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Critical Management Studies

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ABSTRACT

Critical management studies (CMS) offers a range of alternatives to mainstream management theory with a view to radically transforming management practice. The common core is deep skepticism regarding the moral defensibility and the social and ecological sustainability of prevailing conceptions and forms of management and organization. CMS's motivating concern is neither the personal failures of individual managers nor the poor management of specific firms, but the social injustice and environmental destructiveness of the broader social and economic systems that these managers and firms serve and reproduce. This paper reviews CMS's progress, main themes, theoretical and epistemological premises, and main projects; we also identify some problems

and make some proposals. Our aim is to provide an accessible overview of a growing movement in management studies.

Introduction

Critical management studies (CMS) offers a range of alternatives to mainstream management theory with a view to radically transforming management practice. The common core is deep skepticism regarding the moral defensibility and the social and ecological sustainability of the prevailing forms of management and organization. CMS's motivating concern is neither the personal failures of individual managers nor the poor management of specific organizations, but the social injustice and environmental destructiveness of the broader social and economic systems that these managers and organizations serve and reproduce. This paper reviews CMS's progress, main themes, theoretical and epistemological premises, and main projects; we also identify some problems and make some proposals. Our aim is to provide an accessible overview of a growing movement in management studies.

To begin, it might be useful to illustrate what we mean by *critical*. We take teamwork as an example. In a large body of mainstream research, teamwork is presented as a means by which managers can more effectively mobilize employees to improve business performance. By reorganizing work so as better to accommodate task interdependencies, and by leaving team members a margin of autonomy in deciding how to handle these interdependencies, teamwork is often presented as a “win-win” policy, making work simultaneously more satisfying for employees and more effective for the business. Issues such as workforce diversity are studied as factors that can facilitate or impede effective teamwork, and if they impede it, research addresses how the problem can be mitigated.

In CMS research, both the practice of teamwork and the mainstream theories that inform it are seen as more problematic (see Sinclair, 1992; Barker, 1993; Ezzamel & Willmott, 1998; McKinley & Taylor, 1998; Proctor & Mueller, 2000; Knights & McCabe, 2000; Batt & Doellgast, 2006). For example, much mainstream research either ignores, or views as pathological, the solidarity of teams in pursuing their own agendas and priorities—perhaps in resisting autocratic foremen, making work more meaningful, or simply having more fun at work. Critical research has shown how teamwork, when indeed management corrals it toward business goals, can result in the oppressive internalization of business values and goals by team members, who then begin exploiting themselves and disciplining team peers in the name of business performance and being “responsible” team players. The resulting conformism suppresses democratic dialogue about the appropriateness of the underlying values and goals. Critical studies show how teamwork routinely reinforces established class and authority hierarchies as well as oppressive gender and ethnic relations. Critical research has also sought to understand the various mechanisms that make teamwork attractive for many employees notwithstanding its negative effects.

Critical research shows how discourses that are used to legitimate and enforce teamwork occlude social divisions and promote a vision of the firm as a functionally unified entity or as one big happy family. Critical research does not see the problems of teamwork as intrinsic; rather, it diagnoses the shortcomings of teamwork in practice in terms of its embeddedness in broader patterns of relations of domination, relations that operate to narrow and compromise laudable aims of increasing discretion and participation.

While issues of work organization such as teamwork form an important part of the body of CMS scholarship, CMS today addresses a wide variety of management issues in a broad range of fields—not only OB-HRM and OT, but also industrial relations, strategy, accounting, information systems research, international business, marketing, and so forth. Across these fields, the CMS use of the term *critical* signifies more than an endorsement of the standard norms of scientific skepticism or the general value of “critical thinking.” It also signifies more than a focus on issues that are pivotal rather than marginal. Critical here signifies radical critique. By *radical* is signaled an attentiveness to the socially divisive and ecologically destructive broader patterns and structures—such as capitalism, patriarchy, neo-imperialism, and so forth—that condition local action and conventional wisdom. By *critique*, we mean that beyond criticism of specific, problematic beliefs and practices (e.g., about teamwork), CMS aims to show how such beliefs and practices are nurtured by, and serve to sustain, divisive and destructive patterns and structures; and also how their reproduction is contingent and changeable, neither necessary nor unavoidable.

