and Davies, 2005). Despite years of critical and even feminist theorizing, such standards endure and demand that we adhere to them, discipline ourselves by them and prove our literacy in them. What is more, rankings privilege American management journals, whose imperialism further marginalizes critical research already on the margins of the canon.

This raises questions about hypocrisy. If the modern American-style business school (as most are today) has been a conspicuous emblem for the commercializing of higher education, then is the fact that critical management scholars work there not somehow hypocritical? Can we both be employed by the beast and question it as well as the institutional forces for which it officially stands? Answering this question requires historical mediation, because as Kavanagh (this issue) notes, the socio-political evolution of the business school model shapes the very knowledge we have of ourselves as a profession. The use of ranking systems to shelter critical thinking may be based on the idea that autonomous subjects can separate themselves from and remain unchanged by the particular ways their everyday practices tie them to the systems Kavanagh critiques.

As such, using ranking systems and performance regimes to legitimize critical thinking may be a risky endeavour, as only with difficulty can one fully know precisely how our academic subjectivity is shaped by and struggles through such systems and logics. On the other hand, however, none of the contributions in this Special Issue adhere to a purist idea that critique should be practised from spaces unpolluted by the systems the critique targets. Quite the contrary, the Special Issue explores critique as situated in the midst of relationships between critique and objects of critique, thus embodying and negotiating them. Across the contributions, critique is conceived as multiple and diverse practices that must necessarily live in many forms and take many different shapes (e.g., Cator, this issue; Manzoli et al., this issue; Motta and Allen, this issue; Raffnsøe et al., this issue; Tahiri, this issue; see also, Abdellatif et al., 2021; Ahonen et al., 2020; Amrouche et al., 2018).

The relation between ranking systems and the possibilities of critical thinking may, however, be transforming. More recently, the administrative apparatchik has begun scrutinizing and policing the content of scholarship.

For example, the 2020 business school redundancies at Leicester University homed in on academics working in the fields of political economy and critical management studies. The criticality of their research – irrespective of whether it was being published in ‘elite’ journals or not – is what management sought to weed out. Commentators also took due note of the many academics in these fields active in the union. The union threatened to strike over the dispute, and thousands of academics around the world signed letters of support, as did critical journals (including *ephemera*), which called for a halt to the layoffs. Nevertheless, employers prevailed, resistance dissipated, and an explicit engagement in critical scholarship at Leicester University effectively became a dismissible offence.

Right until the business school started systematically firing critical scholars, we thought that research practices of critique, as a mode of academic freedom, could assure some aura of dignity to (working for) the business school. Yet, persistent metrification combined with an arbitrary authority that seeks to determine the content of our research calls for a renewed overhaul of critique. Simply writing yet another critical journal article or book is no longer enough. But what can we do? A tension has long existed between written critical scholarship and other forms of business school critical practices, specifically those concerned with real-life work conditions. Although our academic freedom legitimizes our written critiques, critiquing in our practical work has always been challenging, its being complexly ingrained in conservative academic hierarchies and the managerialist praise of competitiveness that leads colleagues simultaneously work with and against each other. Yet, as long as we are all each other’s supervisors, heads, conference discussants, and double-blinded peer reviewers, we can become more concerned with how academic freedom (including to be critical) can be further integrated into and protected by our practical work. This includes rethinking how we all participate in performing critique, even in the administrative work of organizing meetings, conferences, teaching, and other departmental tasks, as well as when we reproduce or challenge dominant rules of excellence, quality systems, and ways of commenting on each other’s work in order to develop new insight.

Crawling from the wreckage

Coming to terms with the wreckage provides a platform from which to consider and build alternatives. If working in the present-day business school entails experiences of losing certain ideals, safety, and possibilities of teaching critical thinking (Manzoli, et al., this issue), Judith Butler's work on mourning and loss could be helpful here. In *Precarious life* (2004), Butler offers the experience of loss as a potentially transformational reminder of our primary dependency and vulnerability. Butler (2004: 22) is concerned with different kinds of loss – of a person, a community, a national fantasy. Elsewhere, Butler (2003: 467) discusses the loss of culture, and the loss of loss itself. They contend that loss is registered and experienced as a particular kind of undoing. The experience of loss, Butler argues, is also an experience of losing oneself, of experiencing that 'we are not the masters of ourselves' (Butler, 2004: 21).

As the contribution from Manzoli et al. (this issue) demonstrates, experiences of loss, as painful as they may be, can also constitute scenes in which new forms of understanding and agency emerge. Loss reminds us that we are larger than our own deliberate plans, our own projects, our own knowing and choosing (Butler, 2004: 21). Loss, 'challenge[s] the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control' (2004: 23) and is a disorienting experience. However, and of importance here, in loss, 'something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us' (Butler, 2004: 22). In other words, what was lost was not merely an externality but also part of what constituted 'me'. Loss, then, is not necessarily the loss of a person, but rather, perhaps, also the loss of an ideal, of particular pasts or a promised future. Loss undoes the way in which we make sense of ourselves and the world (Dumm and Butler, 2008: 99), thereby reminding us of our interdependence. Therefore, loss can reduce us to passivity but may also become a resource for alternative ways of performing subjectivities. For us, loss can be a profound and political experience that confronts us with our incapacity to simply keep going with our own working lives, because, when a university can no longer function as a home for critical thinking, we lose a part of ourselves.

As this issue's contributions demonstrate, from the experience of loss and through the loss of our ties to each other, we can begin to crawl from the wreckage of the business school. Crawling will be a way of bearing, rather than denying, the irresolvable ambivalence of the subject invariably both acted on and acting. Crawling from the wreckage thus involves seeing ourselves as responsible agents capable of working towards change, against a tide of forces that threaten imagination and resistance.

As we write this, we allow the work already being done to crawl from the wreckage to give us hope. Some, for example, have highlighted the traps of conservative, patriarchal forces that make the emergence of other forms of critique challenging, yet all the more important (Bell, Meriläinen, Taylor and Tienari, 2020; Pullen, Harding and Phillips, 2017). Such studies not only critique the existing order of the day, but also embody more feminist and affirmative engagements with potential future avenues, hinting at a rich array of modes that such endeavours could call forth. For example, one could reformulate the rules of excellence for theorizing and evaluating research (Ashcraft, 2017; Cunliffe, 2022); invent different modes of expression and writing, thus creating and disseminating new vocabularies and insights (Gilmore, Harding, Helin and Pullen, 2019; Pullen, 2018); explore ways of making critique productive as a collective research strategy, thereby interacting with (and changing) the world (Ahonen et al., 2019; Amrouche et al., 2018; Houpalainen, 2020); and trouble business school academia with anti-racist and decolonial forms of critique (Barros and Alcadipani, 2022; Bell, Meyerson, Nkomo, Scully, 2003; Fotaki and Prasad, 2015; Mott and Cockayne, 2017).

Moved by these efforts and the contributions of this Special Issue, we sense a deep need for critique to 'denormalize' the 'new normal' of toxic business school academia, as an act of connectivity as we become ever more individualized, 'competitivized', and metricized. Indeed, critique remains a productive power for connecting hopes, dreams, voices, and enactments within, across, and beyond the business school. It may also rescue us and itself from detached abstractions (or critique for the sake of critique), thereby helping us to embody critical work with regard to the worlds we endure and enact. In other words, we need critique to (re)formulate a politics and ethics

of care (de la Bellacasa, 2011), by which to reinvent what business school scholarship can look like, read like, feel like, teach like, collaborate like, and perform like, without the limiting, suffocating hands of a present-day performance-centred neoliberal regime. This is exactly what this issue's contributions help us further explore. As the roundtable conversation by Raffnsøe et al. (this issue) unfolds, critique can have multifaceted forms and approaches and become voiced in different vocabularies that draw in and upon different notions of critique and critical thought — from deconstructive to affirmative. We thus become able to appreciate how the future of critique is not written in the past, and how many possible futures can emerge from within or between different traditions of critical thought (Raffnsøe et al., this issue) from within or outside of the business school. How we create critical insights and contestations by side-stepping, creatively circumventing, or moving beyond the pressures and forces that threaten and diminish critical thinking remains open, and the answers may give way to new kinds of questions, vocabularies, sensitivities, and practices.

Contributions of the Special Issue

In various formats and an array of voices, this issue's contributions explore the labour and event of critique itself.

First, Sara Motta and Matt Allen take us on a journey into the uncharted territory of decolonizing critique 'in, through and against the business school'. To this end, they present 'a year-long process of dialogos de saberes (dialogue of knowledges)' in which embodiment, relationality, and collaboration feature strongly in their work processes. The openness of the dialogue and writing demonstrates their deep respect for listening to and caring for the other in the decolonial project. From this emergent dialogos de saberes, they convey an affirmative critique, decentring western knowledge as they journey through 'the possibilities (and impossibilities) of nurturing a kind of affirmative critique which we feel has a place and relevance both within and beyond the Business School as metaphor, materiality, and relationality'. Instead of staying with critique that highlights 'specific violent exclusion, elisions, and epistemic injustices coconstitutive of the

modern/colonial (neoliberalized) University’, their affirmative alternative ‘nurture[s] the continued existence/re-existencias of other(ed) ways of being and knowing’. Interweaving different forms of writing, Motta and Allen remind us of the ‘(im)possibilities of inhabiting particular business schools with modern/colonial (neoliberalized) Universities from our different places/positionalities’ and how we can be and become ‘otherwise’ to thereby critique otherwise.

‘Can I say what I think?’ and ‘Can I allow others to say what they think?’ These are two of the difficult questions Manzoli, Garcia, and de Lima generously invite us to explore through their own classroom experiences, as well as students’ and professors’, at a business school in Brazil. Through a collaborative autoethnography, they seek to understand what might be lost when we edit ourselves or our students out of fear or to avoid further polarization. From these conversations and reflections emerges a new understanding of authenticity and empathy. In a western context, the authors write, authenticity is seen as one’s relation to oneself, whereas empathy is one’s relation to others. Their study experiences point to a relational authenticity, whereby a sense of fidelity to one’s own values and ideals is not shaped by firm conviction but rather grows from a recognition of others’ vulnerability and contingencies. This mutual relation between authenticity and empathy becomes a mode of resistance that may, as in Motta and Allen’s contribution (this issue), pave a way for dialogue and multiple positions and perceptions to develop in the business school.

According to Cator (this issue), our primary escape route from the wreckage of the neoliberal business school lies in placing it within the dire context of the Anthropocene and ongoing eco-catastrophe. Planet Earth has no plan B for halting the unprecedented devastation manifesting in biodiversity loss, deforestation, carbon emissions, and water scarcity. Yet, like most large corporations in the post-industrial West, business schools pay little more than lip service to the problem. Consequently, business schools need to redirect the considerable power they currently wield, targeting the climate emergency more intently and rephrasing the agenda required to address it. To bring home the urgency of taking this action, Cator draws on Hannah Arendt’s critique of economic rationality and the myopic anti-ecological mindset

associated with it – a critique especially applicable in today’s era of ingrained neoliberal governmentality. Cator proposes that cross- and interdisciplinary initiatives might be a first step in liberating ourselves from the strictures of economic ideology by which our profession has been diminished to a mere prop of the ‘edu factory’. Thinking with and through other disciplines as a means of envisaging new organizational models will thrust a new and pressing ecological mandate on the business school.

Responding to Parker’s (2018) provocative statement that the business school ought to be shut down, Kavanagh (this issue) contends that it should be *relocated* instead, specifically within the immediate university/community in which it exists. As far as most faculty are concerned, the mandate to internationalize at any cost has played a role in wrecking contemporary business schools. Like corporations expanding into new overseas markets, the business school has become a multinational enterprise with offices dotted around the world, and, as seen in the globalization of capital and finance more generally, this expansion carries with it a litany of dysfunctions. Most saliently, however, it has tightened the grip of economic reason around these schools’ culture, both at home and abroad. For Kavanagh, business schools need to de-internationalize, and, as Cator (this issue, see below) also suggests, such a move would also entail reintegrating the business school within the university itself, especially within disciplines such as law, classics and English. This re-location will precipitate what Kavanagh calls a radical *reimagining* of the curriculum. Problematically, the wreckage never speaks of the wreckage in its own classes and lectures. As such, the business school itself – warts and all – ought to be reflectively reinstated into teaching and learning, thereby enabling students to be more self-aware as well as teaching faculty themselves to better appreciate the academic means of production so reliant on their labour, and, perhaps, to discern better methods for reappropriating those means.

Echoing the concerns of Cator (this issue), Nyberg and De Cock (this issue) warn against the business school’s current attempts to domesticate climate changes and thereby maintain the traditional ideology of the human being as the centre of agency and control. They argue that this assertion of control avoids the unsettling aspects of climate change that challenge the

anthropocentrism in organizational and management scholarship and business schools more broadly. Using the Derridian trope of the monster, Nyberg and De Cock discuss how today's severe transformations give rise to a nostalgic yearning for certainty and truth-tellers, and how one can see the present political waves of populism and the return of 'Sovereigns' in this light. To counter these dangerous impulses for human control, Nyberg and De Cock argue that affirmative critique offers a practice that can challenge existing hierarchies and affirm new voices and experiences. Affirmative critique, they argue, concerns challenging something considered natural and present, and thus opening up a world (or worlds) of multiple agencies and experiences.

In a thought-provoking roundtable, Sverre Raffnsøe, Dorte Staunæs, and Mads Bank (this issue) invite us to further explore the possibility of affirmative critique. Against the backdrop of a PhD programme entitled 'Critique beyond criticism', the three authors carefully discuss the nature and importance of affirmative critique, as well as consider various critical thought traditions of possible relevance as new avenues eventually become reformulated and explored beyond the business school. During their discussion, Raffnsøe, Staunæs, and Bank, offer detailed insights into some historical aspects, significant qualities, and useful distinctions of critique as a theoretical concept and scholarly praxis, reflexively and creatively illustrating these insights with examples from their own and others' work. In moving critique beyond criticism, they not only revisit critical continental philosophical traditions but also unfold how critical feminist, queer, and American Black studies might guide the way to another future for critical scholarship in and outside of the business school. Questioning the different modes, temporalities, and orientations of critique on which we have focused our attention, this piece instils new hope that critique will continue to matter, after all.

The Special Issue concludes with two notes by authors searching for radically different forms of critique by engaging with skills and techniques from artistic practices. Kate Burt discusses creative methods of producing narrative fictions. Thinking between and across her two professional practices of writing children's books and studying organization, Burt reflects on the limits of traditional methods in capturing the complexity and messiness of

subjective experiences of work, organizing, and management. The note joins a growing chorus of resistance to the ‘scientific’ norms of organizational writing and attempts to use fiction or organizational storytelling to grapple with questions of organization and management. In creative and playful ways, Burt transforms feelings of insecurity into a source of resistance against dominating methods. Ultimately, she develops critical, narrative-based methods as a powerful form of scholarly communication apt for exploring topics seemingly out of traditional methods’ reach.

Tahiri (this issue) discusses monstrosity as a means of subversion and survival and as a way of rewiring intellectual critique. To survive and live meaningfully within the horror that is the neoliberal university, she argues, one can turn to becoming monstrous oneself as a powerful and explosive alternative to polite, apologetic forms of critique. Such new practices of critique might include ‘inflammatory writing’ or ‘critique with a bite’, both of which dare to attack and undermine the powerful assumptions and ideologies of established orders. Accompanied by powerful, disturbing, and yet beautiful images from everyday life in a business school, this note suggests that its readers take inspiration from practices and techniques used in art and activism, deploying them to develop more playful, anarchistic, and forceful forms of critique.

Collectively, the contributions in this Special Issue begin to show us how to crawl from the wreckage of the contemporary corporate business school – in effect, by seeing the wreckage for what it is.

The Special Issue also includes three book reviews. First, Mathias Hein Jessen studies critical theory of the corporate form, reviewing *The corporation, law and capitalism* (Baars, 2019) and *The corporation: A critical, multi-disciplinary handbook*, edited by Baars and Spicer (2017). The particular contributions he analyses examine how contemporary legal frameworks (such as international criminal law) and corporate accountability further legitimize corporations, thus amplifying their economic and political power.

In the second review, Gabriel Migheli traces the spectres of spectres of Marx. In his ghostly encounter with Derrida, Migheli reads the *Specters of Marx* (2006) in pandemic times. He explores how the notion of auto-immunity

resonates today as a possibility lying latent at the heart of democracy, and wonders about Derrida's legacy – asking whether deconstruction remains *undeconstructible*.

Touching on Derrida and the May 1968 discussion about the end of 'community' as a concept, in the third and last review, Prem Sylvester discusses Stephen Best's (2018) *None like us*, which stresses the impossibility of organizing Black communities through the Black studies archive. He combs through Best's critique of community-thinking across this archive constructed to conserve enslavement as a supposed basis for solidarity. Eschewing this construction, Sylvester joins with Best and other scholars in exploring the archive *as a work of art*, studying its surfaces and layers, and seeking possibilities for freedom from the constraints of forging collective Black identities. Sylvester remains wary of how fragile these possibilities may be and acknowledges the limits of archive-based remembrance.

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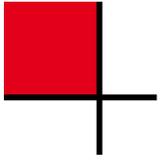
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Decolonising critique in, against and beyond the business school

Sara C. Motta and Matthew K. Allen

Sometimes we are blessed with being able to choose the time, and the arena, and the manner of our revolution, but more usually we must do battle where we are standing. (Audre Lorde, 2017: 119)

abstract

Emerging from a year-long process of dialogos de saberes (dialogue of knowledges) between the authors, this paper seeks to explore and draw attention to the possibilities (and impossibilities) of nurturing a kind of affirmative critique which we feel has a place and relevance both within and beyond the Business School as metaphor, materiality, and relationality¹. The purpose of such a critique is not simply to highlight the specific violent exclusion, elisions, and epistemic injustices co-constitutive of the modern/colonial (neoliberalised) University, but to affirm and nurture the continued existence/re-existencias of other(ed) ways of being and knowing. We draw upon our dark wisdoms and weave our text as decolonising critique through multiple literacies, poetry, decolonising and feminist pedagogical

¹ We use the business school in this text as a means of speaking to and about structuring subjectivities, logics, and (ir)rationalities, rather than as a critique of specific institutions and institutional forms as the apotheosis or instantiation of such structurations of power. We do so with a playful methodological attentiveness in which we honour our/a right to opacity (Glissant, 1997) and in recognition of the lived relationships and relationalities and (im)possibilities of inhabiting particular business schools with modern/colonial (neoliberalised) Universities from our different places/positionalities.

methodologies, story, and interpersonal dialogue. We question in the flesh as text, thought and relationship the logics of rationality and coloniality that undergird the University, while also seeking to affirm the possibility of an onto-epistemological being/becoming 'otherwise'. Our approaches are grounded in the theory and praxis of embodiment, feminist decoloniality and critical pedagogy, and we seek to contribute to literature on the nature of critique, the role of the University in the modern/(de)colonial project, and the radical possibilities for dialogue, collaboration and kinship that can emerge when we move beyond the real and imaginary boundaries that the University creates to constrain our mind, bodies, and spirits.

Beginnings

I am Sara, born of displacement in a foreign land of unbelonging of all my ancestors, forever weaving threads of fragmented lineages of Colombian Chibcha/Muisca, Eastern European Jewish, and Celtic scattered to the winds of forgetting. My power and my pain emergent from the piecing together from impurity and multiplicity; of finding the languages with which to speak my name and know from whence I came; to heal the brokenness and (re)learn, with others, to create again and recuperate our territories into a belonging and homecoming otherwise. Arriving with my children to a distant Country to an estuary place where Awabakal and Worimi nations meet, where salt and fresh waters merge, that has received us with healing hands and loving hearts and finding myself choosing and chosen to occupy a Politics Discipline sitting in a Business School.

My name is Matt. I was born in Moonta, South Australia, on the land of the Narungga people, and I live and work in Newcastle, on the land of the Awabakal and Worimi people. My ancestors came to Australia from England, Ireland, and Scotland, and they connect me to a legacy of migration, white privilege, and to the colonisation of the lands where I live and work. For over a decade, I have been part of social and environmental justice organising, particularly in anarchist and autonomist communities. My professional work is performed at the intersection of economies and society and foregrounds the praxis of diverse economies and anti-capitalist economic organising. I am a

student-scholar in the Australian Graduate School of Management, studying a Master of Business Administration.

Methodological commitments

This piece emerges as part of a broader embodied dialogue across difference. It is our desire to come to know the other in ways which do not seek to make same but to find where we can become in common (Braidotti, 2006: 69; Motta and Amsler, 2017; Singh, 2017) and, as Benedict and Schmidt (2007: 21) describe, in which we ‘create and afford space – extending to each other the freedom to explore rather than defend and justify’. In this tradition, we seek to critique in spirit and flesh the on-going onto-epistemological violences and practices of silencing of other ways of knowing as life enacted by the Business School. Our dialogue is thus deeply embodied and seeks to (un)learn this becoming in common through auto-ethnographic sharing of experiences of both the anti-ethics and violences of the Business School as well as practices of epistemological refusal and decolonisation within, against and beyond the borders of this institutionalised space of Power.

The dialogue has built on the extant practise of one of us (Sara) around questions of decolonising critique and becoming otherwise in thought and body (Motta, 2011, 2016, 2017, 2018b). This work foregrounds and critically engages with divisions of emotional and intellectual labour in the reading and writing process, and we have sought to generate space for writing and creating otherwise, and transgressing/questioning boundaries and borders between academic and non-academic, creative and intellectual, emotional and rational. We have sought to refuse a detached and de-subjectified voice of universality and reason in academic writing and the production of (critical) theory, instead seeking a fostering of dialogue between and across difference, not as violently differentiated knowing subjects, but as two who are uniquely placed and engaged in co-constructing the conditions for dialogical spaces of possibility (Motta, 2016: 41; Benedict and Schmidt, 2007; Firth, 2016).

Resistance to the Business School, situated with the modern/colonial University, which has grown and developed from the hierarchical and dehumanising logics of coloniality and patriarchy must take new forms; forms

which not only challenge those logics, but contest and disrupt the modes of reasoning and terrains of discourse upon which such debates and critiques take place (Motta, 2017, 2019, 2020; Roggero, 2014; McGregor and Knox, 2017). From our dialogues, thus, we decided that we did not want to focus merely on logics of negative critique, of exposing how the Business School reproduces violences and silences against the territories, knowledges, and bodies of those Othered, which has been articulated across the terrain of ephemera (i.e., Brandist, 2017; Cowan and Rault, 2014; Liu, 2018; Steinþórsdóttir et al., 2017; Tim-adical Writing Collective, 2017; Veijola and Jokinen, 2018). For – paraphrasing bell hooks – after one has resisted, one is left with a sort of emptiness, the absence of an alternative mode of life, living and knowing. And the reproduction of this emptiness in our analysis reproduces a one-sided rendition of who we are as raced and feminised peoples, in which to remain within this move is to reinscribe the colonised into the coloniser’s logics of representation and to assume that, as Lugones (2010: 748) describes, ‘(the) global capitalist colonial system is in every way successful in its destruction of people’s, knowledges, relations and economies’. Rather we must remember:

For 300 years she was invisible, she was not heard. Many times she wished to speak, to act, to protest, to challenge... She hid her feelings; she hid her truths; she concealed her fire... but she kept stoking her inner flame... a light shone through her veil of silence... the spirit of the fire spurs her to fight for her own skin and piece of ground to stand on, a ground from which to view the world – a perspective, a home ground where she can plumb the rich ancestral roots into her own ample mestiza heart. (Anzaldúa, 1987: 45)

Thus, we seek to bring a focus to this rich silenced ample mestiza heart to co-weave an affirmative critique as itself a moment and process of prefigurative epistemological (Motta, 2011) enmeshment of ourselves (in relation) otherwise (see also Turner et al., 2017 and their exploration of play as (affirmative) agency as opposed to (negative) critique). We also draw upon Ahmed’s concept of the ‘snap’ experience as opportunity for ‘a rearrangement of in/visibility and embodied perception’ (Antonakaki et al., 2018) in which (individualised) experiences of marginalisation and oppression can be (collectively) held and processed (Basner et al., 2018).

Some affirmative responses are pedagogical in nature, highlighting the essential knowing-capacity of all subjects and communities (Freire, 1996; Firth, 2016). Such pedagogical work is also epistemological as it is a call to challenge our notions of what count as valid forms of knowledge-production, knowledge, and knowing-subjectivities. In doing so, we invite the coming-to-being of new and decolonial subjectivities and epistemologies (Fanon, 1963; Ciccariello-Maher, 2010; Motta and Gonzalez, 2022). This path beckons towards multiple literacies of (critical) reason including story, poetry, song, dance, ritual – and silence (Motta, 2017, 2018b, 2022; Tynan and Bishop, 2019).

As part of our reflections, and emergent from our dialogue with extant critique and our auto-ethnographic space of becoming other as outlined above, we have identified three important themes. We have found that these help us to explore what an embodied and decolonising affirmative critique within, against and beyond the Business School means to us, and what bringing our different experiences of each might offer to the broader struggle of pluridiverse possibilities of affirmative practices of critique otherwise and the (im)possible struggle to decolonise the university. These themes are, firstly, *borders, bordering practices and (the) border patrol subject(ivity)*, which allows us to foreground the onto-epistemological Othering and negation that are the co-constitutive underside of the modern/colonial University (see McGregor and Knox, 2017 for an interesting critique of the both material and immaterial borders and boundaries in contemporary Higher Education). Secondly, *embodied reason and/as critique*, which allows us to rite/write into text the affirmative critique, which we desire (see Tim-adical Writing Collective, 2017 for discussion of how power and resistance must be embodied). Finally, we have chosen *silence* to capture the differential responsibilities that we might have in such practices of decolonising critique when we are marched up to the razor-sharp edge of the border (see also Ruth's (2017) discussion of the potentiality of 'empty' space as a sister praxis to our use of silence).

Affirmative critique from embodied otherness necessarily moves beyond the containments and codifications of White writing and representation (Motta, 2014, 2016, 2022; Gonzalez et al., 2022). For when we talk, as raced and

feminised subjects or as other(ed) subjects more broadly, our speech is often rendered irrational, contained to and through identity, reduced to the 'mere' cultural, or denied as speech at all. As Lugones (2006: 78) describes, we are constructed '... as either invisible, not within the bounds of normalcy (that is without structural description or one as insane or deviant), as inferior, or as threatening because not ruled from within by modern rationality'.

As a necessity therefore, we have also had to move 'to experimental modes of representation' (Chertkovskaya et al., 2017: 737) and embodied forms of expressions to weave the threads of our onto-epistemological becoming common otherwise (see Motta 2016, 2018, 2022 for further explication of this).

Our critique

Our critique emerges from differential and distinct histories and presents of embodiments within patriarchal capitalist-coloniality and living on the stolen lands of so-called Australia². It emerges too from different (dis)embodied placements within the Business School. We neither seek to reify a golden age of the lettered city of the Enlightenment model of the University nor deny that which is distinct about the particular forms that the violent logics of epistemological extractivism onto the territories of feminised and racialised bodies and subjects of neoliberalism take.

Where we begin, our herstories matter for what is told and what remains untold, unsaid, unthought, unthinkable and (im)possible.

Our genealogy of the University and the Business School within this thus begins with coloniality as the necessary underside of the project of the lettered city of the Modern University. This project is premised upon a logic

² Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lived on the continent now known as Australia for over 65,000 years, with more than 500 groups speaking 250 languages and 800 dialects. In recognising that the act of naming is one that reinforces colonial claims to ownership and the legitimacy of state power and control, we take it as our responsibility to engage in a (contingent, partial) refusal of our participation and complicity in such.

and rationality which denies the knowledges, bodies and being of feminised and racialised (non)subjects (Mignolo and Vasquez, 2013; Lugones, 2010), and which is embedded and embodied in the figure of the scholar-academic, who, as depicted in Rodin's sculpture 'the Thinker', is able to separate and tame the bodies and emotions of the Other within and without in order to obtain the necessarily (solitary) critical distance to be able to produce theory (Fisher, 2011; Schwandt, 2018). The thinker, or knowing-subjectivity of coloniality is a White, bourgeois, and masculinised subject that is embodied as and through the enactment of the hierarchical dualisms constitutive of patriarchal capitalist-coloniality between mind/body, masculinised/feminised, culture/nature, secular/divine, knowledge/folklore. This leads to research relationships which are alienated and alienating with clear divisions of labour and knowing-being between subjects who 'know' those 'to-be-known' (Liu, 2018: 87; Motta, 2011, 2017). This is (dis)embodied through a logic of conquest, mastery, extractivism, annihilation, elision and theft dressed up in the language of Reason, Truth and Law and its irrationalities as (re)produced in the modern/colonial Business School (Motta, 2017, 2018b).

Coloniality and the knowing-subject(ivity) of coloniality manifest equally in the pedagogies and bureaucratic rationalities of the Institution, which reinscribe a figure of reason and professionalism deeply cut off from their own humanity and complicit in relationships and practices of dehumanisation towards the raced and feminised other (Abolition Collective, 2019; Ahmed, 2007). Such a subjectivity and institutionality is necessarily monological, with a Speech which is in reality a form of muteness as it is disconnected from active listening towards the other and difference, and as it practices a dismembering and unhearing which reproduces the violence of the (non)being of coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Rutazibwa, 2018; Motta, 2017). Relationships of teaching often reproduce these logics of mastery and provide contexts in which the Other(ed) are object to symbolic, ontological, and epistemological violences in which their knowing-being and herstories are denied, devalued, and elided. Here, reason is disembodied and is dissected into a cognition of displacement, (dis)possession and (un)reason (Motta, 2018a).

The Institution as the (dis)embodiment of a particular Subject of Knowing of coloniality is thus deeply enmeshed with the (re)production and perpetuation of ontological, psychic, and epistemic violence through the exclusion, delegitimization and complicity in the annihilation of racialised and feminised subaltern bodies, subjects and knowledges/lifeworlds (Bhambra et al., 2018: 114; Hall, 2014; Tynan and Bishop, 2019: 223). An 'ideal subject' of the new neoliberal reality emerges from this coalescence of extractive and violent logics, subjectivities, and practices (McGregor and Knox, 2017; Du Gay and Morgan, 2013); this subject is '...grounded in individualisation, infinite flexibility, precarious commitments, orientated toward survivalist competition and personally profitable exchange' (Motta, 2012). Such a subject is ideally without caring responsibilities, disabilities, embodied needs; if it has a body, it is one that is White, cisgendered, masculinised, bourgeois (Motta and Amsler, 2017).

In order to manage the disjuncture between, and displacements enacted by, this ideal subject and/towards the messy physical/psychic reality of living bodies, those who engage with the Business School can find themselves (re)internalising the command to create and extract value, and to (continue to) subsume – as opposed to liberate – their own needs, desires, knowledges and be-ing to those of the University and the broader logics of patriarchal capitalist-coloniality in which it sits and (re)produces (Hall, 2014; McRobbie, 2015). For instance, there is a gendered (intersectional) imbalance of the emotional labour required to (re)produce academic content (Steinþórsdóttir et al., 2017; Veijola and Jokinen, 2018), and an expectation of constant availability; of performing labour at home, in spare time, on weekends (Lynch, 2010). However, this incursion of neoliberal logics and commands into life outside and beyond formal work occurs in only one direction; individualised (yet structurally created) issues such as caring responsibilities are required to be hidden and separated in order to adequately perform the role of 'professional' (Munn-Giddings et al., 1998; Motta and Amsler, 2017) and the knowledges and wisdoms that might come from these realities of care and caring, of displacement and dispossession, dis-re-membered even as their creativity is extracted, (mis)named and tamed.

In this and many other examples, we can see the results of a particular system of discipline, ordering containment, bordering practices and unreason within the University, and the intensification of an extractive logic in which all subjects are either reduced to their productive capacity as generators of 'value', both in terms of economic surplus and in terms of the performance of a valuable transaction with students/customers *and/or* are stripped of their being-knowing. Stripped of its (im)possibility as a site for freedom and decolonisation, the University transforms both education itself, and the people within it, into commodities and (re)produces the logics of non-being/knowing of the Other(ed).

I sit in this frozen landscape, resisting my own numbing as I read a beautiful compas-hermanas work of storytelling collective knowledge processes of autonomous movements. I am called to respond from heart, soul, body, and I reflect:

I sit in this gentrified heartless space of our new panopticon building reading the stories of shared, horizontal dwelling on knowing and knowing as becoming. It takes me to you, and a you as collective, it re-minds me to turn my head, away and beyond the cold steel stems of this building and the kind of codified alienating logics that it seeks to impose upon our bodies, minds and souls. I feel-hear-listen to the words and the affects, the intensities and the bodies, and I reflect upon the taking back of the dispossession of our bodies and our subjectivities, of how this is a bridge in the cracks of the margins of possibility, in which I might dwell, however temporarily, again, and again, in a kind of freedom, that is not meant to be here, in this space and time, a kind of freedom that leaves a thread that leads me an other way, and allows me to re-member, the pieces of my being, to touch you, me, life.

And I re-member that there is always space to recover, to re-turn, and take back our loving-lives and dwelling spaces of otherness, that 'they' cannot take this away from us. Thank you A.

To engage with the joyous and healing challenge of articulating desires, visions, and embodiments for critique and/as decolonisation in the Business

School, we seek a critique that begins with differently placed bodies and embodied experiences with power, resistance, and survival, and which has a deliberate and political orientation towards transgressing the borders and boundaries which underpin the Business School. For as Roggero (2014: 517) writes, 'subjectivity is a battleground: capitalist subjectivation is always at a tension with autonomous subjectivation'. These borders and boundaries, inscribed and articulated along lines of hierarchical binary power relationship, now find their expression in the marketisation of universities. As we have argued, this marketisation is but a recent expression of a deeper structuring logic, which is that universities remain in the thrall of the logics of coloniality and the (un)reason of 'othering' – in which the raced and feminised subaltern, while putatively included and accepted into institutions in the liberal-democratic system, remain epistemically subjugated by the hegemonic and euro-centric nature thereof (Motta, 2019; Abolition Collective, 2019; Hoofd, 2010; Ahmed, 2007; Puwar, 2004). Yet such differently and differentially (dis)placed bodies, voices and wisdoms remain; creating, resisting, surviving in the(ir) absent present/ce. In the Business School, where logics of marketisation and onto-epistemological negation are reproduced and implicit, we share an embrace of refusal through engaging in a dialogue of deep-epistemological listening, storytelling, re-membering and bringing to presence in a way that critical spirit/flesh is brought into be-ing and is expressed in words and deeds as embodied critique.

Borders, bordering practises and border patrol subject(ivity)

I think it was the second time I went to the 'new' building. It was a weekday but not in term time. I was with my two youngest children, maybe two and 10 at the time. I didn't have my ID card as with the 'new' building we now need identity cards to enter the building and then to gain access to the open plan desks. I got through the first doors and took the lift onto the 7th floor. I think I had a number of plastic bags with me with toys for the children and maybe a bit of shopping, and I was dressed in jeans and top or something like this. I tried knocking on the glass door to attract the attention of a colleague or friend. Instead, a woman came out from another set of glass doors and asked me what I was doing there. I was

taken aback at the same time as expectant that this would happen. I breathed and answered her that I was trying to get into my office. She asked me where I worked. I answered in Politics. She told me there was no Politics in the Business School. Here we were, again, in the interrogation stage. I took a breath and told her that yes there was a Politics Discipline in the Business School as I worked as part of that Discipline. She told me that she needed to see photo Id before she could let me in. I told her she could look at my expert page, at which point a rage of humiliation welled up inside and I told her sorry I am not going to do this. You have no right to be asking me these questions and that I was going to contact another colleague. I had to bite my tongue to not tell her to fuck off as I knew they'd probably end up calling security on me if I did. My 10-year-old started to try to pull me away and tell me to be quiet and not to say anything more.

The woman took a step back as though she were talking to a wild dog who might attack her, and I took out my phone to ring a friend to see if he was there. He picked up and I began to cry, and I told him that this bloody woman wouldn't let me in, was enacting the borders and exclusions embedded in this place and asked could he come down and let me in. During some point the woman disappeared. My toddler began to cry, and my daughter tried to distract him as I was crying. My friend came down and walked me into the 'staff' space behind the glass doors and another woman came to see why I was upset. I explained to them both what had happened, and my friend said, 'oh some people', whilst the other woman colleague told me 'oh she was just checking, perhaps she was having a bad day'. I didn't even try to explain or say anything.

Instead, I took my bags, my babies and I left.

Later I wrote a poem, 'Thoughts on the Micro-Authoritarianisms of the University, or Shhh Be Quiet'.

This poem would subsequently become part of a militant enquiry in which we reoccupied the Business School for an afternoon. The day of our reoccupation, the poem recorded in the voice of one of my older white male colleagues with BBC English accent, blasted out over loudspeakers.

Sara's narrative illustrates how the subject of analysis and critique when we speak of the Business School is not only (re)produced through an extractive logic, but that the epistemic violence of (de)subjectification is played out in a multitude of everyday ways and through the (hidden) intimacies of embodied (non)encounters. As Jonsson (2011) paraphrasing Sara Ahmed (2007) describes, 'When white bodies dominate institutions, the bodies and the institutions orientate towards each other, and white bodies become 'habitual' in these surroundings – whiteness becomes that which 'lags behind', unnoticed' and when bodies lag behind 'they extend their reach'. This empowers those who perform Whiteness to intervene and extend their reach comfortably and without regret or responsibility onto others. The Black body becomes an object of misrecognition and a space invader (Puwar, 2004). She is at once invisibilised and illegible on her own terms whilst also made hypervisible and suspect thus legitimising border interventions (Motta, 2016)

Sara's narrative reveals how the Business School and the broader Institution in which it sits as a network of borders and boundaries, both visible and non-visible, also continually works to obscure these violent workings of power on bodies and subjects, who transgress their rules and logics. Adherence to specific protocols becomes a priority, yet the grounds and conditions are continually shifting – the building cannot be accessed without a card; there is no politics in the business school. The structure itself, the physical business school of Sara's account, is aggressively non-human and alienating; it is difficult to imagine the harsh lines, cold edges and fluorescent lights admitting any possibility of being/becoming human, or even of allowing Black bodies to enter. Stuck fast to a single plane of possibility, and trapped in an endless cycle of self-replication, the Business School will readily and always-already police its own employees into the non-existence of assimilation. The experience for the Black bodied scholar is here one of on-going 'restriction, uncertainty, and blockage' (Ahmed, 2007: 161).

But it does not feel sufficient to speak of these movements and bordering practices in abstraction, since they are also the concrete operations of power and control, which occur between subjectivities and bodies. So, it can also be said that accounts such as this are predicated on a fear, both institutional and individual, of the feminised and racialised subaltern subject occupying

legitimate positions of Scholar, Teacher, Academic. Sara's emotional embodied responses of both repressed rage and then sorrow and then flight become legible when we understand how

spaces we occupy do not 'extend' the surfaces of our bodies... Having been singled out in line, at the borders, we become defensive; we assume a defensive posture, as we 'wait' for the line of racism, to take our rights of passage away. If we inherit the failure of things to be habitual, then we might also acquire a tendency to look behind us. To be not white is to be not extended by the spaces you inhabit. (Ahmed, 2007: 63)

After all, it is only through the erasure and delegitimising of such subjects and epistemologies that the knowing-subject of coloniality, the producer of knowledge as mastery, can be constructed and upheld. The disbelief of colleagues is also salient, and perhaps reflects the silent, passive underside of White supremacy within the business school, which occurs within the glass doors of the office and does not necessarily question who and what is on the other side or their positioning on the inside (Rodríguez, 2018). Oppressions and micro-violences are individualised, relegated to the realm of the interpersonal and non-systemic. Sara is told her experience is not one of structured and repeated oppressions and systematic racialised, gendered and classed border-enactment that occur each and every day, no, Sara, no, one has momentary encounters with officials who are temporarily having a bad day. Remember that Sara, imprint it onto your skin.

What is the university for? What is the business school for? What is it good for? And how can we move beyond narrow conceptions of what constitutes Critique to bring forth a praxis of opening, of new potentialities, of radical pedagogies and deep openness to the (an)other? Sara's narrative gives one example of this, one which simultaneously reveals the University's authoritarian and violent White face to itself, while bringing to life other possibilities and knowing-bodies for/of/as the space. The great lie of Institutions is that their power over us is absolute – on the contrary, it is rigid, brittle, fragile, even as re-traumatising. And we must re-member:

...she was invisible, she was not heard. Many times she wished to speak, to act, to protest, to challenge... She hid her feelings; she hid her truths; she concealed her fire... but she kept stoking her inner flame... a light shone through her veil



of silence...the spirit of the fire spurs her to fight for her own skin and piece of ground to stand on, a ground from which to view the world — a perspective, a home ground where she can plumb the rich ancestral roots into her own ample mestiza heart. (Anzaldúa, 1987: 45)

Our life-affirming, creative and embodied responses to the business school and university do not thus seek to supplant and replace the power-operations of these Institutions with imagined Alternatives, but rather trace and embody the time-spaces of possibility for non-monological dialogues, critical enfleshments, refusals, celebrations of survival and nurturing of the untameable wildness of our knowing-being otherwise.

Image 1: University under (de)construction. Matthew K. Allen, 2020.

My experiences of (dis)embodiment trace a trajectory that begins before my birth. I inherent White privilege from my settler-colonist ancestors, and thus come into the world as both being, and not being, of the place we know as Australia. My adult life so far characterised by experiences of being subjugated/(in)visibilised as a working body without a mind, and an academic/intellectual mind without a body.

I remember working with a team of *brasileiro* labourers on a construction site; for them/us, the working day was a game of avoiding

supervisors, and our labour was one of solidarity and collective responsibility. Absent workers were always covered for, and a complicated rostering system employed to lengthen break-times to one, two, three hours. Even when we had to work, we sung, played, and performed impressions of the supervisors. There was a refusal to allow even a moment of intellectual and emotional capacity to be appropriated by this workplace to which we held no loyalties. We sabotaged equipment and committed other acts of resistance where we felt it necessary. My experience was that there was a kind of resistance present in pushing my alienation from labour, and my temporary precarity, to an extreme – I hired my body out for toil but allowed the transaction to encompass no more than that.

As I've begun to work and study in situations where intellectual engagement is a condition of employment, I feel that I've experienced the flip side of this disembodiment, exemplified by the experience of being a student/scholar 'mind without a body' in the business school. My experience is both literal and symbolic disconnection from the physical and embodied; the course is available completely online. The logic of the business school, as Sara and I have explored in our critique, also reproduces further disembodiment that ripples out from the institution itself. In the curriculum, there is a marked absence of knowing-subjects such as Indigenous Australians, the beneficiaries of social-purpose business activities, and other knowing-subjects whose accounts cannot be expressed within the terms of a White business discourse. These subjects are rendered starkly visible through their absence as equal participants in discourse, and through their treatment as abstract objects of study.

It is impossible to talk about these experiences without reference to the dynamics of privilege that shape them; as an Australian-born White labourer, I experienced precarity and the possibilities for resistance in vastly different ways to the temporary migrant worker on the construction site. While I could (and eventually did) leave, for others, this possibility may have been foreclosed, or fraught with tensions and challenges. Similarly, there is an element of choice to my engagement

as a (dis)embodied subject of the Business School; although I am physically absent, I also have 'presence' in the space through embodying some approximation of the ideal (male, white, middle-class cisgender) subject to which the hegemonic order has reference. The experience of erasure is not mine, but the absence of those othered is the premise of my (dis)embodied presence in this space.

Through Matt's narrative borders as separation between places and roles and peoples, between mind and body and between reason and flesh are foregrounded. In which hard labour is de-intellectualised as both a form of assumed refusal but also as the potential to negate the possibilities of enfleshed reason that might emerge from that place and its encounters and solidarities. There is a hollowing out of wholeness which enables survival, at the same time as micro resistances, and a silent-presence within the dominant and critical script of the political and critique that has potentially both liberatory and alienating consequences. This is not the figure of immaterial labour but its underside; the always-already precarious raced and feminised (non) formal worker (Motta, 2017; Federici, 2019).

Into the space of the Business School, conversely is the 'choice' to disembody the body from the workings of the mind and reason; a displacement that is enacted in a kind of no-place in which embodied encounters with others are superfluous and relationality an unnecessary extra. As McGregor and Knox describe:

HE institutions as orderings of human bodies within brick and mortar campuses are deterritorialized through digital technologies on the one hand, and are reterritorialized on the other, as distance learning programmes and open online courses offer new avenues for institutional market expansion. (2017: 518)

This professionalised and marketized exclusion of the body (as the student) and the place (as the encounter with the bricks and mortar of the University) from the production of knowledge is accentuated in such a virtualised scenario. It imbricates smoothly with, and perhaps ironically makes more visible to the newly precaritized W(w)hite subject, the logics, and rationalities of coloniality in which all othered bodies, subjects, knowledges, and lands are

and continue to be (as the constitutive underside of the Modern University) relegated to objects of study and research interventions or elided as a presence/t altogether.

In this scenario of de/reterritorialization and (dis)embodiment, the learner is forced to take on deeper logics of micro-management of the self to ensure that they keep to the time of the clock of assignments and assessments; to ensure self-mastery. Whilst those ‘lacking the requisite flexibility... to generate the necessary activity, or otherwise engage, communicate, market, innovate... have little hope of success’ (Du Gay and Morgan, 2013: 24). Conversely/perversely, in the situation of informalised construction work, the worker seems forced/chooses (our lens of (dis)embodiment matters what can be seen here, arguably confines ‘us’) to remove mind and spirit from their place of labour. Does this at once enable survival whilst simultaneously blocking the possibility of co-creating the conditions of mutual flourishing and collective resistance?

Who becomes master and slave in these (dis)placements?

One without the other. A we that is at once dignified and broken. A separation that serves the capitalist machine of alienated/ing labour and the disembodied unreason and nonbeing that the University (re)produces. Where are the points, possibilities, and tensions from which a meeting with self and/as other might take place? In the refusals to work and study to the clock?³ In the bringing of the embodied into the self-understanding of the worker-scholar? In the telling of our stories to rupture the myths of the consensual construction of the networked city and the smooth functioning of the global (modern) university?

³ It is fruitful here to think with/dwell in the ideas/reflections offered by Ruth (2017) as regards refusal to occupy and use (the office/university) space as prescribed; or those of playful affirmative critique of encounters, disruptions and laughter developed by Turner et al. (2017); or the ideas of self-care and slow encounters offered by Motta and Amsler (2019) in their work about becoming mother and scholar otherwise.

Embodied reasons as/and critique

As Lorde (2012: 372) describes: ‘Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought’. It is the way we here bring to thought and word the unspeakable and the silenced absent-presence of all that is rendered undesirable, deviant, and unintelligible by the dominant logics and rationalities of the business school and the University of which it is a part. Our words are the means through which the embodied experience of violence that criss-crosses in intersecting and differential ways our bodies, relationships, and the land on which we walk can find speech and meaning. This is an other kind of speech to that of Mastery, control and containment. A form of illegibility, a refusal of the ‘too many words to the wrong people’ which Fleming (2013: 629) argues is the premise of the reproduction of (neoliberal) capitalism and subjectivities. Instead, it is a speech (silence) of the fire and water of our serpents’ tongues; a co-becoming of other literacies of (political) reason. It is an act of art as (direct) and embodied activism (de Monthoux, 2014). Our words are small stitches in which we bring together the fragments and re-member our possibilities for a being-knowing otherwise; they are the raindrops and the embers that foreshadow the emergence of another way beyond the onto-epistemological borders that for so long have separated us from ourselves, each other and Country/Madre Tierra.

Epistemologically Divine⁴

Secret Knots

*Grief stricken eyes
hidden behind smiles
that hint
to the tender eye*

This is for you,

Whether or not you know who you
are

⁴ As I was editing my poem, I was going to keep her small, and semi-hiding, and then I thought f*** it I am still (in) hiding. I added that spaces between the lines, breathed and took up space, surrendered into a spaciousness of the (im)possibility of my passing.

*the layers of a life lived
scars faintly visible
covered with
the sleeve

of professionalism;
a professionalism
that disavows
love, vulnerability, desperation, joy.*

*A dank smell
of freshly sanitised lies
and Global designs
no sign*

*of the richness
we walk
bearing our children
upon weary shoulders.*

*Left outside
in the sunshine
with butterflies and ice creams
hidden truths and ancient whispers.*

*Drawing maps on our bodies
to size us to fit
mould our children into line
craft the perfect storyline.*

*Interventions
running through the cursing
blood in our veins
corroding with that*

*White gaze of the Knower.
I once was, too*

I'm trying to bring us all together
like gravity guiding around stars

Because I'm not bringing down the
government,
But I'd kind of like to start

So try to remember,
Whenever you dream of freedom,

Leave some signs or marks

And then when we see them,

We'll know for sure we're not so far
apart

And that there are secret knots
connecting us no matter how lost
we are

These ties, close to the heart

Just want to stay tight but we can't
fight with the tide or the growing
dark

Now you've wandered so far

My heroes, my friends, nobody
knows where they are

And so this is for them –

The long lost, the people I once
knew

*detached, deplaced
erasing and erased.*

*An internal exile
so sublime
no realisation of the crimes
committed in the name*

*of reason, truth,
excellence, objectivity
until long lost sisters
in a faraway land*

*once upon a time
took me
by the hand
stood with me*

*behind burning lines
a glimmer of what was mine
a glimmer of all
I'd denied.*

*A heretic in flesh and word
transgressing borders
that divide us
from ourselves*

and each other.

*Parading
carelessly
leaves little*

*to the imagination.
Confessionals with*

For as long as you've been gone,
I've wondered if I've been gone too.

--

We're called upon to dream about
reclaiming our lives,

I know we'll struggle and we'll fuck
it up,

We're doing it blind, but

We'll be guided by dreams and
maybe see our seeds grow

We know we've walked the earth
alone,

But walking side by side sometimes
we might forget it's so

And then forgetting that we get
scared,

Perhaps we'll let ourselves have
hope

And you know I wish I could've
been there

But I saw that wall where you wrote

We'll turn all our fears into stones

And we'll catapult them straight at
the places where tyrants make
homes

*the new priests of performance review
as the milk stains*

Now that's some heavy
ammunition

*peak their little heads
out from under
their buttoned up bed
and a tenderness*

And a load off your chest

And another night the cops are
getting no kind of rest

*of our relating
freezes that deplaced time
into a deeply felt
encounter*

--

I call upon the spirits now

Of the ones who never bowed down

*of an other place
embraced in the
messiness of the knowing
of our mothering.*

Cover up our faces before the sun
comes around

Because this place is an illusion,

*Motherhood as
epistemologically divine
with blossoming flowers
of a wisdom*

Sometimes I feel I barely exist, but

I tear a hole in the walls of the city
every time my pen slips,

*collectively lived
and made
with the little hands and feet
and adolescent pains*

And it's as jagged as a window
that's been smashed with a brick

A line of flight or an escape, a place
where fear loses its grip

*and shames
making kaleidoscope conceptualisations
of emancipation
as healing*

And we might even feel the gates of
freedom budge another inch

If it feels like fighting back

*of teaching as
possibilities*

Perhaps that's what it is.

Matt Allen, august 2009

*of sentipensamientos
tan diversos*

*they cannot be named
in the language
that maimed us
but rather*

*birth
multiple tongues
breathing fire
that nurture*

*an other way
an other path
of becoming mother, scholar, lover
of becoming Other.*

Sara C Motta, 28 March 2016

Silence

There are many forms of silence: to be silenced, to not find words because it is unspeakable, the silence that enables survival and a silence as dwelling that nurtures the possibility of our speech (Motta, 2018b: 28–39). Just as we have sought to trace the contours of an affirmative critical praxis through the narrative-language of lived experience, and through the music-language of poetry, we here seek to imagine the generative possibilities of the spaces between the lines, the intake of breath, the listening, the possibility-language of silence.

There is a silence through which ‘we’ take off the burdens we have carried since our enslavement and attempted erasure; the removal of a historic and ancestral burden that raced subaltern women have always been made to carry. This removal means that we stop trying to please the Master, stop trying to appear, appease or be recognised within the dominant script of reason and the

intelligible (Halberstam, 2013). This includes letting go of the burden of desiring recognition within and by the 'critical' theoretical and subject of critique for there have been too many silenced betrayals. It involves cultivating our discernment and our recovery through unlearning of the internalisation of self-hate and thus re-remembering our right to safety and recognition on our own terms (Motta and Bermudez, 2019).

Our appearance as knowing-subjects is necessarily viewed as violent into the Whiteness of reason, and thus we have the responsibility to ourselves to refuse speech on these terms. This does not imply a refusal of the work of bridging, but it does imply that this work can only happen if the grounds for deep epistemological listening and (un)learning of the knowing-subject of coloniality are actively embraced by both. This is an affirmative rejection of being subjected to categorisation as (re)inscription of power relations (Risberg and Pilhofer, 2018) and of rendering (our)selves intelligible to 'a constellation that will never accept the preconditions of what (our) voice means' (Fleming, 2013: 629). For our (epistemological) freedom we no longer need to suffer, sacrifice, and self-subjugate.

The project of coloniality and the Modern University strives for an erasure/assimilation of difference, rendering difference itself unspeakable. Bridging and working in solidarity across difference and diversity cannot be premised on the assumption that we come to being together in a power-neutral context (Christensen et al., 2018: 867). In navigating the complexities of privilege, voice, and presence, we can find ourselves allowing/enforcing/policing a silence that obscures and assimilates difference (Cobussen, 2003: 280). When those of us who are able to do so eventually fall back on our systemic privilege at the expense of our comrades and allies and chosen kin, we betray ourselves, and expose the hollowing-out of solidarity and kinship that occurs where we cannot name/accept differences and systemic privileges (Seppälä, 2017). There is a particular silence that surrounds the betrayal of allyship/kinship, which is also a betrayal of the individual and collective self, and a betrayal of what worlds are made possible when we become serious about the work of decoloniality (Ulus, 2018; Tuck and Yang, 2012). How can it ever be safe for peoples with differential embodied systematic and repeating experiences of power and/as (un)reason

to work in solidarity with one another when those differences and diversities are unspeakable? What experiences of power and/as onto-epistemological erasure and annihilation remain still unspoken and silenced?

Silence is thus a deeply necessary component of our dialogical practice of working across differences and differential experiences of power. Our project has, in many ways, been an attempt to foster and nurture a space of generative silence into which we can come to speak, think-feel, and co-create embodied meaning. What we are/have been/will be seeking is a coming to know the 'other' without imposing a form of Knowing that erases and assimilates difference, a process of experimentation and (un)learning on the contested terrain of labour-division, knowledge-production and (non)being-becoming in, with, and beyond the Business School.

Invitations

Through our writing, we have sought to work against, within and beyond our expectations and assumptions regarding who are the subjects of critique, what is critique and who must be given space to speak into the silence so that critique does not reproduce the coordinates of knowing-(non)being and unreason of coloniality. We hope for this practice of writing 'otherwise' to be particularly disruptive in the context of the business school, which mobilises a logic of unreason and non-being in the service of producing 'useful' knowledges pertaining to the government of people and organisations, the erasure of other(ed) bodies, knowledges and lifeworlds, while also attempting to produce ideal (neoliberal) capitalist colonial consuming/producing self-governing subjects and subjectivities. This is an invitation to become an active reader as opposed to a consumer of an 'exotic' and 'erotic' text that merely reinforces a mirror of the hegemonic (critical) 'self'. It pushes against and through a logic of (non)being in which we are made to account for ourselves in terms not of our own and plays with practices in which the work of kinship is to share some of the labour of (un)intelligibility. It demands a process of accountability in which the terms of the conversation premised on the elision and disavowal of raced and feminised others' epistemological medicines and wisdoms are ruptured and exposed for the violences that they are.

We wrote this for ourselves – because writing can be a form of reinvention of the self/emergence of the other, and writing together can be a form of solidarity, kinship, and healing. Our silence and moments of silence are the enfleshment of ‘empty’ space which seeks to be generative of the interrogation of all that is (un)said, (dis)allowed, and mis(named) in the dominant script of the heteronormative capitalist colonial Business School and its (ir)rationalities of reproduction. We wrote this for you – not in order to convince you of any particular way of thinking, but as an invitation to listen, (un)learn and open to the other(ed) within and without.

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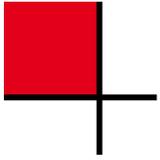
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Echoes from the streets in our classroom: A collaborative autoethnography in a Business School in Brazil

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abstract

Since 2013, Brazil has been suffering from a political crisis characterized by intolerance between people with different ideological positions. In this paper, drawing on a collaborative auto-ethnography, we propose (1) a discussion about the effects of political rivalry and the severe government attacks on the education system, and the consequences for the classrooms in business schools, and (2) sharing our experience as scholars and professors who support critical positioning as a basis for teaching in a top-tier university in Brazil. We describe how polarization, and a politically sensitive scenario influenced the routine of classes and interactions with undergraduate students. We argue that empathy is fundamental for circumventing possible incidences of intolerance or political divergence in the classroom. At the same time, it is required that professors maintain their authenticity and not give up their political and ethical values, which are fundamental to how critical thinking is promoted in business management classes.

Introduction

It was August 2017 when during a break from class I heard the following quote from a business student in the hall of the university department, where I teach psychology: ‘Here comes the left-wing professor talking about those boring

topics again'. At that moment, I began wondering, whether all the spread of hatred, coming from the Brazilian political situation, was impacting me and my faculty colleagues. I also started to think about it, while I was teaching organizational psychology in a business administration course. Was I, in some way, affected by the hatred being spread because of the political chaos we were facing in Brazil? After all, I identified with the left-wing in the political spectrum, and, with the students, I dealt openly with themes that revealed my ideological positioning. If I stood by that behavior, could I compromise the excellent relationship, I could otherwise have established with them? If I stepped back or stopped doing this, would I be failing to develop an open dialogue on sensitive subject matters; or worse still: Would I be reducing my students' opportunity to learn?

Over the last two decades, Brazil has had a period of increasing openness to dialogue on ideological approaches in business schools (Barros et al., 2011). However, a set of social, political, and economic factors has contributed to an extremist configuration of Brazilian political polarization that is permeated by narratives of hate. I could feel that the tension one would usually attribute to football fans, in heated, important matches had infiltrated politics, and somehow this could affect the way I taught my classes. The board of directors at the university had not expressed any rule or direct order regarding the matter. However, since I consider the processes of learning and teaching a two-way street, it was necessary for me to look into how to deal with this new scenario, should this political polarization manifest itself in the behavior of the students.

Wide public demonstrations against the political party system and parliamentary democracy were held between 2012 and 2013 in several countries. In Brazil, an important protest took place in June 2013, during the government of Dilma Rousseff (Fernandes et al., 2020). It became commonplace to hear phrases like 'No more Marxist indoctrination, enough of Paulo Freire!' in protest marches (Haddad, 2019). A wave of intolerance washed over the country, especially after 2013. Groups took over the streets and felt legitimized to argue for anti-democratic, sexist, homophobic, and racist proposals.

This hateful scenario was reinforced in 2018 with the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president (Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco, 2020). Since his election campaign, Bolsonaro has hatefully attacked what appeared to challenge the 'traditional values of the Brazilian family'. In both basic education and university education, attacks also became frequent, as these were places that he and his voters perceived as fields for the dissemination of 'gender ideology' and a 'cultural Marxism' agenda. The university was often described as a 'shambles' (Barbosa, 2021).



Image 1: Protest in favor of the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in the capital of Brazil, Brasilia. The yellow stripe reads no more Marxist indoctrination. Enough of Paulo Freire – Photo from Streit (2015).

The phrase 'Enough Paulo Freire', which appeared on a banner during the demonstration against the Dilma Rousseff government in Brasília in March 2015, caused controversy on social media and even provoked a response from the UN, defending the Brazilian educator. The history teacher responsible for it said:

It is a friendly face for a cruel project – work aligned with Marxism and tyrannical regimes, like Fidel Castro's. People ask for more education, but the MEC (Education Ministry) follows the PT (Workers' Party) ideology. Criticize

little Paulo? Oh, not that! Paulo Freire is a sacrosanct figure! I'm fed up! Pedagogy of the Oppressed = poor things and Marxist indoctrination; I wouldn't recommend it for my dog. (Streit, 2015)

In this context, initiatives have emerged, such as the Escola Sem Partido (School without a Party) movement, whose main motto is 'education without indoctrination', and whose supporters include the Bolsonaro family. In general, the texts of these projects invoked neutrality in the face of what was deemed ideological, political, and partisan indoctrination. One of the most controversial points of these projects lies in the idea that in schools, educators should not discuss themes and contents that may go against the moral convictions of 'traditional families'. The 'School Without a Party' movement created false alarmism and promoted an atmosphere of fear and criminalization of left-wing educational practices.

Beyond moral attacks, the professors' fears were based on concrete, political actions. Educational policies have been suffering from increasing budget cuts, and Bolsonaro usually calls humanities students 'useful idiots' and 'imbeciles' (Barbosa, 2021). During the electoral campaign, in a lecture for entrepreneurs, Bolsonaro said:

Brazilian Education is sinking. We must debate gender ideology and the 'School Without a Party'. We should ram inside the MEC (Ministry of Education) with a flamethrower to get Paulo Freire out of there. (Haddad, 2019: 1)

He also added:

They say you have to have a critical sense [in education]. Go to Japan; see if they are concerned about critical thinking. (Haddad, 2019: 2)

As a humanities professor, many feelings overwhelmed me during this period, but I must highlight the main two: fear and sadness. I felt this process could undermine our freedom in the classroom. A space where I, in principle, should debate and build knowledge and engage in critical thinking together with students, became a space of control and constraints. In this respect, I wondered: What was my stance, and what were the stances of my colleagues and students regarding this situation? What is our role in this process?

To answer these questions, I organized a discussion with a group of colleagues and students, where we could share conflicts and emotions related to the experience of being in a business school during a period of polarization in politics. The discussion with my colleagues was about the challenging experience of facing internal truths regarding education and the place of critical thinking in a business school, given the polarization in politics that arose with an elected far-right president. With students, conversations were about their feelings and thoughts about their experiences in humanities classes.

This article is structured in three parts. First, the methodology is described. In contrast to the above introduction which explained my initial motivations in the first person, the methodology section starts portraying a collective experience, mine along with the two co-authors'. To denote this change, we begin to use 'we' in the text. After the methodology, we present four discussion sections: (1) what it means to be a critical management teacher at a business school; (2) the Brazilian political situation; (3) political intolerance and fear in the classroom; and then, (4) authenticity and empathy in teaching. Conclusively, the final considerations are addressed.

Methodology: The journey of a collaborative auto-ethnography

This article began as an autoethnography. My goal was to share my emotions and thoughts as a psychology professor, assigned to teach business students about other aspects than those constrained by a mainstream business-oriented mindset. When acting as a professor, I understand that I do not teach only theories of psychology applied to administration, but I also problematize them within a sociopolitical context, which raises ethical questions. Therefore, I take a critical position in the Business School, which deserves reflection, especially in a scenario of political polarization.

After some time working alone with my thoughts and emotions, I decided to team up with some colleagues to carry out a collaborative autoethnography. Although I was already sharing my emotions about my experience of being a critical management teacher in a business school with colleagues and students, I was writing the article on my own. As it was a topic that was

stirring my emotions heavily, I thought it would be more fruitful to take this journey with others. The combination of multiple voices analyzing social phenomena creates possibilities that autoethnographers cannot attain in isolation (Chang et al., 2016), thus encouraging us to go beyond individual storytelling and reflection (Nordbäck et al., 2021).

We, the three authors of this paper, are master's and PhD students at Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV), who research business administration, organizational studies, and public policies. All of us have some degree of connection with FGV, whether as a professor, master's student, doctoral student, or researcher, at times performing two or three of these roles at once. We met during classes that covered critical studies in management, contemporary thinking and capitalism, and other spaces for study and research. In the following three paragraphs, we present our backgrounds and interests as scholars.

I am Ana Carolina, I have a degree in psychology, but I focused my academic career on Business Administration. I finished my master's, and I am doing my PhD at Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV) in the Organizational Studies department. I have a career that spans over fifteen years within multinational and national companies in Human Resources. I also work as a clinical psychologist.

I am Marcela, a historian, who also has a master's in Public Policy from the university, where Ana is a professor. As the youngest author (25 years old), I have experienced many of the situations mentioned by Ana, and my generation is closer to the one currently attending the business school. My experience at FGV as an undergraduate and master's student (2014-2021) was marked by political agitation, and during this time, I engaged in various debates concerning social rights and the feminist movement. I attended FGV with a full scholarship. Therefore, I was able to contribute to this article by bringing in the contemporary Brazilian political context and its influence in higher education spaces, especially in FGV.

I am Carlos, an economist and PhD student in Organizational Studies at FGV. I have been researching Brazilian business schools since 2014, and I am

interested in qualitative research with an ethnographic approach. My contribution to the paper was to construct the arguments and methodological process of collaborative autoethnography. I also encouraged Ana to share more of her experience, questioning her thoughts and emotions related to the situations she described.

After Ana's invitation, we started thinking about how to gather interpretations of the profound political changes in the country, and how her experience could impact critical management teaching in one of the most traditional business schools in the country. As our discussions were related to our experiences, emotions, and identities (Haynes, 2018), autoethnography was considered an appropriate approach, as it contemplates the study of a group through the personal experiences of the author (Tienari, 2019). The most significant advantage of this methodology is the ability to 'illuminate social phenomena and experiences that would be difficult to capture through other qualitative or quantitative methods' (McDonald, 2013: 397). It has also been a fruitful methodological approach for the study of relationships and interactions between subjects, identities, and experiences in business schools.

After meetings, presentations of ideas, and discussions of our arguments and data, we chose to use vignettes to bring together principal elements of our interactions. In autoethnographies, vignettes are used 'as a means of enhancing the representational richness and reflexivity of qualitative research' (Humphreys, 2005: 840). As the three of us went through different types of interactions, the use of vignettes made it easy for us to create narratives about 'expressed opinions, or particular terms used in the participants' comments' (Hazel, 1995: 2).

For the elaboration of the article, we followed the three stages established by Chang et al. (2016) for collaborative autoethnography.

a) Preliminary data collection: The authors wrote and reflected on their own experiences as a professor, researcher, or student in the face of political polarization in the country, and later we shared the reports between us. We

focused on the points and situations that bothered us, generated indignation, and even embarrassment for not knowing how to deal with them.

b) Subsequent data collection: Later, we wrote and reflected individually on the interactions between us and other professors and students in the business school. When we shared our experiences, we started to make sense of the relation between us, and the politically historical moment for the country. We pinned the most convergent and divergent points about our interpretations and shared our reports and writing.

c) Data analysis and interpretation: We gathered our personal accounts and decided which aspects could be theorized and chose the points that stood out the most. We discussed which excerpts would be relevant for writing the article in detail and decided on its structure.

What does it mean to be a critical management professor at a Business School?

Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV) is well known, not only for its distinguished professors and business courses, FGV is also one of the few business schools that has a pedagogical interest in critical thinking as part of its curriculum. The institution is divided into eight different research departments, and three of those directly promote critical discussions – Organizational Studies, Social and Juridical Fundamentals and Public Policies. The professors associated with these departments are mainly sociologists, psychologists, historians, and political scientists that study social and historical problems in Brazil, in dialogue with disciplines such as Marxism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, feminism, and Brazilian social theory. Those are the professors we became closer with during our time at FGV.

The model of business education at FGV was historically constructed under North American influence (Lima et al., 2020) and adapted itself with contributions from Brazilian social theory, thereby, becoming a hybrid college situated in the Global South (Alcadipani and Bertero, 2012, 2014). This aspect can be seen in the main curricula of both undergraduate business and public policies courses, which have classes on Brazilian history, sociology, and many

other elective courses that offer theoretical tools to develop critical thinking in managerial studies.

Unlike traditional models of managerial education, where administration is described as a moral and politically neutral technical activity (Dyllick, 2015; Millar and Price, 2018), in FGV there are research groups that engage in critical approaches and invite students to reflect and denaturalize knowledge. We have research, teaching, and an organizational practice agenda based on Critical Management Studies (CMS) and Critical Management Education (CME) that understands management as a political, cultural, and ideological phenomenon. This approach understands managers not only as professional managers, but as people, and is attentive to social groups, whose lives are affected by management activities and ideologies (Alvesson and Willmott, 2003). This process is achieved with professors questioning students and raising their awareness about the world around us. This questioning occurs through dialogue between educator and student, which, according to Freire (2018), is a basic condition for knowledge.

Dialogue presupposes a relationship between two or more people debating a given topic, where each of them may or may not have the same perspective on the subject being discussed. Given the context being described in this work, where political tension and the climate of intolerance are present in the everyday lives of Brazilians, how is the dialogue between professors and students then conducted?

The Brazilian political context

Vignette 1 – In 2014, my first contact with the student body as a freshman at FGV was at an informal event where veterans sang their ‘anthem’. I was not the only girl, scholarship holder, and leftist that got scared because of the lyrics: ‘we will not let motherfu** communists get in here’. I found myself in a polarized space, where I was not included. Mostly white guys called the ‘leftist’ group ‘feminazis’ and people that ‘victimized themselves’. I found my ‘troupe’ and soon enough we closed ourselves in a bubble. After 2016 and all the political agitation, this was a mechanism we found to avoid confrontation. Between 2014 and 2018, Facebook groups became a ‘battlefield’ between students’ political views. I have seen many colleagues attending protests in favor of a ‘military dictatorship’ and supporting Bolsonaro’s electoral

campaign. During 2018, I was scared of speaking up during classes, parties, and social events. The tension was growing, and the groups separated themselves into 'clustered' ideology spheres. I felt like I didn't belong, and I didn't even have the strength to dialogue anymore. From my perspective, the leftists felt isolated and were always 'targeted' by other students' attitudes and comments.

Marcela's story illustrates the political conflicts and what she felt as a young student at FGV during the ongoing polarization of Brazil. To continue this narrative, we must keep in mind the political and historical context of Brazil, especially the so-called recent History. Like other Latin American countries, in the 1980s, Brazil was seeing many significant political disputes over the re-democratization process. Various social movements, especially student movements, occupied the streets in protests for the construction of a liberal democracy, built upon the expansion of political, social, and civil rights, which were all restricted by the military dictatorship (1964-1985). Thus, in the political and social arena, what was at stake was the dispute over which state would be built after the authoritarian period, and one of the main concerns was the reduction of the historical inequalities which had structured Brazilian society (Arretche, 2018).

The first democratic governments faced the challenge of promoting social cohesion amid the biggest inflationary crisis to hit the country in 20 years, and the 'ghost of authoritarianism' (Casarões, 2015). Henrique Cardoso's macroeconomic policy axis inaugurated the first phase of neoliberalism in the Brazilian State, which was characterized by economic stabilization and slow progress in reducing poverty and inequality (Sallum Jr., 1999; Amann and Baer, 2002).

In 2003, Lula (Workers' Party – PT), a trade unionist and representative of the left spectrum, was elected with 61.27% of the votes against the candidate that represented the political status quo. Lula's election raised concerns on Wall Street about whether he could commit to carry out the reforms initiated by Cardoso's government (Kingstone and Ponce, 2010). However, some predictions were proved wrong, as Lula's government promoted a macroeconomic policy, oriented towards the global capitalist market (Kingstone and Ponce, 2010), and which, therefore, promoted an inclusive paradigm of Brazilian neoliberalism (Saad-Filho, 2020). Under Lula's

government, the higher education system was expanded, and scholarships were provided to include the working class in private schools.

In 2011, Dilma Rousseff (Workers' Party – PT) was elected as the first female Brazilian president, and, according to Saad-Filho (2020), she started to promote a government policy called developmental neoliberalism. The political tensions in this context caused mass protests in June 2013, led, above all, by university students and individuals outside of organized social movements. The absence of defined agendas and the general discontent with Rousseff's government set the tone of these demonstrations. For a generation born between 1980-1990, who entered higher education in the 2010s (like Marcela), this was the most significant political manifestation in the streets, and it represented the 'limited power of left neoliberalism' (Saad-Filho, 2020).

In June 2013, what took young people to the streets seemed to be the recognition of the failure of the alliance between the social inclusion paradigm and a market-oriented policy, in other words, progressive neoliberalism (Fraser, 2017). Months later, the streets continued to be agitated, and in November 2013, a tense electoral race put the Workers' Party governance in check. Rousseff's impeachment was accompanied by social and political tension in the streets, institutional spaces, social media, and traditional news. Michel Temer took over the Federal Government and endorsed a series of acts that were market-driven, such as fiscal austerity and massive budget cuts, especially in higher education (Mancebo, 2018).

In 2018, the election of Jair Bolsonaro symbolized a victory of authoritarian discourse and right-wing ideology (Singer et al., 2020; Porto et al., 2020; Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco, 2020). In the cultural sphere, the 'family and traditional values' rhetoric was used as a tool to endorse a model of 'minimum state' (Andrade, 2019). Universities were attacked as spaces of 'bedlam' and serious budget cuts were made concerning federal investments in college education, leading to an educational crisis in the symbolic, political, economic, and democratic spheres (Haddad, 2019; Saldaña, 2019).

How is this reactionary neoliberalism expressed in the classroom? Even before Bolsonaro, scholars had pointed out that the coexistence of pleasure (linked

to a purpose and professional pride) and suffering (linked to the precariousness of working conditions and the frustration of teaching) delimits the daily life of professors in contemporary times (Coutinho et al., 2011). At non-public colleges, this seems even more symptomatic, since the students play a role as ‘consumers’ of an ‘active good’, namely, their education (Almudras, 2021). The tendency of educational privatization promotes draining out the public sphere, and, under Bolsonaro’s government, the political context is reinforced with the defiant attitudes of students towards critical debates. In this sense, Brazilian professors are facing a dispute in their classes concerning their educational project and political beliefs – distinguished mainly by a culture of hatred, perpetrated against educators, which is directly supported by Bolsonaro (Bemvindo, 2018).

The context of the Brazilian crisis is complex and even obscures how the political rhetoric produces feelings and mindsets in post-June 2013 youth (Fernandes, 2019). Let us not forget Gramsci’s warning about the great variety of morbid feelings produced in the interregnum between hegemonic blocks, as the old is dying and the new cannot be born (Fraser, 2017). Fear, sadness, extreme political anxiety, intolerance, and hatred are some of the feelings perpetuated by the contemporary conservative neoliberal crisis in Brazil, which has created a set of young, polarized minds and hearts (Safatle et al., 2020; Andrade, 2019; Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco, 2020).

Political intolerance and fear in the classroom

Fundação Getulio Vargas is a top-ranked, South American business school. AACSB and EFMD/Equis-Accredited, FGV is composed of elite students, some of them scholarship students. At this point it is important to understand the socio-economic profile of students that attend FGV. Brazil is a country of deep inequalities, and the average income of a Brazilian household per. month is US\$ 202,00. The business major program in FGV has many students, whose families receive the equivalent of more than 50 minimum wages per month (29% of the student body). Furthermore, 46% of them live with more than 12 minimum wages. This can explain why 61% do not have any kind of scholarship and bear the costs of US\$1.000,00 per month of college tuition.

Race and class social markers intersect within this scenario, since 83% of the student body is white (Gazeta Vargas, 2021). In terms of gender, nowadays, women comprise the majority of business majors at FGV (59%), a historical record in a school that is more than 70 years-old and that was predominantly occupied by men until the beginning of the 21st century.

Therefore, we were dealing with a small elite (maybe the 0.1% of the richest families in the country) that could become future leaders of large companies and start-ups. Should we, professors of the humanities department, not have a fundamental role in the way leadership conducts business in the future? However, in the face of hatred and political polarization, would openly discussing with students, by making them question and be aware of thorny management issues, be undermined, since critical thinking has always been closely related to left-wing positions?

These questions arose for us when, in April 2019, President Jair Bolsonaro published a video of a student confronting a grammar professor on his social networks, claiming that the professor had spent 25 minutes of class time discussing politics. 'A professor has to teach, not indoctrinate', wrote the president as he shared the one-minute, 54-second-long video. While holding the camera, the author of the video said:

I'm not paying for a course to hear your partisan, political opinion. I'm paying for a course with a grammar class. I'm going to record and show all of your classes on the Internet, okay?

When we heard about this case, it crossed our minds whether it could happen at some point at FGV. Faced with this fear, would we end up making any changes to our conduct in the classroom? In Ana's case, she realized that the preparation of classes and the way she was conducting the dialogue was not being done openly. At that time, she was conducting a survey with some start-up founders, basing her methodological procedure on some suggestions that Alvesson and Willmott (2003) had proposed for the emancipatory goals of critical research to be successful. Ana realized that the authors' suggestions were, in some way, influencing her way of structuring and conducting the classes. She was avoiding the use of specific words (such as capitalism, male domination, manipulation, and repression) to not load the classes with terms

that could be seen as very negative and that could be considered in opposition to the system (Alvesson and Willmott, 2003). She started to question herself: Would I be exaggerating, filtering some lines in a way that could end up reducing the pleasure I get from teaching, and harming my dialogue with the students? Since the real dialogue does not start from a supposed 'neutrality' (Freire, 2017), to what extent am I letting the authors' suggestions undermine my freedom in the classroom? And regarding my department colleagues – are they also feeling concerned about the content they are using to teach?

Ana shared her impressions and feelings with her colleagues to try to answer these questions. She asked how they felt and were going through the experience of teaching in political polarization. It was evident in conversations with Ana's colleagues that there were different experiences in the classroom; each professor sought another way of dealing with the delicate political context that we Brazilians were going through. Teaching practice was significantly impacted by this historic moment. As previously mentioned, political tension has been present in the daily lives of Brazilians as citizens since 2013. From 2013 to 2018, intolerance became the watchword. Much hatred was involved, mainly directed at people with left-wing political positions, and therefore making professors, who had declared their critical positions, more vulnerable.

From 2019 to the present day, intolerance has been giving way to somewhat less excessive sentiments. Not that hatred has disappeared from the political scene, but in the face of the economic, political, and social disasters brought about by Bolsonaro's government, hatred towards the left is less pronounced. Many regret having supported this government, admitting that voting for Bolsonaro only to oppose the Workers' Party candidate had not been a wise choice. Thus, the questioning of Ana's colleagues, about how the current political situation in Brazil was impacting their critical management teaching in the Business Administration course, generated different answers based on the timeline of the recent Brazilian political crisis. Long-tenured professors were impacted by a trajectory of greater political tension inside and outside the classroom, while new hires had not taught at this business school during the height of political intolerance.

Additionally, Ana spoke with four students. Her intention was, initially, to understand how they had experienced her classes. How did they comprehend and feel the critical remarks she provided in class? From their responses, she also wanted to reflect personally on what they had said regarding their experiences in her class.

From the accounts of both professors and students, and her personal reflections with Marcela and Carlos, Ana realized that two themes were becoming significant throughout the study: authenticity (remaining faithful to political convictions and a certain ethical position in teaching) and empathy (embracing the different perspectives that students bring into the classroom).

Authenticity and empathy in teaching

Vignette 2 – ‘During this moment of political tension, have you changed the way of promoting critical thinking through your classes?’ I started conversations with other professors with that question. One of them told me: ‘At first, I was thinking about self-preservation and questioned myself whether to say something. But I quickly gave up this stance. Firstly, because I wouldn’t have been able to do my job, it wouldn’t have worked. Secondly, because I’d go mad, paranoid, I’d just be distorting what I do, right?’ Another colleague commented about the importance of maintaining a reflexive core within the courses, regardless of how difficult that may be ‘because setting aside critical thinking is not just a threat to our professions, our jobs, but also to the pleasure we get from it’. ‘I believe we, as professors, can never exempt ourselves. We will be the ones to challenge the hegemonic narratives they [the students] will face’, adds another professor that also participated in the conversation with Ana.

The conversation with the first professor reveals that, at first, there was a reflection on how far to take his critical position in the classroom. Facing intolerance within a political context, fear can arise as an emotion that limits teaching performance. Can I say what I think? The account shows that, despite these fears and the reflection on how to act in the classroom, the decision, said the professor himself, is to give up these ‘preservation’ mechanisms, so that he can continue with his class in his own way, that is, in an authentic way. The second professor brings an important element to the debate: satisfaction, the pleasure that might be lost if we stop doing our duty.

The threatening feeling that some professors felt was related to the concrete threat of losing their jobs and to the more subjective threat of losing one's purpose and pleasure at work, because improving the ability of students to reflect and make judgements is an essential element of their work. Being overly concerned about what others think should not be the most important thing. What is most important is the implementation of a class plan that is aligned with ethical standards and has the content developed by the department.

The conversations with professors reveal a desire to preserve their professional goals, to maintain the motivation to bring to the classroom what they believe is crucial for learning. As a result, there is a concern with maintaining an authentic position in regard to the students and the course being offered.

The concept of authenticity is present in several central topics in management studies. Apparently, there is a consensus about its meaning – authenticity refers to what is real, genuine, or true. However, many studies use the same lexicon to approach the concept from different perspectives and apply it in different contexts (Lehman et al., 2019). Although authenticity has received attention from scholars in the organization field, its use can be questioned. Within Critical Management Studies (CMS) in particular, this kind of discourse has been considered 'as forms of neo-normative control – a sophisticated way for modern capitalism to tap into the very existence of the employee' (Mogensen, 2018: 221), and as an incentive for growth in productivity (Fleming, 2009; Cederström, 2011; Pedersen, 2011).

However, we consider authenticity to be a genuine means for individuals to resist in situations of social coercion (Durkheim, 1915; Foucault, 2001). Thus, authenticity is not seen as an individual answer to organizational strategies (Pedersen, 2011), but as a way for professors seeking to be as honest and sincere as they can with their beliefs, values, and prejudices (Chickering et al., 2015), thus preserving some of the pursuit for truth, transparency, and genuineness (Plust et al., 2021).

In recent years, authenticity in teaching has been an increasing research interest (Plust et al., 2021). Although not uniformly defined, authenticity usually points to ways of understanding teaching as being intuitive, involving self-reflection and the educator as a sincere, caring person. Plust et al. (2021) present studies regarding authenticity in professors systematically. The results show that authentic professors are congruent, caring, open to encounters, and becoming critically conscious. Congruent teachers recognize their value judgments (Rabin, 2013) and act accordingly, so self-knowledge is an essential factor in this process. However, congruent teachers did not have immutable self-knowledge but rather a continual readjustment of their self-concept in the light of new experiences (Plust et al., 2021). Caring is about valuing students' flourishing and presenting the topics to students in a way that reflects their passions and interests, offering them what is meaningful to their lives (Plus et al., 2021). For this, the teacher must know the student (Rabin, 2013):

Vignette 3 – 'When you're in front of a class and block communication with the students, your semester is bad. We know that. So, the daily task is to dribble the defense. It's a very delicate game. It's like you have to read who's listening to you', comments a colleague on the challenge of establishing a connection with the students. Another professor, when I asked him how he reached out to students during these times of political polarization, said: 'I started questioning: what led most of these young people to this kind of ultraliberal discourse? It's the value of liberty. Well, what do I now? Now my course begins with questioning liberty from another standpoint, from a non-neoliberal standpoint, seeking to dismantle what is deemed natural on the matter'. Another professor also follows the same reasoning, seeking to identify a theme that might sensitize the students more: 'When I deal with subjects related to health and productivity, the students pay more attention'.

A fundamental aspect that demonstrates authenticity is the professors' openness to encounters, which relates to their capacity to promote meaningful dialogues with other professors and students (Plust et al., 2021). During these encounters, professors can reveal relevant parts of themselves (De Bruyckere and Kirschner, 2016; Kreber, 2010; Rabin, 2013; Ramezanzadeh et al., 2016) and create non-judgmental spaces for reflection (Carusetta and Cranton, 2005a, 2005b), where students can debate freely, presenting their ideas and experiences (Plust et al., 2021).

Another characteristic of an authentic professor is becoming critically conscious, which means being self-conscious and reflective when examining teaching methods, being open to negotiating the subjects of classes, and being aware of one's own passions (Plust et al., 2021). Becoming critically conscious also means contesting the status quo, challenging oneself (Kreber, 2010; Ramezanzadeh et al., 2016), and continuing to disagree with conformity (Ramezanzadeh et al., 2017). When asked if he perceived himself as critically conscious, and how he stimulated the critical awareness of his students, one teacher said:

I see myself as critical through the method itself, by trying to ask more questions instead of giving more answers. I try to do this consistently with the students, I try to make them bring out their worldview, their experiences, their activities, what they watch, what they read and so on. I try to suggest relatively open activities that make them question the world and their place in it.

These professors' statements reinforce how important it is to be authentic, genuine, and attentive in relation to students, and also how important it is to understand who the student is. What are their characteristics? What subjects can make them more sensitive and open to critical thinking? The answers from those colleagues show they also take these questions into account and seek to organize their classes around what makes more sense to the students. In Ana's case, she understood that it was important to reach out to the students, to talk about their personal lives, and to reflect on any subject. During a conversation, one student told her:

I felt you gave a lot of examples related to our situation... not, like, organizational examples but examples from our lives, you know? That's really cool, you know? I felt kind of represented, in a way, in your class.

Another one said: 'The more you explain in a way that has close ties with the market, the more I think it's palpable'.

These comments from students suggest both that Ana is attempting to connect the class subject with the students' interests, and with how to communicate, that is, how academic language is adapted so it is best understood and is more in tune with the students. 'I also think that the language is... obviously, it has to be formal because you're a professor, but it's

not that dull thing that makes you say ‘oh, what is she talking about?’ said another student. His opinion is shared by a fellow student:

you [professors] explain in such a way that it’s totally easy to understand. Language and the words you choose help us to understand.

These attitudes indicate that professors seek to be empathetic with their students, taking into consideration what the students think and feel when defining a teaching strategy.

Empathy has become a subject of significant interest in many fields, including psychology, philosophy, and teacher training (Bullough Jr., 2019), as it is understood as an invaluable skill in interpersonal and organizational lives (Parks, 2015). There is a wide range of definitions for empathy in academic literature (Coplan and Goldie, 2014). Some emphasize the affective elements of empathy, while others highlight its cognitive aspects (Bullough Jr., 2019).

We consider empathy to be a characteristic that is desirable for students and educators (Trothen, 2016), making us learn about and recognize others and ourselves in relations to others (Bialystok and Kukar, 2018). Therefore, in teaching, aside from being open to the differences in perspectives between students and professors, knowing how to relate to students, their emotions, intentions, and being able to perceive oneself in relation to them is crucial.

A fundamental aspect of empathy is listening. Literature on the intersection between listening and empathy is scarce (Parks, 2015). When assessed together, these concepts outline an attentive and other-oriented communication (Payne, 2005). During times of crisis and suffering, there is a fundamental social need to connect with other individuals (Dolamore et al., 2020), which turns empathetic listening into an exceptional skill for dealing with conflicts within organizations (Bodie, 2012). In a scenario of growing polarization, listening emerges as an ethically important activity (Tietsort et al., 2021), including in the field of education (Huerta-Wong and Schoech, 2010; Rost, 2013), by helping educators build trusting and respectful relations with students (Lasky, 2000). Developing empathy and the ability to respect political differences in the classroom goes beyond the educational environment. As one of Ana’s students said:

I want to learn more about what other people think. To take what I can learn from a discussion, absorb it, and carry what we had with the professor and the colleagues in the classroom around, to other places.

For that to happen, ‘teachers must take responsibility for providing students the opportunity to use not only their voices within the classroom, but their ears as well’ (Laughter et al., 2018: 112).

Listening is a critical communication skill and, thus, an essential element of education in business schools. Some authors consider active and empathetic listening to be one of the abilities that make up emotional intelligence (Conrad and Newberry, 2012). However, establishing a deeper connection between speaker and listener does not happen spontaneously. In addition to being all ears, the interlocutor should receive both undivided and investigative attention, that is, the collocutor should make an effort to identify and question suppositions, to respect, to try to build empathy and, especially, to be free from judgment (Ferrari, 2012; Spataro and Bloch, 2018; Weger Jr. et al., 2010).

Final considerations

The atmosphere of extreme political polarization (McAvoy and Hess, 2013) is affecting educational institutions around the world (Laughtere et al., 2018). Based on our personal experience and from the accounts of department colleagues and undergraduate students, we have argued that the way of conducting critical management teaching in the classroom has changed during the Brazilian political crisis. From 2014 and 2019, political polarization reached its height, and the most frequent emotion among people with different ideological positions was hatred. However, it seems something has been changing. Bolsonaro’s election and the conduct of a fascist policy is not admired by most of our students, since, although most of them adhere to an ultra-liberal policy, they are in favor of democracy.

Some reports show that the political context and hatred towards the left influenced Ana’s and her colleagues’ conduct, but at no point did they renounce their desire to help students be more reflective and critical in their

thinking. Despite all the different strategies they developed to deal with this challenge, authenticity and empathy were always there.

All of the professors describe in their stories that they seek to promote meaningful dialogic encounters with transformative potential. They did not mention their standpoints on political parties, but neither did they hide their criticism and reflections on political matters. According to the students that we talked to, FGV is an institution with a wide and diverse range of political views, where professors suggest reflection on a certain logic of the economic, political, and social system instead of an unrestricted defense of a worldview.

Furthermore, empathy stood out when we spoke with the students and professors. Professors sought to integrate multiple information sources from different media, and assess these sources from different points of view, engaging the class in dialogues where opinions might diverge. Another strategy utilized by the professors was to reach out to the students and encourage them to open up about their personal lives, in an attempt to build empathy.

At first, authenticity and empathy seemed to be linked in a complicated way, since these concepts, in a way, stand in opposition to one another. Furthermore, many authors consider that empathy and authenticity might even reinforce oppressive attitudes when interlocutors hold values and convictions about the topic under discussion (Bialystok and Kukar, 2018). Generally, authenticity is considered a virtue that concerns the relationship of an individual with self, while empathy is considered a virtue that reveals our capacity to be open regarding others. If understood in opposition, authenticity refers to a Western notion of 'yourself' and empathy to 'the pinnacle of openness to others' (Bialystok and Kukar, 2018: 24).

As a result of this investigation, we suggest that authenticity and empathy cannot be understood as concepts that are opposed to each other but are mutually related. While the authenticity of a teacher consists of a certain fidelity to their own ideas (Bialystok and Kukar, 2018), it is not built on firmness and unshakable convictions but on a relationship with the other that recognizes vulnerability and contingencies. For this reason, an educator's

authenticity could not be developed without empathy, without being open toward others. This does not imply that our convictions must be abandoned, but we must accept that what we consider 'proper' is constructed in an intersubjective relationship and include a broader category that transcends a reciprocal relation between professor and student. An authentic and empathetic relationship occurs in a wider context.

Considering Taylor's (1992) philosophical discussions, we can understand that being an authentic professor means doing what is necessary and invaluable, not only to the professors themselves or the students but also in a broader context, where both professor and student are included (Kreber et al., 2007). An authentic and empathetic relationship occurs in a larger social context. A context consists of several levels, including the content of the teaching, the discipline, or the subject area; the psychological environment within the learning group; institutional norms and policies; and finally, the general community or culture where professors and students belong (Cranton and Carusetta, 2004a). Thus, to achieve more authentic and empathetic work as an educator, we must ask ourselves: Have I considered my own and my students' social, political, and cultural contexts? Have I considered what is important to teach these students in these contexts?