In developing its critical agenda, CMS has been influenced by contemporary developments beyond academia. Well-established critiques of the fundamental features of contemporary capitalism have been undercut by the decline and fragmentation of the Left since around 1970 (Hassard, Hogan, & Rowlinson, 2001). During the same period, the development of new social movements has opened new critical perspectives (e.g., Alvarez, Dagnino, & Escobar, 1998). The expansion of the European community and the rise of China, India, and other emergent economies have served to relativize Anglo-American business models and values (e.g., Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Dussel & Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Post-September 11, 2001, many certainties have been unsettled, even as others have been reinforced. A succession of major natural and social crises has brought into sharp focus issues that previously may have seemed more peripheral, issues such as business ethics, environmentalism, and neo-imperialism. These broader developments have direct relevance for the everyday conduct of management and the everyday experience of work; yet they rarely take center stage in mainstream scholarship and teaching. CMS appeals to faculty, students, practitioners, activists, and policy makers who are frustrated by these conservative limits.

CMS has consistently raised the concerns about the demoralized state of management research (see Anthony, 1986)—concerns that are aired sporadi-

cally, and perhaps increasingly, by mainstream scholars. CMS has anticipated but also radicalizes the sentiments expressed recently by Ghoshal (2005):

Academic research related to the conduct of business and management has had some very significant and negative influences on the practice of management...by propagating ideologically inspired amoral theories, business schools have actively freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility. (p. 76)

CMS radicalizes such sentiments by pointing to how prevailing structures of domination produce a *systemic* corrosion of moral responsibility when any concern for people or for the environment requires justification in terms of its contribution to profitable growth.

The following section describes CMS's progress to date—the conditions of its emergence and its growing visibility. The following three sections review in turn the common themes of research under the CMS banner and its main theoretical and epistemological premises. The fifth section sketches the landscape of CMS projects in research, education, social and political activism, and everyday management practice. The sixth discusses two key problems that are likely to shape the future theoretical agenda for CMS. The conclusion formulates some proposals for a CMS movement that we see as still in the early stages of its development.

It is impossible in the space available to address the critical work done in all the various topics and fields; our goal instead is to review the main currents of research and their theoretical backgrounds. Our review is limited to work in English.

PROGRESS

Before analyzing the various strands of CMS, we sketch the context of business education within which it emerged and the body of knowledge to which it is counterposed. Since the recommendations of the influential Ford and Carnegie reports in the 1950s, business schools have been placed squarely within universities. The rationale for this was explicitly technocratic: Business expertise and education should be set upon an analytical, scientific foundation equivalent to that then being developed in the social sciences and in the teaching of the engineering disciplines. A positivist, value-free model of scientific knowledge was enthroned,* marginalizing other approaches. It promised the

* *Positivism* is a particularly slippery term, so it is useful to explicate what we mean by it, namely an approach which assumes that (a) there is an objective external reality awaiting discovery and dissection by science; (b) scientific method gives privileged access to reality; (c) language provides a transparent medium for categorization, measurement and representation; (d) the observer scientists occupies a position outside and above reality from which he (rarely she) develops and validates robust theories about reality (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, p. 61; see also Hacking 1981; Adorno et al., 1976).

production of impartial, rigorous, and reliable knowledge capable of replacing the contestability of custom and practice with the authority of management's own science. Such a context, itself shaped within the broader Cold War environment of patriotic consensus, was hardly conducive to the emergence of radical critique within business schools.

Once installed in universities, business schools came into closer contact with the social sciences. These social sciences, however, were themselves evolving. The broader liberalization of advanced capitalist societies and their universities, combined with the growing disillusionment amongst policy makers with the relevance of the dry, abstract knowledge emerging from the social sciences, led to some relaxation of the grip of positivism in late 1960s and 1970s. Across the social sciences, the established positivist hegemony began to be pluralized (but not displaced) by alternative research traditions—including varieties of Marxism, hermeneutics, and pragmatism (discussed in the following section)—that promised to draw researchers closer to the complexities and contradictions of the social world.

The effects on business schools were moderated and delayed, in part because these schools were concurrently expanding rapidly in number and size in tandem with the growth of large corporations and the associated demands for credentialed managerial labor. However, the shift within the social sciences was eventually repeated in business schools, albeit in weaker and often more compromised form. The most significant openings were in the fields of management and accounting; changes were also seen in information systems and marketing.

In this context, a number of the more established and prestigious management journals began to accommodate some heterodox research (e.g., Daft & Lewin, 1990). This development facilitated the promotion and the recruitment of more critically oriented faculty. It also enabled the broadening of undergraduate curricula and some recruitment of critically oriented doctoral students. It has even spawned a number of management departments and business schools whose philosophy and/or faculty are explicitly “critical” in orientation (e.g., the business school at Queen Mary's, University of London, <http://www.busman.qmul.ac.uk/pr/BusMgt-06.pdf>) and which offer MPhil/PhD study in Critical Management (University of Lancaster Management School, <http://www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/Postgraduate/MPhilCritMngt/>).