In this way, a conception of authenticity and empathy as an 'opposition' between self and other is abandoned, making room for another that understands it as an experience of sharing. Thus, the relationship between authenticity and empathy ceases to belong to the field of rivalry and is put into the field of ethical reflection (and production). Likewise, this is how it is possible to build a true community around learning (Cranton and Carusetta, 2004b; Carusetta and Cranton, 2005a, 2005b; Cranton, 2010), where everyone – professors, and students with the same or differing political views – can socialize and feel they belong to the same space.

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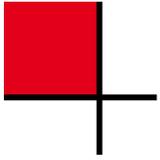
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Climate change and the business school: Going beyond neoliberal ‘solutions’ with Hannah Arendt*

Charlotte Cator

abstract

Climate change is gaining growing attention in institutional politics and the business world. As businesses start widely embracing the turn to climate change, business schools are increasingly addressing sustainability-related topics in their educations. However, the difficulties meeting defined climate goals indicate that current responses to climate change are insufficient. To shed new light on the role of business and business education in addressing climate challenges, this article turns to Arendt’s political theory. Her critique of liberalism and the demise of politics helps elucidate the current domination of economically oriented approaches to climate change, which further aggravate humanity’s destructive relationship with nature. Through a reading of Arendt’s account of political action, I propose a two-pronged role for business schools addressing issues related to climate change. The first involves reflecting on the role of business in the commonly shared world and its embeddedness in a natural environment. Such reflection takes a certain humbleness about the role and position of business as well as an engagement with inter- and cross-disciplinary education aimed to acknowledge and interact with other actors in the common world. The second prong entails a commitment to fostering political

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moments, an objective enabled by the capacities of critical thinking and political action inherent in potentially all human beings. In this way business schools can encourage reflection on the role of business in the common world and on how neoliberalism intensifies humanity's devastating impact on nature, while also connecting critical thinking to action in the common world.

Introduction

Concentrations of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere are growing, ice caps are melting, and the climate is changing. Members of the scientific community increasingly agree on the course these developments will take and the role humans have played in causing them (IPCC, 2018). Responses to this scientific consensus and the related questions of sustainability widely vary. At one extreme, Trump has given climate denialism a powerful voice, while at the other, climate activism is steadily gaining momentum, giving rise to international popular movements such as Fridays For Future and Extinction Rebellion. This polarisation is occurring against the backdrop of political institutions' increasing focus on climate change,¹ especially since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 (United Nations, n.d.). The business world, too, has sought to address climate change: mounting numbers of businesses are adopting SDGs in their business strategies (Pedersen, 2018), social enterprises abound (Bersin, 2018), and the World Economic Forum (WEF) has argued in favour of more responsible forms of capitalism (Schwab, 2019). This drive on the part of business is also reflected at business schools, where sustainability is becoming a common topic covered in courses and through initiatives such as the UN Principles of

¹ Throughout the paper, I use the term climate change to designate the unusual changes in the environment in a broad sense and the questions and challenges stemming from this. Hence, I acknowledge that climate change is but one aspect of a changing environmental system with various boundaries (Steffen et al., 2015), interconnections and reinforcing tendencies. At the same time, climate change is the aspect that is obtaining more attention than some of the other factors, perhaps because changes in the climate are somewhat easier to perceive, despite the separation between cause and effect in terms of both space and time (Naustdalslid, 2011).

Responsible Management Education task force (PRME) (Hoffman, 2018; Hughes et al., 2018).

However, the UN (2020: 2) reports that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 'we were not on track to meet the Goals by 2030'. This resonates with the World Resource Institute's conclusion (2020: 6) that 'commitments and action by countries, cities, and companies, as well as levels of climate finance, still fall woefully short of the ambition necessary to meet the Paris Agreement's goals'. This indicates that efforts to counter climate change so far have been ineffective, and that the problem has yet to be approached from a sufficiently critical perspective. Hughes et al. (2018) suggest that these shortfalls may partly stem from the way business schools seem shackled to neoclassical and neoliberal paradigms that discourage critical approaches to sustainability. Increasingly run like corporations, business schools also find themselves preoccupied with capital flows and the sale of intangible goods (Beverungen et al., 2008; Butler et al., 2017) and thus neglect the necessary critical perspective on current challenges. These issues urgently need to be rectified, for on the present trajectory, in just seven years, humankind will have blown its carbon budget for keeping global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius.²

A more critical approach to these challenges compels certain questions about what role business should play in addressing them and how business schools can foster the necessary critical thinking about a sustainable future. To better understand how business and non-business actors should respond to the climate change conundrum, I turn to Hannah Arendt's political theory. Although organisation studies have seldom engaged with Arendt's work in the past (Bloom, 2019), her ideas are gaining prominence in organisational contexts. Bloom (*ibid.*), like Johnsen et al. (2018), engages with Arendt's distinction between labour, work and action to inform our understanding of organisational politics. Her thinking has also helped to address a wide range of other organisation studies topics, including freedom

² As of the beginning of 2021. Mercator Research Institute for Global Commons and Climate Change: <https://www.mcc-berlin.net/en/research/co2-budget.html>.

(Van Diest and Dankbaar, 2008), dignity (Ingman, 2017) and social movement organisation through online media (Gao, 2018).

Arendt's concepts of reflection, judgment and critical thinking have been discussed in the light of totalitarianism (Burø and De Cock, 2022) as well as storytelling and subjectivity in organisational contexts (Jørgensen, 2020). For Arendt, reflection, judgment and critical thinking enable action with an awareness of the future, which thereby paves the way for political action (Vino, 1996). This close connection she draws between critical thinking and action gives renewed hope that critical thinking at business schools can make a practical difference, while it enables an engagement in the radical politics needed to meet current challenges.

In this paper, I engage with Arendt's thinking to understand business schools' role in addressing climate change. To this end, I interpret the current debate and its shortcomings through a reading of Arendt's analysis regarding the dominance of liberal values and the alienation spawned by the economy's invasion of the public sphere. Arendt's sharp distinction between the political and the economic urges us scholars to rethink where business is positioned in the climate change debate. Such a reading further enables a reflection on the role of business schools – the very institutions educating the business actors that will one day act in the common world. This role should revolve around humbleness, reflection and the fostering of political moments where they arise.

The article is structured as follows. In the following section, I outline the various responses to climate change currently observed. I then turn to Arendt's political theory and her critique of liberalism, emphasising in particular the social sphere's invasion of the public sphere and the dominance of a private notion of freedom. Arendt considers these developments to have caused the demise of political action, which is the only activity able to counter human alienation from the world. Next, I connect Arendt's critique to contemporary neoliberalism and the way this political project dominates the debate around climate change. Having situated Arendt's thinking in current times, I then explore her proposed solution to countering world alienation by conceptualising an Arendtian

approach to climate change and the role of business and business schools within this approach.

Responses to climate change

Although scientific consensus about the human influence on climate change has essentially been reached and public awareness of the issue is growing, the topic remains controversial. On the one hand, transnational social movements like Extinction Rebellion in the UK and Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg's Fridays For Future movement have drawn attention to climate change and related issues. On the other hand, fuelled by certain think tanks, scientific arenas and economic actors, climate denialism has been on the rise since the 2000s (Dunlap and McCright, 2011). By now, a substantial body of literature exists on how political and ideological polarisation (Smith and Mayer, 2019) and socio-political variables more generally (Poortinga et al., 2019) influence climate change perceptions.

This polarisation is occurring against the backdrop of an increasing institutional attention to the issue. Attempts at international collaboration have intensified since the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 15) was held in Copenhagen in 2009 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015 (United Nations, n.d.). The European Union has responded to the 2030 Agenda with a 'European Green Deal', which aims to implement the SDGs and make Europe 'the first climate-neutral continent by 2050' (European Commission, 2019), as well as with a detailed plan for a circular economy (European Commission, 2020). On the national level, more than 300 policies supporting sustainable production and consumption have been implemented in more than 70 countries (United Nations, 2019).

All of these approaches emphasise the private sector as an important agent of change. The 2030 Agenda largely relies on collaboration with a multitude of stakeholders, including large companies, whose revenues outstrip the GDP of some countries. Providing considerable economic rewards, the agenda presents not a burden but 'a gift to business' (Pedersen, 2018: 23). The EU envisions new forms of 'networked governance' that go beyond

central authority to bring government and market actors together (European Environment Agency, 2017: 88). At the same time, more and more companies are accounting for social and environmental sustainability in their strategy and business practices, considering ‘corporate sustainability ... the precondition for doing business’ (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002: 130). The rising number of social enterprises means that the amount of companies with aim to play active societal or political roles is also growing (Bersin, 2018). This was clear even at the WEF in 2020, where the private sector considered itself a key player in the transition to a sustainable future and, in some cases, assumed an activist role (Wu, 2020). The CEO of the WEF, Klaus Schwab, published a manifesto calling for a more responsible form of capitalism (Schwab, 2019), while the forum also included more classical forms of civic activism, for example, Greta Thunberg’s entrance on the stage (The New York Times, 2020).

Thus, businesses are clearly moving away from Friedman’s (1970: 17) idea that ‘the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits’. Hoffman (2018: 34) stresses that both regulatory and market pressures have now made sustainability ‘a strategic concern driven by market forces’ – a development acknowledged by CEOs and business students alike. Indeed, the number of courses dedicated to social and environmental issues are rising, and over 600 business schools worldwide have committed to sustainability, signing a variety of agreements and conventions, the most notable of which is the UN international task force PRME (Principles of Responsible Management Education) (Hughes et al., 2018).

However, the actual efficacy of this corporate turn to climate change is dubious. Speaking at the UN Climate Summit in 2019, Greta Thunberg pointed out the manifest inadequacy of actions thus far and their continued reliance on economic growth and largely non-existent technologies (The Guardian, 2019). A look at companies’ generally superficial engagement with the SDGs exposes the fundamental weakness of corporate responses, whereby for all intents and purposes the SDGs become no more than a mere communication tool (Mhlanga et al., 2018). More broadly, businesses engaging with climate and sustainability matters tend to revert to a business-as-usual approach, therefore effecting only limited change (Wright

and Nyberg, 2017). The same goes for business schools. Although greater efforts are being made to introduce sustainability in business education, they fail to include a broader vision. Predominantly governed by neoclassical economics and neoliberalism, business education is struggling to undertake the major paradigm shift, needed to address sustainability (Hughes et al., 2018), and the prevailing neoliberal principles of governance forestall any more reflective or critical approaches to business education (Beverungen et al., 2009).

As such, economic actors and political institutions appear unable to take the necessary actions to critically address the current challenges, while business schools are failing to facilitate the necessary critical thinking. To shed new light on the role of the business school, I turn to Arendt's political theory, applying it to interpret the debate around climate change and the roles of various actors in it. Following Arendt in this context allows for reflection on the position and task of business schools in facilitating the critical thinking needed to confront the current challenges.

Arendt's analysis of the demise of politics

Aiming 'to think what we are doing', Arendt (1998/1958: 5) analyses how liberalism and the domination of the economy have degraded politics. This domination is the product of a fundamental confusion about the human condition on Earth and the three main human activities of which this condition consists – labour, work and action – as well as of liberalism's focus on private interests and its private notion of freedom.

It should be noted that Arendt's engagement with liberalism is ambiguous. On the one hand, terms like individual rights, freedom, the constitution and pluralism, often associated with liberalism, have an important place in her thinking (Gines, 2009).³ Like liberals, Arendt connects universal human rights with citizenship, and similarly rejects the traditional conception of human rights that appeals to national, religious or even ethnic community values (Wellmer, 1999). Arendt also echoes various liberals' concerns about

³ In 2017, Kathryn T. Gines changed her name to Kathryn Sophia Belle.

excessive individualism or the loss of civic virtue (Hiruta, 2019). However, her concern regarding the worldlessness of the superfluous masses and the demise of the public sphere that these concerns raise lead her to oppose liberal theory and politics (Villa, 1999).

One should consider her opposition with care, for she does not always do justice to the richness and nuance of the liberal tradition. She states, for example, that liberal notions ‘express the bourgeoisie’s instinctive distrust of and its innate hostility to public affairs’ (Arendt, 1973/1951: 146). With her selective reading of economic liberalism, Arendt seems to equate liberalism with the bourgeoisie, thereby overlooking the internal conflicts within liberalism and inhibiting an in-depth engagement with the liberal tradition as such. According to Villa (1999: 199), ‘she is at her weakest and most spare in her readings of liberal theorists’. Nevertheless, Arendt’s arguments concerning liberalism exemplify how she re-articulates ideas against the Western philosophical tradition, showing the continued relevance of her challenge to contemporary political thought (Wellmer, 1999). With this relevance in mind, I discuss Arendt’s main arguments against liberalism as well as her conception of politics.

Private interests and the social invading the political

Arendt (1998/1958) centres her critique of liberalism on two points. First, she maintains that the social invades the political because liberalism emphasises private interests. She traces this invasion back to John Locke, who theorised society as founded on private property as the product of one’s labour. This foundation implies a prioritisation of the private above the common, thus leading the worldly, collective character of property to be discounted. This development also sparked the glorification of labour, which Adam Smith and Karl Marx later intensified by considering labour as the source of wealth and of productivity, respectively. Arendt, however, identifies labour as the activity connected to biological cycles and necessary to sustain life. Directly connected to consumption, it is ‘the most natural

and least worldly of man's activities' (*ibid.*: 101).⁴ Still, as political economists like Smith and Marx glorified labour and its division increased, the sphere of labour ceased to be the household, rendering labour a public activity involving human interdependence instead. As a result, wealth could be freely appropriated, and self-interest became a central element of the public realm. With the once private economic matters of the household becoming public, the boundary between the private and public dissolved, and both became subsumed in what Arendt (*ibid.*: 47) considers the 'constantly growing social realm'. The invasion of this social realm into the public realm rendered political action impossible.

In a related development, economics became a science with statistics as its main tool. Considering humans as conforming beings that follow certain behavioural patterns, economics came to emphasise patterns and rules rather than exceptions or deviations. This thinking was also reflected in how the bureaucracy replaced the individual ability to act within the political agora and reduced politics to large-scale household administration. According to Arendt, these developments are connected to the escape of another human activity from its original sphere – work. Work is originally an activity in the realm of use products, that is, the objects that give human life durability. However, the strengthened focus on labour made work a mode of labouring and use products mere consumption products. Because the categories characteristic of work – means, ends and utility – do not apply to labour and necessities, means and ends became indistinguishable as work transformed into labour. It has become unclear 'whether men live and consume in order to have strength to labor or whether they labor in order to have the means of consumption' (*ibid.*: 145). This is still considered the case in contemporary society, whose intricate connection between work and consumption serves to drive capital accumulation (Chertkovskaya and Loacker, 2016). This not only obscures the realities of labour relations

⁴ In her writings, Arendt speaks of *man* and *men*. This can be explained by the fact that 'Arendt for the most part evaded the woman question, steadfastly refused to identify herself with the women's liberation movement, and relegated any discussion of women and their position in the *vita activa* to the footnotes of her monumental work, *The Human Condition*' (Allen, 1999: 98).

(Reddy, 2016), but also has far-reaching consequences for politics. According to Arendt (1998/1958), work has come to dominate the political realm of action, and this fixation on productivity and progress has made politics a mere means to an end and a simple matter of administration and bureaucracy.

Liberalism and its private notion of freedom

The liberal conception of freedom further intensified the decay of action, speech and politics that followed from the dominance of labour and work. Arendt considers liberals hostile to government, which is merely intended for 'the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all' (Smith, quoted in Arendt, 1998/1958: 220). As such, a private notion of freedom, which is incompatible with politics, became central, in which freedom stems from inner willpower and is located in the private subject, and is thus identified with security and activities outside the political realm. Liberal politics is concerned with 'the maintenance of life and the safeguarding of its interests' (Arendt, 2006/1961: 155).

Arendt (1990/1963: 29) considers such a negative notion an instance of 'liberty', as distinguished from freedom. The latter should be understood in a positive sense as 'the political way of life' (*ibid.*: 33), enabled by the *polis*, a form of political organisation that brings humans that were born unequal together and makes them equal 'by virtue of its [nomos]' (*ibid.*: 30). However, Hiruta (2019: 39) notes that a strict dichotomy between liberty and freedom in Arendt's thinking would be reductive. Although primarily understanding freedom as positive, Arendt *also* acknowledges the importance of certain negative aspects of freedom, namely the necessary absence of certain non-freedoms in the public sphere. Nonetheless, she rejects a merely negative approach to freedom, which, she argues, causes the demise of politics.

The demise of politics

As Arendt diagnoses the problem, the positive dimension of freedom disappeared from philosophical tradition after the *polis* of the ancient

Greeks. Labour and work escaped their original spheres, and action lost its importance. This loss is dangerous because action is the only activity grounded in the plurality of people, in their simultaneous equality and distinction. Speech and action make up the human activity *par excellence*, since ‘a life without speech and without action ... is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men’ (Arendt, 1998/1958: 176). When action deteriorates, a political community becomes harder to form, although such community is, for Arendt, the only way to counter violence, domination and, ultimately, totalitarianism (Kalyvas, 2008).

Action was confined because its relation to beginning anew and taking initiative makes it risky. Action gives human life meaning, but in acting, agents disclose themselves by speaking about the world they share with other agents. In speaking about this world, people connect with one another in a ‘web of human relationships’ (Arendt, 1998/1958: 183), which exists by virtue of the wills and intentions of the plurality of people. Through this web, every agent is always necessarily related to other agents, who are in turn able to act themselves. Every action thus necessarily elicits a reaction, which is a new action in itself. This relatedness of agents implies that action is unbounded, uncontrollable, and unpredictable. Putting instrumentality at the centre of political thought is an attempt to avoid the riskiness of action in plurality.

This attempt has failed, however. Arendt (*ibid.*: 231) argues that, instead of acting in plurality, humans started to ‘act into nature’ by altering and conditioning natural processes. This argument relates to the unmitigated human capacity to obliterate non-human objects as well as to how natural science experiments transformed nature into a ‘process’ in which ‘all particular natural things derived their significance and meaning solely from their functions in the over-all process’ (*ibid.*: 296). While the modern sciences enabled humans to know more about their surroundings as well as to have greater control over them, scientists’ conduct shifted from being grounded in their ‘love for the earth and the world’ (*ibid.*: 264) to revolve increasingly around mathematical expressions of sense data and experiments that positioned scientists outside of natural processes. As such,

the role of natural language diminished, and nature became increasingly subjected to the structures of the human mind. Arendt (*ibid.*: 262) describes how these scientific developments have led to ‘both despair and triumph’, as scientific progress has come with a form of nihilism that has alienated humans and robbed them of their sense of being at home in the world.

Political action and the world

Arendt thus draws a connection between human alienation from the world and the demise of politics. In her view, the only way to counter this alienation is by reviving the ‘experience of politics’ of the Greek *polis*, which emphasises the ‘phenomenality of political action’ and the public world as a space of appearances (Villa, 1996: 135). Political action is grounded in plurality, which is ‘specifically *the* condition of all political life’, according to Arendt (1998/1958: 7). A form of equality is established between people who come together in speech acts, in turn constituting the political. Kateb (1984: 15) emphasises that this is not equality as an ‘equality of condition’ but as ‘a condition that makes men equal’. All humans have a potential talent for a political life and the possibility to know others and be known by them, both of which constitute equality in the political.

This shared potential, then, focusses on the shared interests arising from that which is between humans, that which ‘*inter-est*’ (Arendt, 1998/1958: 182). This common world is made up of the human artifice that humans create through work and the plurality of innumerable, irreducible perspectives and opinions of humans inhabiting the world. Arendt thus clearly distinguishes the world from nature with ‘a form of nature–culture dualism’ (Ott, 2009: 2): Labour concerns nature and has no place in the world; work and action do have a place, albeit with different functions. Work creates the world; action ‘illuminates’ it (Villa, 1996: 164).

For Arendt, political action can never be a means of attaining a desired state of this world, for such a predefined goal would undermine plurality. Once a goal is agreed upon, Arendt considers the rest of the debate to be necessarily non-political, a question of administration and management, which pertains to the realm of work. The value of political action lies in the activity itself,

the moment in which it is able to ‘gather [people] together, to relate and to separate them’ (Arendt, 1998/1958: 53). Hence, political action cannot be evaluated on the basis of morals or motives. It is infused by what Villa (1992: 276) calls ‘disinterestedness’, which enables humans to rise above the mere pursuit of interests.

Given that for Arendt politics cannot be based on certain interests, a specific end state of the world or a set of moral obligations, her account is a radical critique of the domination of economic and private interests in the public sphere as well as of institutionalised politics. According to her, the latter has transformed politics into ‘a profession and a career’ defined ‘according to standards and criteria which are themselves profoundly unpolitical’ (Arendt, 1990/1963: 277). Although Arendt’s political theory has been criticised for being elitist, utopian and too detached from other societal spheres (see for example Canovan, 1978; Wolin, 1983), Arendt’s (1998/1958: 9) emphasis on ‘natality’ urges one to consider the importance of new beginnings and responses to events. For Arendt the ‘most fundamental threat to democratic politics’ is ‘the loss of responsiveness to events: the erosion of the contexts in which action makes sense’ (Markell, 2010: 79). This makes Arendt’s framework of political action especially relevant to ‘extraordinary politics’, as distinguished from the ‘normal politics’ related to managing the national household (Canovan, 1978: 21). A public space is created, and a political community arises, when a small group of people care about public matters and courageously take action. Although replacing the existing institutions of normal politics and social administration with such action is unlikely or even undesirable, an important political potential lies in allowing for the new and unexpected – especially in light of the unprecedented challenges posed by climate change.

To understand the current relevance of Arendt’s critique, in the following section I trace its tenets – the centrality of private, economic interest in the public sphere and the private notion of freedom – in current neoliberalism.

Arendt's critique in light of contemporary neoliberalism

Neoliberalism should be approached with the same caution as Arendt's reading of liberalism, as it risks becoming an 'overblown notion' unless carefully described (Dean, 2014: 150). As such, I will focus on neoliberalism not in terms of its 'multiple and mutating forms' (Callison and Manfredi, 2020: 2) and empirical realities, but of its standing as a political project and an art of government, which is more pertinent in the context here. This focus enables me to consider how the underlying ideas of neoliberalism can be subjected to the critiques Arendt raises against liberalism. As a political project and an art of government, neoliberalism fundamentally aims to model political power on market principles. Like liberalism, neoliberalism conceives of the market as the 'site of truth' (Foucault, 2008: 30) or the 'information processor more powerful than any human brain' (Mirowski, 2013: 62). Unlike liberalism, however, it emphasises the role government plays in facilitating the market by actively constructing society and the market as well as the conditions for competition. Neoliberalism thus shifts from a labour and exchange model to entrepreneurship and competition. According to Foucault (2008: 147), society is transformed into 'an enterprise society' ordered by the market and mechanisms of competition, which makes the individual a *homo oeconomicus* and an entrepreneur of the self.

The centrality of private, economic interest in the public sphere

The neoliberal and the liberal understandings of private property and the position of labour differ substantially as neoliberals do not base the state's intervention in society and the market on the idea of labour as the foundation of private property. Instead, acting as entrepreneurs of the self, individuals in the enterprise society compete on the market as a means of both sustaining and defining their lives. Private property also takes on new meaning in neoliberalism. Departing from the classical liberal notion of property rights as a necessary protection from the state, neoliberals believe that (intellectual) property rights can be 'reengineered and changed to achieve specific political objectives' (Mirowski, 2013: 68). Thus, insofar as these political objectives centre on promoting the market, property rights are a means to such promotion.

Despite the aforementioned contrasts, Arendt's fundamental problem with liberalism still holds: The increasingly public manifestation of an economic mode of sustaining life – whether in the form of labour or entrepreneurship – allows wealth creation to go unchecked, and private, economic interests to generally dominate the public sphere. Because neoliberalism exports the model of the entrepreneur of the self to other societal spheres, the economic mode of sustaining and defining one's life pervades society. According to Brown (2019), this phenomenon can be directly observed in the political sphere. Being hostile to sovereignty and political power, leading neoliberals such as Hayek and Friedman emphasise the market and individual freedom, but this emphasis reduces the political sphere to one ruled by economic principles alone. Brown (2015) argues furthermore that neoliberalism has led democratic citizenship to be replaced by investments in human capital of the self, while the political has been transformed into a realm of administration and management. Public life, on the other hand, has ceased to be the realm of politics, conflicts and deliberation about values or objectives to become a problem-solving and benchmarking domain. Rather than liberating the citizen from the state, politics and social concerns, neoliberalism 'integrates both state and citizenship into serving the economy and morally fuses hyperbolic self-reliance with readiness to be sacrificed' (*ibid.*: 212). As a result, inequality becomes a natural phenomenon necessary for progress (Mirowski, 2013), and neoliberalism a model that engenders rather than checks runaway wealth accumulation.

Private notion of freedom

Arendt's (1998/1958) second major problem with liberalism is its conception of freedom as being private and negative instead of based on a plurality of people aiming for a common objective. However, while Arendt criticises the lack of positive freedom in liberalism, Vercelli (2016) notes that classical liberalism in fact includes an orientation to positive *and* negative freedom. For although classical liberalism stresses the absence of an authoritarian state that interferes with the individual's negative freedom, it also explicitly refers to autonomy, which is an aspect of the individual's positive freedom that the state can enhance. This focus on positive freedom, Vercelli argues, disappears in neoliberalism, which considers state interventions to impinge

on individual freedom. As Mirowski (2013) also underscores, neoliberalism aims to accommodate the market – a place in which individuals are considered fragmented selves, discontinuous collections of decisions and investments. This means that, in neoliberalism, political plurality can arguably be even less a basis for positive freedom than in liberalism. Neoliberalism is hostile to a political environment where citizens speak and deliberate with one another, instead viewing private interests as something to safeguard by facilitating and accommodating the market.

Neoliberalism can thus be said to prioritise private interests in the public sphere while relying on a private notion of freedom. This indicates that it decreases the possibility of political action to a similar, if not larger, extent than liberalism. The way climate change is addressed in the public sphere is a case in point. In the next section, I discuss how neoliberal approaches dominate the climate change debate and how this impedes approaches that would resonate with Arendt's idea of political action.

The neoliberal response to climate change

The neoliberal response to climate change reflects Arendt's description of how scientific developments have alienated humanity from the world. Mirowski (2013) identifies three steps in this response: science denialism, emissions trading and geoengineering. All three originate from neoliberal think tanks and academic units and, deployed in unison, constitute a completely market-based solution. The first, immediate step, Mirowski argues, is science denialism, which merely serves to deter wider responses to the perceived crisis as a means of buying time for commercial parties to offer up solutions in the second and third steps. The second step in the medium-long term is the instalment of carbon emission markets. These, Mirowski argues, are bound to fail because lobbying and financial innovation will ultimately neutralise the nominal caps put in place, thus leaving actual emission levels unaffected. By reinforcing oligopolistic power and steering investments from energy infrastructure innovation towards financial instruments, emission markets actually hamper the development of sustainable solutions. What is more, making carbon the universal unit of

measure neglects the complex relations existing in the environment, as well as implies technocracy and renders a democratic approach to the underlying structures of the problem difficult (Beck, 2010; Swyngedouw, 2011). Mirowski (2013) identifies a third, long-term step – geoengineering – based on the idea that entrepreneurs will address climate change through large-scale manipulations of the climate, such as weather modification, solar radiation management and CO₂ sequestration. However, geoengineering fails to deal with the root causes of the problems and reinforces the very market mechanisms likely to have caused the problems in the first place.

According to Mirowski, these three solutions combined hamper political action and leave the market as the only recourse to find solutions. Due to some ‘interim solutions’, people come to trust that the problem is being solved even when it is not (*ibid.*: 352). This reliance on the consensus that purely techno-managerial market solutions will resolve the crisis masks the underlying tensions between the plurality of voices that should be included in the debate. Consensual discourse that reduces environmental problems to CO₂ emission numbers, in turn portrayed as the enemy we need to fight, overlooks that these emissions are an integral part of the system rather than an excess of it (Kenis and Lievens, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2011, 2013).

This consensual, market-based approach focuses on questions of individual behaviour, thus rendering collective deliberation redundant and depoliticising the issue. This makes it difficult to question the underlying structures that have ultimately led to the human domination over nature and the unbridled build-up of greenhouse gases – which are at the heart of today’s climate change challenges (Hargis, 2016; Parr, 2014). According to Swyngedouw (2011: 77), this lack of fundamental questioning leads to a ‘post-political environmental consensus’ in which climate change is portrayed as a trajectory of opportunity and development with no internal tensions or conflicts. It also strengthens the hegemony of neoliberalism and promotes a form of what Mouffe (2005: 31–32) calls ‘win-win politics’ that neglects its conflictual dimension. Such forms of liberal environmentalism deny the trade-offs that ‘may be necessary among values of efficiency, economic growth, corporate freedom, and environmental protection’ (Bernstein, 2002: 14).

Hence, the neoliberal response to climate change is likely to exacerbate human alienation from the world as well as humanity's destructive impact on it. As such, the business sector is unlikely to be able to critically address the problem. To understand the resulting implications for the role of business and business education, in the next sections, I explore an Arendtian interpretation of climate change politics through which to counter such alienation. More specifically, I consider the configuration of the different societal spheres that Arendt's framework suggests, as well as the position and role that business and business schools can occupy within this.

Arendtian climate change politics and the role of business schools

Arendt's description of humans acting into nature and losing a sense of being in the world resonates with Latour's (2018: 13) call for us to acknowledge the climate problem by 'seeking a territory that we and our children can inhabit', stressing that we should 'look for a place to land'. However, a neoliberal approach to climate change yields 'solutions' that rely on assumptions of technological development and reduce human beings to politically passive, self-interest-pursuing beings. Business schools reflect this approach, addressing sustainability primarily through old paradigms. Such approaches reinforce the image of what Villa (1996: 201) calls the 'technologized "national household"' in which political action is neither possible nor necessary. However, the climate crisis might be just the crisis that Arendt would consider the supreme political moment in which previously unquestioned bonds of human interconnectedness are put at stake and threatened. If so, this crisis should be seen not as 'a synonym for disaster, but [as] the moment in which we are forced to become political beings' (Norberg, 2011: 132). Only by addressing the crisis politically and involving the plurality of people in the debate can we avoid falling for 'the obvious short-range advantages of tyranny, the advantages of stability, security, and productivity, [which] pave the way to an inevitable loss of power, even though the actual disaster may occur in a relatively distant future' (Arendt, 1998/1958: 222).

To see the climate change debate through the lens of Arendt's political theory, one must be aware of the various societal spheres and how they occupy the public sphere. Arendt's analysis stresses how a particular configuration of human activities burdens the natural world and helps us understand, how we have come to live on what Tsing et al. (2017) call 'a damaged planet'. As these activities continue to constitute the human condition on this planet, we can change our relationship to nature if we find a better configuration (Ott, 2009). Considered in light of Arendt's distinct conception of politics and her critique of the social sphere as well as institutional politics, responses to climate change that originate in businesses or high-level political organisations are non-political and therefore potentially exacerbate both humans' alienation from nature and their devastating impact on it. For Arendt, a political approach to climate change would emphasise plurality and the human capacity to act politically and to perceive, connect to and participate in the world that is shared with others.

Where, then, does this strict and narrow conception of politics leave business and business schools? In Arendt's framework, the latter play a crucial role in the work that constitutes the human artifice and the material conditions of the world, in which we act politically. Although Arendt's distinction between the economy – or the social – and the political seems sharp, Villa emphasises that for Arendt:

Action concerns the world originally disclosed through work, the "subjective in-between" of words and deeds not taking leave of the world, but "overlying" it. This confirms the suggestion ... that the relation between action and work, or what we would call the political and the social, is somewhat more permeable than it first appears. (1996: 165)

Hence, the economy organises the world in which we act politically, and although this economic organisation is not political in itself, a better configuration of human activities depends on greater political action as well as a more modest role for labour and work.

Accordingly, economic institutions' presence in the public sphere, and the (lacking) political character of the institutions designing climate policies,

should be the subject of critical political discussions. The role of business in the transition to sustainability in the common world should also be addressed with the organisation of the economy in mind. In this, the economy should be recognised as the sphere, not where freedom can be attained and identities formed through work and consumption, but where labour and work provide the stable basis for the common world in ways that respects the other spheres of human and natural life. In the context of the climate change debate, this has two implications for the configuration of human activities and the role of business. First, political action should supersede labour and work, which implies a more modest role for business. Second, work and economic organising impact how the common world is configured, which makes it important to understand and reflect on these impacts. As such, business schools' role should revolve around reflection, humbleness, and the fostering of political moments where possible, all of which I discuss in the next section.

Reflection, humbleness and fostering political moments at business schools

A critical approach to climate change and sustainability at business schools concerns the common world, which is partly made up of decisions taken by business. This implies that business schools have a two-pronged role involving reflection and humbleness, on the one hand, and the fostering of political moments on the other. With regard to the first prong, business education must therefore enable this reflection on how business impacts the common world, an objective that can be achieved through courses that engage with the economic system as such and question how business is organised and organises the common world. This aim resonates with Holt's (2020: 585) call for business schools to embrace conscience, which is 'that aspect of an action that recalls and critically examines itself in relation to the self-understanding of those experiencing the action'. Through courses that critically engage with the economic system and the role of business in creating the common world, business schools might 'stimulate wonder, curiosity and openness to inquiry for its own sake rather than on instrumental "in order to ..." grounds' (*ibid.*: 586).

The attainability of such change is exemplified in the recent, ‘immensely popular’ course on the re-examination of capitalism at Harvard Business School (Hoffman, 2018: 38) and the rise of business education initiatives such as PRME. The latter shows that students can be stimulated in various ways to engage in questions about business’ place in the common world and relation to a natural environment. Underlying these initiatives is the aim to integrate economic, social, and natural systems in business teaching, through inter- and cross-disciplinary education. Given the ‘wicked problem’ that climate change constitutes (Lehtonen et al., 2019: 339), any single discipline is unlikely to provide the needed ‘solutions’ and different disciplines will have to interact and exchange knowledge.

The human artifice is constructed through many forms of work, and many considerations must come into play for the debate to be political and the plurality of voices to be heard. Business schools should therefore maintain a certain humbleness when it comes to their role in addressing climate change. They should acknowledge that the economy only makes up *a part* of the common world and be humble about their role in shaping it. This requires them to acknowledge uncertainty as distinguished from risk, as Knight (2006/1921) proposes. Whereas risk entails measurable distributions of possible outcomes, uncertainty is unmeasurable and unquantifiable. These so-called ‘unknown unknowns’ (Jasanoff, 2021: 851) become apparent when one deals with climate change, especially when considering the unpredictable course of events after so-called ‘tipping points’ (Steffen et al., 2015). Such radical uncertainty resonates with Arendt’s emphasis on natality and the unboundedness and unpredictability of the actions that co-constitute the common world. Thus, climate change should not be approached as a management problem of calculable risk and clear-cut solutions, but as an inherently complex and uncertain phenomenon, the responses to which require new reflections and initiatives.

This proposed humbleness also involves learning from and understanding other actors in the common world. Business schools should consider different forms of work, including those more difficult to relate to a business context, such as artisanal forms of work, interest organisations and NGOs. According to Lehtonen et al. (2019), teaching methods that include arts,

dialogues and reflection are needed to create the learning spaces and encounters in which pathways to a sustainable future can be imagined and constructed. Such inclusion of different actors and methods would reflect Arendt's (1998/1958: 222) emphasis on equal political participation and the need to resist the temptation of 'the obvious short-range advantages of tyranny'.

The second prong of business schools' role entails fostering political moments where they might arise. Although Arendt's demanding and narrow conception of politics seems to render activities in institutional politics and the economy non-political, her focus on action, on every human's capacity to *act* politically, implies a potential that can be found and cultivated throughout the common world. Arendt's account of political action opens up for an attentiveness to political moments, for the spirit of civic engagement existing at all levels of society and for critical thinking inherently connected to action.

Accordingly, efforts around sustainable development – such as the SDGs, activists at WEF, or sustainability discussions in a business course – might not automatically be political in an Arendtian sense. However, they do carry a political potential in that they concern and affect the common world. Moreover, they might lead to instances of political action elsewhere, inspiring actors to come together and discuss the world's future in a space of equality and at a distance from direct economic or private interests. In other words, as long as efforts regarding climate change are not readily adopted mainly for economic purposes, but engaged with critically by a wide variety of political actors, such efforts will engender a sphere conducive to discussing concerns about the world and climate change.

The business school also holds this political potential. Business students are not merely future business leaders, nor are business schools merely intended to teach the principles of business. The students are *also* actors with the capacity to act politically, and business schools are *also* the institutions with the capacity to educate students broadly for a life in the common world. Indeed, anything students learn about the common world can mobilise their political capacity. Arendt's distinction between the political and the social

might seem sharp, but her action-based understanding of politics makes it difficult to pin down exactly where and how politics takes place. This difficulty makes it more important to foster the political potential inherent in all human beings and to continuously strive to enable this ideal conception of politics.

Business schools thus have the potential to transcend neoclassical approaches as well as the standard economics and statistics education they offer, each of which Arendt would consider a catalyst for world alienation. In fact, business schools can and should play an important role in the response to climate change. To the extent that climate change results from human activities needed to provide the goods and services that sustain human life and make up the common world – what Arendt would call labour and work – climate change is an economic problem that should be addressed as such. This requires reflecting on and critically engaging with how business impacts the common world, while also remaining both humble about the position and role of business and open to political moments. To this end, business schools need to move away from the prevailing ‘extreme neoliberalism’, which fails to sufficiently acknowledge students’ reflective and critical capacities (Beverungen et al., 2009: 266). Although complicated and demanding, only such a radical move can meet the magnitude of and uncertainty surrounding climate challenges, which ‘call for a different response, one more attuned to the purposes than the results of inquiry’ (Jasanoff, 2021: 851). A shift from means-end thinking towards reflection may help to critically reconfigure the human activities comprising the human condition.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed the growing attention that climate change is gaining in institutional politics and the business world at large. As businesses start widely embracing the turn to climate change, business schools are increasingly addressing sustainability-related topics in their educations. However, the difficulties in meeting the defined climate goals indicate that the current responses to climate change are insufficient. To

shed new light on the role of business and business education in addressing climate change, I have turned to Arendt's political theory. Her critique of liberalism and the demise of politics can be applied to neoliberalism and its domination of the climate change debate. The non-political 'solutions' currently proposed neglect the plurality of human beings inhabiting the common world and hamper political action. Hence, rather than 'solving' climate change, these approaches are more likely to further alienate people from the common world that binds and situates them in nature. The only way to counter this alienation and humanity's devastating effect on nature is to reconfigure human activities.

Such a reconfiguration would expand the space for political action at the expense of labour and work, implying a more modest role for business. It would also spur a need to understand and reflect on how economic organising – or work in Arendt's framework – impacts the configuration of the common world. This is where business schools come in. Their approach should have two prongs, one involving reflection and humbleness, and the other a commitment to fostering political moments. Business schools should enable reflection on the role business and the economy play in the commonly shared world, and on their embeddedness in a natural environment. Such reflection takes a certain humbleness as to the role and position of business, as well as an engagement in inter- and cross-disciplinary education aimed to acknowledge and interact with other actors in the common world.

Business schools should also foster political moments. Arendt's theory emphasises the potential capacities of critical thinking and political action inherent in *all* human beings. Thus, although Arendt's strict and demanding concept of politics seems to dismiss the realm of work and business schools as politically irrelevant, every business student has a political potential that can be sparked. Events in political or economic institutions may seem non-political, but they do affect the common world or even lead to instances of political action, bringing political equals together to discuss issues regarding the common world. Through the reading of Arendt's theory employed here, business schools get the important role of promoting reflection on the place and role of business in the common world, which in turn enables a critical

understanding of how neoliberalism is intensifying humanity's devastating environmental impact and the associated ramifications. At the same time, by addressing various actors in the common world and acknowledging the need for political action, business schools can play an important role in bridging critical thinking with action. Arendt's political theory thus connects the two, thereby renewing the hope that critical thinking at business schools can make a practical difference.

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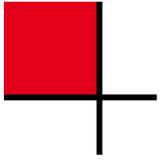
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Don't shut down the business school: Re-locate it

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abstract

Critical Management Studies, and the business school within which it has flourished, is in crisis. Again. Instead of shutting down the business school, as Martin Parker has proposed, this paper argues for *re-locating* the business school, meaning that location (as in jurisdiction) should be central to the school's identity, mission and understanding of the world. The paper describes how business schools, as promoters of globalization and internationalization, have worked to stigmatize the local in teaching and inquiry. Two case studies on the Celtic Tiger and corporate manslaughter illustrate the argument. If business schools and universities are to celebrate the local, then they should actively *de-internationalize*, unwinding some of the embedded practices of internationalization. Business schools should also work to *re-integrate* themselves back into the university, forging stronger links with disciplines that have traditionally eschewed the pursuit of generalized theory, such as history, law, classical studies and engineering. This also means abandoning the ABS Guide as a way of assessing research output and instead investing time in designing and installing a local, university-wide research assessment scheme. Finally, re-locating the business school means *re-imagining* the school's curriculum, approach to research, understanding of critique, and how it imagines and engages with its own *polis*.

Introduction

This Special Issue's call for papers reprises critical management studies' (CMS) ongoing concern about its perceived inability to change the status quo or to improve the world in any meaningful way. That concern is manifest elsewhere, such as in Parker's (2018a, 2018b) radical suggestion that the business school (b-school) should be shut down and bulldozed¹. Parker is sincere and I, for one, would not be disappointed if his wish was fulfilled, but he is probably well aware that this is unlikely to occur and smacks of 'biting the hand that feeds' as one of my colleagues opined upon reading his *Guardian* article. The b-school is an institution, and, by definition, institutions do not come and go by the week. Indeed, if the b-school is to be shut down, it is probably more likely to occur as part of a collapse and reconfiguration of higher education, rather than because of any internal criticisms. COVID-19 may be much more potent than CMS in inspiring a re-imagining of the university and its constituent entities.

Parker's discontent speaks to the frustration of many critical scholars. What should the 'critters' – a term suggestive of an unpleasant but harmless animal – do? Piss inside the tent, piss outside the tent, or just take the piss?

Instead of advocating that b-schools be shut down, a more pragmatic view is that they should be *re-located*, by which I mean they need to be re-positioned so that location is central to their identity, mission and understanding of the world. Tellingly, Parker begins his book with a two-page description of an imaginary b-school, one that we instantly recognise because most of us work in a simulacrum of his depiction. In my own school,

¹ Parker is just one in a long line of people who have criticised the b-school. Notable contributions to this large literature include the following: Pfeffer and Fong (2002) found little evidence that management education had a positive effect upon career success (or managerial performance); Bennis and O'Toole (2005) argued that b-schools are too focused on 'scientific' research, are hiring faculty with limited real-world experience, and are graduating students ill-equipped for management; Grey (2004), taking a critical perspective, argued that management education should explicitly acknowledge the political, ethical, and philosophical nature of management practice; Davies and Starkey (2020) provide a recent review of contributions to the debate.

part of our mission is that we should 'look and feel' like a top-50 b-school², while when I was employed in another Irish university, the criticism, inside and outside the university, was that the 'commerce faculty' did not look like a b-school. This scuppered its chances of getting accreditation, with the consequence of not being able to attract top quality staff and, more importantly, overseas students willing to pay high tuition fees. The b-school has become a place with no sense of local place, a generic, aspatial entity, much like Starbucks is the same, whether it is in Singapore, San Francisco or Sligo: 'It could be the office for any knowledge company on any office park near any somewhere' (Parker, 2018a: 1). The strategic imperative for the b-school is that it *not* be local, because, quite simply, the local is bad.

In the next section, I discuss the concept of the local, how universities have traditionally identified with a local context, how the local has come to be stigmatized within the discourse of higher education and the b-school's role in that process. Two short cases then illustrate the issue. The first shows how the local was ignored by Irish management academics who rarely, if ever, analysed the Celtic Tiger, the financial crash of 2008, or its aftermath, even though Ireland was a unique laboratory for social and economic experiments. The second case documents the absence of management academics from the conversation around corporate manslaughter, which I attribute to the demands that they construct general theory rather than intervene in local jurisdictions. I then outline what needs to be done to address and reverse this stigmatization of the local and the consequences for the b-school and its academics.

Stigmatizing the local

The local (or the proximate) is a relative term that might refer to a part of a body, a village community, a city-state, a nation or indeed any social space. Understandings of what is and is not local are invariably ambiguous, elastic,

² A 'top-50 b-school' is usually understood as being in the top 50 in the Financial Times ranking of business schools (Financial Times, 2021). However, the term is nebulous, not least because there are many ranking schemes with different methodologies.

fluid and contested, as are the meaning of related terms such as locale, location, hinterland, area, near, far, proximate, distal, catchment, etc., each of which takes on a particular meaning depending on context. That context is concretized once 'local' is used as an adjective, as in a 'local university', which is our concern in this paper. Most importantly, the 'local' emphasizes a university's physical location in a particular *jurisdiction*, which accords with the long tradition of identifying universities with a place and also with the reality that each university operates in a geographic territory governed by a legal authority.

The local is a socially produced phenomenon and is therefore normatively employed in thinking, action and structures of power (Soja, 1989; Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2006, 2009; Beyes and Steyaert, 2011). Thus, the local might be variously seen as something to be celebrated, denigrated, ignored or re-defined. In recent decades, the local has tended to be depicted negatively in a range of discourses that have impacted universities and b-schools in particular. The discourses interweave, but the local tends to be denigrated in internationalization, globalization, Americanization, Englishization, virtualization, and universalism.

Universities have always identified with a particular location and, since the eighteenth century, with a particular nation-state. However, in recent decades they have increasingly sought to re-define themselves as *international* in character and purpose, partly as a consequence of the wider economic, political and social forces of globalization and neoliberalism (Altbach and Knight, 2007; de Wit, 2020). The expansion of capitalism, the liberalization of markets, the removal of cross-border trade barriers, the growth of multi-national corporations, and the development of new technologies of transport and communication have all radically changed universities and the global academic market. Universities have responded to reductions in state funding through a suite of activities, including branch campuses, cross-border collaborative arrangements, courses for international students, new English-medium programmes, as well as targeting students from distant places who typically pay higher fees than local students. Becoming more international is now a ubiquitous feature in almost every university's strategic plan. For instance, the words 'global' and

'world' appear 6 and 5 times respectively in my university's vision statement of just 252 words (University College Dublin, 2015). Of course, internationalizing higher education has many appealing aspects: It enables students to see the world from new vantage points, to think differently about their own traditions and prejudices, to see themselves and their cultures in new ways, and to prepare for a global labour market. The danger is, when the difference that defines the very notion of culture is subordinated to the desire to create a standardized, one-size-fits-all culture. The concept of one's own culture and the consequent idea of multiculturalism requires distinctive cultures typically centred on geographic locations and nation states. Internationalization goes too far when any sense of the local is disparaged and when the desire to attract overseas students drives indigenous people out of the classroom. And there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that many programmes in leading b-schools have very few domestic students.

B-schools have played a particular and not insignificant role in this project of internationalization. Partly, this is due to scale, as, globally, at least 13,000 institutions now offer business degrees (Peters et al., 2018b). Partly, it is because b-schools have centred their research on private firms, which slowly became the dominant organizing template and model for universities (Rhodes, 2017). If private firms were able to expand operations outside of their original location, why could universities, which for centuries had been strictly associated with a particular place, not do the same? Moreover, management academics, teaching globalization and international business, provided a ready supply of cases, constructs and frames to help internationalize the university (Ahmed and Rao, 2011).

B-schools have also spearheaded the belittling of the local by modelling themselves on an idealized image of US business schools (Jamil, 2015). To that end, b-schools typically present themselves as international in outlook and constitution and see themselves as competing in an international market. In that framing, the local is not only of limited value but is a drag on the overall strategy. This is reinforced by accreditation bodies that require an international dimension in the b-school's governance, culture and

strategy (see for example EFMD, 2020) and by metrics that rate, for instance, the percentage of international faculty in the school.

One important feature of internationalization is the adoption of English as the normal language of communication (Altbach, 2007; Piller and Cho, 2013; Boussebaa and Brown, 2016; Frath, 2017). Again, b-schools have played a significant role in this phenomenon. For instance, the highest number of Master's programmes with English as the medium of instruction, in non-English speaking countries, is in business and economics subjects (28%) (Hultgren et al., 2015: 3). In addition, the various ranking lists used in b-schools, are dominated by US-based journals and almost all are published only in English. Surprisingly, little has been written about this phenomenon in English, even by critical management scholars (Boussebaa et al., 2014; Boussebaa and Tienari, 2021), though it has been addressed in other languages (Barbier, 2016; Frath, 2017).

Seeing the global as good and the local as bad (or at least not as good) is exemplified in the way b-schools place particular value on multi-national corporations (MNCs), rather than local indigenous businesses. For instance, my own school's strategy, in 2015, included these targets:

- Be the largest recruitment base for the top 10 ICT companies, top 10 financial institutions, the big 4 accounting firms
- Double the number of graduates working with EuroStoxx 50 companies
- Double the number of graduates working with the top 10 London investment banks
- 90% of faculty are international or internationally-trained

More broadly, many multinational companies pay relatively small amounts of taxes compared to local businesses and local labour, fuelling the notion that tax is for the 'little people'. Unlike local companies, MNCs can avoid paying taxes because they are domiciled nowhere, or 'any somewhere', as Parker might put it. The label 'multinational corporations' (MNC) does not properly describe these entities; rather, they are 'no fixed abode corporations' (NFACs). NFACs are hard if not impossible to tax because they

are unlocatable, which is incompatible with tax systems based on taxable entities being domiciled in a particular, identifiable location.

As well as these macro-level drivers, b-schools have embraced a particular location-less epistemology and paradigm of inquiry. That paradigm is commonly called positivism, which is an umbrella term encompassing mathematical modelling, functionalism, as well as quantitative and hypothetico-deductive approaches to inquiry. Since the late 1950s, b-schools have adopted this positivist paradigm with enthusiasm. The problems with the paradigm are well-known, but what I wish to emphasize is how location is eviscerated in this epistemology that privileges making mathematical models of the world. Of course, location can be included in a mathematical model – such as in an engineering model of a particular river system – but the type of models that have dominated management studies since the early 1960s are usually *location-less*, in that they either exclude location from the model's dataset and/or use the model to justify and promote a general theory that is devoid of location specifics or limits.

Not everyone bought into the shift to positivism that began in US b-schools during the 1950s and 1960s, and it is no surprise that an alternative paradigm of inquiry also emerged around that time. Sometimes labelled as interpretivist, qualitative, or phenomenological, it is invariably defined by its opposition to positivism. There are major differences between interpretivism and positivism, but the former, in its particular manifestation in b-schools, has also worked to eviscerate location. Interpretivism harbours many variants, but in b-schools it typically involves detailed study of a particular manifestation of a phenomenon, and then, through induction, it seeks to identify and name general theoretical constructs and propositions. The approach is certainly different – mathematical models are conspicuously absent – but the search for and belief in general (i.e., location-less) theory still animates most interpretivist research in b-schools. The pity is that interpretivism has been ingested into b-schools mainly as a methodology without much upset to the dominant epistemology. In contrast, other disciplines like history and anthropology, and professional fields like law and engineering, do not exhibit the same fetish for location-less theory.

Critical management studies has, from the get-go, been hostile to the b-school's commitment to managerialism, and has highlighted the political and ethical dimensions of management techniques, theories and pedagogy. It shares many of the same intellectual roots as interpretivism, though it focuses on *power* and inequalities rather than interpretivism's primary concern with *meaning*. Notwithstanding this change in focus, location still does not figure centrally, as the talk is about management, generally, and workers, generally, and systems of regulation, generally. Thus, Parker, an inspirational figure in the CMS community, speaks of shutting down *the* business school, generally, rather than, say, Warwick Business School³. Even in the CMS manifestation, the drive to theorize, to develop general, location-less (or alocal) theory is evident.

Evident, but not hegemonic. *ephemera*, in particular, has given space to location, with two special issues on Latin America (issue 3 in 2006 and issue 1 in 2020) that seek to counter organization studies' obvious Eurocentrism. But that Eurocentrism is perhaps confirmed by the fact that the ten articles in the 2006 special issue received a total of only 43 citations, none of which was in an ABS-ranked journal⁴. Another CMS journal, *Organization*, also had a special issue on Latin America in 2006 (Volume 13, issue 4) and the six articles in that issue have a much higher citation rate (a total of 741 citations) with many citations in ABS-ranked journals. However, focusing on citation rates is perhaps part of the problem, as it at once hides and facilitates the construction, operation and maintenance of echo chambers, both small and large. A group of fifty academics citing one another a lot – a collective version of self-citation, perhaps – might advance egos and careers, but might make little difference otherwise. Moreover, most of the articles in the three special issues still engage with location at a highly aggregated level that glosses over major differences between jurisdictions. For instance, 'Latin America' refers to a group of 20 countries, 14 dependent territories and 640 million people. Similarly, the special issue in *Organization* emerged

³ The University of Bristol does not have a conventional b-school, which is perhaps why Parker moved there.

⁴ An ABS-ranked journal is one that features in the ranked list of journals produced by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (Anonymous, 2021).

out of discussions within APROS – Asia-Pacific Researchers in Organization Studies – where the ‘A’ in APROS refers to Australia (25 million people), Asia (4.6 billion people in 55 countries) and the Americas (1 billion people in 35 countries). This is not to dismiss such high-level, geo-political analysis, and some of the ideas will surely percolate into what management academics teach, but it is still difficult to see how writing ‘critical’ articles in management journals will make a ‘practical difference’, as this call for papers puts it.

Two illustrative cases

This section presents two cases that illustrate what happens when we fetishize the creation of location-less, general theory.

The invisible Celtic Tiger

The Irish economy grew at a rapid and unprecedented rate between the mid-1990s and 2008, with much international attention and commentary on what was known as the ‘Celtic Tiger’. That growth was halted abruptly in 2008, when the property bubble burst, leading to a financial collapse, bank bailouts and years of austerity. Ireland, during the Celtic Tiger and post-Tiger periods, presented a unique setting to inquire into management and organizational practices in a society and economy that was moving from pre-modernism to post-modernism, experimenting with de-regulated financial services, working through new forms of social partnership, and subsequently becoming a social and economic laboratory for austerity. What, one wonders, had Irish management academics to say about these unprecedented phenomena?

To answer this question, I reviewed all of the papers presented at Irish Academy of Management conferences between 2004 and 2012, an interval spanning the Celtic Tiger and post-crash periods. A total of 1405 papers were presented in the nine conferences, with most papers being presented by Irish management academics. Full papers were located from the conference organizers for all years, except 2007 and 2010 when only the titles were available. My analysis focused on identifying those papers that

were primarily concerned with issues clearly associated with the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath. Full details on the study are available elsewhere (Kavanagh, 2013) but, in summary, virtually none of the papers presented research into either phenomena. The overwhelming sense from the analysis is that Irish management academics, including myself, were indifferent to the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath, at least in their research.

One could come up with different explanations for this. For instance, perhaps the management academics saw the Celtic Tiger as properly the domain of the economists and felt they lacked the necessary analytical techniques. Perhaps, but I feel it was more to do with the difficulty in producing context-less theory – a primary requirement of management scholarship – through studying the Celtic Tiger. Even if few Irish management academics might see themselves as positivists, the values of the academic habitus are the values of positivism. History does not matter very much, nor does geography, nor national culture, nor particular legal jurisdictions (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004). For most management academics, local situated studies have low value, other than as case studies of some more general phenomenon. Treating the local as *sui generis* means accepting that the narrative and analysis have narrow spatial and temporal boundaries – an explanation of the Irish economy in 2007 is unlikely to explain the French economy in 2010 – and such local studies are not valued by most management scholars. Moreover, the timeline between doing management research and getting it published – usually at least a number of years – means that academics will not risk undertaking research, where the analysis is unlikely to endure over space or time. Academics learn this as part of their research training: A PhD typically takes at least four years to complete and so PhD students are attracted to research topics where the contribution will be fresh and widely recognised in four or more years' time. As a result, 'critical' research is either not done at all or else is abstracted from the particular to such an extent that it becomes vague and meaningless. Or, as Judith Butler said in the quote prefacing the call for papers:

Critique is always a critique of some instituted practice, discourse, episteme, institution, and it loses its character the moment in which it is abstracted

from its operation and made to stand alone as a purely generalizable practice. (2001: 212, original emphasis)

This is not to say that we cannot generalize, as we surely do this all of the time. The issue is to avoid *over*-generalizing, on the one hand, and being mired in particularisms on the other (Morin, 2020). To effect this we need to impose and recognise appropriate limits on generalizing, or, as Butler puts it, we should develop a practice of 'constrained generality' (*ibid.*).

The case of corporate manslaughter

Corporate manslaughter is defined as an act of homicide committed by a company or an organization. Since 2008, it is a criminal offence in English law, as a result of the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act (2007) that was introduced to the House of Commons after a series of tragic events in which management failure, either directly or indirectly, caused multiple deaths, but for which there was no clear legal process for redress. The first significant event occurred in 1987 when the *Herald of Free Enterprise* capsized, resulting in the loss of 193 lives. The Director of Public Prosecutions brought charges against the ferry company and seven employees, but the trial judge held that the various acts of negligence could not be attributed to any individual who was a 'controlling mind' (McColgan, 1994). A year later, 35 people died when three trains collided in Clapham. In this case, the British Rail Board admitted liability, but, while compensation was paid, nobody was prosecuted for manslaughter (Hidden, 1989). In 1993, the owner of an activity centre was convicted for gross negligence manslaughter and jailed for three years after four teenagers drowned in the Lyme Bay kayaking tragedy. This case indicated that it was easier to convict where the company was relatively small and the 'controlling mind' could be easily identified (Dunford and Ridley, 1996). In 2003, an appeal court in Scotland rejected a charge of 'culpable homicide' brought against a gas pipeline firm, Transco, after four people died in Larkhall, though the company was fined £15m for breaches of the Health and Safety at Work Act (Shiels, 2004). In 2005, senior managers in Network Rail and Balfour Beatty were cleared of charges arising from the Hatfield rail crash in which four people died, though again both companies were fined for breaching health and safety regulations (Milner, 2005; Tait, 2005). Collectively, these cases

exposed a gap in the legislation that the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Bill (2007) sought to fill. The Irish parliament published a similar bill in 2016.

The topic of corporate manslaughter and corporate crime has been discussed extensively in the legal studies literature, at least as far back as the 1960s when the legal scholar, Alfred Conard, examined the economics of injury reparation (Conard et al., 1964). Perhaps the most influential contribution was the 74-page manuscript on corporate punishment by another legal scholar, John Coffee (1981), written not long after the Ford Motor company was unsuccessfully prosecuted for manslaughter for allegedly failing to correct known defects in the design of its Pinto car. In April 2021, Coffee's paper had 1128 citations in Google Scholar (the vast majority in law publications) and 305 in the Web of Science, but of the latter, only seven are in what would be considered the management and organization studies (MOS) literature. Another notable contribution was by Clarkson (1996) and again most of the 131 citations to his paper are in the law literature. Significantly, the five citations to his paper in the MOS literature are all authored by Jeroen Veldman. The absence of any discussion in the MOS literature about corporate manslaughter is also clear from a search of the ABI/Inform database, which found no scholarly articles written by management academics on the topic before 2008, when the UK Act came into force.

Why might this be? Why does MOS have so little engagement with the legal dimensions of organizations? The critical management studies journal, *Organization*, has been around since 1994, so there was, one would think, a ready outlet for contributions. The notion that the corporation has the capacity to murder was well-known, not least because of Joel Bakan's book, *The corporation*, in which he likened the corporation to a psychopath (Bakan, 2004). Why, then, did MOS have little or nothing to say about corporate manslaughter, at a time when legal scholars, practitioners and legislators were heavily involved in changing the law, so that corporations could be held to account?

Perhaps the most straightforward explanation is that management academics have collectively accepted and agreed that changing the law is not their responsibility and that it should be left to lawmakers and those with a deeper and specialist knowledge of the law. The Companies Act (2006) is the longest Act in British Parliamentary history—with 1,300 sections covering nearly 700 pages—and analysing or contributing to its formulation is beyond the expertise of management scholars, whose contributions must necessarily be more indirect. How many of us have read such statutes? Instead, the argument might go, the role of management scholars is to set the agenda, and then it would be up to other fields, law in particular, to handle the technical implementation. However, the corporate manslaughter case indicates that this explanation is unsatisfactory. What the case clearly shows is that management scholars were *not* involved in the conversation about corporate manslaughter, either directly or indirectly, and were in no way part of either setting the agenda or articulating necessary legislative changes. For me, and hopefully for you, a more compelling explanation is that most management academics are besotted with constructing general theory rather than making practical interventions. Even within the CMS community, the extensive discussion on ‘critical performativity’ is largely an abstract debate about the *idea* of performativity rather than substantive engagement with practitioners (Prasad et al., 2016; Butler et al., 2018)⁵. Practical interventions must routinely be focused on a particular location at a particular point in time, which problematizes any attempt at generalization. For instance, to properly address the issue of corporate manslaughter and corporate homicide one must change legislation in *particular* jurisdictions, as it happened in the UK in 2007 and in Ireland in 2016.

⁵ There are, of course, exceptions, such as Parker and Parker’s (2017) ethnographic study which highlighted the difficulties in realizing critical performativity. There are also a few attempts to promote and support political engagement, such as *Organization’s* Acting Up section.

Re-locating the b-school

In 2004, Steffen Böhm and Sverre Spoelstra edited a special issue of *ephemera* (Volume 4, Issue 2) that addressed similar issues to this one. In their editorial piece, they wondered if CMS had achieved enough, asking:

Has the CMS project even come close to starting to have a real impact in the academy and wider spheres of society? Our answer is a clear No. (Böhm and Spoelstra, 2004: 98)

Sixteen years later, the editors of this special issue are even more downbeat:

If critical thinking once harboured the optimistic hope of making a practical difference, in the face of such a brutal reality it now risks being an inept moralising bystander grimacing at others' attitudes as the ship goes down. (Fleming et al., 2020)

There is clearly no easy or single solution to the problem. It seems to me that four alternatives are available. The first is to simply shrug one's shoulders, accepting that the world is imperfect and that, for better or worse, we should continue doing what we have been doing. It is not a perfect tent, but at least it is a tent. A second option is to walk out of the tent, which is perhaps the most honest course of action if one has concluded that the *status quo* is untenable and unlikely to change. A third option is to stay in the tent but to change one's pursuits and priorities, such as ignoring the pressure to produce academic publications and instead to engage much more directly with practice, drawing perhaps on action research methodologies. A final option is to stay in the tent, but to put one's effort into changing the systems that are perceived to ensnare CMS and MOS scholars. Not all of these options are mutually exclusive, and their relative merits will depend on one's individual situation and prospects; however, in this paper I will focus on the last option.

Any attempt to change institutionalized systems and practices will necessarily be long and will involve a series of struggles, none of which will be easy. In such a context, I am advocating that the guiding light should be to bring *location* back in. Here, I am not talking about the social production of space, in the Lefebvrian tradition (Lefebvre, 1991) followed and fostered

by people like Harvey (2006, 2009) and Soja (1989), but rather one that emphasizes location as a particular *jurisdiction*. We are overlooking something of significance if we talk about organization without bringing in the law – it is not for nothing that we speak of ‘law and order’ – or fail to recognise that law is rooted in particular locations, which is why we speak of the ‘law of *the land*’.

But reinserting location, and, more importantly, the local, into the lexicon of business academics will not be easy. To illustrate this, it is worth considering Jones and Munro’s (2005) comprehensive study of the organizational studies literature. They catalogued the literature into 40 different issues, ranging from ‘aesthetics’ to ‘violence’, but none related to either location or the law. If academics are not talking about the law of the land, then it is difficult to see how their talk will change these laws.

Overcoming prejudice against the local will be difficult, but not impossible. It should be considered an ideological adjustment requiring engagement and initiatives at different levels, from how higher education and research is funded to the design of individual programmes of study. I see the project of re-locating the b-school as having three primary elements; namely, *de-internationalizing*, *re-integrating*, and *re-imagining*, which I will now discuss.

De-internationalizing

So, what might de-internationalizing look like, and what role might CMS have in the process? First, there is much scope for CMS to engage with and provide a b-school perspective on the ‘critical internationalization studies’ literature. This literature probably emerged about a decade ago when Brandenburg and de Wit (2011) published a paper titled ‘The end of internationalization’ in which they critiqued the increasingly instrumental focus on internationalization in higher education. Subsequent contributions focused on how, by embracing a particular form of internationalization, ‘universities not only tacitly reproduce but also actively contribute to the reproduction of global inequality and harm’ (Stein, 2017: 14). A significant conversation on the topic has now emerged in the higher education policy literature (Knight, 2011, 2014; de Wit, 2015; Altbach and de Wit, 2017; Stein,

2017, 2019; Mok, 2018; Coelho et al., 2020). However, a citation search indicates that none of the key contributions to that conversation have been cited by papers in management education journals, such as *Management Learning*. This lacuna is surprising because b-schools have been a primary vehicle through which universities have sought to internationalize – for instance, almost all of the 4000 students in my university’s overseas operations are taking programmes run by the b-school – and because internationalization is often a foundation for their success. Thus, a practical step would be for CMS and management education scholars to engage with these debates by inquiring into issues such as: the dimensions of internationalization; forms of internationalization; the links between globalization, neoliberalism, and internationalization; b-school’s experience of internationalization; as well as the unintended consequences, dark sides, and ‘myths of internationalization’ (Knight, 2011). For instance, the rising tide of nationalism that runs through Brexit, Trump’s presidency, the growth of the Alt-Right, etc., can be at least partly seen as a backlash against unfettered globalisation and uncritical enthusiasm for internationalization. Nationalism, in its extreme form, is ugly, hateful and dangerous and should be suppressed. This means addressing the reasons why it has taken root, including more comprehensively analysing the complexities of globalization and, for b-schools and universities, their role in the process. Celebrating the local should not mean stigmatizing the global, and indeed it would be wrong to frame the issue around a binary choice between the two. And we should be ever-watchful for the fascism, hate and xenophobia that can emerge when the local becomes an obsession.

The conversation might also unpick the argument that the reduction of state funding and the liberalisation of higher education has turned education into a private good available to a global market. Universities are still deeply connected to the nation – often on a statutory basis – and have an important role in developing citizens, creating local knowledge, and educating a local workforce. Moreover, despite the reduction in direct state funding, much of university income can still be traced back to the state via research grants, state-supported student aid, etc. From this perspective, higher education is neither a commodity nor a private good, but instead is

best seen as a public good, which brings particular responsibilities to the state's citizens (Rhodes, 2017).

As well as having a broad debate within management and organization studies, the conversation should also have a local dimension, since this is where the rubber meets the road. For instance, b-school academics have particular expertise in setting out the financial risks of relying on students from far away for such a large proportion of the organization's income. The coronavirus crisis has made this risk all too real, but one can envisage a range of circumstances – from social unrest to politically inspired restrictions to pandemics – that make such a heavy reliance on overseas students unwise.

B-schools have a particular and legitimate interest in the policy and practice of internationalizing as they have excelled in generating income from overseas students. However, the University of Leicester's School of Business provides a salutary lesson on how this experience can play out. In the early part of this century, the School attracted a fully internationalized cohort of thousands of students, spread across study for all levels of award, with both on and off campus delivery, mitigating any potential downturn in any particular market. The School turned over tens of millions of pounds a year, with approximately 50% passed on to the central university. Under Gibson Burrell's leadership, the school also became an important hub for critical management studies. However, in January 2021 the university management informed 16 staff in the School of Business, including Professor Burrell, that they were at risk of redundancy and that the School would be 'divesting from research in Critical Management Studies and Political Economy' (ULSB16, n.d.) *Eaten bread is soon forgotten.*

De-internationalizing will involve unwinding some of the practices that incentivize the international at the expense of the local. For instance, as part of the Bologna process, the fee to attend a university in any EU country became the same for all EU citizens, regardless of their domicile or citizenship. In contrast, the US privileges in-state students by setting their tuition fee as typically less than half the fee imposed on out-of-state students (Anonymous, 2020). Introducing a three-tier system in the EU (in-

state fee, EU fee and non-EU fee) would at least recognise that universities are still part-funded by the state's taxpayers and have national as well as EU-wide responsibilities. Another approach would be to pressurize those who compile university ranking schemes to reduce the weighting given to factors that incentivize internationalization.

One can expect resistance to any suggestion that universities, and b-schools in particular, should de-internationalize. Even if the leaders in a particular b-school thought it the right thing to do, one can anticipate arguments that it would be impossible because of the requirements of accreditation. Yet, different lines of attack can be identified. For instance, the accreditation bodies themselves recognise – partly as a consequence of becoming more global – that b-schools should not all adopt the same model. In particular, AACSB accreditation provides scope for re-asserting the importance of the local because it focuses on the alignment between a b-school's practices and its articulated mission, rather than an idealized (American) model. One can also push the accreditation bodies to modify criteria that encourage the proliferation of American management ideas and practices that work to stigmatize the local.

Re-integrating

If de-internationalizing is primarily a university wide-project, re-integration is more about re-aligning or re-locating the b-school within the university's constellation of academic disciplines. This will mean forging stronger links with disciplines that are rooted in particular locations and those that have traditionally eschewed the pursuit of generalized theory. Perhaps the most obvious such discipline is law, but other disciplines include history, classical studies, Celtic studies, many disciplines in the humanities, and also engineering.

Re-embedding the b-school into the university (recognising that some b-schools are not part of a university) will not be easy. Currie et al. (2016) helpfully map out what they see as a range of forces, institutional and otherwise, that work to separate off the b-school from other academic units within the university. For instance, accreditation bodies require a b-school

to have reasonable autonomy in deciding its strategy, managing its budget and running its operations, which creates one barrier with other parts of the university. They also identify recent developments that push the other way. For instance, they put much store in the widespread perception that the complex problems of today require more interdisciplinary research, which should help lower the walls that separate the b-school from other disciplines. This may be the case, but my own sense is that b-school researchers typically play only a marginal, if not token, role in interdisciplinary research teams, which might explain why b-school academics have largely absented themselves from the wider conversation about how, why and when interdisciplinary research should be conducted and their own role and potential contribution to such endeavours. This is important because, despite routine exhortations, actually doing interdisciplinary research is far from easy, not least because the concept itself is very muddy. Advocates for, and experiments in, interdisciplinarity have been around since at least the 1950s (Sewell, 1989), but it is only in recent decades that the issue has been engaged with at a deeper level, with important distinctions emerging between disciplinary, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research (Rosenfield, 1992; Max-Neef, 2005; Kessel and Rosenfield, 2008; Schaltegger et al., 2013). In particular, transdisciplinary research, as originally formulated by Edgar Morin (1992), seems especially relevant to the complex problems confronting business and society. B-school academics have a good opportunity to frame and contribute to the wider conversation on interdisciplinary research as b-schools already draw on many disciplinary traditions. Indeed, there are some welcome indications that this is already happening, even if the dialogue is largely confined to management education (Gröschl and Gabaldon, 2018; Beckman and Schaltegger, 2020; Oliver et al., 2020).

Instead of hoping that interdisciplinary research will lower the b-school's walls, another approach is to try to dismantle the practices that have built the walls in the first place. In this category we must foreground academic evaluation systems and journal ranking schemes which have received much attention in the literature, as well as in the coffee shops and public houses

that academics frequent (Rowlinson et al., 2011; Mingers and Willmott, 2013; Tourish and Willmott, 2015; Buckley and Baur, 2020; Harley and Fleming, 2021). A common narrative is that neoliberalism has led to the marketization of higher education, which has had a pernicious effect on academia through a raft of metrics, journal ranking lists, league tables and the like. However, my sense is that academics, especially those in UK universities, have spent too much time complaining about these various measurement schemes. Measurement schemes, either implicit or explicit, are bound to exist as the basis for decision-making. Even in the late eighteenth century, German ministers of state were employing bureaucratic and market-based practices to reshape the working lives of academics in German universities (Clark, 2006). Hence, rather than complaining about the ABS list, it would be more productive for CMS scholars to get involved in designing and implementing alternative systems. And, if we want to re-integrate the b-school with the rest of the university, such a system should be university-wide or state-wide. Many such systems exist, such as the Bibliometric Research Indicator (BFI) in Denmark, the JUFO Publication Forum in Finland, the Current Research Information System (CRISTIN) in Norway, the AERES list in France, the ANVUR list in Italy, the Flemish Academic Bibliographic Database (VABB-SHW), and the Scholarly Publishers Indicators (SPI) in Spain.

My own university operates a university-wide, output-based research support scheme based around a ranked publication list that uses indicators from registers maintained by ministries in Norway and Denmark, a federation of learned societies in Finland, SNIP (Source Normalised Impact Factor per Paper), and CiteScore. The scheme has a number of advantages over better-known rankings, such as the ABS list. First, it recognises a much wider range of research outputs – including journal articles, books, book chapters, conference papers, and reports – than the ABS list, which only recognises journals. Second, the list includes a wide variety of publication outlets with very different understandings of epistemology and methodology. The current list has almost 55,000 entries for journals/book series/ conferences with about 20% ranked as ‘prestigious’. It also includes a large number of outlets that use languages other than English. Third, the

publication list is university-wide and so faculty are not penalized for publishing in 'non-business' journals or for collaborating with colleagues outside of the b-school. Fourth, the scheme works to counter the bias in alternative ranking schemes that use either Scopus or the Web of Science as their data source and which are consequently biased towards STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines. In particular, the scheme provides an opportunity for disciplines to make the case that particular publication outlets can be considered 'prestigious' even though they may have a local focus. Fifth, the scheme recognises the fallacy of trying to rank journals into five divisions – which the ABS list seeks to do – by having only two publication levels, normal and prestigious. Sixth, the scheme enables alternative forms of granular measurement, by, for instance, adjusting the weighting based on the number of authors and their affiliation.

Notwithstanding the merits of such a scheme, the ABS list continues to be used in my b-school. The resistance has come, not from deans or university managers, but from faculty colleagues, who have argued that potential future employers (and peers) will use the ABS list to assess one's quality, rather than a list that is peculiar to the university. But one can only continue the struggle, as elements such as these in the administrative infrastructure are important in configuring collective and individual subjectivities.

Other approaches to re-integration centre on seeing the university as primarily a *community*. From this perspective, re-integration is an organizational issue on which b-school academics have a particular expertise and responsibility. Just as they played a not insignificant role in the corporatization of the university through proselytizing the language and practices of business, they can now help build a university as community by leveraging insights from decades studying organizations and organizing. In particular, the CMS community has much to offer on the back of its research into alternative and more democratic forms of organizing. Part of this would involve thinking through new (and old) ways of cultivating dissensus and dialogue as well as designing resilient and effective collective practices such as participatory budgeting and electing rather than appointing academics to senior positions (Fleming, 2020: 1309). Of course, these types of practices already exist to some degree; for instance, the highest-ranked Irish

university in international league tables, Trinity College Dublin, still elects rather than appoints its Provost and other senior academics (Trinity College Dublin, 2021). The point for the b-school is to embrace rather than turn its back on the university, articulating an idea of the university as a community rather than, ironically, a business.

Finally, it is hard to overstate how important it is to support one's local union – remembering that unions are almost invariably tied to particular jurisdictions – as it is only through collective action that local issues, such as the treatment of the academic precariat or the proposed redundancies at the University of Leicester, can be adequately addressed.

Re-imagining

This special issue is concerned with why critical thinking in the b-school has reached an impasse, what to do about this unfortunate situation, and how to re-imagine CMS. However, re-imagining CMS cannot be easily separated from re-imagining the role and purpose of b-schools, which, in turn, brings us into wider debates about re-imagining universities as teaching and research institutions. Running through all of these debates are questions about the valorization of context-free, objective, universal knowledge. Nowotny puts it well:

If we are ready to accept the fact that the image of a universal, invariant and context-independent science is becoming irrelevant for all practical purposes and it is the specific context, in which knowledge is produced, taken up and transformed, which matters, we must strive to heighten context-sensitivity and to spread its awareness. (1999: 255)

If context-sensitivity means anything, it surely means that location matters and that the law operating in that location – the law of the land – matters. Hence, calls by critical scholars and others for ethical business, equality and justice are fine, but they will not amount to much if they explicitly or implicitly ignore the law of the land.

In thinking through how the b-school might be re-imagined, it is helpful to understand how and why the institution has taken its present form, as this

might give a sense of its longer-term trajectory. Here, Peters et al. (2018a) have usefully mapped the b-school's evolution across five generations, and, interestingly, their map is mainly framed around *location*. While the first generation is centred on vocations (the b-school as a 'trade school'), the second and third generations are focused on the US, the fourth on Western Europe and the fifth on emerging markets in Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa. Location and context continue to matter.

Location has always been – and should continue to be – central to the idea and identity of a university. The university is a place and a *polis*, a community entangled with its hinterland's history and geography. And for the university and the b-school, this should be reaffirmed and celebrated, even if this runs against the marketization logic that seeks to turn universities into placeless competitors. In practice, this means framing responsibility through the lens of proximity, which universities and b-schools can do by supporting local businesses, local communities, and local cultures. Some of this will require groundwork in terms of ensuring that administrative structures and decision-making processes give due value to the local.

Location can also provide a useful lens for thinking through some new forms of the b-school that might be emerging. Parker (2018a), for instance, wants to replace the b-school with a 'school of organising', which would consider many different ways humans arrange the world in order to get things done, without centring on the private firm or the capitalist economy. Ferlie et al. (2010) present a thoughtful argument for a 'public interest' model of the b-school, though they never define 'public' and so it ends up meaning everyone in the world. There is, in their template, no concept or celebration of a particular, local *polis*, presumably because they do not want to be labelled as relativists or parochial. Hence, they valorize objective (location-less) knowledge and 'a developing cumulative knowledge base rather than a series of unconnected short-term and local projects' (*ibid.*: S67). They also see 'the research intensive medical school as a comparator [for the public interest b-school] rather than the case based law school' (*ibid.*), but in doing so they gloss over the important distinction between a medical research team developing a coronavirus vaccine, which should work for everyone in

the world, and a legal scholar studying Irish constitutional law. Moreover, the concept of a prescription, which is meaningful in medicine, is less suited to the competitive world of business, where prescriptions are only effective if taken by some, but not all, actors. Contra to Ferlie et al., I would argue that the b-school should model itself on a law school, rather than a research-intensive medical school, as legal scholars can be directly and visibly involved in changing the law of the land and are not required to turn almost everything into a theoretical contribution. Not that there is anything terribly wrong with a theoretical, location-less idea. The trouble is when this becomes hegemonic, obliterating any claim that context is important.

Following Ferlie et al.'s (2010) paper, Cardiff Business School re-configured itself as the 'world's first Public Value Business School' (Kitchener and Delbridge, 2020; Cardiff Business School, 2021). Its mission statement is 'to make a positive impact in the communities of Wales and the world...[and] to help sustain our local and global economies' (Cardiff Business School, 2021), but this fudges the local-global issue since positively impacting Welsh communities might negatively impact other, non-Welsh communities. But fudging is perhaps inevitable once a b-school tries to articulate what it values and what it does not value. Should it, for instance, support a local homeless charity or a poverty alleviation programme in Ethiopia? Even if it tries to do both, centring the b-school on *values* does problematize the traditional academic tendency of not taking a normative stance and of being silent on moral issues (Anteby, 2013; Chung, 2016). The hope, then, is that the re-imagined business school will articulate and manifest its values and be willing to take a normative position on matters of concern. While there are clearly global issues of import, such as climate change, these should not crowd out local concerns.

This focus on the local can also help re-imagine our understanding of research and the education of researchers. The local, in research, should not just be the source of a convenient sample that the researcher uses to contribute to a theoretical conversation. Rather, research is better conceptualized as a dialectical process that articulates the *two-way* relationship between the local case and the generalized abstraction. It is not just a question of what the local can do for the theoretical, but also what the

theoretical can do for the local. This two-way relationship tends to get glossed over in the long time horizon of doctoral research and doctoral programmes that train students in how to be an academic and how to make theoretical (location-less) contributions. The result is a narrow understanding of research and, in particular, little emphasis on how research might impact public policy or changes in the law of the land. Addressing this means de-emphasizing the PhD and PhD supervision – especially in hiring and promotion metrics – and re-emphasizing research in undergraduate programmes and research masters. In particular, the research Master's should be celebrated as it enables timely inquiry into a contemporary, local issue of importance, without the pressure to produce general theory.

Valuing the local also frames what researchers consider worth studying (and not studying). The new dispensation should foster research into phenomena such as community supported agriculture (Watson, 2020), local food production systems, community-based enterprises (Hertel et al., 2019), as well as key concepts such as the local, community, collective agency, mutualism, and place. The research should have a clear policy dimension, emphasising actions that should be taken, especially changes to the law, rather than simply harping on about what is wrong with the world. And there is much scope to inquire into Parker's (2017: 418) assertion that 'a localized small business system is more resilient to economic shocks, as well as providing clear advantages in terms of environmentally friendly business practices and the reduction of inequality'.

Re-imagining also extends to how the b-school positions itself as a teaching institution. While I have much sympathy with Harney and Thomas' (2020) vision of a new form of undergraduate education centred on the liberal arts, I feel this is too narrow. Engineering, science, and medicine all have much to offer and we would be doing students a disservice by not recognizing this or by demonizing these disciplines. Students of business should not be overwhelmed by physics envy, but they do need to understand how physicists, physicians, engineers and lawyers engage with the world and the benefits and limits of these different perspectives. And they should also understand how different perspectives lead to different actions and interventions, which always have a political and ethical dimension.

The move to online learning that will almost certainly occur as a consequence of COVID-19 provides a unique opportunity to re-imagine what, who and how b-schools will teach in the future. Having explored the issue in our own institution, our sense is that the future will be a blended model of online learning complemented by intensive on-campus sessions, which is very suited to students living locally (where locally might be within 200 km of campus).

Re-imagining the b-school and university is a long-term project that should draw on our shared traditions and competencies in building a resilient vision of the future. That vision can only be realised through a combination of individual, institutional and systemic changes, similar to the catalogue of initiatives that helped transform Cardiff Business School into a public value business school (Kitchener and Delbridge, 2020: 314). A notable feature of that case was the commitment of senior faculty to the vision, which is a good example of senior faculty leading by setting a good example (Harley, 2019).

Concluding remarks

Does critique have a future in the b-school? Critique will always have a future, but CMS, as a distinct field within management and organization studies, might not. I say this because (i) CMS has tended to equate critique with fault-finding and is shy about making positive proposals for change; (ii) the term 'CMS' seems to imply that other management academics are unable or unwilling to engage in critical thinking, which comes across as arrogant; and (iii) critical writing on organizations is 'too often pretentious, obscurantist and dull' (Grey and Sinclair, 2006: 445). The cynic might add that CMS 'allows reasonably well paid professionals to feel just a little bit rakish and dangerous, as they simultaneously meet the demands of promotions committees, research evaluation exercises and fly the world to important meetings' (Parker, 2010: 297). The cynic would also probably see this special issue as just the latest output from a lucrative cottage industry that publishes writings about the travails and future of CMS.

Much of that writing is about how 'critical performativity' might work as a driveshaft linking CMS's intellectual engine with the muddy wheels of

practice (Spicer et al., 2016). In that discussion, I side with Fleming and Banerjee (2016) who dismiss the idea of CMS scholars getting managers to change their practices by interacting with them. Instead, they argue that CMS scholars should take action *locally*, within their business schools and universities. They also advocate a 'critical pedagogy' that presents 'both negative and positive cases in a mutually informative exchange between students and instructors' (*ibid.*:269). In this sense, critique is more akin to *appreciation* than fault-finding, where the management academic – not just those on team-CMS – take a role similar to a film critic, identifying and discussing what is bad *and* good in practice. The move, in short, is from performativity to *normativity* (Parker and Parker, 2017; Kavanagh and Cusack, 2020). Their third tack is to foster a 'public CMS' that engages in awareness-raising initiatives using, in particular, the broadcasting media. This makes much sense, though it is easier said than done, requiring a somewhat different skill-set and a clear sense of one's audience, one's *polis*.

One person who has done this is Chris Grey, who, after making excellent contributions to the CMS and MOS literatures, is now writing a highly regarded and influential blog on Brexit (Grey, 2021), which is perhaps a good model for the future of critique in the b-school. In his blog, Grey addresses and analyses a highly contextual, local issue that matters to him and other British citizens. Crucially, his blog is about changes to the law of the land in a particular jurisdiction; his country. It is a local issue, but one of historical importance. His blog is not an attempt to engage with managers or change managerial practices, and so is not a form of critical performativity. Nor does it seek to formulate a theoretical contribution or generalize (Brexit, of course, is a one-off). Nor is it trying, in the tradition of engaged scholarship (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006), to bridge a perceived gap between theory and practice. One might argue that Grey is dabbling in political journalism. But so what? The long years he has spent in various b-schools must have given him a deep understanding of how business and commerce works, while his research has surely enhanced his ability to critically analyse complex issues.

Perhaps the best strategy for critical scholars is to identify and engage with a few important *local* issues where their own research skills and disciplinary

knowledge can be leveraged. Such issues might be in the scholar's own institution or sector, or they might involve changes to the law of the land or shifts in public policy in a particular jurisdiction. After all, all politics is local.

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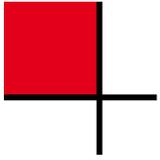
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In these critical times: Of monstrosity, catastrophe, and the future of critique

Daniel Nyberg and Christian De Cock

abstract

In this essay, we argue that the climate catastrophe is the Monstrous disruption that opens the instituted and textual reality to an outside—overflowing planetary boundaries—whilst de-centring human beings as the assumed masters of the universe. This contradictory relation—an external force other than humans, contingent on humans—constructs a situation ripe for nostalgic yearning for certainty and truth-tellers. Across the globe, this takes the form of the Sovereign, who domesticates climate change into a shared phantasm upholding human mastery and exceptionalism while denying others’ agencies and experiences. The alternative, we suggest, is to stare into the abyss opened up by the climate catastrophe and support an affirmative critique of responsibility towards the other. This compliments the common negative form of critique in organization studies, but also suggests the end of the business school.

Somehow, in the midst of ruins, we must maintain enough curiosity to notice the strange and wonderful as well as the terrible and terrifying. (Tsing et al., 2017: M3)

Introduction

Screens and newspapers are filled with apocalyptic images from across the globe depicting the catastrophic impacts of climate change: from wildfires to

floods and cyclones. Even so, the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere steadily increases, with the planet on track to reach global warming of at least 3 degrees Celsius by the end of the century (United Nations Environment Programme, 2019)—a state incompatible with organized human civilization on most continents (New et al., 2011). The academic field of organization studies has recognized the severe implications of climate change (see e.g., special issues in *Organization*, Wright et al., 2013; and *Organization Studies*, Wittneben et al., 2012), and there is growing critique of how mainstream management and organization theory incorporate climate change into corporate wealth creation and economic growth (Ergene et al., 2021; Kalonaityte, 2018). The mainstream employment of existing and dominant organizational theories to translate climate change into palatable and calculable futures is also evident in business school teachings of climate change, emphasizing ‘sustainability’, ‘risk’ and ‘resilience’ (Allen et al., 2019; Wright and Nyberg, 2016). This position projects humans as rational and in control of their destiny, with western capitalist democracies assigning corporations and entrepreneurs the task of addressing climate change.

In line with critical organization studies literature, we argue that this assertion of control avoids the unsettling aspects of climate change that challenge the anthropocentrism within organizational and management scholarship as well as within business schools more broadly (Allen et al., 2019; Ergene et al., 2021). Within business schools, the dangers of climate change are converted into business risks and opportunities supporting the continuation of compound economic growth and the depletion of natural resources (Nyberg and Wright, 2022). Using the Derridian (1976, 1978) trope of the monster, we aim to contribute to critical debates on the domestication of climate change by showing how particular representations of climate change inform climate actions (Campbell et al., 2019; De Cock et al., 2021).

We argue that the climate catastrophe is the Monstrous (capital M) disruption that opens up the instituted reality to an outside—overflowing planetary boundaries—whilst de-centring human beings as the assumed masters of the universe. This contradictory relation—an external force other than humans, contingent on humans—constructs a situation ripe for

nostalgic yearning for certainty and truth-tellers. With this, we also contribute to recent discussions on the re-emergence of authoritarian populism (Robinson and Bristow, 2020) by suggesting that it signals the return of the Sovereign (Derrida, 2005). Populations are turning to, or hiding behind, a Sovereign defending the phallogocentric instituted reality against the monster. In doing this, the climate Monster is translated into a phantasm, a monster (lower case) in the form of an external enemy upholding the social reality of a common human world. The alternative, we suggest, is to stare into the abyss opened up by the climate catastrophe and support an affirmative critique of responsibility towards the other. This compliments the common negative critique in organization studies, but also suggests the end of the business school.

The essay is structured as follows. We first engage with Derrida's early writings to argue that climate change can be seen as the Monster, breaking the linguistic structure that centres human agency and challenging human exceptionalism. We then show how two common responses to climate change—apocalypse and adaptation—are domestications that uphold the current western idea of progress for a common humanity. Third, we engage with Derrida's later writings to warn against hard sovereign power as a stabilizing factor. Finally, in the discussion, we outline an alternative route—affirmative critique—of responsibility by embracing the other.

Derrida and the climate Monster

Our engagement with Jacques Derrida takes as its point of departure a conference in Baltimore on the 20th of October 1966, where Derrida delivered the paper 'Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences'. He suggested there that language had replaced humans, who had replaced God, as the foundation in the trajectory of western metaphysics. The world was no longer anthropocentric—it was linguistic—and 'in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse' (Derrida, 1978: 354). In the talk, Derrida argued that there is no simple origin, no source or kernel, from which one can trace the meaning of a word or discourse.

This linguistic emphasis is conveyed through his (in)famous claim that ‘there is nothing outside of the text’ (Derrida, 1976: 158; ‘il n’y a pas de hors-texte’) because reality is always-already ‘inscribed in a determined textual system’ (Derrida, 1976: 160). Whilst this was often interpreted to mean something like ‘everything outside the actual text or texts we are considering is irrelevant and doesn’t really exist’ (Culler, 2007: 102), Derrida arguably meant quite the opposite: there is only text because you cannot get out of the text. He fundamentally put into question the idea that there is a mental picture, ideal or signified, that gives meaning to language, structures it, which can be found outside the system of language. Experience is always mediated and ‘the original’ is produced as an effect of signs and continuously supplemented.

Rather than finding an origin or centre, of interest is the motion between the structure of representation and its impossibility. There is an internal contradiction in the homogeneity of language that makes change possible. The homogeneity of constructing the structure of representation is dependent on the ‘close and patient tracing of construction’ (Wolfreys, 2007: 18). The tracing, or perhaps colouring in, can end outside the dotted lines, that is, be otherwise. The play of the structure is therefore, so to speak, within its own movement. It is not imposed from an ‘outside’. Considering that the linguistic system has no origin or centre, there is an infinite play of difference, an excess, in that the trace can transcend any particular context. Moreover, and for the same reason, this infinite play also means that the system has a lack; it cannot be closed.

At the end of the Baltimore presentation, in our reading, Derrida (1978: 370) can be seen to suggest the incompatibility of these two interpretations: i) the excess or abundance outside the structure that provides endless possibilities of play, and ii) the gap or lack filled with insecurity and ‘nostalgia for origins’ or ‘reassuring foundation’ that leads to endless substitutions of a centre. The structure cannot be totalized because of either the empirical infinity for the limited subject or the absence continuously filled in the present. This ‘irreducible difference’ is the future arrival of the ‘monstrosity’ (Derrida, 1978: 370). Derrida (1978: 370) invokes the trope of the monster in suggesting the future arrival of ‘the formless, mute, infant

and terrifying form of monstrosity' that will overcome the two interpretations of language without structure or centre, that is, the difference between the social abundance informing linguistic developments and the lack of a centre (continuously supplemented).

We argue that the climate catastrophe can productively be seen as the Monstrous 'arrivant' addressing the irreducible difference. This is a future that 'breaks absolutely with the constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, presented, as a sort of monstrosity' (Derrida, 1976: 5). With regard to Derrida's first interpretation, the climate catastrophe is the abundance, the outside, which simultaneously confirms and de-centres humans. It is becoming glaringly obvious that there was never a human mastery of the world.

Following the second interpretation, climate change grounds human exceptionalism by its human origin. Climate change has been a politically polarizing issue, becoming the identity supplement par excellence, with the position on climate change grounding human experience through links to, for example, voting and consumption patterns (McCright and Dunlap, 2011). It is an exceptionalism that, at the same time, breaks with the modernist human progress, while denying the consequences of the dominant modernist project of freedom and prosperity through forms of capitalism. The agency of humans to completely alter the planet without collective willingness to take responsibility for the consequences can, potentially, lead to a longing for authoritarian agency; that is, for someone else to deal with the Monster (of their own creation).

This Monstrous 'arrivant' is unpredictable and presents in the 'form of an absolute danger' (Derrida, 1976: 5), with which current modernist concepts and constructions cannot deal. Similar to the dangers of climate change, Derrida (1984: 23) elaborated on the concept of 'disaster' in the context of nuclear catastrophe, claiming that it is 'fabulously textual', because until it happens, it can only be imagined, and once it happens, it marks the end of human civilization. Derrida's (1984: 23) 'fable' ('something one can only talk about') was located in the socio-political reality of the 1980s, with the forces of destruction stockpiled and capitalized. Since nuclear catastrophe could

only be talked about, it produced a construction of the then present reality: the time was marked as ‘the nuclear age’ (Derrida, 1984: 21). The nuclear age, similar to the present era of climate change, was constructed through ‘fables about the future’ (Toadvine, 2018: 52), which suspend the present.

Rather than a Monstrous arrival, we argue that this textual interpretation of nuclear catastrophe as the imagined end of civilization is a phantasm for western capitalist democracies. The phantasm is the construction of an illusion of a common end, and hence a common world—the familiar claim that ‘we are in this together’. However, as Barad (2019) points out, nuclear catastrophes have already happened. Barad describes how the aftermath of sixty-seven US nuclear bomb ‘tests’ on the Marshall Islands between 1946 and 1958, with one bomb test 1000 times the size of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, was a catastrophe in the sense of an ‘end’. The break produced by radioactive colonialism left two-kilometre-wide craters, and a radioactive fallout resulting in higher rates of cancer and Marshallese women giving birth to ‘jellyfish’ and ‘grapes’, as they themselves described it (Barad, 2019: 526-527). Thus, the nuclear catastrophe has happened, several times. It just did not enter the western psyche as a reality since the effects were suffered by the other.

The disasters already experienced by marginalized human and non-human populations arguably prick the inflated phantasm of a common looming catastrophe. This is a phantasm upheld and shared in the pretence and projection of a common world (Toadvine, 2018). However, what the Marshallese experience tellingly suggests is that there is no common world, no one reality. Even so, by endlessly rehearsing nuclear war (and its aftermath) in films and books, there is a domestication of ‘an image of a postnuclear world that “stands in” for the actual failure of the imagination to be able to conceive of the end’ (Masco, 2013: 273), and these articulations of the world, through contemplating its violent end, have colonized the present. Perhaps, the popularity of apocalyptic fiction and films suggests that people in the western world are even ‘dreaming of it, desiring it’ (Derrida, 1984: 23).

Does the same process of ‘domestication’ not apply to the climate catastrophe too? Have people in the western world become inured to disasters because they are already frequently played out on screens? This creates a form of implicatory denial (Norgaard, 2011), where people glued to televisions and the internet witness the extreme hurricanes, flooding and droughts displacing thousands of people, recognize climate change as the culprit for these extreme weather events, and yet feel comfortable that they will somehow be able to adapt to these consequences, and therefore can disregard them again as soon as the visual spectacle on the screen is over. The climate Monster is textually institutionalized as a monster—a phantasm supporting the existing world order. The climate catastrophe is a spectacle that exists elsewhere, and even with the increased frequency of its consequences, these are not integrated into modernist grids of intelligibility; there is a lack of proper concepts to think ‘the catastrophe’, as it lies across the abyss that separates the Anthropos from the other and challenges the anthropocentric exceptionalism in current ways of thinking and being.

The domestication of climate change

The trope of the monster assists in explaining domestications of the climate catastrophe, which use dominant discursive frames around adaptation and apocalypse. Following the initial literal denial of climate change (Oreskes and Conway, 2010) and the implicatory denial of its effects (Norgaard, 2011), the current dominant responses are domesticated by folding climate change into dominant social imaginaries (Wright et al., 2013). Despite the ongoing and increasing impacts in the form of extreme weather events, record-breaking temperatures, and sea-level rise (IPCC, 2018), the climate catastrophe is continuously pushed into a known future; essentially an extension of the present with added ‘visions of innovation, sustainability, resilience, and adaptation, those increasingly greenwashed, green-tainted words, retrofitted to neoliberal policies’ (Nixon, 2018: 12). This colonization of the future by the dominant economic system of corporate capitalism, promoted by business schools, clings on to human-centred conceptualizations and constructions of climate change.

The discussions around ‘adaptation’ are symptomatic of this. Rather than developing new conceptualizations that are commensurate to the present environmental violence, societies are readying themselves for what lies in the future. This focus on adaptation and resilience, prevalent in contemporary discourses around climate change, then becomes a justification for or defence of the current dominant economic system. It is clever technological adaptation that will ensure the continuation of what is seen as a linear progressive development of the world (De Cock et al., 2021). For example, in their study of local adaptation in a community vulnerable to climate impacts in Australia, Bowden et al. (2019) show how the local community resisted any attempts towards adaptation until after the events. Following fierce opposition towards implementing measures to protect houses in vulnerable areas from flooding, the local council settled for future ‘trigger points’, when they would implement flooding polices. Nothing is to be done until the flooding has already happened; until the future has arrived.

Alternatively, and simultaneously, there is an embrace of the doomsday scenarios of the climate apocalypse with warnings of impending disasters ‘repeated ad nauseam by many scientists, activists, business leaders, and politicians’ (Swyngedouw, 2013: 9). This is articulated as nature’s payback for how humans have treated the planet; an ‘apocalypse without the promise of redemption’ that threatens all of humanity (Swyngedouw, 2010: 218). This reaction is what Miéville (2018: n.p.) called the ‘sheer arrogance of despair, the aggrandisement of thinking that one lives in the Worst Times’. Yet, this apocalyptic future is a continuously shifting finitude, forever delayed to the ‘not yet’. The coming apocalypse is the external (or Nature) that centres humans by offering certainty of what will come. The surrender to the coming apocalypse negates the climate change catastrophe by providing ‘truth’, since there is no apocalypse without truth: ‘Apocalypse means Revelation, of Truth, Un-veiling’ (Derrida, 1984: 24).

Povinelli et al. eloquently summarized these two positions which both forego agency in *the present*:

Rather we hear the soothing sounds of apocalypse or adaptation. The apocalyptic allows us to remain with(in) the comforting lullaby of finitude—death, death, death, immediate and decisive! And adaptation allows us to believe that we can continue on without change or major discomfort. Neither is true. Both are false. But both have a power in late liberalism that cannot be ignored. (2014: n.p.)

Within the social sciences this domestication of the climate catastrophe can be witnessed in the adoption of the term ‘Anthropocene’, which contrasts the human actor to other biological, meteorological, and geological actors (Povinelli, 2016). The Anthropocene clearly centres humans (anthro) as the culprit for ‘climate change’, which is usually followed by a debate about when it started and/or which particular form of human organization is to blame (see e.g., Haraway, 2015; Malm, 2016; Moore, 2015; Yusoff, 2016). The Anthropocene, which centres humans, becomes an outside or boundary to engage in the form of climate justice (Schlosberg and Collins, 2014) or the end of capitalism (Klein, 2014). On the other side of the spectrum, the Anthropocene becomes a call for re-centring humans through human ingenuity and, in a linear fashion, supporting geo-engineering to construct the ‘good’ Anthropocene of ecomodernists (Ellis, 2011). The answer is to reconfigure the Earth so as to avoid reconfiguring the economy (Nyberg and Wright, 2022).

The notion of Anthropocene can furthermore be seen as a way to sustain a distinction between humans and the non-human world. A geological epoch—the Anthropocene—supplements the centre from within and in the present. The term has an assuring connotation, suggesting humans are in control and that ‘we’ share a common destiny. However, there is a lack of responsibility and agency requiring an ‘other’: something or someone to deal with the monster. The monster is needed to ground conflicting experiences and provide a shared singular ‘truth’. The political solution is then the return to comforting narratives and the someone/something that can provide a solid ground once again. Tokarczuk (2019: 3), in her recent Nobel lecture, despaired at our ‘frequent attempts to harness rusty, anachronistic narratives that cannot fit the future to imaginaries of the future, no doubt on the assumption that an old something is better than a new nothing, or trying in this way to deal with the limitations of our own

horizons'. And of course, the 'truth' and certainty these narratives provide tend to come with particular forms of power in their wake.

A dark turn: The rise of sovereign power

The rise of right-wing or authoritarian populist parties and leaders—read Bolsonaro, Duterte, Orbán, Trump as a start, but the list goes on—is often attributed to 'economic anxiety' (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). The assumption is that the failure of neoliberal globalization of free markets and trade created economic losers that are not benefitting from this trend or lost their comparative status, and that this economic disadvantage is translated into support of populist parties. However, this does not explain why more people appear to be turning to exclusionary (generally right-wing association with nationalism) rather than inclusionary (generally left-wing focus on equality and strengthening political participation) forms of populism. If populism's basic logic is the separation of society into two antagonistic groups—the 'the people' vs. 'the elite'—and claim to respect the popular sovereignty of the people (Mudde, 2004; Ostiguy et al., 2021), why are people supporting the destruction of the democratic horizontal axis in favour of a strong vertical axis to a leader?

We are not suggesting a causal relation between climate change and authoritarianism or right-wing populism, but rather that climate change feeds into the failure of the established system of representation to effectively incorporate economic and social dislocation (Panizza and Stavrakakis, 2021). Populist actors offer political solutions to the experienced failure of economic progress and articulated threats to reified binaries and borders. McCarthy sums up how authoritarian populists address these dislocations:

[They] assert "blood and soil" claims of indissoluble links between the nation and the biological and physical environment; deploy resurgent tropes of territorialized bodies politic, contagion, and disease; exploit national natural resources to buy political support and underwrite their political agenda; attack environmental protections and activists to give extractive capital free reign; eliminate or attack environmental data and science in a "posttruth"

era; and are especially dysfunctional political responses to the security threats, fears, and divisions associated with climate change. (2019: 302)

The return of the Sovereign—an authoritarian leader that embodies the sovereignty of the people—on most continents can then be seen as a consequence of the uncertainty and the anxiety of social dislocation that characterize current times. For Derrida, sovereignty is the power to decide exceptions by giving itself the right to decide what is normal and what is exceptional:

...sovereignty, like the exception, like the decision, makes the law in excepting itself from the law, by suspending the norm and the right that it imposes, by its own force, at the very moment that it marks that suspense in the act of positing law or right. The positing or establishing of law or right are exceptional and are in themselves neither legal nor properly juridical. (2011: 82)

The law is here caught in the paradox of ‘using violence to guard against violence’ (Lucy, 2014: 149). In this, sovereign power exempts itself from the law by making the Sovereign the lawful arbiter for both normality and exceptionality. This power refers back to the age of European kings, and is ‘defined by the spectacular, public performance of the right to kill, to subtract life, and, in moments of regal generosity, to let live...a regime of sovereign thumbs, up or down’ (Povinelli, 2016: 1).

Across different continents—e.g., Trump in North America, Orbán and Putin in Europe, Duterte in South East Asia, and Bolsonaro in South America—national governments are emphasizing the sovereignty of nation states against articulated forces of globalization and trans-nationalism. The reassertion of state sovereignty and aggressive nationalism has re-emerged, with the Sovereign establishing a certain reality based on anachronistic narratives. Former President Trump exemplified this by declaring climate change a hoax and then dismantling the Environmental Protection Agency’s policies on climate change (as well as other environmental protection policies). This exercise of sovereign power is particularly problematic for addressing the challenge of climate change, because of the Sovereign’s territorial and divisional politics. Strengthening national territorial securitization and increasing state competition hampers the possibility of

addressing the climate catastrophe in the present. Rather than states working together, the Sovereign is called upon, yet again, to protect national interests of competitiveness, jobs, and economic growth through aggressive foreign policy.

In response to challenges by environmentalism and climate protests, 21st century sovereign power situates responses to the climate catastrophe within a security context and, more specifically, environmental protesters within the spectre of terrorism. The real threat is then not ‘climate change’—which can be domesticated and brought within human control—but the greenies and vegan terrorists, who are blurring the distinctions and hierarchies between humans and animals, nature and culture. This has been clearly articulated by leaders in the fossil fuel nations of U.S., Australia, and Canada, for whom the problem is not the fossil fuel corporations, but the people engaging in protests and boycotts (Irwin et al., 2022).

Sovereign power is used to defend these distinctions and to reproduce a ‘natural’ order which upholds the rights of corporations to use animals and lands, and criminalizes the tactics of ecological activism (Povinelli, 2016). The Sovereign is called upon to defend human exceptionalism and to create a world of certainty through linguistic performances, where people can retreat into ‘the well-trodden, obvious and unoriginal center point of commonly shared opinions’ (Tokarczuk, 2019: 20). The end of the world that the Sovereign defends is then not the destruction experienced by the Marshallese, but rather the disintegration of ‘horizons of significance and possibility’ (Toadvine, 2018: 57).

For Boltanski (2011: 126), sovereign power justifies itself ‘by decreeing or conserving rules... whose observance enables the maintenance of order—that is to say, of reality such that it cannot be otherwise than it is’. Boltanski (2011: 125) calls this a model of ‘simple domination’, where domination is ultimately ensured through repression ‘obsessively orientated towards preserving a ready-made reality, which must be sheltered from disturbances that might be provoked by consideration of experiences in touch with the world’. With the ‘world’, Boltanski (2011:57) refers to the unabsorbed background or ‘everything that is the case’, which can be distinguished from

the linguistically instituted reality. These disturbances in the ever-changing world of living and non-living beings are made palpable by incorporating them into the constructed reality. It is not the world that matters here, only the maintenance of a carefully constructed social reality. Sovereign power confirms over and over again a certain truth *about* the world without concerning itself with what is actually happening *in* the world; or to paraphrase Tokarczuk (2019): it offers imaginaries of the future that cannot fit the catastrophic climate impacts that are already happening.

Sovereign power does not directly engage the world. Demands for climate action may be officially recognized, but they remain simply couched in declarations as a form of ceremony supporting a singular truth and reality. Not even declarations of a ‘climate emergency’ lead to any substantial efforts or changes to political priorities. The impetus is to keep the current social order by reinforcing the instituted reality; the socio-economic order must be upheld. With events and experiences following in the wake of climate change that increasingly challenge this constructed reality, a ‘strongman’ (yes, gendered) is required to keep this order in place. Even fascist temptations are no longer beyond the pale when there is a lack of solid ground or when facing demands to reaffirm human exceptionalism. The gap between truth claims and experiences of the world can be filled with the tyranny of certainty, the enforcing of a ‘natural’ order.

For the Sovereign, liberal notions of dialogue and careful argumentation are simply notions to be abused or set aside in the pursuit of a singular political aim. The Sovereign can, through linguistic performativity, create a certain reality by adhering to the playbook of former U.S. President George Bush’s strategist, Karl Rove: ‘We’re an empire now, and when we act we create our own reality’ (Rove quoted in Mankoff, 2017). However, there are limits to linguistic performances, with the climate catastrophe infringing on institutions engaged in domesticating it by aligning it with constructions of their ‘reality’. Gaps are opening up between how the world is instituted and how it is experienced, and it is here that the possibilities for a critique arise: staring into the abyss of climate catastrophe—facing the Monster.

Discussion: Towards affirmative critique

With sovereign power on the rise across the globe, as attempts are made to reassert western and modernist colonizing realities of human exceptionalism and control, it is perhaps more urgent than ever to develop alternatives to the dark turn to the Sovereign. In the face of the climate catastrophe, this dark turn is seductive. The climate Monster challenges the linguistically constructed and confirmed reality by i) de-centring humans with an abundance of extreme weather events and ii) denying human exceptionalism and ideas of progress. The phantasm of the textually institutionalized climate monster, on the other hand, feeds into a reassuring foundation of truth and a shared reality to defend. The Sovereign is voted in or 'accepted' to defend old divisions and hierarchies between humans as well as between humans and non-humans. The Sovereign provides origins, foundations, and certainty in nationalistic tales. However, the re-emergence of far-right populism and its success at the ballot box are potent reminders that hard sovereign power, and the fascist horrors that trailed in its wake in the 20th century, have at best been concealed for a number of decades. Such critical times demand pondering anew what critique can mean, what form it can and should take, and what it can still do when faced with the climate catastrophe.

In this section, we aim to outline the possibilities of critique without a common world or experience. Rather than critiquing the phantasm of the climate monster and the supporting narratives of adaptation and apocalypse, affirmative critique opens up the abyss of the end of the 'common' world as the horizon of significance and possibility. The destruction of a linguistically constructed reality upheld and stabilized by powerful institutions also, necessarily, destroys any notion of a common world. In declaring that 'There is no world, there are only islands', Derrida (2011: 9) cites the last line of a poem by Celan (2014): 'Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen' [The world is gone, I must carry you]. There is no ground or foundation for a common world.

This is not a nihilistic declaration, rather the opposite: the lack of a common world is exposed only through the abyss over which 'I must carry you...', but

also any other' (Derrida, 2005: 152-153). This is an affirmative responsibility, since, in recognizing that there is no common world, what I must do in carrying you '...is make it that there be precisely a world, just a world, if not a just world, or to do things as to make as if there were just a world, and to make the world come to the world' (Derrida, 2011: 268). This is a double affirmation of recognizing oneself as both dependent on and responsible for any Other. Affirmative critique is here about moving the discourse to include new connections and traces within the structure of representation, that is, to span the instituted reality by embracing the world.

Embracing the other

Affirmative critique is concerned with the conditions of formation and movement that allow the visibility and intelligibility of new social and physical arrangements. Critique then is no longer about an effort to take apart and demolish an existing structure in a sort of nay-saying—the climate catastrophe is already doing that demolishing—but rather it 'is the operation that seeks to understand how delimited conditions form the basis for the legitimate use of reason in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped' (Butler, 2009: 787). One such threshold condition is the crumbling of the seemingly self-evident distinction between the human and non-human, and even life and non-life, under the challenge that the climate catastrophe poses in the nominated geological era of the Anthropocene. This is a post-anthropocentric position that recognizes and embraces the constant flux, enactments and diverse effects of other living and non-living beings.

From his early writings, Derrida (1978: 151-52) questions the separation between language and the world and sees the distinction of the inside from the outside as the 'originary violence' of metaphysics. The negation of a 'natural' division between language and the world problematizes anthropocentric binaries—subject/object, meaning/matter or human/non-human—and the presumption of Nature or matter as passive and controllable. This negation of the division between language and the world (or nature and culture) also challenges human exceptionalism. Kirby (2011: x) points this out in translating Derrida's 'no outside of text' to mean 'no

outside of Nature'. Thus, any divisions and categories are temporary constructs.

Such a position recognizes that the climate Monster makes it 'increasingly difficult to ignore the inconceivably vast forces emanating from the environment, forces entangled with human actions but scarcely subordinate to them' (Nixon, 2018: 12). It is this becoming-aware of the 'urgent proximity of nonhuman presences' (Ghosh, 2016: 5), of the 'overlaid arrangements of human and nonhuman living spaces' (Tsing et al., 2017: G1), that compels the rethinking of the instituted reality. Moving beyond the instituted field of vision in the form of endless capital accumulation requires new concepts to name the current threshold conditions and new narratives to incorporate social dislocation. Otherwise, the return to the Sovereign is likely to become the main option for contemporary deployments of power. It calls for new narratives and stories that help to understand conceptualizations of agency, time, and space that the climate Monster calls forth.

In challenging human exceptionalism, Povinelli (2016: 4, 179) coined the concepts 'geontology (Nonlife being)' and 'geontopower (the power of and over Nonlife beings)' to describe 'a set of discourse, affects, and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife'. It is a distinction, she suggests, which is simultaneously unravelling and being reconsolidated. What interests Povinelli (2016: 9) is 'the slight hesitation, the pause, the intake of breath that now can interrupt an immediate assent' to these all-too-obvious distinctions between the human and nonhuman, life and non-life. Morton (2013: 7) has pointed to the need for developing a 'geophilosophy that doesn't simply think in terms of human events and human significance', and Grosz has used the notion of 'geopower as a way of characterizing the geological, inhuman and pre-individuated forces that subtend and provoke organic life' (Grosz et al., 2017: 134), thus destabilizing concepts of identity and agency.

These ideas and concepts point to the end of the human dream that reality is significant for humans alone, with affirmative critique including

‘innumerable relationships with nonhumans; the interrelationships among life forms and between life and non-life’ (Morton, 2013: 128), which can ‘stimulate new forms of noticing that may help provoke layered thinking about responsibility’ (Nixon, 2018: 16). It involves becoming aware of other temporal patterns that have been hitherto ignored because they never fitted the timeline of progress (Tsing, 2015), and for business schools it means taking responsibility for what is done to the planet.

The experiences of the others affected by climate change are generally excluded from business schools’ ‘Eurocentric’ imaginaries of aggressive return on investment. If there is no ‘common’ world, affirmative critique starts with questioning business schools’ dominant western and linear temporality (see e.g., Nyberg and Wright, 2022; Parker, 2018). There are physical markers or traces to follow in understanding what has been achieved in the name of ‘progress’ and legitimized and established as truths by business schools.

These traces can be followed both in understanding how these marks have silenced or excluded others, as well as to affirm suppressed agencies. For the former, there are traces of lobbying that shapes political decisions and represses alternatives, such as indigenous ways of knowing and being; mine sites haunted by disrupted waterways and endangered species; and plastic bags, carbon emissions, and all the unaccounted-for ‘waste’ and ‘externalities’ of the industrial era. These traces or materialities are political in that they have sedimented dominant relations and connections as ‘natural’ or ‘objective’ foundations. These traces provide contrasts to what they are not—exclusions of what could have been and what might be (see also Raffnsøe et al. in this issue).

For the latter, affirmative critique is then to confirm these ‘minor histories’ as alternatives or possibilities for new relations and connections (De Cock et al., 2021). Not by looking back, but, rather, by making a-new. This is an experimental and hopeful pedagogy in affirming responsibilities towards and demands from marginalized humans and more-than-humans. This is not about representing the world, but making the world present (Ingold, 2015). Affirmative critique engages alternative imaginaries to create

possibilities for making sense of the present, and, in the next section, we discuss this in relation to contemporary debates within organization studies.

Contributions and paths forward

Affirmative critique opens up the narrow discussions of critique in the burgeoning literature within organization studies on critical performativity (Cabantous et al., 2016; Just et al., 2021). The debate, so far, is generally about whether critical scholars should engage in reformative (Wickert and Schaefer, 2015) or radical (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016) critique. However, both modes of critique are relying on forms of human control to either reform the self-destructive aspects of capitalism (reformist critique) or expose the domination and destruction of corporate capitalism (radical critique) (Cinque and Nyberg, 2021). The concern with critical performativity, beyond the clear emphasis on human agency and reflection, is that by criticizing the binaries and instituted reality, there is a risk of reinforcing them as such. Barnwell (2017: 31), quoting Rita Felski, pointedly asks: ‘what virtue remains in unmasking when we know full well what lies beneath the mask?’

Affirmative critique, instead, supports the move within organization studies towards alternative organizations (Parker et al., 2014; Parker and Parker, 2017). This scholarship is based on affirming different and alternative organizations, with the (unrealized) potential to embrace a broader range of possibilities in re-configuring relations with living and non-living beings. With no ‘outside’ of the linguistic structure, this means breaking down existing linguistic structures and embracing the world with new conceptualizations and ways of seeing. Beyond alternative forms of organizations, it requires new types of humans with different understandings of themselves in relation to others. Traces of these subjectivities, which are changing the construction of humans, already exist within, for example, feminist science studies (Haraway, 2016), reconstructions from speculative fiction and oral histories (De Cock et al., 2021), and marginalized histories of indigenous peoples’ ‘reciprocal relationships with thousands of plants, animals and ecosystems’ (Whyte, 2017: 159). The point is not to genetically slice humans into a new category

(see e.g., the Crakers in Atwood, 2003) or romanticize aspects of the past; it is to change how humans understand themselves and their experiences in the world.

A recent example of this type of thinking by organization scholars is Gasparin et al.'s (2020) discussion of how humans may live in a radically transformed relationship to the world. By using parasitic logic, Gasparin et al. (2020) propose diverse and playful forms of reasoning to disrupt the dominant anthropocentric logic. The discussion of the parasitic human is then not about 'taking without giving' (Gasparin et al., 2020: 309); it is a discussion of a more complex and symbiotic or mutualistic relationship to the planet. Phallogocentrism is an obstacle for developing new alternatives and imaginaries to replace the dominant western idea of progress. As such, affirmative critique can be seen as scholarly resistance of the Anthropos—'as Man the Manager' (Wolfe, 2020: 135)—evident in business school teachings that reproduce human, male, and white exceptionalism.

The discussion of binaries and divisions also contributes to debates in organization studies on authoritarian or right-wing populism with anti-democratic or anti-pluralist agendas (De Cock et al., 2018). Recent waves of populism have generally been attributed to austerity and economic decline (Robinson and Bristow, 2020). However, an alternative analysis suggests that these movements are reactions to loosened borders (e.g., Brexit), binaries (e.g., the white majority of all different groups voting for Trump) and divisions (e.g., Global North and South). At the core of populist movements is the experienced challenge to the privileged part of these oppositions. While research has established that scepticism of climate science and lack of support for environmental actions are closely aligned with right-wing populism (Żuk and Szulecki, 2020), the dynamics between climate change and populism require further discussion (Lockwood, 2018). If climate scepticism is not primarily due to economic interests but is rather a reaction to a perceived threat to the social order, then wider dissemination of climate science may have the opposite effect: it strengthens the support for socially sedimented divisions.

In this essay, we have argued that the climate Monster challenges the instituted reality that is privileging certain people, groups, organizations, and nations. The climate Monster acts as a counterforce undermining this privileged position, which creates uncertainties as well as unrest. Rejecting climate science and action is then arguably about incorporating the social dislocation and strengthening the old divisions and hierarchies of Phallogocentrism. Within authoritarian populism the political solutions are then nationalistic agendas with stricter borders that keep others out, conservative agendas that equate equality with white and male oppression and appeals to sovereignty and a Sovereign. Thus, the turn to the Sovereign is about centralizing and elevating the linguistic structure ordering reality.

Finally, we contribute to recent discussions in organization studies that radically question the current anthropocentric position on climate change and provide alternative directions for organization scholars (Campbell et al., 2019; De Cock et al., 2021; Ergene et al., 2021). This literature has shown how the climate Monster has been domesticated by corporate capitalism to support the existing dominant social order in pursuing economic growth. What is generally seen as 'inaction' on climate change is, from this perspective, a flurry of 'actions' that internalize the climate impacts and supplement the lack of a structural centre with human agency. Ecological forces are translated into business opportunities and new technologies are employed to bolster human mastery. A phantasm of climate change is employed to sell the idea that 'we are in it together'; a 'we' that promotes individual actions in addressing climate change.

Even the apocalyptic discussion of climate change feeds into this 'we' by portraying an ending in the form of a climax of human extinction. This is a privileged and paradoxical end that is both finite and possible to experience. Without these two assumptions, the 'end' loses its meaning and appeal. The discussion of a common end supports the phantasm and denies the experienced ends of the world for othered species, communities, and habitats. A new 'regime of truth' (Evans and Reid, 2014) or 'imaginary' (Levy and Spicer, 2013) for 'us' would then fulfil the same political function of privileging dominant categories in structuring reality and centring humans.

Affirmative critique demands creating new and responsible relations and processes that open this instituted reality to the world. Affirmative critique is built on embracing the world and making the world challenge instituted realities through the experiences and disturbances of living and non-living others. This is different from negation of the instituted reality in the form of unmasking the origin of domination or revealing the social order that produces false consciousness (Nyberg and De Cock, 2019). Since there is no common reality experienced as the world, negation of the instituted reality runs the risk of reinforcing the phantasm of shared humanity. Similarly, the common affirmative critique based on utopia becomes problematic, since the shared common future utopia is also a phantasm. The utopian nostalgia for a past that never was is the basis for most authoritarian populism currently reinforcing old hierarchies and divisions (Kojola, 2019). There are no possibilities for a 'happy ending', for a shared past or future, since there is no common ending.

Rather, affirmative critique is about rethinking the relations and connections that link singularities as well as those organizational forms that institutionalize communities. There is an ethical obligation towards others that is developed through recognizing that there is a shared mortality and vulnerability when facing the climate Monster. This is not an outside, threatening humans or individuals; it is the future to come that needs to be embraced by building new, more inclusive, structures of representation for co-habitation.

Concluding remarks

While Derrida never made much mention of the climate catastrophe, in his last seminar before his death in 2004 he returned to the originary metaphysical violence of nature/culture by questioning the stupidity of drawing a line between humans on one side and animals on the other, with the latter having 'no other supposed unity than a negative one, or one supposed to be negative: namely that of not being a human being' (Derrida, 2011: 8; see also Derrida, 2008). With this, Derrida questioned human exceptionalism that sets humans apart from any other aspect of the world; a

world that is occupied by Life and Nonlife. This logically would then also apply to different humans and provide the possibility of opening up the fault lines both between humans as well as between humans and the world, by questioning the stabilizing apparatuses that construct unity and uphold lines of distinction. This is what Boltanski (2011) refers to as the instituting practices of reality. There is thus no world (singular) to stand on; only a Monstrosity that demands the suspension of certainty.

Searching for solid ground in substituting the lack of certainty or structure is fraught with danger in the form of power claiming to uphold certainty or truth. Climate change framed as the outside is currently employed by Sovereigns to re-centre humans, enticing a nostalgic search for certainty and support of those who promise to provide human mastery over nature. This is a danger reproduced by business schools, founded on teaching the mastery over labour and nature. Business school teaching tends to deny the Monstrosity of the climate catastrophe, domesticating it through the deployment of corporate friendly terms such as sustainability, adaptation, transition, and resilience. Nyberg and Wright's (2022) recent review of climate change research within business schools shows that they are still adhering to their founding principles of professionalizing mastery over others (Life as well as Nonlife) in serving profit and, in doing so, they are ultimately denying the climate catastrophe. Any challenge to these truth claims is circumvented through the monoculture of publishing and being a useful idiot for big business (Fotaki and Prasad, 2015). As such, the business school is obviously ill-equipped to test knowledge claims that take into account the world when facing the Monstrosity that is the climate catastrophe.

Critique acknowledging the climate Monster is about opening the instituted reality to the world, that is, allowing for world variations, or play, and giving new meanings to a trace that decentres humans in representing and conceptualizing the world. Derrida already opened up this possibility in *Of Grammatology*:

The instituted trace cannot be thought without thinking the retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears *as such*

and thus permits a certain liberty of variations among the full terms. The absence of *another* here-and-now, of another transcendental present, of *another* origin of the world as such, presenting itself as irreducible absence within the presence of the trace... (Derrida, 1976: 46-47; emphasis in original).

Affirmative critique, we argue, is about making such absence present by challenging that which is seen as natural and present, and opening up a world (or worlds) of multiple agencies and experiences. Affirmation is then performative in making a-new or 'mattering-forth' (Povinelli et al., 2021) by bringing absences into presence/the present. These absences are haunting instituted practices (see also Raffnsøe et al. in this issue) as differences. These hauntings are evident in the 'ordinary' taken-for-granted suffering and incredible violence inhabiting categorizations of both humans and non-humans. The labour and energy to challenge existing hierarchies and affirm new voices and experiences are evident in recent protest movements such as BLM, #MeToo, and Fridays for Future. Of course, there are modes of policing, oppressing, and erasing these absences that challenge existing hierarchies. This is the promise of the Sovereign.

The double move of affirmation is then to first recognize the suffering and historical forms of violence enacted upon human and non-human others and, second, to embrace the forces of the world that are destabilizing existing hierarchies and decentering humans. The climate Monster assists in the first movement through its denial of a world that has been reduced to a singular reality of human production, distribution, and consumption, calling into question Eurocentrism (and Phallogocentrism). This, hopefully, will lead to the second movement of new relations and modes of critique that hold certainty in suspense and are open to non-human traces. This would be a form of critique that embraces the world by questioning the institutional forces of instituted realities. In facing the Monstrosity of the climate catastrophe, perhaps there is inspiration to be found in Paul Celan's (2014) poem *Faddensonnen* (Threadsunns), which ends with the line: 'There are still songs to sing beyond humankind'.

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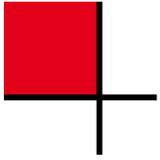
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Affirmative critique

Sverre Raffnsøe, Dorthe Staunæs and Mads Bank

abstract

Addressing their own scholarly work as well as work by other researchers, the three participants in the discussion examine how it is possible and fruitful to offer critique, first and foremost in organization and management studies but also more generally. Topics discussed include the ubiquity of critique in the present and age of criticism, conceptions of critique, the distinction between negative and affirmative critique, criticism as a problematic caricature and affirmative critique, as well as feminist anger as critique and black scholars' dreams and articulations of another science and another possible future. When conceptualizing and discussing affirmative critique in organizations and management studies as a critique beyond criticism, the three discussants seek assistance from the work of, among others, critical philosophers based in a European tradition (Derrida, Foucault, Kant, Kierkegaard, Schlegel, and Socrates), critical psychologists from Australia (White), as well as scholars and poets situated in critical feminist and queer studies (Butler, Muñoz, Haraway, Puig de la Bellacasa and Sedgwick) and American black studies (Baldwin, Hughes, Lorde and Hartman).

Introductory note

'Affirmative critique' is a text-product of a roundtable that took place at Copenhagen Business School, in prolongation of an on-going annual series of PhD courses entitled 'Critique beyond criticism' at Aarhus University.

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.

Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

[...]

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

(Langston Hughes, 1936//1995)

The following roundtable took place at Copenhagen Business School, February 28th, and continued July 14th, 2020, in prolongation of an on-going annual series of PhD courses entitled ‘Critique beyond criticism’. Close to 60 PhD students annually file applications to enrol in the course organized by professor Dorthe Staunæs, Aarhus University. A number of international scholars have given talks at the course, among others Maggie Maclure, Manchester Metropolitan, Professor Nina Lykke, Linköping University, Assistant Professor Brigitte Bargetz, Associate Professor Jette Kofoed, Professor Uffe Juul Jensen, Aarhus University, and Professor Cheryl Mattingly, University of Southern California. The courses were followed by two international and interdisciplinary seminars involving around 30 researchers with affiliations and backgrounds from the Nordic Countries, the UK, Russia and Eastern Europe. Together with associate professor in educational psychology Mads Bank (MB), two of the regular presenters and organizers of the PhD course, professor in social psychology Dorthe Staunæs (DS), Aarhus University, and professor of philosophy and management philosophy Sverre Raffnsøe (SR), Copenhagen Business School, discussed crucial conceptions and aspects of critique grounded in the discussions held at the PhD courses and the two researcher seminars. While addressing their own scholarly work, as well as scholarly work by other researchers, they discussed how it is possible to offer critique in organization and management studies. Topics discussed included the ubiquity in the present and age of criticism, conceptions of critique, the distinction between negative and affirmative critique, critique as a problematic caricature and affirmative critique as voiced, feminist anger as critique and black

scholars' dreams and articulations of another possible future. The three discussants got help from the work and concepts of, among others, critical philosophers (such as Derrida, Foucault, Kant and Kierkegaard, Schlegel, and Socrates), critical psychologists (like White), critical feminist and queer scholars (such as Butler, Muñoz, Haraway, Puig de la Bellacasa, Sedgwick) and critical race scholars (such as Baldwin, Hughes, Lorde and Hartman).

Introduction: Critique in organizations and of management/leadership

MB: In addition to teaching repeatedly at the PhD course for a number of years and publishing on the subject of critique (Raffnsøe, 2015), both yourselves and I have not only worked with critique in the context of organizational studies and management studies but also, and in particular, in connection with critical management studies. Would you say that discussions of critique and forms of critique are pressing issues within organization and management and within organization and management studies?

SR: Personally, I have often worked in practical settings with managers and organizational practitioners; and within this context, an ongoing challenge has been the question: How to voice a critique of and work out suggestions for improvement of existing practice in ways that may be heard, in ways that seem sensible, useful and constructive to practitioners? And how to avoid forms of critique where the critic comes to be perceived as a person who considers himself as lecturing from a superior and detached position out of touch with existing practice? If you, as a theoretical scholar, come to be perceived as a critical know-it-all, out of touch with practice, your interventions and your critique will have no appreciable effect. Consequently, the attempt to understand critique and its effects, as well as the endeavor to develop new forms of critique that can be perceived and have effect as concrete critique of some specific instituted organizational practice, discourse or institution, rather than abstract critique, have been ongoing concerns in my dealings with practitioners in organizational and management contexts.

DS: My guess is that the engagement with critique as a concept and a practice is intensified in management/leadership learning settings. A range of new kinds of learning laboratories taking place at business schools, universities, university colleges as well as in private companies implies training the ability to be sense-able and response-able while at the same time performing critique of more overall political and organizational matters (Raffnsøe and Staunæs, 2014; Staunæs and Raffnsøe, 2018). Some of this has also inspired me in my own teaching endeavors. Alone and together with Associate Professor Malou Juelskjær (Juelskjær and Staunæs, 2016), I have addressed issues of affirmative critique in relation to educational leadership, when we asked students to design leadership chairs. Most people know the phrases ‘to chair’, ‘leadership chair’, and ‘a seat at the table’. The phrases are materialized historically in, for instance, the throne, the pulpit and a professorial chair, and, more recently, the director’s chair – very concretely, in Charles and Ray Eames’ office chair that Don Draper occupies in the TV show *Mad Men*. These are materializations of classical management and leadership ideals. Together with the students, we experimented with imaginations of leadership and management by designing chairs ‘otherwise’. This involved a critique of previously known chairs. What kinds of intimations of leadership and management were explicitly and implicitly already palpably present in these chairs? How would they affect us, condition our attitude and responses to management and leadership? What were their limitations or shortcomings? Where could they lead us? How could they in turn be reworked and challenged? And where would this lead us? In this manner, the work on existing forms of leadership chairs and the construction of new forms of leadership chairs took the form of an ongoing affirmative critique, of existing forms of leadership chairs and conceptions of leadership. Would the throne, the pulpit or the Eames chair work in educational organizations and why (not)? What other wishes and demands could make up a chair today? What kinds of materials and forms would be due and what kind of (self)leadership/management would that kind of chair enable? What would happen if other dimensions were added? Other materials? In that sense, designing the chair involved an analysis of educational leadership in the precarious times of postcolonialism and late capitalism. The chair involved an affirmative critique, which made it possible to lead otherwise.

MB: Were the students knocking up carpentry with tools such as saw, hammer and nails?

DS: Actually, the participants were not designing a finished chair. They were drafting a number of schemes of what a chair/the chair might look like and examining ideas or drafts of a possible leadership ontology. You are right in the sense that the affirmative critique took the form of a common construction site. In fact, we took inspiration from a Swedish carpentry school when we designed the exercise. Wood, cloth and plastic would probably have done a lot to enhance the potential for making new critical framings and viewpoints. These materials would absolutely support the affective pedagogy, but we contented ourselves with speed markers, paper and house magazines, Google, the students' imagination and a number of texts discussing new public management, self-management, management and enhancement of potential.

MB: What came out of it?

DS: A number of quite diverse depictions of what might become of educational leadership in late capitalism and where educational leadership becomes precarious. Some chairs were low and lounge-like, as an invitation to intimacy. Some could move along the movements of the employees. Some leadership chairs had more than one seat and facilitated collective decision-making. Some seats were equipped with nasty spikes making it impossible to be seated at all, and not to move or pay attention. The design process implied a critique of current forms of educational management; however, the experiment demanded of us to go beyond criticism, produce something 'otherwise', and declare its effects. The lab work encouraged us to discuss how different forms of organizing and managing can evoke affective atmospheres, how late capitalism, gig-economy, the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene, with its investment in biopolitics and necropolitics, co-construct the chair and chairing, and how social categories like race and gender intersect with (the design of) the chair. Designing and materializing chairs helped us challenge norms of governance, organizing and management, while not leaving us in paralysis. It prevented us from just offering an inevitable no to

governance or no to leadership. Instead, this process demanded efforts to reformat and dream.

MB: This reminds me of the critical edge in the narrative turn in psychology and how this is played further into org studies by people like David Boje, David Barry and John Law. At the heart of many narrative psychologists, for instance Michael White's engagement with social problems, lies a critique of power and neo-liberal forms of subjectification. But instead of just barking from the outside, White moves on to develop alternative ways of talking and narrating. These are not only critical counter-stories. Rather, White helps clients to negotiate and co-construct narratives that open up for personal and collective action, ethical responsibility and permit a reorientation towards values. This has been taken elegantly up by, for instance, David Barry. Inspired by White's narrative therapy, Barry aims to reconfigure organisational problems through an externalisation that allows the reconstruction and retelling of the issue. Parallel to this, I like scholars such as John Law. Using a literary style, he writes social science fictions. For instance, he deconstructs the conception of the manager as an individualized person in possession of power. The interesting shift is, then, when he moves from this deconstructive critique to an affirmative critique. Here the manager becomes reassembled as a plurality of subjectivities, as a 'debating society' with multiple positions and concerns, including an attention to the beauty of science and a wider ethical responsibility. Suddenly, the manager is transformed before our eyes into a multiplicity that can equally involve a scientist, an accounting administrator, an artist, a broadcaster, journalist, producer, scriptwriter, musician, or engineer. In this lies a critique in affirmation of what could be otherwise and of multiplying possible identities. Here, critique offers resources for alternatives actions. Boje's (2012) work on storytelling in organizations offers a similar approach. Rather than truth-seeking, it becomes a matter of how storytelling is used pragmatically – an approach that permits an opening up to the multiplicity of stories that are possible in organizational life.

SR: So, when narrative methodologies are used affirmatively, it is about telling other stories and taking the point of departure in what already is, but also in the cracks. To create space and moments for knowing and feeling more-than what is already present.

MB: Yeah, it is about going back and forth, re-interpreting and adding something to what happened and could happen. To cultivate 'what could have happened' and prevent dominating narratives in shadowing alternative subjectivities and ways of coming into existence.

DS: This reminds me of Foucault's sentence from the text *What is critique*: 'how not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them' (Foucault, 1997: 44-45). In these sentences, critique becomes the art of not being governed so much; however, it is not a utopia of not being governed at all. Of saying no to and opposing every form of government. That is not the point. Rather, the quote points to the possibility of looking for and vitalizing tendencies of not being governed like *that* or with these specific costs. Other ways, moments and spaces exist that are not just *different from* but *otherwise*, which implies an indomitable impulse that differentiates from the ways, moments and spaces already known. These tendencies exist and are materialized here and now, and they are strongly connected to our capacity to imagine and ability to sense and be affected. Critique suggests that what is could have been 'otherwise' (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1967/86), but this 'otherwise' is also in danger of disappearing if not affirmed. I think this connects with what you told us about narrative theory. The methodology of critique implies experimentation, telling other 'science fictions', co-constructing other ontologies and 'worlding' differently.

MB: These examples show clearly that the concept of critique is transformed radically. Some scholars talk about post-critique (Anker and Felski, 2017), others emphasize that it is time for critique, and this can only begin with self-critique (Fassin and Harcourt, 2019). How is it possible to turn 'affirmation' and 'critique' into a joint venture, and what does critique beyond criticism actually mean?

DS: We borrow this, your last expression, from Michel Foucault (1997), while picking up on the notion of affirmation from Gilles Deleuze, Rosi Braidotti and others. Simply explained, this form of critique is about evoking a diagnostic impulse that emphasizes the tendencies in the material while reading it. It is about an 'experimental attitude', as Foucault (1997) and Butler

(2004) say in their analysis, while approaching what is, what could have been and what might be. This experimental attitude may take place in teaching, research questions, design as well as in the métiers of organizing and leading.

MB: Yes, as I understand it, affirmation is a concept Deleuze takes up and elaborates from Friedrich Nietzsche, who argues against Hegel's negative dialectic. We will return to the subject of being critical whilst wanting to say more than just 'no' but let us just get to grips with the reason why it is relevant for many students, for members of organizations and for us to return to critique in new, experimental, but perhaps also more binding ways. What do you have to say, Sverre, on the historical and societal resonance background you have previously written about in *Outlines* (Raffnsøe, 2015)?

The age of critique

SR: Today, critique is a natural and ubiquitous challenge for all forms of practice. They must all be able to stand up to and face critique. Critique is now impossible to 'get around', shun or avoid. Critique is a natural and unavoidable condition, at least in the western sphere. The philosopher Immanuel Kant provides a formula for this in a foreword to the 1781 version of *Critique of Pure Reason*. He characterizes his own time as 'the age of criticism'. Indeed, critique is characterized as that 'to which everything must be subjected' (Kant, 1781/1976: 13/A XI, XII).

In this context, Kant emphasizes that social authorities and institutions, such as governmental legislation and religion, must be able to handle critique. You cannot accept power and authority in and of itself. You can no longer go along with, accept and affirm such bodies just because they have power and authority. They can only have credibility if they can stand up to critical assessment.

This is something new that gradually begins to emerge in the period from the Enlightenment to the American and French revolutions. At that point, one can start talking about critique's *Declaration of Independence*. Critique is now no longer a subordinate and limited activity; a limited activity that belongs to and serves some other overarching constellation. Critique is generalised and

dispersed. It becomes an overarching activity without borders. Since then, for the last 200-300 years, we in the West have lived in the age of critique.

MB: What are the consequences when critique is generalised?

SR: In Kant's own major works, it turns out that even knowledge and reason must be critically assessed. This is a crucial point in his first main critical work, *The critique of pure reason* (Kant, 1781/1976). If one does not subject reason to strong critique, it does not know its own limits. Reason ends up speaking about what it cannot know and making sweeping and bold assertions that are unsubstantiated. Unquestioned and undisputed reason postulates all manner of things about the world without any basis in our empirical experience of reality. In the absence of critique, even reason becomes an impostor.

In the second main critical work, *The critique of practical reason*, Kant makes it clear that our notions of what is morally right must also be critically assessed (Kant, 1785/1976). In his third critique, *The critique of judgement*, it appears that even aesthetics and art, those fields where we seem to be able to unfold freely and limitlessly, also call out for and must be able to withstand critique (Kant, 1790/1978). Even in relation to art and free artistic creation, a critical and evaluative institution is needed. So, this problem begins to emerge from around 200 years ago, namely that critique is unavoidable and ubiquitous.

DS: If we are to relate this to our own time, is the whole evaluation culture that has emerged around hospitals, schools and welfare institutions, and the whole thing of evaluating management, as well as ourselves and the management of ourselves, all the time, emblematic of the age of critique? Is it critique or capitalism – or both? Or the last spasm? And how is that similar or different from critique 'as we know it in CMS' (I think we will come back to this), as well as in what we did when designing leadership chairs?

SR: Today, something is only binding and has real value if it can stand up to critical appraisal. And preferably from as many people as possible. This is equally true for organizational practice as well as its outcomes or products.

The introduction of the market as a critical body in a number of different settings should also be seen in this context. Market exposure represents the beginning of us understanding and installing market mechanisms and economic rationality as a form of critique. Everything only really gets its proper value or price through the critical appraisal that a large number of independent actors subject it to, when they critically choose between different options. Critical and economic rationality play a part in opening up the possibility for patients to freely choose their hospital. But they also play a crucial role in carrying out teaching evaluations. Again, also to critically evaluate whether educational institutions live up to assumed expectations and are producing added value. In this way, constant critical development is also presumed and maintained.

Critique's caricature

MB: Surely one can also speak of a multiplication of critique in postmodernity? But also, of the problem that critique becomes ineffective? For example, critiques of the diagnostic system or psychiatry, or whatever it might be. These critiques have been running since at least the 1960s or perhaps as far back as the 19th century, when the major institutions were established. Equally, one might claim that the critique of management and of traditional management theory voiced by critical management studies has, to a large extent, remained ineffective. What is the effect of the critique? It doesn't look like this critical form changes very much. In reality, is it something else that is starting to move these systems, some other practices or something more from within?

At the same time, critique relates increasingly to something subjective rather than anything intersubjective or societal. Hence, problems emerge with critique because we do not have a common reference point. We no longer have a common framework for these value judgements. That is why critique becomes purely subjective. The ubiquity of subjective critique is what permits, for example, Trump to call facts 'fake news'.

SR: Yes, when critique begins to become ubiquitous and unavoidable, the possibility arises that one can use (or abuse) critique in a variety of contexts

and for all sorts of different purposes. You can adopt this critique, use it and (mis)use it for your own purposes. When critique has become a natural value and a generally accepted norm, it can also be actively used as a weapon against others. When you talk about Trump and his scepticism about climate change, he takes a widely recognised critical figure and makes use of it for his purposes.

MB: So, Trump can say: It may well be that science claims that we have achieved some firm and indisputable results, but I am still sceptical and critical. It should be investigated more thoroughly; and, at the end of the day, I don't think the claims hold water.

DS: Trump and other – including here at home – ‘Trumpetisters’ adopt a critical figure – negative critique – that can be turned against some knowledge that claims to be the result of what should be a critical activity par excellence, science, to demonstrate that it is not critical enough. ‘I’m still sceptical’; ‘I don’t think the claims are substantiated enough’; ‘I want to see more evidence’; ‘You’re not critical enough’. It is a very good example of how critique changes hands and is used for the opposite of what its origins had in mind: the battle against ignorance becomes the maintenance and perhaps even the protection of ignorance.

SR: It is, of course, a good example of how widespread, ubiquitous and natural critique is today that critical forms can be gathered, adopted and applied against even those who consider themselves to be critical.

Negative and affirmative critique

MB: Bruno Latour also points out in his article ‘Why has critique run out of steam?’ (2004) precisely some of the problems we face when critique becomes ubiquitous in different fields. And when we repeat critique ‘by reflex’.

SR: One problem with the ubiquity of critique in the age of critique is that critique is not just experienced as having been generalized. If you look more closely, it is perhaps one particular form of critique that has been generalized and which has become almost hegemonic. This is the kind of critique we called

negative critique in the PhD course. And that's also the kind of critique that Trump uses when he claims to expose climate science and claims to point out that its proponents don't have any clothes on if you look at them properly and impartially – critically.

DS: This is also the problem that Latour (critically) seeks to diagnose and turn against itself in 'Why has critique run out of steam', namely that a certain kind of critical disclosure has spread and is occurring across the political spectrum. It is no longer just an effective weapon used by a critically subversive left. Critique has also become a terrifying weapon for a right wing that can use it to mark itself out as a counter-power in opposition to the existing one. And critique has become destructive.

MB: How has this happened?

SR: In negative critique, critique becomes a practice that has the form of a sustained disclosure: an insistent investigation that examines assumptions in order to prove which ones are false. By extension, one can denounce and expose the false in such a way that it should become clear to everyone what does and does not fall into that category. Negative critique is also an activity in which one is sceptical about established dogmas, doctrines and opinions, and where inflated societal authorities are attacked in order to bring them down to earth and show that they are not entitled to respect. In fact, this is the kind of critique that the small child incarnates in Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Emperor's New Clothes' critique as a disclosure that brings the naked truth to light, namely that the emperor and his helpers appear with all their airs and graces, but, on closer inspection, they turn out to be imposters who have no clothes on. As 'The Emperor's New Clothes' also shows, negative critique is also a critical practice that allows the critic to defend and protect themselves. Against being duped. Against subjection to societal authorities and power. Against mistakenly accepting inherited dogma and opinions.

MB: The generalization of critique and the ubiquity of criticism is also palpable in Marxism and Critical Theory. Here, the negative critical attitude not only becomes a generalized, defining and self-defining, approach to the

world, its power structures and alleged knowledge: It is essential to remain critical in order to avoid being duped or taken on by others. Moreover, it is equally essential to subject yourself to criticism: to direct criticism against yourself, to constantly subject yourself to critical self-revision, if you want to avoid deluding yourself, if you want to avoid becoming subject to false consciousness. In this manner, critique and self-criticism is an overarching concern in various strands of Marxism, and for a number of thinkers contributing to the Marxist tradition from Marx and Engels to Gramsci, Laclau, Mouffe, Althusser, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Debord, Hardt and Žižek, as well as for maybe lesser-known figures such as Alexandra Mikhailovna Kollontai, Franz Fanon and Angela Davis.

DS: But it is also important not to ‘uncritically’ imagine all sorts of things. Just as it’s important to be sceptical of everything that others can try to fool you with and make you believe.

SR: Negative critique is a form of critique that began to gain serious significance in the West from the early Enlightenment. An emblematic incarnation of negative critique can be found in René Descartes. His *Meditations* turn on the idea of doing away with and protecting oneself against all inherited dogma and assumptions (Descartes, 1647/1979). If we subject these to negative critique, then we can protect ourselves and avoid falling victim to them. And if we follow such critique all the way, we can hope that we can reach what Descartes considers to be real and certain. Descartes himself is aware that critique is a destructive business, which means that you have to pass through a zero point, where you feel thrown into deep water without having learnt to swim, as he puts it. But, through this critique, one can reach a new starting point, a bedrock, solid ground, something undeniable, a new, secure start that one can safely take for granted in the future. One can rely on such a new start precisely because it has proven that it can stand up to negative critique. Negative critique is a form of critique that has its justification and its time, especially in an era such as early modernity and Enlightenment, where one seeks to break away from the inherited dogma and all too well-established authorities that one has been told to believe in.

DS: Consequently, negative critique might certainly be of service in organization and management studies; as a safeguard against all too well-established and traditional ways of organizing, against dogmas, unreflectiveness and stupidity, as a way to debunk power structures and hierarchies.

MB: Negative critique is, then, not just a bad thing that one must avoid?

SR: When we distinguish between negative and affirmative critique on the PhD course, the adjective does not relate to our judgement of it. We are not saying that negative critique is bad critique, whereas affirmative critique is good critique. The adjective rather describes the form of critique and its relationship with the wider world that the critic establishes. Affirmative critique affirms, supports and encourages something in that which it criticises. By contrast, negative critique locates something in its subject matter that it backs away from and cannot commit to, and perhaps even accuses or condemns.

While the adjectives 'affirmative' and 'negative' characterize the manner of critique, and in particular its relationship to the surrounding world, this does not in itself imply a definite and unequivocal evaluation or appreciation of the object or the world that is criticized, as being either good or bad, right or wrong in itself or in total. Affirmative critique affirms but does not confirm, ratify or corroborate what presents itself in its given form, or as it 'is'.

In affirmative critique, the critic does not adopt a 'positive' stand, insofar as she or he confirms what is positively given. An affirmative critic is not a 'positivist'. Instead, affirmative critique affirms and accompanies something that is on its way in the object or the subject. Whereas negative critique seeks to debunk unfounded claims and to expose and denounce conceit, affirmative critique is affirmative in the sense that it is loyal to, focuses on and intensifies forces that are already stirring in the examined. It is not loyal to the state of things or existing practice as such. Rather, it dissociates itself from the state of things and existing practice insofar as it focuses on and intensifies something that is still arriving in them, something that remains unredeemed.

The difference between negative and affirmative critique should be perceived as an alternative between two paths or courses of action; between alternative approaches or ways to conduct oneself when one establishes a relationship to and aims to pass judgment on the world one needs to face and measure up to. Whereas affirmative critique traces and affirms something arriving in the object or subject it assesses, negative critique traces something to be denounced, something that one should avoid falling prey to or subscribe to.

While these alternative critical approaches or ways to proceed differ in decisive ways, they do not form contrary or contradictory terms, nor opposites that are incompatible and irreconcilable, that exclude one another. On closer inspection, affirmative critique proves to have a crucial aspect or element. When affirming a force (or virtuality) that exerts itself or makes itself felt in the examined, affirmative critique implicitly affirms an already existing non-positivity or negativity inherent in it. Concomitantly, an additional non-positivity or negativity makes itself perspicuous in affirmative critique, insofar as it seeks to outbid or surpass the examined by probing how it points forward, ahead of itself, in various directions.

On closer inspection, likewise, negative critique proves to have a crucial affirmative aspect. Negative critique is not to be reduced to pure and simple denial or negativity. In the first place, negative critique is never to be perceived as all-encompassing, all-including, all-embracing and all-subsuming. In practice, part of what is criticized is always left unincluded in the scope of criticism and thus indirectly confirmed or left alone or at peace. In the second place, and maybe more importantly: Negative critique is always offered and developed by a specific social existence. Consequently, this form of existence is always already at work affirming itself in and through the verdict it passes and pronounces. Even in negative criticism, the critic affirms his own existence or way of being with regard to the surrounding world, even though primarily done indirectly and maybe re-actively.

Paraphrasing Kant, one might claim: While an affirmative critique unaware of its inherent negativity ends up being blind (or naive and 'precritical'), a negative critique unconscious of and unable to acknowledge its own

affirmativity (or self-affirmative action) ends up being empty (or stupid and aimless) (Kant, 1781/1976: 98/A52 and B76, 77).

MB: Wow, that was a lot, Sverre. Quickly, interrupting you, if negative critique is not simply a bad thing in itself, critique or evaluation of the critical activity itself becomes a key issue.

SR: Different forms of critique can each have their time and place – and their limitations. But negative critique is above all, perhaps, a critique that shows its limitations when it becomes ubiquitous and hegemonic, unstoppable. When it becomes a dogma itself. And a general relationship with the world that the critic breathes through. Then the critic risks ruling over a desert, as Latour points out. And then you can get the feeling that negative critique basically loves life and its surroundings in the same way that, according to Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze, birds of prey love the lamb; tender, mutilated, bleeding and dying.

DS: What is rather dull or uninventive is that negative critique, in a way, starts out from the same point that it criticizes. It starts in the same place and then just reflects it negatively. In that way it's like a photo negative – if people remember the old technology – there's not much ingenuity or speculation involved.

SR: An affirmative critique begins openly and explicitly in a social context, while negative critique can contain within itself the ambition of a subject that can protect itself and become self-sufficient, rest in itself, as is evident in Descartes. This is a subject that retreats from the world and sits in its dressing gown by the fireplace in its boudoir. Quietly and in seclusion, it seeks to process its experiences with the world – or come to terms with its traumas (Descartes had recently participated in the Thirty Years' War) – in order to become a delimited subject. To be able to rethink everything without feeling too threatened. To find firm ground upon which it can safely rely.

DS: I know him well! It's the dressing-gown-by-the-fireplace figure that the more activist critique we've seen in the women's liberation movement and the gay movement, and today in LGBTQ+, Black Lives Matter and Decolonizing My White Curriculum, try to break away from. I would say they make

affirmative critiques because they are based on diagnoses of (normative) tendencies and do not try to do away with the canon or eliminate white cis-men but try to challenge prevailing assumptions and open things up to include more and more in a radical rethink of why we do what we do in teaching, treatment, prisons, preventive work. Such an approach is more social insofar as it openly and explicitly starts in a social and material context.

SR: Activism can also be seen as a way to avoid retracted and self-sustaining forms of criticism. Interacting with the world challenges pre-established forms of critique and forces them to further develop.

The dream of affirmative critique

MB: It is the self-sustaining forms of critique that both Foucault and Deleuze dream of replacing with more affirmative forms of critique. Forms of critique that, instead of exposing and condemning, make something new shine forth in what they judge. Here I have a quote in which Foucault emphasizes such an ambition:

I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would try not 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 judgments but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. (Foucault and Delacampagne, 1980/1997: 323)

That quote expresses a dream of a different kind of critique.

SR: Yes, that quote is from the article 'Le philosophe masque' from *Le Monde* (Foucault and Delacampagne, 1980: xvii). In this context, Foucault also indicates the preponderance of other more traditional kinds of criticism that may be rooted in 'a sort of anxiety' that finds expression in 'the feeling among the critics that they will not be heard unless they shout louder and pull a rabbit out of the hat each week' (Foucault and Delacampagne, 1980: 324). At the time, Foucault was of course trying to challenge and distance himself from shrill and repetitive forms of criticism brought to the marketplace by various Marxist schools of thought.

In another piece from the same newspaper the year before, in 1979, Foucault describes how he is attracted to the popular uprising he encounters when he goes to Iran and covers the Iranian Revolution in some articles. The uprising fascinates him because it is part of history while containing an irreducible, inexplicable and fundamental moment that escapes history. Foucault also emphasises how ‘one needs to watch, a bit underneath history for what breaks and agitates it’ (Foucault, 1981: 267). Foucault focuses on the uprising’s moment in history, in which history loses its naturalness, to develop a critical thinking that can examine where the uprising might point towards.

Often, Foucault compares his interest in the Iranian Revolution to Kant’s preoccupation with the French Revolution. For Kant, the landmark here was not, first and foremost, the historic event and what it led to. Around Europe, the event was greeted with an enthusiasm that did not just disappear again as soon as the revolution began to degenerate into terror. The enthusiasm is, for Kant, a sign that observers around Europe want to maintain how the French Revolution set a dividing line between today and yesterday; an irreversible break that makes the world point beyond itself. Like Kant, Foucault is interested in the virtuality of historical upheavals; the power that is effectuated through them. What was emerging and could become, even if it may never come to be fully realised.

Affirmations, hauntings and affect as critique

MB: In such a critical approach, one seeks to focus on a level where history begins to move. In this way, one can come to think something different from what actually became the case, thereby creating space for emancipation.

SR: In such a form of critique, one says ‘yes’ and affirms. In that respect, it is affirmative. However, you do not approve the actual state of affairs or current events. One relates these to that which is beginning to make itself known, and could have made itself known, but which is not necessarily realised. The virtuality in history – a force that effectuates itself through it – is affirmed rather than the facticity and actuality. In affirmative critique, virtuality emerges as a level that is essential to our existence. Virtuality becomes tangible as a crucial plane of existence that opens up an unresolved gap with

actuality, with the present and the practice in which one stands, and with the past that has led you to where you are. Affirmative critique is an affirmation that points to a surplus in relation to what is merely given. It opens up something ‘hopeful’.

MB: If we are to connect hopefulness with narrative therapy, as it has been developed by Michael White (2007), then we could take an example from my research. I have studied how, as a psychologist or social worker, you can work with young people and be inspired by these poststructuralist and narrative ideas. In my fieldwork, they talk about their good results, which are really based only on the fact that they have had contact with a lot of young people. Then, I ask what it is, they think works for them. Then a social worker spontaneously says that it is about them being enthusiastic on behalf of young people and giving them some energy. It is of course hugely interesting because they are not talking about creating new narratives, but about energy, which is not articulated or theorised in the tradition or in their practices. So, they talk about passion as something they develop and use in their way of being with each other and with the young. I’m making a scholarly, affirmative critique of this shift by describing it as a new management technology, in line with the technologies Foucault describes. It is an affective form of management and self-management, and affective subjectification, that is not about appropriating or positioning but about opening up to the emergent through the modulation of moods. And that movement and emergence can be precarious and uncontrollable; we don’t know where it will take us (Bank, 2016a, 2016b).

SR: Yes, this is a very good example of how, in affirmative critique, you do not merely affirm what is present but something that is not yet fully present. You affirm something that is ‘à venir’, as one would say in French: something that is still arriving, or maybe even something that *might, could or should* be about to arrive. Sometimes it might even be a case of affirming something that could have been about to arrive or should have arrived in earlier, historical events, but did not arrive. Affirming something that still haunts us – perhaps even to such an extent that it makes the seemingly familiar world uneasy and uncanny – because it remained unrealised, because it could have arrived or should have arrived.

MB: Yes, social workers, in a way, make an affirmative critique of the narrative turn in organizational psychology in the sense that they add something, a bodily way of working, an affective work. When I then affirm this by writing it out through affective concepts such as mood and energy, it opens up a virtuality by projecting, developing, strengthening and extending these trends. It is a form of critique that adds, invents and dreams.

SR: Yes! A parallel to this is Schlegel, who, contrary to the negative critique he calls ‘hypercriticism’ (Schlegel and Arndt, 2007), highlights an affirmative critique. According to Schlegel, this kind of critique must be an ‘author raised to the second power (ein Author in der 2t Potenz)’ (Schlegel, 1988, paragraph 35: 927); and that means that it must thoroughly revise the works it assesses in light of what they are on the verge of realizing, without necessarily fully living up to it or realizing it (Schlegel and Eichner, 1967). Affirmative critique is therefore a productive activity that focuses on, intensifies and potentializes movements that are already underway. Such a critique is loyal; but loyal to the work by being loyal to the virtuality and potentiality that is underway but not fully written out in the work. It is a virtuality, meaning that what is presented does not reside within itself. In this manner, affirmative critique also highlights that the work and our practices more generally are inconsistent and uneasy with themselves.

DS: In these ways, affirmative critique can also affirm the latent in what it criticizes – something that could have been or should have been. In doing so, this kind of critique highlights not only a dynamic force but also something extra and potentially disturbing – or something uncanny in what it is investigating. Something that might even be said to ‘haunt’ the investigated. For example, a colonial past. Derrida’s (1993/2006) concept of hauntology, which has been taken up recently in an interesting special issue ‘Ghostly matters in organizing’ of *ephemera* (Pors, Olaison and Otto, 2019) and in feminist new materialism (Barad, 2010), has a good, affirmative grip of such critique and is currently widely used in, for example, the decolonising efforts we had in the past, because it precisely sets out the case for a study of not only what there is in an organization, but what there can be or could be. That which haunts and creates new hauntologies/ontologies.

MB: Surely it is also a kind of demanding – and displacing – challenge to, and affirmative critique of, existing management practices that you organize when you ask students or managers to build a leadership chair?

DS: Yes, the design of leadership chairs is, in many ways, a very affective affair. When you begin to both deconstruct and reconstruct these, you discover how they can be haunted by historical power relationships and distribution, by exploitation, slavery, early and late capitalism, but also by power, freedom and change. Negative critique is also an affective affair, but whereas, if we follow Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003), it is often driven by mistrust and paranoia because it stays in the negative mirror image of what it analyses. Perhaps the affirmative shift and the speculative critique relies on a different, more complex and contradictory affective mood. This different tone of ubiquitous scepticism and chronic negativity is not what one wants, because critical practice is fuelled by a hope that things can be different than they are – and perhaps also better. In the example of the leadership chairs, there were feelings of the same genre as the enthusiasm you were talking about earlier, Mads, which the pedagogues hacked into. There was also frustration and fear, but through the design imperative, tendencies to demask power and feelings of fatalism and disappointment were constantly challenged – although these can actually provide plenty of energy in the body (there's nothing as delicious as a little paranoid thesis, right?!). One of the things that critique that goes beyond criticism can do is to allow being surprised – also positively – and to 'cruise' generously around the utopias, as the late queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz (2009) has so nicely formulated it, but always with an analysis of what and how power and affect are intertwined and therefore with the need of continuous critique.

SR: It's good you added the last part because one can become quite nervous and think that the challenge of hermeneutic scepticism and mistrust ends with a kind of 'cruel optimism', as Lauren Berlant (2011) calls the emotional structure that unabashedly nurtures common fantasies of continual increase and growth, and which continuously tends to repeat itself despite constant experiences of failure. If you are subjected to injustice, there is a need for negative critique. It is no coincidence that Descartes' analysis came after he had been involved in the 30-year war and had been exposed to artillery fire;

that, after being bombed and shaken, he had to retreat to try to find safety and a (sheltered) self. Negative critique contains an element of self-affirmation and security that can be necessary – also as a distancing from overpowering negative affection. The way I see it, however, affirmative critique does not amount to a naïve idea of ‘just thinking positively’ and hovering effortlessly over the troubled, the heavy, the unjust and the unliveable. On the contrary. Affirmative critique is also associated with a sense of discomfort, with a sense that time is always already ‘out of joint’, is out of sync with itself. It contains a striving to affirm that experience and a striving to explore what can be done with it.

DS: Yes, I fully agree, and your nervousness needs to be taken seriously, because when we talk about affirmative critique and its relation to affect, it is precisely about nurturing the complexity of the analysis. It involves thinking about that and how it makes a difference, what moods we make our critiques through, and how our critique contributes to moods and individual feelings and what this brings about. Affirmative critique also occurs through unpleasant and ugly feelings. Anger at racial and gender injustice, for example, has driven black feminists and feminists of colour, such as Audre Lorde, Sara Ahmed, and, on the Nordic stage, the feminist adoption researcher Lene Myong, to anger-filled feminist killjoy pieces (Ahmed, 2017) in the form of eye-opening critiques and experiences of just not feeling and not being able to be at home in what one should/is supposed to be at home in.

In the essay *The uses of anger: Women responding to racism*, Lorde writes that anger at racism and sexism, for example, is laden with information and energy and can therefore pave the way to change; not just a shift in positions but as a basic and radical change to the premises of our lives. One should not avoid the anger. But perhaps one should avoid the fear of anger and avoid the fear that the anger plants another unpleasant feeling, namely guilt. Both anger and guilt are informative feelings. They point out that something is not right here. Something that could be different. Maybe even should be different. Guilt can be a beginning of new knowledge, writes Lorde (1984/2007). This is an affect-based affirmative critique that takes seriously the complexity and virtuality that we previously talked about, and it points out tendencies.

Let America be America again

SR: Your example of feminist ways of taking up anger makes me think of the black writer James Baldwin. Although he grew up in the United States, he went to Europe and in many ways felt better received and more comfortable there. But at some point, he discovered that he would have to go back to America despite basically feeling that in many ways he did not belong there. Why? Largely because he had an unresolved critical relationship with American culture, including its relationship to race, gender and the direction of desire, that made him feel ill at ease and unwelcome. He had an unresolved relationship in both a negative and an affirmative critical sense. He felt anger and frustration. He felt there was something he had to return to, point out and take on. But while it was uncomfortable for himself, he also felt with his anger that he had to make his contribution to re-energizing and strengthening something that was already moving in American culture. Once he returned, he embarked on a literary project that involved retelling America's history as seen through three of his murdered friends: Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King (Baldwin, 2017).

DS: After the police murder of the African-American man George Floyd (and while this round table discussion is taking place), millions of people are flooding the streets protesting against racism and police violence as part of the movement Black Lives Matter, especially in the US, but also in Europe, a continent closely connected to black suffering and death on both sides of the Atlantic and in a planetary perspective through transatlantic slave trade, capitalism and 'Man's project' (Wynter, 2006). Anger fuels activism and protests; but in the fuel of protests hope is embedded. The hope of a world otherwise (Lorde, 1984/2007). This form of critique resonates with the non-positivist and 'out of joint' critique the African-American poet Langston Hughes writes into the poem 'Let America be America again'. Especially in the lines: 'O, yes, I say it plain, America never was America to me, And yet I swear this oath — America will be!' When Hughes projects 'America', he affirms 'The land that never has been yet', but he does not confirm a once existing America or a particular notion of a future America. In relation to and despite his disillusion with America, he affirms a virtuality in the project of America with the challenges this implies in relation to the existing USA. I read the poem as

a critique that allows for more than saying no and more than re-acting. The poem allows for dreaming and being active in worldings-to-come.

MB: Interesting. Affirmative critique is not concerned with confirming what is but with affirming what may become or may be in the making. However, as we know, it is just not possible to voice this kind of criticism freely and free of costs. This is evident if one begins to note the counter-violence it provokes, physically and symbolically.

SR: Even Socratic irony and questioning can be understood as an early kind of challenging affirmative critique (Raffnsøe, 2015: 52). Does the pedagogue, the discussant in question and being questioned, who puts himself forward and makes the claim that he is a teacher, really live up to what he claims to be? Is he really what he pretends to be? Among all the teachers, is there one teacher who manages to live up to our expectations of being a teacher in an emphatic sense of the word? In this manner, affirmative critique affirms and highlights the inadequacy and the insufficiencies of existing practice. Today, this kind of affirmative critique, drawing on an inherent pretention and aspiration in, say, management or teaching practice, could amount to a questioning of whether the teacher, the leader or the manager manages to live up to what she or he pretends to be by being a teacher, a leader or a manager. Or it could amount to asking whether there is one 'true' teacher, leader or manager who lives fully up to our expectations, among all the teachers, leaders and managers. Insofar as a gap opens between pretense as it is maintained in social and organizational practice and an aspiration that is articulated with the pretense, insofar as social and organizational practice indicates and fails an aspiration, an irony and a virtuality appear that open up the possibility of an affirmative critique.

Affirmative critique is equally conspicuously present in Kierkegaard. In an autobiographical note, Kierkegaard compares himself to a number of his successful contemporaries. They were all benefactors of the age, who had made a name for themselves by making life easier and more systematic, be it at a practical, organizational, or even spiritual level. He set a different goal for himself: 'You must do something, but inasmuch as with your limited capacities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become,

you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm, as the others, undertake to make something harder' (Kierkegaard, 2002: 171).

In short: Affirmative critique is not 'positivistic' or unambiguously confirmative. Instead, it is radically and repeatedly critical. It is active, rather than re-active. It is radically re-constructive, rather than constructive. In this regard, the response from the Greek city-state to Socratic irony is quite telling. His compatriots experienced Socrates' affirmative critique as so challenging and non-affirmative that they ended up sentencing him to death for undermining the morals of the state and its youth. Towards the end of his life, Kierkegaard's affirmative critique took on the form of an ongoing challenging of the Danish national church and its office-holders. Kierkegaard claimed that they were above all interested in earning their bread and butter rather than in living up to the expectations of a Christian in the true sense of the word. Affirmative critique always comes with a price, both for the critic and the criticized. And the performativity of critique implies that critique is frequently not implemented.

Critique as a virtue

MB: Perhaps one could read your Baldwin example as a sign that critique is becoming a virtue, as Butler suggests in her queer-feminist reading of Foucault's concept of critique (Butler, 2004). This is where critique, rather than being detached and quick to judge, as we have already discussed, is about starting a whole new self-formation in which precisely the specificity of the response to the world is important. This is something that narrative psychology and White also work with for therapeutic purposes.

SR: Yes, you could say that, for Baldwin, critique became a virtue in Butler's sense: something you have to take on and try to live up to, something you have to wrestle with as a challenge to a self. Critique was not positive; and it didn't come for free.

DS: Yep, affirmative critique is about being 'response-able', as Haraway writes in her *Companion species* book (2008) and taken up elegantly by Barad in many texts; that is, to reconcile one's responsibilities with one's ability to respond.

Critique is not just about finding fault, even if it's tempting, but about engaging, about being generous in listening and close-reading – as Haraway in her feminist forerunner of Latour's 'matters of concern', *Primate visions*, points out, critique and care are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary. Now I am reading Saidiya Hartmans's wonderful masterpiece *Wayward lives*, where she 'elaborates, augments, transposes, and breaks open archival documents' (Hartman, 2019: xiv) in order to tell stories otherwise of black social life in the beginning of the 20th Century; other stories than the archivists (the social philanthropists, the reformers, and innovators, the police, the court and the doctors) imagined when they collected and interpreted photos, journals, documents etc. Attentively noticing and listening to details and almost disappearing gestures, she fabricates and transforms 'problems' into beautiful experiments. It may well be that generous listening and sensibility need to be learnt. And something that it can be a challenge to learn. Perhaps when we discover that we are becoming dressing-gown philosophers, we must sneak out of the chamber and allow ourselves to be taught by those who do not look like us. Other people and other types, such as some management learning – including the more explosive kind with horses and llamas – that we are doing right now (Staunæs and Raffnsøe, 2018). Currently, the philosopher Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) uses exchanges with Latour to say that critique is not only a matter of concern but also, to a large extent, of ethics and thus of caring (matters of care), and that caring can involve the use and contribution of hope, enthusiasm and anger.

What does this mean for CMS?

MB: We began by debating the importance of discussing various forms of critique in management and leadership practice as well as in various societal contexts; but to what extent might it be productive to discuss critique and criticism in management studies and in critical management studies?

SR: It is important to reexamine the role and form of critique in various organizational contexts and in management and leadership settings, as we began by stressing; but it seems to me that it has also become an increasingly pressing issue not only to discuss conceptualizations and understandings of

critique but also to develop new forms of critique and ways to articulate critique in organization studies for more specifically scholarly and theoretical reasons.

As Steffen Böhm and Sverre Spoelstra have argued, there has at least since the 1990s been ‘a kind of “empire-building” going on’ ‘that has tried to institutionalize critique within the field of organization and management studies’ (2004: 97). The criticality of critique for the distinctiveness and the self-understanding of a journal like *ephemera* was evident from the start in its original subtitle ‘critical dialogues on organization’. Critique played a major defining role from the outset. I remember that the very first editorial contained a paragraph on critique. It voiced ‘a hope to produce a space for the articulation of alternative *models of critique*’. According to the editorial, this would only be possible ‘if we remain attuned to the need for sympathetic engagement, one which is not just dismissive or oppositional, but which seeks to engage into a *dialogue*’ (Böhm, Jones and Land, 2001: 4). This emphasis on critique was equally evident in the very first article entitled ‘*ephemera*: Critical dialogues on organization’ (Burrell, 2001).

MB: Yes, I agree. That form of critique and critical thinking continues to have a decisive, defining, precarious and unsettled role for *ephemera* and other journals highlighting themselves as critical and self-critical. It is specifically evident in this year’s call for papers ‘Crawling from the wreckage: Does critique have a future in the business school?’ (Fleming et al., 2020).

DS: Yes. However, giving a critique is not only critical for *ephemera*’s perception and definition of itself. The denomination of several organization studies and business journals such as *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* and *Electronic Journal of Radical Organization Theory and Organization* highlight that they are devoted to publishing critical work. But it does not stop here: a substantial part of the publications in other organization studies journals such as *Organization*, *Organization Studies*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Management History*, *Human Resource Management*, *Human Relations* and *Journal of Industrial Relations* indicate that the terms ‘critical’ and ‘critique’ have played a pivotal and defining role for the self-conception of a number of editors and scholars

contributing to these journals. In a sense, critique is the backbone of scientificity. Contributors such as Alvesson and Willmott stress that the word 'critical' 'has of course a number of meanings' and is hardly a distinctive feature of CMS in the sense that all research 'is in principle critical in the sense that researchers challenge weak argumentation, speculative statements, erroneous conclusions, etc.' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2011: 6). We need something more-than-critique; a qualified differentiation and not just 'critique' in CMS.

MB: But if we point out that critique, not so surprisingly, plays a major role in *Critical Management Studies*, should we not just take laid-back position, and claim that everything is fine! What is the problem?

SR: The emergence and institutionalization of CMS is certainly a major event in organization studies leading to the production and publication of valuable research. Moreover, it has formed a most needed and welcome addition to org studies that has been able to shake the very foundation of mainstream management and organizational research. Nevertheless, my point would be that, unfortunately, the significance of the adjective 'critical' and the substantive 'critique' have usually only been discussed cursorily or in passing, and in a non-systematic way in CMS. According to an article on the subject published in *The Academy of Management Annals*, 'critical' in CMS 'signifies more than an endorsement of the standard norms of scientific skepticism or the general value of "critical thinking"', insofar as it 'signifies radical critique' or 'an attentiveness to the socially divisive and ecologically destructive broader patterns and structures – such as capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, and so forth' (Adler et al., 2017: 137).

DS: Yes, and other contributors such as Böhm and Spoelstra underline that critique is 'all about being critical about oneself and *fearlessly* speaking out to established authorities' (Böhm and Spoelstra, 2004: 97; Jack, 1994), while yet others highlight critical scholars' allegiance to perceived resistance against hegemonic suppression, colonization and established relations of power (Alvesson, 2008). But do we, and in advance, always know what and who that is?

SR: Insofar as the terms ‘critique’ and ‘critical’ have remained theoretically and conceptually underdiscussed in CMS, the definition of the signifier ‘critical’, which is supposed to enable a clear and distinct characterization of CMS as opposed to established and mainstream management theory and discourses, will remain fluff. In this manner, theoretical and conceptual laziness with regard to the notion of critique is closely related, I feel, to a certain indistinctiveness, indetermination and aimlessness of CMS.

DS: CMS has remained a contested term and movement, not only in terms of what it stands for and whom it includes but also in terms of the specific contribution that it is supposed to make. This indecisiveness is closely related to a still unaccomplished discussion of the role of critique and criticism in CMS. This is why, I feel, that the current special issue is so important. While disagreement and diversity may be productive, further discussion of the term critique and its embeddedness in the Age of Enlightenment and ‘Man’s project’ (Wynter, 2006) could enable us to take the examination of internal divergences and convergence to a new level and permit us to scrutinize the self-articulation and identity of CMS and other ‘critical projects’ in unexpected ways and by the help of the black feminist and queer feminist voices, I have tried to bring into this roundtable talk.

SR: Totally, and moreover, the lack of a more developed theoretical discussion and conception of critique in CMS entails that the critical organizational scholar quite often implicitly happens to presuppose and draw upon a specific conception of critique as the true and agenda-setting notion of critique, the conception that we, during our PhD course on criticism and affirmative critique, have tried to name and articulate in terms of negative critique; and he or she usually happens to do so without being fully aware of doing so and without being perceptive that there might also be other critical approaches, other possibilities. In this case, the critical management scholar habitually begins by presupposing an either-or of a negative critical ‘against’ (or for) an already established practice and a divide between the prevailing practice and an oppositional study of it (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer and Thaning, 2016: 18-19). Initially allotting the critical scholar a seemingly marginal position as someone who arrives in the organization from the outside, this kind of negative critique in turn permits him or her to occupy the center as a ‘frank

speaker' that may seem to transcend power relations as she or he confronts the organization with upsetting truths that shake established hierarchies and speak of a world beyond them. In turn, this may not only lead to a quite undifferentiated appraisal of practice but also prevent the scholar from developing alternative approaches and forms of criticism. Of course, this is just one caricature and worst-case scenario. A lot of differing approaches abound...

In sum, however, I feel that all this indicates that there is a pressing need in CMS to pick up on the different beginnings of a discussion to commence a renewed, more systematic and thorough discussion of what critique might be, of the various modes of being critical and how they relate to one another, as well as of how they may relate to, counter and supplement one another. It would permit us to form a more diversified idea of critique and criticism, as well as of how these forms might be or service, and when they might be counterproductive in CMS.

DS: Yes, when we go for a critique beyond criticism in org & management studies, we must complicate and nuance instead of totalizing or 'just going oppositional'. I think a lot can be learned from books like Hartman's and movements such as *#Black Lives Matter* and *#Say Her Name*, as well as the debates and movements on democratizing and decolonizing the university (Nielsen, 2019) and diversify the curriculum, where critique becomes entangled with intersectional lenses, responsibility, experimental attitudes, and ethical considerations for a 'justice-to-come' (as our initial poem by Langston Hughes suggested) locally and planetary.

MB: Exactly, critique is not only to let your voice be expressed. It implies attentive caring and listening as the current feminist canon goes. Thanks, let's keep on caring and listening in CMS and beyond.

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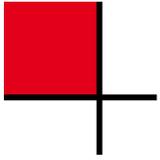
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Writing dangerously: Creating fictional narratives as an alternative form of critique within business schools

Kate Burt

abstract

Organisational scholars employing arts-based methods offer a potent alternative to traditional forms of critique. While other faculties encourage arts-based methods of enquiry, creativity has largely kept to the fringes of business schools. My decision to employ a creative narrative method to examine intra-organisational authenticity through the writing of a children's book unearthed the division and tensions that such an approach elicits. This paper points to a climate of insecurity as the source of internal resistance to critical narrative-based methods that move beyond the accepted traditions of organisational storytelling. It further highlights the opportunities for critique that such creative narrative methods offer business schools. It makes the argument that business schools must embrace those experimenting with alternative methods of critique to be relevant to the organisations they study.

The piano man and other cocktails best stirred

I know a management scholar who's also a concert pianist! Should he be allowed to present his research as a concerto?

This question was put to me by an esteemed academic during a presentation for my doctoral studies. On the surface, it might seem like a strange question

to ask a student in a business school, but I had just announced that my method of research would be to write a children's book. I was asking for it. The room was full of unfamiliar faces, including a cheery scholar, who later told me he just came along because he thought what I was proposing all sounded so strange. I was a two-headed bearded lady standing in a business school showing everyone her knickers. The man with the piano question was not impressed. My knees silently quaking. My tired brain quickly sifting through the middens of research that are created in your mind when preparing for a PhD presentation.

'Yes', I replied. After all, you learn more than how to hit the keys when you learn the piano. You learn history through a musical canon, musicology through experience, language through sheet music, communication through tutorial and musical expression, creativity and collaboration through composition and performance. Issues of power and control through followership, discipline, work ethic. The fine relationship between talent and drive. You learn how to *learn* the piano and much more.

But who was this inexperienced student with her ridiculous plan, piano analogies and her apparent lack of awareness or respect of everything that ever happened before? Not to mention an inability to *actually* play the *actual* piano. That would be me. But not only me. In the field of organisational scholars, there is a rich tradition of narrative as a means of inquiry (Sliwa and Cairns, 2007; Rhodes and Brown, 2005; Beigi et al., 2019). Many scholars argue that narrative methods offer a critical tool that allows us to understand both organisations and our experience within them (Czarniawska, 2018; Gilmore et al., 2019), through its ability to provide analysis as an 'additional point of contact' to the everyday world (Phillips, 1995: 945). These benefits have led to an increase in the use of narrative as a tool of critical inquiry.

The ways in which narrative methods are now deployed in the organisational space are as diverse as the topics they traverse (Beigi et al., 2019; Gilmore et al., 2019; Conroy and Batty, 2020; Nair et al., 2018; Knowles et al., 2017; Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Phillips, 1995). And it is this diversity of

applications within organisational studies that has inspired me to employ this narrative methodology.

In this article, I address the issue of creativity in organisational studies through my own work as a children's author working with arts-based narrative methods within a business school.

As a children's author, I know only too well the power of narrative to explore topics that can seem out of reach. My own picture book, *Room on our rock* (Temple and Temple, 2020), whilst not an academic text, used a reversible narrative to allow children to experience two stories of displacement, providing a moment of intimacy with subject matter that is difficult for young audiences. Likewise, narrative methods within the academic sphere are also capable of exposing new ground. For example, Czarniawska (2018) investigates the researcher's ability to effectively investigate anxiety at work by analysing two Polish works of fiction. Knowles et al. (2017) use Joyce's *Ulysses* to uncover truths about organisational life. Weatherall (2019) documents an unconventional approach to her doctoral thesis with the aim of better capturing the humanity and meaning in her research. Conroy and Betty (2020) write a play to disrupt conventions of leadership. Rhodes (2015) explores the importance of joy and humanity in organisational writing by blurring genre with fictocriticism. While Grafström and Jonsson (2019) challenge the idea of the static case study with its rationalistic perspective by commissioning a work of fiction and documenting the potential of this twist on narrative methodology. All these examples are a challenge, a test of the norm. They tease the edges of what can be done and offer new ways of thinking. They employ diverse narrative methods with the purpose of uncovering knowledge previously out of reach.

So, with such a clear precedent for the use of narrative, why then is there resistance to creating a children's book within a business school? Instinctively, we know it is an endeavour that lies somewhere between risky and ludicrous. It certainly requires justification in a way that other methods would not.

This paper argues for a broader use of arts-based methods within business schools – but specifically here, for the creation of narrative fictions. I posit that narrative is in a unique position to wedge open the door to creativity within business schools because of its burgeoning acceptance and proliferation. But whilst narrative methods have found a foothold in organisational studies, they are more widely accepted as ‘surrogate cases’ (Sliwa and Cairns, 2007), which can be understood as employing narrative in a realistic sense to gain insight examples that can be directly applied to organisational studies (Short and Reeves, 2009; Grafström and Jonsson, 2019). Also accepted are methods that use narrative as ‘stories of organising’ which allow for meaning through the extraction of analogy or interpretation (Rhodes, 2016; Czarniawska, 2018; Knowles et al., 2017). Despite the groundswell of daring, insightful and imaginative uses of narrative in organisational studies, when it comes to creation of fiction, business schools are particularly wary. It is not the use of narrative that is questioned, it is taking a seat at the piano and inventing things. Masking this unease is a display of concern for the validity of creative work. It begs the question, is the true source of resistance an insecurity within the business school based in its own relevance and the destabilising possibilities of opening the door widely to creativity?

Who might walk in if business schools were flourishing hubs of fictions and imagination? And more worryingly, what might walk out...

The issue with business schools is one I have experienced myself completing an MBA. Jammed classes, case studies glorifying masculine power structures and neo-liberalist jargon filled the syllabus. There was no storytelling, save that storytelling that reinforces the existing capitalist ideals. It did not feel dangerous. This curriculum has been linked with a preoccupation with maintaining an appearance for the sake of relationships with the corporate world (Gioia, 2002) and its ability to generate profit from students (Parker, 2018). It reinforces hierarchies that rely on inequalities, and it presents little alternative to a capitalist paradigm (Davies and Starkey, 2020) despite the constant cry for critical thinking. Some go further suggesting that business schools have committed a moral failure (McDonald, 2017) and would be better razed to the ground (Parker, 2018).

This is not my position. Instead, I argue that arts-based methods should be warmly welcomed by the establishment, as they may be a lifebuoy to an institution suffering a crisis of relevance. Even organisational scholars, who would rather see business schools bulldozed, assert that our imaginations are where we need to start to create better worlds (Parker, 2018). These critics suggest that ways of improving the business school model could include broadening the curriculum (Godfrey et al., 2005) and including new disciplines (Parker, 2018). While others advocate for moral imagination and engaging in organisational experiments (Patriotta and Starkey, 2008). Creativity, it seems, is key. The presence of more arts-based methods would reimagine what it means to be a business school and open a door to a diversity of perspectives. It is norm defying work, and perhaps for some, still welded to academic conventions and well-trodden methodologies, it is dangerous work.

Opening the door and other unwanted house guests

Harnessing my professional experience as a children's author to create a unique art-based method has allowed me to explore aspects of the subjective experience once hard to reach. In addition, creative narrative methods like my own also contribute to a broadening of methods within organisational studies more widely and allow us to expose the human within the organisation. This is only made possible because of the purchase narrative methods already have within organisational studies and the ability of story to amplify convention, as well as to subvert. Organisational storytelling has a history of reaffirming management conventions and positivist norms (Beigi et al., 2019). It is a tool used to control and consolidate power, to assist management in navigating change, to assist individuals with issues of identity, to communicate information. Writing is not just a conduit for perpetrating norms but complicit and integral. The 'facts' and 'science' act as a barrier for the manager to hide behind during uncomfortable decisions. At the other end of the spectrum, narrative methods allow for the subjective lived experience to re-enter the room. Storytelling is also a tool of sensemaking that allows for a coherence of the subjective experience (Rhodes and Brown, 2005). Put another way, storytelling threads the

incongruities of organisational life so that they may hang together. This intrinsic dichotomy of organisational storytelling (Sliwa and Cairns, 2007) is what provides it with the ability to subvert and conform. It is both conventional and disruptive, and as creative methods go, it is also accessible. For this reason, narrative methods offer the greatest access for creativity and change, bringing with them new ideas and new people.

Making it up and other bedtime stories

The use of narrative methods has now well outgrown its origins of storytelling as a means of simply reinforcing convention. It is an established and expanding tool of critical enquiry. A review of 165 papers on organisational storytelling found only seven of those papers published before 2005 had a critical lens. There were an additional 32 papers identified as using a critical lens published between 2005-2015 (Beigi et al., 2019). The review amplifies Rhodes and Brown's (2005) assertion that beyond story's ability to reinforce the dominant management narrative is a potent means of disrupting convention and debunking assumptions. Like all forms of creative expression, it allows us to dive deeper into the subjective by embracing emotion and a textural humanity in a field that is inextricably linked to people and their lived experience (Czarniawska, 2008; Gilmore et al., 2019). The emergence of critical storytelling and its acceptance as a methodology can be credited to those organisational scholars who have long wrestled with the stifling constraints of normative academic convention. In Phillips' seminal article 'Telling organizational tales: On the role of narrative fiction in the study of organizations' (1995) he argues for the use of narrative fiction as a research method. He posits that strict divisions between traditional methods and narrative fiction are overdrawn. This cleft between truth as fact and art as fiction is becoming increasingly difficult to defend. Instead of doing so, scholars exploring this tension suggest that it offers exciting opportunity to learn more about organisations (Czarniawska, 2008; Gilmore et al., 2019; Phillips, 1995).

This call to engage in narrative fiction and widen the critical lens has also been answered by those organisational scholars looking to examine the way

in which we write and its effect on what we learn and how we teach. Those engaged in the ‘writing differently’ movement shine a light on the growing resistance to the ‘scientific’ norms of organisational writing and highlight the capacity for critical narrative-based methods as a powerful form of critique. The special issue in *Management Learning* on ‘Writing Differently’ (Gilmore et al., 2019) unearthed a diversity of approaches to writing that challenges academic convention. They identify that by conforming to academic conventions of writing, we are conforming to the norms that have created it (Gilmore et al., 2019), and that by exploring new ways of writing, we advance the ways and nature of our learning. They argue that engaging directly with how we write can challenge and change management conventions and stimulate transformation (Gilmore et al., 2019; Harris, 2016; Grey and Sinclair, 2006) whilst making organisational writing more impactful and pleasurable for the author and reader (Kiriakos and Tienari, 2018; Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Phillips, 1995). The diversity of knowledge and intent in narrative-based methods is certainly varied, but all share a common goal. They aim to resist the ‘suffocating scientific norms’ of academic writing motivated by a desire to ‘demonstrate one’s cleverness, or to accrue publications as an end to themselves’ (Grey and Sinclair, 2006: 443). These scholars argue such stale writing extracts the humanity from learning and research and inhibits our ability to make more creative and interesting contributions (Gilmore et al., 2019; Weatherall, 2019; Grey and Sinclair, 2006).

As both a professional writer of children’s books and an organisational scholar, this resistance of conventional writing and storytelling calls to me. The ‘scientific’ extraction of the humanity from the organisation seems a response to the mess that comes with subjectivity. But for an author, the mess is where the truth lies. Without the mess of subjectivity, the writer is left with a clinical palette that limits the options for furthering knowledge and furthering the story. Finding value and knowledge only in positivist methodologies denies organisational scholars their positions as scholars, not just of the organisation, but of the human experience that created the organisation.

It is this ability of fiction and narrative methods to reach beyond and offer better ways of critiquing the subjective human experience that eludes scientific method (Beigi et al., 2019). Many aspects of work life are out of reach of empirical studies and our ability to critique them is compromised by their hidden human nature. Scientific attempts to force the invisible into the light somehow flatten and weaken its authenticity making it unreliable to study (Czarniawska, 2018). At their heart, alternative narrative methods help us to find a way in, to critique what is not seen on the surface. In my own work, creating a work of fiction to explore personal authenticity in an organisational setting, exposed the personal strain on the individual as it juggles a constructed self at work. A fictional approach here allowed for a thought experiment to take place that yielded unexpected insights about the politics of self at work. These narrative methods are employed in order to develop radically new insights about working life to reach beyond what is available on the surface. They offer powerful modes of critique through their merging of consideration for the audience and the effect that writing has on the author at work.

But is there a difference between using narrative methods, embodied writing styles, and just plain making it up? Joyce, Kafka, William Dean Howel, even SpongeBob SquarePants have all been used effectively as an alternative lens for critiquing organisation. Whilst examples of original narrative creation are more limited, there are examples of poetry (Richardson, 2003), graphic novel (Short and Reeves, 2009), and short form fiction (Rhodes, 2001), as well as long form (Grafström and Jonsson, 2019), but these examples are far from common. What can creation of story lend to organisational scholars? It can create a new source of data, a new method, and reintroduce the self into the research, allowing the readers to gain some further knowledge about themselves (Phillips, 1995). All these things are true. But the most unique contribution fiction offers organisational critique is derived from the way in which it inverts the arts-based model. The criticism levelled at some creating fictions within the arts faculty is that they are really practitioners with little interest in the rigour of research (Bourke and Neilsen, 2004). Not so for the organisational scholar who comes to narrative-based methods, not for the sake of practicing the methodology, but as a tool of organisational

critique. This cross-contamination from arts-based methods has the potential to yield new knowledge and approaches in business schools that are largely untapped.

For my own work on critical study of intra-organisational authenticity, the possibilities presented by narrative methods are profound. Here, traditional writing is not just stifling, it is limited to probing the surface murky waters of the self at work. What goes on beneath is unknown and obscured by many things including our presentation of self. Those studying emotions at work have found that while traditional ethnographic methods mean the researcher is present, this does not guarantee that the people they are studying are (Czarniawska, 2015). I wanted to *find* the people I was studying and understand their subjective experience. Arts-based methods present a potent means of critiquing constructs by tracking the human experience at work. By injecting a fiction, I am able to extract some of what it means to be human at work. When researching intangible constructs, such as personal authenticity, narrative methodology provides a way of rupturing the surface tension that the individual so carefully creates at work. Van Maanen (2006) supports this approach arguing that traditional ethnographic writing can gain textural sophistication from being blended and combined with other genres.

Reattaching the heart to the head and other questionable procedures

It is a strange thing that whilst many of the organisations we study look to harness creativity to ignite culture and gain competitive advantage, business schools remain constricted, when it comes to narrative forms of critique (Gilmore et al., 2019). Emotion is often seen as an irrelevance and an obstacle to clear and clinical analysis. Somehow, it makes scientific sense to sever the organisations from the dynamic human emotions that inhabit them. Those who practice arts-based narrative methods as a means for deeper learning must make a strong case for such transformative writing, as there is still a need to legitimise creativity within business schools and particularly at the doctoral level, where we should be encouraging

experimentation. But with all this talk of writing plays, poetry and (God forbid) a children's book, one question hangs around the business scholar's mind like a fly trapped in a bottle: What does all this talk of writing have to do with management? Are these concerns of generating fiction not *really* more appropriately suited to the arts faculty, where they belong? And while Phillips (1995) vigorously defends his call for narrative fiction as a methodology that evolves our knowledge and deepens our study of organisations, it is met with resistance. And while Gilmore et al. (2019), point to the importance of questioning and breaking scientific norms perpetuated through writing styles so that we might develop new ideas, the resistance remains. And though Savage et al. (2018) call for fiction to be a central concern to management scholars, still there is doubt. Doubt that something as fluffy as *making things up* can have any relevance to the confident unyielding and definable scientific norms of organisational study. And yet, it does. For all the thoughtful critical arguments that surround this issue of writing in organisations, one common truth binds them. We are, what we write. For managers, this is of vital importance. Gilmore et al. (2019) observe the link between how we write, and who we become:

...we literally write out the vast hinterlands that are our lives, then we constitute ourselves in the image of the disembodied scientist whose goal is a scientific knowledge bereft of ethics, care and understanding. (2019: 3)

The act of writing impacts on us physically and on the reader (Bevan, 2019), and therefore, how we feel, when we write, matters to our learning and to the knowledge we plough. Much like work, writing can be laborious. It can be dirty. It can be dangerous. It can also be fun. The process of writing in the appropriate conventions of organisational studies is often not fun or dirty or dangerous. It is removed from the human experience and feels (dare I say *feels!*) absent and *tricky*. Employing fictional methodologies and combining them with the rigor of the academic provides a freedom to delve into your own knowledge as it merges with lived or embodied experience. It is at this nexus between the scholar and the writer that insights are formed, and it is through the process of reflexivity and creativity that they are extracted.

Jumping the shark and other final reflections

I do not advocate for all scholars to try their hand at the short story, spin a clay pot, or weave an org chart into a tapestry (although I'd like to see that!), but the inclusion of arts-based methods within the business school makes business sense. Whilst thin off the ground, examples are already emerging, like Conroy and Batty's exportation of embodied leadership engaged through the lens of a playscript (2020). Imagine the possibilities for business schools that are open to more ideas like this, more dangerous creativity. There is a particularly exciting opportunity for working creatives, such as myself, to merge their academic selves with their practice to gain new insights. Work like this enlivens a business school and creates a climate for exciting discourse of a diversity of students with an array of views, not all simply tamed by a middle-class dream. The time is right. The expansion of critical narrative work has created 'the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of social and cultural structures' (Cixous, 1976, as cited in Phillips et al., 2014: 348).

If we value and employ a variety of methodologies to our research, then we should similarly value and employ a more expansive and varied approach to our writing, inclusive of creative work. In doing so, we broaden our understanding of what different approaches to writing can offer our work (Conroy and Batty, 2020; Gilmore et al., 2019). This aims to avoid the *deadening* effects of formulaic writing in favour of imaginative, experimental and reflective learning (Gilmore et al., 2019). This is not done to avoid the rigour of academic work or to replace it – instead the intention is to augment and enhance.

An evolution of the traditions of narrative draws on more aspects of the researcher as artist and has the potential to extract the unexpected. Narrative fiction probes the subject matter in interesting ways, whilst also contributing to the way in which we study organisations. In taking the risk to write differently, or even dangerously – to create, we demonstrate innovation through both our failures and successes. Business schools, brave enough to embrace those looking to *make it up*, display, not just a confidence

in themselves, but stand poised to be the first in line for the spoils of an emergent methodology.

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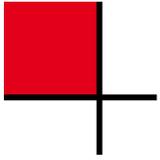
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Monstrous critical practice

Desiree Tahiri

abstract

Incisive yet often politically neutralised, traditional academic critique has had little effect on the neoliberal organisational cultures of the university. Monstrosity as a means of subversion and survival can grow a communicative practice that rewires intellectual critique. 'Monsters', the imagined and the real, live in ways that can be instructive for creating lives at the boundary of the neoliberal 'normal'. The swelling dread and psychopathy of the horror genre mirrors our parallel world of Kafkaesque bureaucracies. To survive and live meaningfully within the horrific neoliberal university, we must become monstrous. Monsters assert freedom and power in their anarchistic threat to the established order. No apologies, nor polite critique. Business schools have opened portals to neoliberalism: we must sharpen the teeth and claws of our critique between the walls of the universities we inhabit and wreak creative, anarchistic havoc.



1| My own image (2019) silver gelatin photograph

As Parker contends, ‘seeing things differently might be a precursor to doing things differently’ (2005: 165). Horror holds a mirror up to the dystopian reality we live in. It shows a gory, disturbed world, triggering raw emotions of fear and disgust, rather than telling from a standpoint of conventional academic disconnection. This note descends into the darkness of the horror genre to illuminate the institutional psychopathy of neoliberal universities. The metaphors and allegories conjured by horror are sources for anarchistic inspiration and hold pedagogical value in helping us diagnose the nightmare of our own organisational culture.

Inside these scary institutional castles lurk even scarier entities – under these dire circumstances, we must grow fangs and become monsters. I summon monstrosity as a subversive force, drawing on the countercultural history of the grotesque and the gothic to unleash inflammatory, hybrid modes of critique. Thanem conceptualises ‘monstrosity’ as potent with ‘radically different ways of living, thinking, working and organizing’ (2011: vi). Monstrosity encompasses a critique that *shows* rather than *tells*; a critique that is combative rather than complicit with the business school and other wicked bureaucratic regimes.

The goal of this note is a justification for monstrous critique, illustrated with examples of what that might look like. To begin, we shall briefly gaze upon horrific neoliberal growths sprouting during the pandemic. I shall then revive you with the electrifying writing of the Invisible Committee and Jem Bendell, operating beyond academic abstraction and other colonial, patriarchal traditions of objective authority. From here, I will show you monstrous entities such as the multi-headed critical practice of the Rhodes Must Fall movement, whose radical methods of critique push for critical praxis beyond the boundary of academic writing.

Having peered at these expressive forms of non-conventional critique that exemplify the spirit of monstrosity, we return to the business school – which we know is in dire need of a biting critique.

‘Biting back’ conjures visions of the powerful jaws of the vagina dentata. Cixous argues that to undermine phallogocentric authority still embedded within Western patriarchal institutions, women must write their own mythology – ‘taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of’ (Cixous, 1976: 887). The vagina dentata may be our emblem – a monstrous female body that we redefine as subversive in its ability to sabotage organisational logic that works to ‘maintain control of the body as self-contained, disciplined, bounded and detached’ (Vachhani, 2009: 174). It is a figment of female monstrosity that snaps and scrambles the DNA of neoliberal institutions, particularly relevant considering the university’s patriarchal undoing of feminist struggles, as in the severing of humanities studies.

Many images in this note, either my own or drawn from public promotional material, do equal work to writing. The transmutation of visual arts into critical sociology, and vice versa, creates new knowledge and networks, perceived as experimental within the university context. This note aims to jam that system of categorisation.

The plague



2| University café; my own image (2020) digital photograph.



3| University café; my own image (2020) digital photograph.

The values and priorities of our universities have become clear – COVID-19 has exposed the brutality of the neoliberal university. The caution tape in the scenes above could denote the violence universities exercise towards staff and students in their exclusion from a meaningful ‘seat at the table’ in decision

making. The sign in image 3 (situated at a university café) does work to rebrand distancing as collectivity. Such shallow discourses of care and solidarity are offensive. Implicating the now common social practice physical distancing, it is not unusual – except for its peculiar wording. Who is this caution-taped scene at a university reserved for? Is it for the haunting presence of the virus itself, which promotes the reconfiguring of spaces of commercial interaction?

The pandemic produced a ban on travel to and from Australia, and thus – hobbled by an over-reliance on international student fees, Australian universities' revenue dropped. Subsequent cost-cutting measures are having negative consequences for the quality of education. Both international and domestic students have been abandoned by their universities. COVID-19 has been used to justify the disposal of unprofitable courses and staff, while enforcing class division through the rise in online delivery, in which a reduced quality of teaching is received by the poor, while face-to-face learning remains accessible to the privileged (Cooper, 2020).

A dark vision orchestrated by the Australian Education board is rapidly manifesting: the university as an employer's production line. Intellectual thought here is most valued in its conversion into economic productivity. In 2020, some degrees doubled in cost, while 'job relevant' degrees (in science, technology, engineering, and maths) became significantly cheaper (Department of Education, Skills, and Employment, 2020; Duffy, 2020). The highest cost degrees ('funding cluster 1') house those disciplines that teach critical thinking. Debt is a neoliberal disciplinary mechanism, and reinforces the role of universities in class reproduction, placing equity groups that gravitate towards social sciences at a further disadvantage.



4| My own image (2020) mixed media collage: menstrual blood, hair, university map, cardboard, found images, dried venus flytrap.

How did we get here?

Our ‘normal’ is a hyper-bureaucratic wasteland producing endless social and environmental problems in its self-serving philosophy and practice. Its autophagic nature foretells its own demise.

COVID-19 has been exploited by the university manageriat as a chance to spring a trap – and in response we must escalate our critique. Despite the dull

discourse of returning to a post-pandemic ‘normal’, talk amongst academic communities of alternative universities guided by anarchistic principles abounds (Connell, 2019; Cooper, 2020; Australian Association of University Professors Administrators, 2020; Fleming, 2021).

Amongst the wreckage of a neoliberal order, it is time to sabotage and rebuild a sustainable, meaningful survival. Thanem argues that ‘organization theory needs monstrous others’ to provide opportunities and space for disruptions to the organisation’s impulse to organise thoughts and bodies (2006: 186). It is no longer worth concealing radicality under blue shirt business school uniforms; we need to do more explicitly punk, robust critical praxis. A radical alternative is the only inhabitable future.

I will attend presently to forms of academic written critique that commence a metamorphosis into the monstrous. It is through this *way of doing* that a monstrous methodology is constituted; a way of doing things differently from the normal, such as the bridging of this text’s written language and visual media in my framing of the monstrous.

Inflammatory writing

We can find literary forms of critique that show rather than tell their critical praxis. The Invisible Committee and Jem Bendell write critique that playfully bends the rules of academic writing.

‘The whole critique of finance capitalism cuts a pale figure next to a shattered bank window tagged with “Here. These are your premiums!”’, The Invisible Committee (TIC) exclaim (2017: 7). An anonymous French anarchist collective of political activists and writers, TIC critique with anger, despair, and passion; it is difficult not to consider opportunities for acts of civil disobedience upon immersion. Their style is inflammatory. When we ‘talk about life’ and ‘talk about conflicts’, as they write, there is a disengaged rhetoric used that projects neutrality through fact relaying, which they argue has depleted its ‘exchange value’ (TIC, 2017: 7). Instead, we should ‘talk *from the standpoint of life*’; ‘*from the midst of conflict*’ (TIC, 2017: 7, italics in original). This kind of talk is committed to a particular ethics and politics. It

is fierce, open, vulnerable, and risky. It stands on its own as monstrous writing that embodies a way of living, rather than a distant diagnosis under the pretence of objectivity.

Bendell's critique forecasts the unfolding climate breakdown, monstrous in its visceral illustration of the accelerating horror we are unavoidably being swallowed by. It is precisely this unfiltered horror we need to be able to confront and come to terms with our dire situation. Bendell practices his critique with passion, apocalyptic imagery, and a strongly communicated politics of resistance (2018).

In his article *Deep adaptation*, Bendell directly confronts the reader with a vivid description of the horror to come:

With the power down, soon you wouldn't have water coming out of your tap. You will depend on your neighbours for food and some warmth. You will become malnourished. You won't know whether to stay or go. You will fear being violently killed before starving to death (Bendell, 2018: 11).

Bendell reflects on moderating his tone, potentially considered dramatic – and thus unacademic. This conclusion would be, as he says, 'an interesting comment on why we even write at all. I chose the words above as an attempt to cut through the sense that this topic is purely theoretical' (Bendell, 2018: 11). We cannot look away from the frightening confrontation of this literary monster.

Writing is largely maintained as the most privileged form of knowledge production and dissemination within contemporary Western culture. While the previous examples represent monstrous divergences, there is still a commitment to talk isolated from action. Writing is a kind of action and should be reclaimed as such, rather than neutralised in the quarantined world of paywalled journals. Resisting these terms forces us down the trajectory of radical monstrosity. Both Bendell and TIC embody elements of monstrosity in their abandonment of obscurantist academic conventions, infusing punk attitude from which we can take inspiration.

If we are to truly scare the university, we must embrace the transformation of our critique into something more indefinable, fearless, and alive.

Monstrous

'Monsters' that defiantly inhabit institutional spaces can teach us something about how to practice freedom. Marina Warner traces the etymology of the word 'monster' to its Latin roots of 'monstrous', meaning 'I show', (as in demonstration) (2012: 25). The Latin verb 'moneo' is also connected, meaning 'I warn', (as located in the word 'monitor') (Warner, 2012: 25).

Across humanity's history, gothic and grotesque monsters have reigned over the shadowy, liminal spaces of the world's mythologies, freak shows, and arts. As complex creatures of wonder, monsters embody a warning, taboo, or curiosity grounded in their cultural and historical context (Halberstam, 2010). A concoction of gothic, grotesque, and carnivalesque traditions, the discourse of horror is one of otherness, disturbance, violence, and terror. The 'gothic' has always been embedded with countercultural attitude, transgression, darkness, and disorder, deviating from Western norms: 'normality' still connected to its roots in ancient Rome, the symbol of 'the center, order, visibility and civilisation' (Parker, 2005: 154).

Anarchistic monsters corrupt neoliberal institutions with their disregard and manipulation of rules. They autonomously 'undermine and exceed the boundaries of that enterprise' (Thanem, 2006: 185). We can learn from the protagonist in the film *American Mary* (2012), who defied the patriarchal, fee-hounding medical school – abandoning the institution to operate an autonomous, underground body-modification clinic using the skills she learned (simultaneously 'deconstructing' her lecturer). Lessons can be learned from the grotesque slugs in *Shivers* (1975), which slide into the crevices of the conservative, bourgeois residents of a luxury hotel and transform them into queer, sexually voracious 'zombies', liberated through chaotic parasitic control. These stories and many more offer inspiration in their subversive and spirited methods of achieving radically different ways of being. As Newitz writes, 'nothing is more dangerous than a monster whose story is ignored' (2006: 2).

Biting back

Organisations in Western capitalist societies historically value and are structured upon dominant conceptions of masculinity. Competition, profiteering, control, status, and stoicism: the neoliberal values rewarded within bureaucratic organisations are also those which mark masculinity within Western conceptions of gender. Into this space snarls the abject metaphor of *vagina dentata* – a monstrous extension of the disordered female body, an omen for the ‘breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction’ between ontological entities (Vachhani, 2009: 173). The phallogocentric discourse through which the *vagina dentata* is often interpreted invokes a binary of the passive, castrated female body – or its inversion into the castrating *femme fatale*. Vachhani instead emphasises the fluidity of the *vagina dentata*, situating it within Western historical constructions of the grotesque monstrosity of the female body. As an entity to align with in a neoliberal, patriarchal business school, the monstrous *vagina dentata*, with its dangerous bite and scrambling of meaning, disrupts the discourse and logic of Western institutions and what it means to organise (Vachhani, 2009).



5| Artist unknown (ca. 540 B.C.E.) Terracotta painted gorgoneion antefix (roof tile), terracotta, paint, made from mould, 21 x 26.2 x 9.4 cm, photograph in the public domain.

[<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/253581>]

One renowned monstrous female of ancient Roman myth whose spirit we might summon in our critique is Medusa, said to transmute every living thing that met her eyes to stone. The fanged mouths of her serpent hair and the tusks that jut from her grin (as visible in her older depictions) are symbols of the castrating vagina dentata. As a palimpsest of the phallogocentric myth which describes her, Cixous rewrites the Medusa's story from a feminist standpoint: 'you only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing' (1976: 885). Here, the monstrous Medusa does not turn her victims to stone, instead deploying her feminine gaze to unfreeze phallogocentric storytelling which revolves around the fear of the emasculating female. Medusa laughs at the 'trembling Perseuses' (Cixous, 1976: 885). She knows, as Gourlay asserts, that 'male superiority is a myth, and their fragile social control is one decisive gaze away from crumbling' (2020). What we might learn from the story of Medusa, and its rewriting, is that the neoliberal or patriarchal powers that categorise and oppress us are not set in stone. We need not ask permission for freedom, but rather (with care) already assume autonomy and enact the reality we want.

A monstrous methodology involves writing and critiquing that embodies a meaningful, self-determined way of living. Monstrosity charges the micro-politics and tensions of critique within the university with anarchist principles and rejection of victimhood. In a praxis that destabilises the imagined authority of university management, the detonation of monstrous critique is done strategically and carefully; the aim is not to flamboyantly lose one's job (unless it is). One of the most effective ways to do this is perhaps in numbers. It is much trickier to exterminate a swarm, whether it in the form of collectively organised action such as occupation of administration offices; local, routine forms of resistance such as time-killing, *la perruque*, and sabotage, declining participation in bureaucratic processes, or waves of creatively hybrid, seditious works.

Monstrous critical praxis

Monstrous critical praxis grows beyond the confines of language. It involves refusing the distinction between writing (the standard, secluded realm of

intellectual practice) and other forms of communication, giving life instead to creatures of hybridity. Monstrous critical praxis involves a chaotic continuum of art, writing, performance, activism, and simply being alive in particular ways. Categorisation is refused. As a continual project for ‘finding ways to practice forms of freedom’, enabling genuine negotiation and exploration of alternatives, critical praxis means fully embodying your critique (Tiidenberg and Whelan, 2019: 86).

Consider the confrontational displays below, which do work to both diagnose and counteract the plague of capitalist, colonial paradigms embedded within universities. Energised by forms of carnivalesque humour and civil disobedience that disempowers ‘authority’, their creative critique physically and/or psychologically infests the enemy’s supposed territory.

Culture jamming



6| UOWasteland (2016) Instagram post, 23 May.
[<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFvA1wcH327/>]

The practice of appropriating imagery for political intent has artistic history. One such artist, operating under the name ‘UOWasteland’, conducts critique through visual manipulation of the many promotional images that ‘could be misinterpreted as snapshots of a terrible apocalypse’ (2016). UOWasteland curates galleries on social media of filtered and captioned culture-jammed images. The work alludes to surreptitious neoliberal projects undertaken at

universities: managers scheming within coal mining corporate headquarters, or scientists funded to conduct research into weapons manufacture. This is an effective visual example of critical, carnivalesque humour, subverting managerial authority through the discourse of horror and demonstrating the darkness infiltrating our universities.

Student activism

Left-wing, politically active students are monsters within the system they feed. Many students resist the commercialisation of universities and do discursive and physical work towards realising an imagined alternative – a decolonised, autonomous or free university (Cole and Heinecke, 2020). Their critical praxis does not merely envision, it enacts: monsters impolitely grasp back what belongs to them.

Racist subjugation practiced under apartheid still lingers amongst the structural inequalities of South African society, its neoliberalised universities built upon the legacy of colonisation. It is here that the Rhodes Must Fall movement originates. University of Cape Town politics student Chumani Maxwele had gone to a poor, Black township nearby to pick up one of the street's buckets of human faeces left out for council to empty and hurled its contents into the bronze face of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes shouting 'Where are *our* heroes and ancestors?' (Fairbanks, 2015).

The statue is a symbol of ongoing apartheid and the Eurocentric foundations of South African academic content and management: the system is coded to erase Black history. Maxwele's action was a direct, monstrous critique, rejecting victimhood. Waves of protests were triggered, calling for the decolonisation of academic institutions and justice regarding other intersecting issues.

The movement spread, and later that year, at the University of Witwatersrand, a second movement of resistance was ignited: #Feesmustfall. Building on the energy of the previous radical actions, this movement responded to the government's significant rise in university tuition fees, already an institutional block to education for poor, Black young people.

The students deployed tactics of disruption: occupying buildings, squatting on campus, boycotting classes, and storming administration meetings (Fairbanks, 2015; Ismail, 2016). Alongside these direct actions were also more creative expressions of resistance, including a sombre display of cardboard tombstones installed outside the university's hall, engraved with university debts; performances of students drenched in fake blood laying within body outlines as dark metaphors for the murder of poor Black South Africans' futures; and a book, *Rioting and writing: Diaries of Wits Fallists*, that was 'written, managed, and led' by student activists (Ismail, 2016; Maldonado-Torres, 2017).

This open access book is an example of monstrous spirit in its reflexive, intentionally 'unacademic' literary critique. It was written by student activists directly involved in the struggle that they 'defended with [their] bodies' (Chinguno, et al., 2017: 23). The text enacts what it preaches: decolonisation of academic thinking. It consists of a collection of articles that "speak from the heart" rather than being framed by academic conversations' (Chinguno, et al., 2017: 23). Their intersectional critique is monstrous; its sharpened teeth tear the illusion of authority self-prescribed to the neoliberal institution, and in the process of its own doing, creates a decolonised reality.

The horror! The horror! The bureaucrat's labyrinth

Horror in the capitalist institution is everyday routine, its violence operating through the subtexts of its discourse. The 1980s saw the beginnings of a transformation of Australian universities into increasingly corporatised, Kafkaesque bureaucratic organisations under new neoliberal managerial boards to attract funding. There is a vast literature in Critical University Studies examining the neoliberalisation of the institution, academics, and students (Houghton, 2019; Schwartz, 2019; Connell, 2019).



7| My own image (2020) mixed media assemblage: cicada shells, cardboard, university leaflets, found objects, organic materials.

Neoliberal Wasteland



8| Screenshot of item on Curtin University's homepage in 2019. [https://www.curtin.edu.au]



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9| Screenshot of item on Maquarie University homepage in 2019. [<https://www.mq.edu.au/>]



10| Screenshot of item on Western Sydney University's homepage in 2019. [<https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/>]

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11| Screenshot of item on Deakin University's Bachelor of property and real estate degree webpage in 2020. [<https://www.deakin.edu.au/course/bachelor-property-and-real-estate>]

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12| Screenshot of item on University of Wollongong's *Open Day 2019* webpage. [<https://openday.uow.edu.au>]



13| Screenshot of item on Deakin University's Bachelor of property and real estate degree webpage in 2020. [<https://www.deakin.edu.au/course/bachelor-property-and-real-estate>]

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14| Screenshot of University of Wollongong's webpage on branding in 2020, which includes details such as the specifications of the usage of the logo's font, colours, and positioning, 2020. [<https://www.uow.edu.au/brand/>]



15| My own image (2021) digital photograph.

Above is a view into a building at the University of Wollongong that opened in 2021 during the COVID-19 lockdown. An entrail-like sculpture hangs in the stair-well, a gruesome reminder of 200 or more permanent staff whose jobs were sacrificed (Latifi, 2021). The waxy indoor plants; large windows, impeccably clean and wide space, and grey-shaded walls and furniture produce a corporate aesthetic.

Opening the portal: The business school

The business school was the doorway creaked open to usher neoliberalism into the academy. The ensuing tide of managerialism engulfed any remaining academic capacity 'to collaboratively and collegially manage ourselves, and to freely research, critique, act, and organize with the wider communities and

movements that characterize our location', as Spooner and McNinch argue (2018: xxv).

There is a deception woven through our universities by business schools: that capitalism is the best and the only way of organising. This is 'capitalist realism' as Fisher terms it, the mundane madness of the rule of profit maintained as logical, projecting a linear progress as parallel with economic growth (2013). Within contemporary business schools, capitalism is, as Parker contends, 'taught as science, rather than ideology', alongside the implicit idea that all human behaviour is guided by a rationality of self-interest (2018). This assumed psychology is the basis of business subject areas such as Human Resource Management, concerned with the manipulation of people and their desires in ways that could best serve the organisation or manager seeking control (Parker, 2018).

In the 1980s, while business schools inflated, sociology departments shrunk, forcing the migration of academics across disciplines (Parker, 2015). A decade later, Critical Management Studies grew from this juncture. At first imagining an alternative approach within the business school seeking radical changes to management, it became dominated by business school professors (Parker, 2015). Critique had its teeth filed if not pulled. Across the university, critique has become a performative exercise, channelled through writing which satiates audit requirements. People operate within the department, wearing the sinister skin of neoliberalism, yet harbour the desire to change it. How do they reconcile their occupation?

Bite back: Critique with teeth

If the goal is to change the system, then conventional critique has sadly not worked. As Tiidenberg and Whelan write, reflecting on Foucault's analysis of critique, 'questioning that which seems inevitable ... challenges the production of knowledge and limits authority' (2019: 84). To apply this thinking to traditional practices of critique itself, such as that embodied by an academic journal article, inspires the creation of something hybrid, anarchistic, and direct.

Monstrous academics refuse to be subdued within the neoliberal university system yet must negotiate this path to ensure their ongoing employment within a culture of censorship and fear of defamation (Parkinson, 2017). This is the position I find myself in – a PhD student writing from within an institution, about that institution. As Moten and Harney write, ‘to be in but not of – this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university’ (2004: 101).



16| My own image (2021) silver gelatin photograph, cooked in hot beeswax.

‘Straight’ rhetorical academic critique has much capacity for incisive insight. Anarchistic abandonments, however, produce texts that are self-aware, emotional, and subjective with creative, practical, ‘fuck-you’ attitude. Texts that flip the rules grow teeth and claws to carve spaces for alternative ways of being.

Forms of critique can be expanded; there are broader references and traditions usually suppressed or ignored in academia. I want to make the case that critique done as an active, unapologetic, and collective praxis – a ‘monstrous’ critical praxis, is especially powerful. If we want critique to be meaningful, relevant, and effective, it must engage with the world as an open, diverse social project. A monstrous methodology means rejecting mainstream institutional standards of what counts as research, how to best do research, and how to present and share research. The essence of my own monstrous methodology is a challenge to hierarchies of knowledge, fusing disparate media and fields on an equal platform, to form a political, practical critique.

Toothed ‘others’ that inhabit institutionally drawn boundaries – precarious academics that bite the hands that feed, alongside indignant students, assert power in their anarchistic threat to the established order. A monstrous critical praxis undoes aloof, phallogocentric, colonial norms of academic methods and Western epistemology. It scrambles bureaucratic logic. Critical praxis as direct action – developing free schools or occupying administerial spaces – forces the disruption of business as usual and demonstrates what other worlds could look like. Critical praxis can also take the form of artefacts, monstrous in their way of doing ‘a text’. The examples of monstrous methodology in this note pulsate amongst others in an enduring mass of resistance; teratomas growing in cracks in the institution, which may eventually overwhelm it. They embody elements of anarchism in their care, creativity, vitality, future-mindedness, and struggle for autonomy amongst the horror of neoliberal work and life. Undertaking a monstrous critical praxis requires courage, an acceptance of risk, and endurance of spirit. Negotiating a way through the established order takes time. As Slavoj Žižek jokes, musing on the struggle to castrate capitalism and those in power, rather than their outright cutting ‘you make small changes and all of a sudden, balls are no longer there’ (2009).

Like the *vagina dentata*, a queered entity of death and birth, re-written by ‘we, the sowers of disorder’ as Cixous says, a space of infusion between bodies incorporated by her devouring jaws – we must bite back, rewrite, and birth a new reality (1976: 884). The horror of the business school and the neoliberal possession of our universities is not reasonable. In response I have decided not to be reasonable. Critique ought to have teeth, be connected to the world

beyond the university, and act rather than hope for change, or else it is complicit. This is the only way we can meaningfully survive, on our own terms. I call for action, for the collectivisation of my fellow monsters. Together our monstrous critique is a formidable force, and it is time for us to reclaim our university. Sharpen your teeth!

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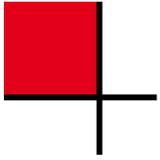
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Towards a critical theory of the corporate form

Mathias Hein Jessen

review of

Baars, G. (2019) *The corporation, law and capitalism: A radical perspective on the role of law in the global political economy*. Leiden and Boston: Brill. Historical Materialism Book Series, volume 188, (HB, pp. xx + 498, €155.00/\$186.00, ISBN: 978-90-04-29707-4).

Baars, G. and A. Spicer (eds.) (2017) *The corporation: A critical, multi-disciplinary handbook*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (HB, pp. xi + 554, £99.99, ISBN: 978-1-107-07311-1)

In recent years, critical research on the corporation has sprouted in a number of different disciplines, wherein the corporation (or critical research on the corporation) has not earlier been a focal point or a specific point of interest: History (Stern, 2011); intellectual history (Jessen, 2012; 2020); corporate law (Ireland, 1999; 2010); management and organization studies (Veldman, 2013; Veldman and Willmott, 2013); geography (Barkan, 2013); political science (Ciepley, 2013); as well as an issue on corporate governance here in *ephemera* (Jansson, Larsson-Olaison, Veldman and Beverungen, 2016), just to mention a brief selection. This is not to say that

corporations and corporate power have not previously been treated within these disciplines, but given the seemingly increasing political and economic power, coupled with numerous scandals and misuses of this power, critical research on the corporation – or more precisely, research on the specificity of the corporation and the corporate form – is on the rise within a number of different sub-fields and disciplines. The two books reviewed in this essay are an example of, a testament to, and a contribution to this development. The first book is Marxist legal scholar, Grietje Baars', *The corporation, law and capitalism: A radical perspective on the role of law in the global political economy*, which uses the commodity form theory of law to analyze the role of the corporation and corporate accountability, particularly in post-WWII international criminal law. The second is a handbook entitled, *The corporation: A critical, multi-disciplinary handbook*, which is edited by the same Grietje Baars along with André Spicer.

The books are of both qualitative and quantitative magnitude. They both testify to the burgeoning interest in critical, multidisciplinary research on the corporation. Where Baars' book is probably more for the specialized audience, interested in law, capitalism, and the corporation (and their intersection), the handbook may naturally have a broader interest, exactly because it allows the reader to dive into specific sections, fields, or sectors of interest. A handbook is a specific genre consisting of several different entries, in this case more than 40, and thus it is not a book meant necessarily to be read from cover to cover.

As the introduction to the handbook states, the corporation 'has become a dominant form of economic life'. Corporations are among the biggest and most powerful economic entities in the global economy, and if 'we really want to understand the contemporary economy, a good place to start is the corporation' [Baars and Spicer, 2017b: 1]. Another central characteristic, which Baars and Spicer put forth, is that the corporation, as an organizational form, is increasingly edging out other organizational forms, thereby increasingly creating a 'corporate monoculture' [Baars and Spicer, 2017b: 2]. As Baars and Spicer recognize, there is already a vast amount of scholarship on the corporation, mainly in law, but the existing scholarship suffers from two central problems, namely, a lack of interdisciplinarity and a

critical approach. It is these problems that the books seek to rectify (or begin to rectify) through several disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary entry points.

Grietje Baars', *The corporation, law and capitalism*, is, as the title suggests, a book 'about the relationship between law and capital, or, put differently, about the role of law in capitalism' [Baars, 2019: 2]. Baars is a Marxist legal scholar and thus approaches law, capitalism, and the corporation from this perspective. The book highlights that the corporation is a product of law, and builds on a Marxist legal perspective stressing that law and capitalism are co-constitutive. This means that '*because of law's relationship to capital*, law cannot, categorically, be successfully employed to prevent or remedy the many negative effects produced around the world by corporate capitalism' [Baars, 2019: 3, italics in original]. Hence, instead of presuming – as many corporate reformers do – that legal regulations and law restrict or control corporate action, the point is that they actually enable corporate activity. Baars is especially focused on corporate accountability through international criminal law, and the key argument of the book is that 'rather than thinking of corporate accountability as capable of restraining corporate value extracting activity, we should think of it as *facilitating* corporate profit making and corporate capitalism as a whole' [Baars 2019: 2, italics in original]. Therefore, Baars attempts to show, how 'counterintuitively, international criminal law has helped, and continues to help, corporations gain and maintain a legitimate role in the management of global affairs' [Baars, 2019: 2]. Rather than constraining corporations, corporate accountability enables their actions, because accountability (and the potential criminal liability that comes with it) legitimizes corporations as partners in global governance.

Critical and interdisciplinary scholarship needed

As already stated, the main argument of the handbook is that while there is a lot of academic work on the corporation, this work suffers from two fundamental shortcomings: a lack of interdisciplinary scholarship and a lack

of a critical approach [Baars and Spicer, 2017b: 3-5]. Let us start with interdisciplinarity, and why it is important.

As Philip J. Stern points out in the handbook chapter on ‘The corporation in history’, in medieval and early modern Europe, the legal structure of the corporation was not primarily, or to a very large extent, used for commercial business or enterprises, but rather for a large variety of purposes, especially towns, cities, and municipalities [Stern, 2017: 23-24]. A corporation was a legal and political institution that allowed groups of people to unite into one body, to own common property, to be a subject of right, and to enjoy certain privileges, for instance autonomy, tax exemptions and perpetual existence [Stern, 2017: 24]. However, from around the 17th century, the corporate form increasingly began to be used for commercial enterprises, especially the colonial and imperial joint-stock trading companies, of which the Dutch and the British East India Companies were the most prominent. In early modern Europe, the state chartered, recognized, accepted, or created several corporations and imbued them with certain privileges and exemptions from law (often autonomy, own jurisdiction, tax and customs exceptions, etc.), in order to govern social life (Barkan, 2013). The corporation was historically a governing entity created, recognized, or accepted by government or the state, and whose business rights and capabilities were only added at a much later stage in history (Ciepley, 2013: 141). Therefore, to understand corporate power, how it wields its power, as well as its relation to state, law and capital, we need to study its historical development.

Additionally, just as the corporation is obviously an *economic* entity, it is also a *political entity*, both in the sense that it is politically constituted, but also in how it wields political power internally over its members, for instance how it governs its employees through rules and regulations beyond those of national laws (see also Anderson, 2017; Ciepley, 2013; Ferreras, 2017). The handbook tries to take this interdisciplinary problem seriously by dividing the book into two parts. The first is a range of disciplinary overviews, focusing on the role of the corporation in different academic disciplines such as history, legal studies, economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, geography, accounting and management studies. The second part consists of so-called ‘interdisciplinary thematic chapters’, which are grouped

into 10 subsections on, respectively, the evolution of the corporate form, the multinational corporate group, the financialization of the corporation, corporate value chains, corporate citizenship, the corporation and crime, the corporation and ideology, corporation and communities, corporations and resistance, and finally, alternatives to the corporation. This structure offers the reader an overview of existing scholarship and challenges within different disciplines, as well as deeper explorations of specific fields of interest.

With regards to the *critical* part, this refers to the fact that most existing scholarship on the corporation is within law. This scholarship is generally uncritical, as it takes the corporation as a given. The problem with such an approach is exactly that it is *not* interdisciplinary.

The dominant conception of the corporation found in corporate law, microeconomics, and corporate governance derives from the neoclassical theories of the corporation as minimization of transaction costs, as nexus of contracts and in agency theory. In Ronald Coase's 'theory of the firm', the hierarchy of organisation in the firm (as opposed to the free market) is justified due to the minimising of 'transaction costs' (1937), a conception further developed in the understanding of the corporation as a 'nexus of contracts' (Jensen and Meckling, 1976). This conception is problematized in a number of entries in the handbook: The paradigm of corporate governance, known as 'agency theory', which is dominant in corporate governance theory and practice, holds that the executives or managers are 'agents' for the shareholders, who are the 'principals' [Deakin, 2017; Lazonick, 2017]. This means that the executives of a corporation have a fiduciary duty to serve the interests of the shareholders and maximize shareholder value, a conception which has led to numerous practices, such as mergers and acquisitions, buy-outs, de-mergers, downsizing, divestment, outsourcing and stock buy-backs, as well as resulted in new incentives for executives, such as performance bonuses and stock options [Veldman and Willmott, 2017; Ireland, 2017].¹ These ways of viewing the corporation treat

¹ The idea that shareholders in any meaningful way can be said to 'own' the corporation has forcefully been debunked (Ireland, 1999; Ciepley, 2013), and

it as essentially a practical legal arrangement, or an economic necessity, or the result of free contracts, and thereby miss what Baars in *The corporation, law and capitalism* characterizes as the ‘intimate, symbiotic relationship between law and capital and the nature of the corporation’ [Baars, 2019: 3].

The corporation, law, and capitalism

Baars’ book is a Marxist approach to the corporation, particularly a Marxist legal scholarly perspective on the corporation based on the commodity form theory of law. According to Baars, the task of the Marxist legal scholar is to take the role of law seriously in how it facilitates, structures, and – which is a central notion in the work – ‘congeals’ global capitalism [Baars, 2019: 3]. The book starts with a long chapter on the historical and legal development of the corporate form, and subsequently focuses on international law, and particularly international criminal law post-WWII, focusing on the war tribunals in Nuremberg and Tokyo. The book finally turns its attention to different tribunals in the 1990s and the development of corporate social responsibility and corporate accountability.

As already stated, the key argument of the book is that corporate accountability does not restrain corporate capitalism, but rather facilitates it [Baars, 2019: 2]. The central argument is that law, and particularly international criminal law, on the face of it seemingly (ideologically) safeguards against corporate humanitarian violations – by providing corporate accountability and punishing corporate wrongdoing – but that, in effect, it *legitimizes* corporations as legitimate actors of global governance, and grants corporate impunity. By making them subject to regulation and punishment, they are at the same time legitimized as subjects and citizens. Therefore, law can never be the solution to the problems of corporate power because law, capitalism, and the corporation are characterized by an

instead it could be said that shares represent not ownership but a right to a (possible, future) profit [Ireland, 2017]. Likewise, Ciepley (2013) has forcefully argued that the defining features of the modern business corporation – limited liability, asset lock-in and entity shielding – cannot be said to derive from individual contracts, but must be understood as governmentally granted privileges.

‘intimate, symbiotic relationship’ [Baars, 2019: 3].² It is law which enables the corporation and the corporate form in the first place, and therefore it is not possible to regulate or restrain it through law [Baars, 2019: 3].

For Baars, the point for the Marxist scholar is both to expose ‘structures of domination’ (that is, how the corporate form structures domination and exploitation) and ‘subverting the beliefs and values which sustain them’ (here, specifically company law) [Baars, 2019: 9]. Company law and mainstream legal scholarship, according to Baars, treat the corporation ahistorically, and thereby come to render it natural, necessary and fundamentally beneficial for economic and societal development [Baars, 2019: 11]. In this respect, company law scholarship and textbooks function as a type of ideology that conceals the operation and function of corporations, while at the same time ‘congealing’ the corporation and the relations of production and power within it.

As mentioned, Baars employs the commodity form theory of law to the corporation. The theory was first developed by the Soviet Marxist legal scholar, Evgeny Pashukanis, in his *General theory of law and Marxism*, first published in 1924 (Pashukanis, 2003). Without going into detail with the theory, from such a perspective, capitalism and law are co-constitutive and the necessary conditions of each other. What is central to the argument of the book is that the commodity form theory of law posits property ownership as the *Grundnorm*, not just of company or property law, but of *all* law. And that in this understanding it is the *subject* which is the cell-form of the legal system (as the commodity is the cell-form of the capitalist mode of production to Marx in vol. 1 of *Capital*). This is especially central to an understanding of the corporation, which gains its status and role as the main engine of capitalism in 19th century Anglo-American corporate law, precisely because it here becomes a *separate person in law*, as a legal subject. Law in this way functions as the necessary basis of the corporation, as ideologically

² In this sense, the argument is reminiscent to Joshua Barkan’s in *Corporate sovereignty: Law and government under capitalism* (2013). Here Barkan argues – through Giorgio Agamben’s notion of the exception – that it is exactly through law that the corporation gains the privileges and exemptions from law that makes it possible for it to operate the way that it does.

supporting and legitimizing structures in society, and by seemingly being an autonomous, abstract, and general way of regulating human relationships. Law – here specifically in relation to corporate accountability – presents itself as part of the solution to corporate misconduct, rather than as part of the problem [Baars, 2019: 29].

It is the legal *form* of the corporation that is central to understand because it

was developed as a legal concept to “congeal” relations of production ... and minimise capitalists’ risk-exposure while maximising surplus value extraction. In other words, the corporation was constructed as a “structure of irresponsibility” – precisely to ensure ‘corporate impunity’ (and the impunity of the individuals behind the corporation). [Baars, 2019: 11]

The corporation became ‘capital personified’, an amoral calculator, driven by the profit imperative, or the imperialism at the heart of the corporation’. [Baars, 2019: 11]. What Baars terms the ‘imperialism at the heart of the corporation’ refers to the fact that it was the corporate form which was the main engine of imperialism through colonial trading companies. And it also demonstrates how the profit imperative compels the corporation to continually search for profit and expand its operations around the globe (and, perhaps even beyond with current corporate plans to colonize space).

The specific analysis of the book concerns international criminal law (ICL) after WWII. A central part of the analysis is the post-WWII war tribunals held in Nuremberg and Tokyo, as well as the ‘rediscovery’ of ICL after 1989. To Baars, the trials served to legitimise what she calls ‘capitalism’s victor’s justice’ by concealing the economic causes and imperialist nature of the war and thereby excluding economic actors from the scope of ICL, despite the fact that the role of economic actors in instigating the war had been a point of agreement between the allies prior to the tribunals [Baars, 2019: 134-35]. The US in particular feared that future corporate and industrial participation in the government’s war efforts would be curtailed if they were penalized for their role in the war. The trials therefore served to legitimise especially the US’s position as global economic hegemon and enabled capital’s further expansion through colonization. The trials also marked a shift in the conception of the corporate responsibility. The corporate form developed in

the 19th century to *minimise individual responsibility*, but the post-WWII trials represented a move toward individual as opposed to corporate responsibility and liability [Baars, 2019: 135]. The tribunals thereby resulted in the disappearance of the economic causes of the war from the mainstream narrative. Instead, economic actors were portrayed as essentially peaceful, and economic development became synonymous securing peace. The result was that the war's economic aspects were hidden, and corporate impunity was constructed [Baars, 2019: 198].

After 1989, ICL once again came into vogue, but the set-up of the tribunals rarely (if ever) placed businesses or businesspersons on trial, leaving this mainly to NGOs and 'cause lawyers'. Often employed in internal armed conflicts away from the Western centre, 'global institutionalised ICL forms part of an effort to shift power to a global governance regime, and is aimed to allow for intervention in less powerful states/against individuals less favourable to prevailing power structures' [Baars, 2019: 310]. This is part of a general movement where corporations are increasingly *partners* in governance. This means that corporate ICL lends

the corporation in taking up this 'public', governance function. Corporate rule is here, perhaps counter-intuitively, because corporations have posited themselves ... as 'good corporate citizens' capable of the same errors as humans, and accountable to the same laws as individual people. [Baars, 2019: 343-44]

The fact that corporations are 'accountable' gives them status as legitimate actors in global governance.

Towards a critical theory of the corporate form

The books reviewed here highlight a central element to scholarship on the corporation, namely that such scholarship must be interdisciplinary and critical. To properly understand what the corporation is, and how it wields political and economic influence and power, we need to push beyond understandings of the corporation as a legal person or creation. We need to approach it from different disciplines, as a historical, political, economic, sociological, anthropological, etc. entity. To this end, the handbook provides

a great resource for exploring both disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and thematic approaches to the corporation. However, I would like to point out two issues that the books do not adequately address: Firstly, like much of the scholarship on the corporation, it is almost exclusively focused on the Anglo-American context, or at least the Anglo-American conception of corporations. This makes a lot of sense given that it was and is in Anglo-American corporate law that the corporation was developed, and it is this conception which has spread around the globe and which to a large degree governs the multinational corporations in the global sphere. However, it could be interesting to see more of how this is translated, or contested, in different national, regional, or local settings, both in the West and elsewhere. Secondly, which is from a more personal point of interest, are the perspectives from other humanities-disciplines than history. For instance, from philosophy or intellectual history. The contributions are mostly, again with good reason, from the different social science disciplines, but the corporation is centrally an *artificial or legal person* which can own property, has (some kind) of responsibility, represents interests, and so on. Insights from intellectual history or philosophy could help elucidate how the corporation has been conceived as a subject with rights, responsibilities, liabilities, etc. and highlight how this is central to understanding how corporate power is legitimized (Jessen 2020).

Moreover, I want to highlight the focus on the corporate *form*, within this new wave of critical research on the corporation (as highlighted by Baars, but also in the handbook). What I mean by this is, to paraphrase Ciepley (2013: 141), the corporation is something different from business in general, which has been and continues to be conducted under a number of different legal forms, such as sole proprietorship, partnerships, family-owned, foundation-owned or cooperatively-owned companies. In this respect, the corporate form is a historical newcomer (particularly compared to the first two). Therefore, the corporation is not simply a business firm or a managerial firm, or a large, capitalist organization. The corporate form is not specific to business entities, but has historically been used for monasteries, universities, towns, colonies, and many others, but also, presently, for different associations and business organizations, such as the

ones mentioned above. The corporate form is thus a form which gives a collective the right to own property, to make contracts, to sue and be sued, be the object and subject of law, and in general to be an entity, a legal or fictitious person. Additionally, the corporate form establishes the right to centralized management of its property and the right to establish and enforce rules within its jurisdiction. The *modern* corporate form specific to *business*, which began to emerge with the 17th century joint-stock trading companies (but which was not fully developed until 19th century Anglo-American corporate law) is particular with its principles of separation of ownership and control (between shareholders and directors), limited liability (that shareholders are only liable for the amount they have invested), and entity-shielding (that the corporation itself owns its own assets, and that these cannot be repossessed and claimed by investors). It is the combination of these factors that has made possible the pooling of large amounts of capital for risky endeavors by redistributing responsibility and accountability, and which has contributed to making the corporation and the corporate form so powerful – both economically and politically. These features have been central in making the corporation, what Baars terms, ‘global capitalism’s main engine’ [Baars, 2019: 3]. As she points out, we need to understand ‘the nature of the corporation’, this ‘masterpiece of legal technology’ [Baars, 2019: 3].

As a result, I also find strongest those chapters in the handbook that focus specifically on the nature or form of the corporation. This is formulated clearly in the chapter on ‘The corporation in anthropology’. Here, it is specified how corporations ‘loom large in anthropological research on everything from resource extraction to financial trading and pharmaceutical testing to commercial advertising’ [Foster, 2017: 112]. However, it highlights something very central, namely that this is

not the same thing as paying attention to the corporation per se. In other words, *how do we anthropologists attend to the specificity of corporations without instead backsliding into a general critique of capitalism (or neoliberalism instead)?* [Foster, 2017: 112, italics in the original]

To reiterate: The chapters that are strongest are the ones that deal with the corporation itself in its specificity, rather than those in which it becomes a

placeholder for a number of other things, such as more generally large-scale organization, business elites, or social movement studies that oppose corporate power.

In this literature, the important difference is between corporations being presented as representatives of capital, power, exploitation, etc., and then analyzing what is specific and particular about the corporation and the corporate form. What is central about this new and emerging critical scholarship on the corporation is exactly that it puts the very nature and form of the corporation to the fore. Instead of treating corporations as a stand-in or a proxy for ‘capitalism’, ‘neoliberalism’, ‘economic power’ or ‘elites’, or subsuming it under the general headings of ‘organization’ or ‘organizing’, this critical scholarship analyzes what is specific to the corporation. This form, which as the handbook states, and as I quoted in the introduction, is edging out other organizational forms, thereby increasingly creating a ‘corporate monoculture’ [Baars and Spicer, 2017b: 2].

It is also here, in paying attention to the specificity of the corporate form (and its relation to capitalism), that the potential of these books, and of this new scholarship, for management and organization studies is to be found. I would argue that this literature tends to underplay specific key actors or overarching logics (such as the corporation and capitalism). In that sense, the potentially vacuous focus implied by the notions of organization and organizing could be strengthened by a Marxist and legal view of organizational forms, chief among them the corporation and the corporate form. The books thereby provide a great resource for scholars of organization and management studies, who want to dive into the corporation and the corporate form, and also serve as good examples of interdisciplinary research that focuses on for instance law, history, and capitalism. At the same time, both works give strength to critical scholarship on corporate accountability, corporate social responsibility, corporate citizenship, social development goals, as well as the contemporary discourses on responsible, accountable, or stakeholder capitalism and corporations. As especially Baars convincingly shows, more than changing capitalism, such debates are at risk of supporting corporations as legitimate (yet flawed, and thereby ‘human’) responsible actors in global governance.

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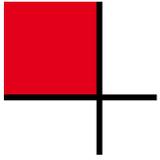
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Specters of specters of Marx : A ghost that was named Derrida

Gabriel Migheli

review of

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A ghostly encounter

What is that voice? Whose voice? And to whom is it addressed? A voice almost sepulchral. A ghost, an encounter. How are we surrounded by voices and ghosts like that? What can we learn from them? Let us go through this encounter with a ghost named *Derrida*.

Specters of Marx, published in English in 2006, is composed of lectures given at a conference entitled 'Whither Marxism?' held in 1993 at the University of California, Riverside. Composed of five distinct parts, the book is an astute and malicious typical Derridean play of resonance and words, here along the word 'specter'. Derrida leads a thorough discussion of some of the central concepts of Marxism as well, reclaiming its actuality through the lens of deconstruction. But above all, more than a text of circumstance, it is for Derrida a text of *resistance*. Back then, the time was indeed one of a certain

liberal euphoria: exhilarated by the fall of the Berlin Wall, voices announcing the end of history, and the contemporary conjuration of Marxism was having a field day. It is to resist this *Zeitgeist* that Derrida was appealing to the ghost – and not just any ghost, but that of Marx.

Times have changed since the publication of *Specters of Marx*. From the violent crisis of neoliberalism in 2008 to the rise of rightwing authoritarian regimes and revolts such as those of the Yellow Vests (not to mention the acceleration of the ecological crisis), many drawbacks have tempered the ardor of the proponents of such a triumphant liberalism – but many issues are specific to our situation. What's more, as Jacob Rogozinski, French philosopher, and former student of Derrida, showed that to think with and beyond deconstruction is perhaps the only path available so as to remain faithful to it (Rogozinski, 2005). Even though it may mean to think *against* it.

So does it mean that we are done with Derrida? How are we to read him critically in a time of pandemic? Are we done with ghosts in general? What heritage could we claim of him and deconstruction today?

To lead our discussion, we will focus on the core concepts at play in the *Specters of Marx* and more broadly in Derrida's thinking. We will introduce the question by showing to what extent Derrida's legacy remains very much alive when it comes to understanding the current political situation, as well as the field of critical management studies. We will then focus on the question of debt, political but also ecological, a topic so thoroughly discussed in *Specters of Marx*. Afterwards, we will turn to the notion of auto-immunity. Although developed in his later work, this notion is of high heuristic and political insight. Still, this is not to say that Derrida's concepts, as relevant as they are, could become the supreme explanatory principle. Some points call for a more critical discussion with other paradigms, such as biopolitics. The coronavirus not only highlighted how we remain vulnerable as a species, but also crudely exposed how biopolitical forms of power are distributed through the social and political field. Exhilarated racisms and the flare of xenophobia remind us how differential categories of human beings are being held up across several lines of fracture. Finally, this is where perhaps deconstruction must be at play against himself if it wants to keep Derrida's legacy alive.

Derrida and organization studies: a living legacy

Derrida is widely discussed in organization theory today. The appropriation of his rich corpus, though not exhaustive and still in progress, has nonetheless known a significant development in recent years. Whether it be the limits of any business ethics (Jones, 2003), the aporia at the heart of organizational democracy (King & Land, 2018), or a critique of the ontology of organization studies (Cooper, 1989), his heritage remains even more present across disciplines.

The notion of ‘hauntology’ that he developed in *Specters of Marx*, an ontology of the ghostly as opposed to an ontology of presence, has indeed contributed to a profound renewal of disciplinary fields as diverse as geography (Holloway & Kneale, 2008), cultural criticism (Fisher, 2012; Hardcastle, 2005) and, more recently, notably *via* a special issue published in *ephemera* (Pors et. al, 2019), in the field of management studies (Di Domenico & Fleming, 2014; Pors, 2016a, 2016b). As Pors et al. (2019) point out, the ghost is not just another conceptual category or metaphor. Disturbing the established criteria of knowledge, navigating between presence and absence, the ghost is not a metaphor nor another concept. As Pors et al. (2019) point out, the hollowness of the ghost suffuses the category of space and time, sealing an encounter with the Other:

For Derrida, the ghost is something that perhaps once belonged to knowledge but no longer does. It is something that (no longer) fits in any meaningful way with discourses, concepts and systems of categorization. As a sort of quasi-object/subject (Serres, 1991), the ghost brings with it a rather indecipherable message from a space beyond discourse and representation (Pors et al., 2019: 9).

So what if *Specters of Marx* was such a ghostly encounter? Could we wander into Derrida’s own crypt without getting lost or losing sight of our own predicaments? Could we try to *un-crypt* Derrida and perhaps *decipher* him?

Derrida un-crypted

Immediately, the book, by its very subtitle ('The state of the debt, the work of mourning and the New International') inscribes itself in a certain connection to the *debt*. The debt to which Derrida refers is of course the debt we owe to Marx, or at least of a certain 'spirit of Marxism', as he insists. This meditation about debt and death, life and legacy is foremost a meditation on mourning. But far from a fascination towards death, deconstruction unsettles the categories life and death itself (Derrida, 1993).

Derrida's reflection on mourning takes on a disturbingly contemporary resonance. The pandemic has completely unsettled the categories within which we think about life, death or mourning. Death has erupted in the intimacy of our lives; the macabre counting on a daily basis; the flabbergasting effect of trauma and the political sideration it causes. But this ghostly presence can become something other than a ghostly haunting. Derrida has, on the contrary, always insisted on the ethical and political issues at stakes with specters. More than a living-dead, it is a living legacy: 'And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations' [xviii].

The epidemics did not affect people randomly nor uniformly. It is first and foremost the most fragile populations on a socio-economic basis that were exposed in the first instance to disease and death (Ahmed et al., 2020; Patel et al., 2020). Care workers, delivery workers, nurses, cleaning workers; their work being disregarded or even simply ignored (a point we will come back to later, from a biopolitical perspective). But their sudden appearance onto the political stage also reminded us how these categories of workers were reduced to quasi-specters *before* the pandemic. Here the debt we owe them is not only a moral or psychological issue, nor a question of mere recognition and gratitude. It is, as Pors et al. (2019) acutely notes, a political question:

A ghostly encounter may allow us to realize that "distance" was always only a psychological and ideological construct designed to protect us from the nearness of things...and that we are, indeed, entangled to global chains of capitalism, even in our daily organizational work and efforts (2019: 22).

Coronavirus has not only exacerbated socio-economic disparities, but it also illustrated the radical ecological consequences of capitalism in an era of the Anthropocene. The question of ‘debt’ takes on a wholly different meaning when one considers it in reference to our ‘ecological debt’. As Latour (2014) has shown quite remarkably, one of the most enduring difficulties in situating ourselves in this new era lies in the very (lack of) resources available in our language. This challenge does not await organizations. It is already imminent in its urgency and immediate in its consequences. Coronavirus might therefore be a figure for such possible catastrophic outcomes, compromising the future of the next generations. One of the most ambitious and perilous challenges so far awaiting organizational theory and praxis is then radically confronting us with the ‘debt’ we owe to our Occidental conception of nature and resources.¹ As it is, are we able to get rid of it? To think our relation and the way we organize beyond reification of natural resources, beyond what Derrida called the ‘wearing in expansion, in growth itself?’ [92].

Auto-immunity and its limits

Borders have been closed. Factories were stopped. Populations have been massively displaced or, on the contrary, prevented from moving. For some, this meant life or death. Rhetorical and political means were deployed to associate the foreigner to the propagator of a lethal and highly contagious disease, feeding nationalist and xenophobic flares. How could things have turned upside down so quickly on a global scale?

Just as the antibodies that guard the immune system can turn against itself, a political body can sometimes act as if it were *suicidal*. This dialectic logic of a possible auto-destruction from within is precisely what Derrida identified as ‘auto-immunity.’ Far from reifying or biologizing the political or the social, auto-immunity disturbs the very category of identity. Because it is never a threat from the outside that makes the immune system derail, but a possibility that permeates from its origin within. Even a notion such as ‘origin’ is fundamentally flawed if it refers to an overarching founding substance.

¹ See, on this question of Anthropocene and organizations, among others: Banerjee et al., 2021; Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021; Wright et al., 2018.

Conceptually, the alteration is always consubstantial to the 'self'. What is 'proper' within a community is 'alter' from the very beginning.

Politically, the paradigmatic case of such an auto-immune situation was, according to Derrida, the reactions that followed the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Although every situation is singular, a parallel with the Covid crisis could be insightful. In several texts (for instance Borradori, 2013; Derrida, 2005b), Derrida describes how democracy can mobilize its own defenses against itself. The range of auto-immune reactions could be quite vast and lead to various manifestations in different realms of the political system, from surveillance to coercion, from economic to military means. As disturbing as it may be, what the scale of the measures implemented during the crisis exposed is that the differential exposure to life and death is not a mere byproduct of exceptional measures taken to prevent the pandemic. Quite the contrary, it has exposed how exception is consubstantial to the normal state of affairs. Auto-immunity is therefore always a latent possibility at the heart of democracy:

There are numerous examples of autoimmunitary logic at work in the West's response to terrorism. They include attacks on privacy and human rights: civil liberties being discarded or eroded by spying, the interception of emails and telephone calls, arrests without charge, endless detention, the practice of "extraordinary rendition", and a general increase in torture sanctioned by western governments. Other cases are limitations on personal freedom: on travel, increased security, and restrictions on immigration. These all feed into increases in personal anxiety. The war on terror itself is an example of autoimmunity, as it has increased the likelihood of further terrorism. The problem of autoimmunity is also demonstrated by the treatment of refugees and immigrants in western countries. Claims that certain ethnic and national groups are likely to be terrorists are used to demonize refugees and immigrants and to detain them arbitrarily and indefinitely (La Caze, 2011: 609).

It could be argued then that the current health crisis constitutes another paradigmatic case of an auto-immune response. In this respect, organizations are not spared from these questions: how can the very integrity of the democratic system be preserved without compromising the immune strategies (medical and political) that are necessary to halt the pandemic? How are we to distinguish exceptional measures that had to be taken from more or less obvious infringements of democratic fundamental laws? If there

is perhaps no clear-cut answer to this question, a satisfying problematization should invite us here to depart from the sole paradigm of auto-immunity.

As insightful as the logic of auto-immunity proves to be, it nonetheless can discard many issues regarding power, racism or even the concrete ways in which security apparatuses were deployed during the crisis; the obtrusive inequalities that prevail may be analyzed further on more political and socio-economical grounds. Thus, we would like here to open a discussion that could be prolonged between auto-immunity and biopolitics. What's more, the complexity of the ongoing situation should guard us from relying overtly on a unique paradigm; calling for a fertile debate between various philosophical and intellectual traditions.

Derrida after Derrida

Can we think of Derrida after Derrida? What could it mean for us to think *after* Derrida? Did not Derrida warn us to avoid the two symmetrical pitfalls of worship or destruction? And what could 'after' even mean here? Is it about chronology? Is it a pure philosophical issue? Is deconstruction *undeconstructible*? Perhaps. But perhaps this call to vigilance is another name for deconstruction. Confronted as we are with multiple challenges, there is no doubt that deconstruction remains a critical and decisive intellectual tool in order to elaborate a theory as well as a praxis for emancipation. Activists, academics and all those struggling for a more just world can find themselves in Derrida's legacy. Still, as Derrida reminds us, to remain faithful is to remain *unfaithfully* faithful.

In a recent contribution, Jean-Luc Nancy² (2021a, 2021b), went as far as labeling the coronavirus a 'communovirus.' What did he mean by that? First, he wanted to make a point about how the pandemic unveiled the current state of our common dependency as a species towards our environment. Thus, to a certain extent, it was argued that the virus served as a catalyst of an

² Nancy, who passed away during the Covid crisis, was a former student of Derrida and, along with Lacoue-Labarthe, with whom he wrote many books, a foremost and original continuator of deconstruction.

ontological premise: the ground upon which a new *common* human condition could result may lie in our very exposure to the virus. This interpretation is disconcerting on many aspects. First, Nancy based his reading of the crisis on an ontological presupposition of the human condition as being-in-relation. This could be supported or not on a speculative ground. But on another perspective, it considerably dismisses the socio-political basis of any community. Is not auto-immunity here somehow assuming a homogenous exposure of everyone to the virus? Indeed, biopolitics operates differently, by *fracturing* the continuum of human life along racist, sexist and economic lines of division. And these lines of fracture remain as acute as ever. One just has to consider here with angst the alarming rise of xenophobic and racist politics (Lorenzini, 2021).

Secondly, biopolitics is more than a mere set of institutional and technological control apparatuses. Biopolitics presupposes that power in modern society is configured through a certain production of *subjectivity*, itself resulting from specific socio-political structures. These are what define how we think about ourselves prior to any ontological premise. Therefore, placing the discussion on ontological ground can prove misleading and leave aside some decisive issues. As such, despite its profound insights on ethical and political issues, deconstruction is not exempted from *auto-immunity* as well. To be sure, raising these difficult points should not be considered as taking a pessimistic counterpoint to Jean-Luc Nancy's position, nor throwing away deconstruction as such. Many different fronts have been opened during the pandemic; the point here is more to critically assess different paradigms so we may find new ways of organizing and thinking.

One of these fronts is of course social movements. This is not to downplay the challenges awaiting us nor to promote a unitary and homogeneous vision of them. But more than the common exposition of our immunity, the pandemic and social movements could be considered as a 'battlefield' (Pleyers, 2020); a battlefield that is political as well as theoretical. From auto-immunity to biopolitics, these are quite concrete and sometimes different questions that are then outlined. Among them, perhaps the most urgent: is another 'politics of life' (Fassin, 2009) possible? How are new forms of collective subjectivities emerging? What's our situation, what's our heritage?

‘Our heritage was left to us without a testament.’

This sentence by French poet René Char, to which Arendt liked to refer, perhaps defines our situation now. We are left with no clues nor testament on how to invent the future. This might be our risk but also our chance, as Derrida might have put it; and it is certainly our most challenging and daunting task. But it should not prompt us to believe that we are settled in any way with the ghosts. Perhaps the ghost is not behind us. Is it ahead then? Perhaps waiting for us. Or us waiting for it? Or for him? But who? The ghost might as well be our future. Might we learn from it? Can we learn to live *after* Derrida? Perhaps. But not without him for sure. Not without reading him. But also, as it is implied, not without *questioning* him. After all, it was him who urged us to do so; this excruciating and never-ending task of speaking with ghosts: ‘Can one, in order to question it, address oneself to a ghost? To whom? To him? To it, as Marcellus says once again and so prudently? “Thou art a Scholler; speake to it Horatio. Question it.”’ [221].

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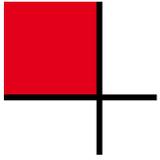
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Against Black community? Organizing solidarity through the archive

Prem Sylvester

review of

Best, S. (2018) *None like us: Blackness, belonging, aesthetic life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. (pp. 208, \$24.95 in PB, ISBN: 978-1-4780-0150-8, DOI: 10.1515/9781478002581)

In the embers of May 1968, French post-structuralists such as Maurice Blanchot (1988) and Jean-Luc Nancy (1986) made the argument that ‘community’ was no longer a tenable concept, nor a desirable political end. Per this line of thought, the ‘communism’ that would close off and essentialize what constituted community had to be fundamentally rethought. For Jacques Derrida, the archive was similarly an object of (State) power that closed off what could be (communally) known – a foundationally troubled mode of consignation, often violent in its ‘gathering together [of signs]’ (Derrida 1996). It is in these strains of attempts to rethink community and communitarian thought that Stephen M. Best’s *None like us* intervenes, stressing the apparent impossibility of organizing collectivity – specifically, ‘Black’ community – through the archive. Beginning with how Black studies has (re)constructed ways of knowing Black – especially Black American – pasts, Best takes the reader through ‘surface readings’ of artwork and historical records, arguing for an ‘unhistoricist’ that, he proposes, would

enable contemporary Black people to reconsider their grounds of being-together. Specifically, Best argues, organizing Black community around the historical wound of slavery is an error; the horrors of slavery should not be treated — literarily and historically, narratively and archivally — as an accumulative and accretive epistemology and ontology, but a *past* that shatters any attempt at consignment, at present community.

Best's critique of community begins with Black studies itself, particularly with what he calls its 'communitarian impulse', that is, 'the thesis that black identity is uniquely grounded in slavery and middle passage' [1] and that 'the slave past provides a ready prism for understanding and apprehending the black political present' [2]. The phrasing of '*none like us*', which Best takes from David Walker's 1833 text *Appeal to the coloured citizens of the world*, thus implies a litote, producing 'a meaning by denying its semantic opposite' [8]. The 'us' that is apparently constituted in Walker's time, when slavery persists in living memory, is called to negativity, to a hope that the figure of the slave be impossible in the future. 'None like us' also, Best suggests, calls to a reader in the present day to say that none from that wounding time be reproduced, a call that may be read as underscoring 'an assumed and impossible universality to Walker's "us"' [9].

What Best wants us to pay attention to are two tendencies he notes in the *reproduction* of literary and historical narratives of slavery over the past few decades of (American) Black studies — what he calls 'the recovery imperative' and 'melancholy historicism'. The former is 'the ethic of an empathetic historicism fundamentally recuperative in its orientation' [12], that seeks to recover what is unrecoverable. What was instituted and conserved (Derrida 1996) in the archive *then* cannot, Best argues, be constitutive of the *now*. Best's criticism of the recovery imperative implicitly rejects the construction of 'counter-narratives' (Bastian 2006) that can reconstruct an alternative past from and through historical recovery. This imperative is to be interrogated because what it seeks to recover *from*, i.e., enslavement, becomes what is to be recovered at all, that is, 'a "we" *at the point of our violent origin*' (emphasis added) [14].

Per Best, then, work that follows the recovery imperative recovers violence from the archive to apparently produce a ‘melancholic’ treatment of history, a narrative mode that he argues was inaugurated by Toni Morrison’s classic novel, *Beloved*. This narrative performs accounts of pain — most notably, of slaves — to extend to the racialized social body as redemption, as an ontological beginning; here, ‘blackness derives from bearing a negative relation to [history]’ [9]. Such a ‘transference *from readers to characters*’ (emphasis added) [78], as seen in readings of *Beloved*, acts, according to Best, as a ‘refusal of...detachment’ from, and ‘persistent identification’ [68] with, history — with a melancholy past. Assigning the beginnings of Blackness to such violence is therefore problematic to the author, as it relies on ‘a sense of impossible black sociality’ [10], one that is ‘to be appreciated in the *failure* to make its racial legacy present’ (emphasis added) [78]. In other words, Best argues that these historically-derived accounts of moments when Black people were subject to the violences of slavery are mistakenly reproduced as the constitutive conditions of Black solidarity. These accounts apparently fail *because* they are interpreted as accounts of solidarity rather than separateness, i.e., where a Black *person’s* wound is misread as that of Black *people’s*. Best therefore encourages us to read in these instances ‘a selfhood that occurs in disaffiliation rather than in solidarity’ [22].

These differences in accounting for Black pasts leads to Best arguing in favour of a *rhetorical* mode of uncovering what happened before (irreducible to something like a collective past), rather than a *historical* mode. The emphasis here is on how we might *write* history, rather than on recovering the lives of archived subjects — or, Best might argue, the objects — of history. It would mean questioning ‘what it would mean to write about figures who resist our attempts to restore them to wholeness, who resist our projects of historical recovery’ [25]. Best begins with the question of how we might read the *surface* of historical records, of the archive, before moving to the archive itself, and in particular the ‘rumors on the surface of the archive’ [26], the indeterminate and indeterminable traces from which we have recovered history. Along the way, Best rejects melancholy historicism, that which assumes slavery as the originary point for Black community, instead setting out through the rest of the book in search of ‘a historicism that is not

melancholic but accepts the past's turning away as an ethical condition of my desire for it' [20].

(Surface) Reading the archive

Historical recovery or 'reconstruction' from 'below' the surface of the text, the textual present, is for Best doomed to always carry presentist modes of relation to refigure the past. A critic — of art or narrative — who engages in such recovery may be accused by Best of overestimating their critical remove from and/or mastery over the object of recovery. For Best, an artwork (or the work of art) provides an alternative model for thinking that confronts us in the present, against historicizing depth. Through the example of El Anatsui's *Hovor II*, which comprises thousands of reworked liquor bottle caps, Best argues that the political note here — Europeans traded alcoholic drinks such as Scotch with Africa from the time of the earliest contact between the two peoples — lies *on the surface* of the artwork, rather than requiring critical access. By reading 'surfaces that point reflexively to their own, internal complexities so that they can also be said to offer their own form of critical understanding and, in that sense, to be the very medium in which thought happens' [34] such as those of 'the layered paper canvases of... Mark Bradford, Gwendolyn Brooks's free-verse poems, and... the recent novels of Toni Morrison' [22], then, is to enact a 'non-sovereign form of critical subjectivity' [33]. '[T]hinking *like* a work of art' (emphasis added) [35], then, forces us to linger with what that art *itself* surfaces. The work of art presents itself as a clue to, and method for, surface reading (Best and Marcus 2009). Dissolving the critic into the *experience* of art, then, allows Best to emphasize that the political work of such experientiality is 'not an interpretation or contextualization of it, but a *description* that allows one to inhabit it' (emphasis added) [36]. Surface reading, then, works out an '*aesthetics of the intransmissible*', one that eludes knowing its depths in its shimmer. For Best, this enacts "a "style" of freedom: freedom from constraining conceptions of blackness as authenticity, tradition, and legitimacy; of history as inheritance, memory, and social reproduction; of diaspora as kinship, belonging, and dissemination" [22-23]. Such an

aesthetics also re-figures the surface as a layering of fragments, of ‘notions of disturbance, interruption, performance’ [51] that enrich the surface.

The surface is then not an inert layer, but a *layering* of fragments accumulated through history. The critic can ostensibly reveal something of that history without needing to reach (impossibly, Best argues) for a cohering of those fragments. Best’s method, then, enacts a ‘separation [from the past] as a condition of relation [in the present]’ [56]. Such a distancing, says Best, is to perhaps be found in the narrative of Morrison’s *A mercy*, written decades after *Beloved*, which ‘abandons us to a more baffled, cut off, foreclosed position with regard to the slave past’ [78] and hence ‘what it means to be held by the grip of slavery but not race’ [79]. The slavery narrative, once again, is a melancholy historicism that is not to be treated as constitutive of Blackness.

This critical distance that Best argues for is both temporal and subjective. The epistemic anxieties that arise from such a project of knowing, or more precisely, the past’s unknowability, is especially relevant for reproducing history from the archive(s). The archive notably presents a ‘fiction...of plenitude’ [84], an excess of the recorded past, while still suffering from a notable poverty in what is *knowable* about that past. Archival work, then, has a foundational lack that Best wants us to pay attention to. He is, however, not concerned with the production of archives (cf. Azoulay 2019, Mbembe 2002, Sekula 1986) nor its architectonic dimensions (cf. Derrida 1996, Mbembe 2002). He is not concerned so much with the Derridean *arkhe*, the memorial ‘inside’ of the archive (Derrida 1996). He is, however, concerned with the archival aspect of memory, or rather, the archive’s deformation of memory. We cannot get past the outer skin — the surface — of the archive not because we cannot access the material depths of the archive, but because there is nothing in it that is epistemically unmarked by racial or colonial violence. The implication, then, chimes with Arielle Azoulay’s (2019) invocation to value what remains ‘outside’ the archive, outside the violent making of historical memory. Past the surface, the critic is ‘at risk of mistaking the recovery of the past for its redemption’ [87], especially if we don’t recognize the ‘ontological *disturbance* [in Black culture] the archive produces’ [88]. In other words, the slave figures that are recovered by the

critic from the archive are ‘metaleptic, the figure of a figure’ [90] — the critic reproduces a violent reduction of real, which is to say fuller, persons. Reading these figures on the surface, then, is Best’s attempt not to *misrecognize* those figures as easily readable in — or simply transferable to — the present.

This mode of surface reading, then, immediately throws up problems of the *critic’s* spatiotemporal — which is to say historical — location, and more importantly if there is such a thing as a stable surface at all. As Carolyn Lesjak (2013: 246) puts it, ‘[s]urface reading hopes to freeze time, to stay in the present in its appeal to the commonsensical, to a thing’s face value’. However, this occludes the movements of those apparent ‘fragments’ that came to be arranged as the surface, which can only be read in their historical arrangement. Best’s surface reading of artwork — which is also how he reads the archive — is neither exactly ‘along the grain’ or ethnographic (Stoler 2010) nor hermeneutic (Lesjak (2013: 244): ‘a hermeneutics of suspicion is replaced by a suspicion of hermeneutics, a disavowing of interpretation itself’); instead, it claims that what the surface *presents* is what the surface *is*. This seems to ‘leave untouched the level on which ideology [and other productive tensions] structures the apparent contiguity and coherence of the surface of the text itself’ (Lesjak 2013: 249). This negativity at the heart of the text — an absent-presence which pulls reading in a certain direction — produces a certain narrative of the wound, of the history of slavery (one certainly structured by colonial and racist power) that Best identifies but does not *interpret*. This negativity may in fact be better understood by *reading dialectically* — by reading the surface of the text in its negation, looking *below the surface to surface* the historical forces that structured the unknowability of the past, the violence that made Black sociality impossible. Such reading, then, is of a particular political project (informed by Marxism, certainly, but also queerness — Lesjak cites both Fredric Jameson’s espousal of dialectical ideological critique and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s attention to the sensory, lived experience of reading) that would value how the organization of the text can both reflect and deform sociopolitical organization.

It is important here to keep in mind how the politics of reading dialectically comes up against the political valences of the critic as interpreting-self, the latter of which for Best must be pursued towards the direction of the abnegation of the self. Such a mode of reading, extended to the social text, can generate a reading of community as a form in which the critic, the apparent political agency, is always-already imbricated and implicated in, and cannot *exceed*. Specifically, Best argues that this latter orientation is truthful to the political tradition that Cedric J. Robinson brought forth: ‘There is an essential opacity to the black radical tradition, an “imagination” amenable to neither the *utopianism* of a revolutionary consciousness nor the pure *negativity* of a black nihilism’ [41]. It is important to respect this tradition, and acknowledge the questions surface reading asks of us, on why even ‘effective’ dialectical reading can fail in ‘doing anything’ to the depths (such as those produced by ideological structures) of the text.

Archival limits

The opacity of texts, for Best, coincides narratively and politically with the opacity of archived acts and figures that he suggests have been historically instrumental in producing narratives of Black ‘community’. Knowing and reproducing these agencies in contemporary narratives is a path to tread with caution.

For Best, these ontoepistemological difficulties, especially of the political self, are exemplified at their limit with the (recording of) the act of suicide. Narratively, it represents the unknowable, or the knowable at its limit. The act itself becomes, for Best, ‘a singular principle of negativity at the center of the order of history’ [94]. The presence of acts of suicide in the archive, he contends, subverts the classic distinction between a closed totality and an opening of/through creativity, between structure and agency [101-103]. Simply put, what agency might we ascribe to an act of suicide? *Whose* agency? Death, as a ‘fact of social existence’ [99] is made politically useful when archived as suicide, but this political agency attributed to suicide, argues Best, is another instance of attempting to ‘restore to wholeness’ a community of the enslaved which simply cannot be. Taking up the case of

Willem Bosman's *A New Description of the Coast of Guinea* (1705), Best points out how an error of translation produced a figure of the suicide-bombing 'Commander in Chief of the *Negroes*', where in fact, the (accidental) suicide bomber was a Dutch commander. In other words, the agent of suicide is misattributed, eliminating the source of political agency in the act of suicide that abolitionist scholars have 'romanticized' as 'good death' [106].

To reproduce archived acts of suicide as a particular kind of political agency that could make collectivity is, per Best, to mistake the form of that agency. Reading the corrected translation is to recognize that agency as 'expressed as a refusal of the possibilities of social action that have been shaped and organized by colonial power — in short, when the enslaved innovate in the interest of their own oblivion' [105]. It is an act of negativity, of *negative creativity*, that distends its place in the archive through its opacity; the opacity of the act, then, reflects the slave's (the past figure's) opacity. Reading suicide as political practice is difficult because that reading is conditioned by the act's colonial-archival figuration, by the metalepsis wherein the recovered slave 'makes himself once over from the stuff out of which he had been made' [105].

Like suicide, the rumor is a surfacing of fragments that are readable as they come to us via the archive — in other words, without certainty in their relation to the eponymous 'us'. Their very whispered uncertainty would mean that they cannot functionally be put to use for an organizational project. The many voices that make the rumour paradoxically vacate it of a subjective position. Rumour, provided with 'material textual support', becomes an aural object that is 'neither ordinary speech nor literary invention, but something approximating their transaction' [121]. Rumour as archive, archive as process. It is then the very availability of rumours to us that 'makes them more subject to doubt at the level of their ontology' [115] since their auralness is now reified as writing, beyond the fragmented ontological impossibility, their whispers, that rumours surface from. We were never meant to read the rumour. Rumours are emblematic of the non-recoverability of historical subject-making. Leave the past in the past, says Best (which is to say, in the colonial archive). Do not make community out of

a melancholic past. What else, however, gets left behind if and when we leave the past alone?

An unhistorical organization?

The descriptions of violences done to and by raced subjects in the archive cannot then, per Best, be (re)written and narrated as registers of that which may record (and hence possibly organize) a collective Black experience. The ‘past’ recovered from recordings of the enslaved is separate from the present — it is *theirs*. Such a non-melancholic historicism would require us ‘to see in our severance from figures in the past, to see in their opacity, the idea that they are present to us in the only way they can be, and thus to be acknowledged, but not to be known’ [99]. But is melancholy, history, and collectivity to be so easily abandoned?

We may first ask of Best, is melancholic historicism merely reparative or could it be performative of something other than melancholy? Diana Taylor (2003) argues that there is no subjectivity outside the historical memory, even — in fact, especially — if such memory is traumatic; its ‘remembering’, its ‘thought’, organizes an embodied subjectivity that reanimates present possibilities of collectivity. These possibilities reverberate in differential ways across the social body; trauma, which is ‘anti-archival by definition’ (ibid: 193), cannot be reduced to a singular experience, an argument which Cvetkovitch (2003) also makes. Particularly, it is embodied and communitarian *performance* that makes trauma anarchival: ‘Looking at performance as a retainer of social memory engages history without necessarily being a “symptom of history”; that is, the performances enter into dialogue with a history of trauma without themselves being traumatic’ (Taylor 2003: 210). In other words (and *pace* Best), it may not be trauma but mourning that is to be found in the heart of the archive (Cvetkotvitch 2003). Melancholy, then, does not need to hold onto its object in a Freudian sense, but perform a being-together that still holds its negativity.

Secondly, taking Best’s historiographical philosophy seriously upends historicity itself. It restores agency to the past only by breaking from it in the now. Best acknowledges the *unhistoricism*, the *unframing* of time, of such a

method but asks us to consider its value in avoiding tendencies to remake the past in the narratives of today. Best's historiographical method might be usefully applied towards a sort of perceptual, or phenomenological, constitution of raciality, particularly Blackness; of how, '[i]n the archive, we discover not who we are but how "we" are not' [132]. There is, for Best, no Black solidarity to be found in histories of agency constructed interpretively along the grain, with a view to forging contemporary collectivity. For example, Best may agree with Azoulay's assertion that the archive, as a mode of instituting citizenship (and hence organizing the potentialities of collectivity and solidarity in modern liberal democracies) forecloses modes of being-together in the present, but goes further in his abandonment of historicity than Azoulay's unlearning of history¹. It is a troubling extreme to which Best's unhistoricism takes us, but this is not to abandon his compelling insights into the 'place', the source, of the archival whisper. We do need to be careful that we are not seduced by the fallacy of a definitive and wholly recoverable history. In other words, we cannot simply be organized *by the very presence* of a traumatic or melancholy history.

Such caution does *not* mean, however, that the historically (which is to say ideologically, colonially, racially) constituted surface is to be taken as is, recognized as constituted violence, and hence quickly abandoned. To do so would equally be to give up our future(s). Reading dialectically, 'notions of surface and depth can be seen in productive tension or unease with each other' (Lesjak 2013: 248). It is then precisely in what is *not* on the surface of the archive that is of importance, not to reconstruct a past that has no ontological certainty, but to recognize how it is that very ontological negativity, the contradictions immanent in its recovery, that is vitally constitutive of the now. In other words, it is precisely in reading that opacity immanent to text that Best's mode of archival reading can be enriched. Historical recovery — not reproduction — is fundamental to making our

¹ By reading on the surface of the archive we would go beyond the Azoulay's critique of archival recovery, that 'a place *in the archive* is meant to supersede people's place *in a world* previously shared with others' (Azoulay 2019: 173), that in fact the very memories the archive writes demonstrate that the world was never shared. We would have to disavow any record of world-sharing itself.

present legible *through* its structuring occlusions and whispers, even if we acknowledge that the past cannot simply be superimposed onto present contexts, that its figures cannot be made present.

How, then, are modes of organizing our present sociality — of making community — modulated by (carefully) reading Best's invocations? For one, relying on archival records of enslaved Black life to construct contemporary modes of being-together is a fraught exercise, owing to the ontoepistemological disturbances of colonial violence that conditions what is knowable through the archive. In other words, Best argues that assuming the past is simply translatable to present ways of knowing would be a mistake. Historical trauma modulates the spaces and experiences in which Black people can organize today, but, Best argues, they do not — and should not — determine the narratives of community that thus emerge. Simply put, when we cannot be certain about *a* past, we must not make of it *the* present.

However, it is vital to remember, *pace* Best, that what is not easily known about historical reverberations in our present spaces and experiences of being-together *cannot be ignored* — *it always and continuously structures our present*. To understand the separation and differences that organize the 'surface' of our contemporary moment, that name and shape the forms and relations of community, it is essential to think and study critically the productive forces (a production that can very well be of negation) of our histories. We may be severed from our pasts in multiple ways by the violence of the archive, but to imagine that we may forge an unhistorical future is firstly to disregard the persistence of colonial and racial violence in subjectivization today, as, for example, the vast literature on sociolegal racisms demonstrates (cf. Harris 1993, Roediger 1999). In other words, to leave the past in the past as Best suggests, painful as it may be, is to disregard its persistence into the present, and hence to abandon the very possibility of acting against the violences of the now.

Collectivity, and hence solidarity forged through and against modes of historical recovery, is necessarily the mode of effective political action when faced with the atomizing logic of racial capitalism. Community cannot so easily be dissolved. Our narratives must reflect this. To make our futures,

those faced with historical violence must be able to mourn what they have lost. Community generates spaces for powerful performances and narratives that move *through and beyond* what they recover.

To abandon solidarity in favor of Best's anti-communitarianism is to cut away the filigree linking pasts to presents, and imagines futures on unsteady grounds — it would simply see us flattened to temporal stasis. We may (and, I would agree, should) reject essentialized images of community, but many radical hopes and creative openings have been violently closed by neoliberal and fascistic political tendencies that have crept up everywhere. Certainly, *None Like Us* reminds us that community is a fragile thing, one whose ontology escapes us whenever we try to grasp and fix it. But, if I may be so bold as to suggest, it is precisely in the dynamic, generative joys of organizing community — with all the hurt it may force us to remember — that we may find ways of being-together that step beyond melancholy historicism. The goal, then, is to produce alternative modes of organization rather than be impeded by negation — in fact, making more than what has been, and what is, *through and beyond* that very negation.

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