CMS has been strongest in the United Kingdom. The existence of sizable numbers of U.K. academics disaffected with established management theory and practice became evident with the first Labour Process Conference in 1983, which drew most of its participants from schools of management and business. The Labour Process Conference has continued to meet annually in the United Kingdom since then, drawing between 100 and 200 participants each year. In a parallel development, the Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS) was formed in 1981 as a spin-off from the more main-

stream European Group for Organization Studies. Whereas participants at Labour Process Conferences often took their inspiration from the Marxist tradition, members of SCOS were closer to postmodernist and poststructuralist theories (see discussion in the following section).

A second wave of growth in the United Kingdom became visible in 1999, when an unexpectedly large number of people—over 400, drawn from over 20 countries—participated in the first CMS Conference. This conference and the biannual series it inaugurated differentiated itself from the Labour Process Conference by extending to a broader range of themes and by engaging more intensively with postmodernist and poststructuralist ideas. A listserv emerged to support this community (*critical management*).

The United States side of the CMS movement first became visible as a workshop at the 1998 Academy of Management meetings and the concurrent formation of a listserv (*c-m-workshop*). The ensuing series of annual workshops eventually became a formally recognized Interest Group of the Academy in 2002. At the time of writing, the CMS Interest Group (CMS-IG) has 845 members, which is more than many of the older divisions. Of all the Academy groups, it has the highest proportion of non-U.S. members. Whereas in the United Kingdom the annual Labour Process Conference and the biannual CMS conference series have continued in parallel with modest overlap in participants, the U.S.-based CMS-IG has sought to encompass both “wings” in the one grouping.

Other geographic nodes of CMS have arisen too, notably in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, and Brazil. Apart from the growing openness of established journals, the international development of CMS has been supported by the emergence of a number of critically oriented journals, most notably *Organization*, *Organization and Environment*, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, *Gender, Work and Organizations*, *Management and Organizational History*, and *Critical Perspectives on International Business*. CMS has also benefited from CMS members’ creation and/or close involvement in several nonsubscription electronic journals that have actively promoted and disseminated critical work: *Ephemera*, *Electronic Journal of Radical Organization Theory*, *M@n@gement*, and *Tamara*.

COMMON THEMES

The widespread use of the CMS label to identify alternatives to established, mainstream conceptions of management followed the publication of Alvesson and Willmott’s (1992) edited collection *Critical Management Studies* (see also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_management_studies). However, the tradition of critical management studies goes back to older, humanistic critiques of bureaucracy and corporate capitalism (see Grey & Willmott, 2005;

Smircich & Calás, 1995; Wood & Kelly, 1978) as well as to the tradition of research inspired by labor process theory, which highlights the exploitation of workers by employers (Braverman, 1974). As we shall show, these critiques of management have been elaborated, challenged, and complemented in recent years by those informed by several other streams of thought.

It would be a mistake to attribute too much unity to the CMS movement. Our paper will give ample space to delineating its variants and internal tensions. It is nevertheless possible to discern a relatively widely shared sense of purpose. For most participants in CMS, many of the most important motivating problems are related to the capitalist core of the prevailing economic system and this core's articulation with other structures of domination (CMS scholars have also addressed the repressive features of "socialist" work organizations; e.g., Littler, 1984; Thompson, 1989; with the demise of the Soviet bloc, this question has lost its urgency, though it remains a salient question, e.g., in the study of China). The focus is reflected in the official "domain statement" of the CMS-IG (<http://aom.pace.edu/cms/>):

Our shared belief is that management of the modern firm (and often of other types of organizations too) is guided by a narrow goal—profits—rather than by the interests of society as a whole, and that other goals—justice, community, human development, ecological balance—should be brought to bear on the governance of economic activity.

This concern is one CMS shares to a degree with some mainstream "stakeholder" approaches to corporate governance; but CMS proponents argue that so long as the market is the dominant mechanism for allocating resources in our societies, community and government influences are forced into a subordinate role. This subordination has been reinforced by the "financialization" of contemporary capitalism, which further intensifies pressures on management to prioritize the interests of stockholders (including the executives holding stock options, of course) over all other interests (Lazonick & O'Sullivan, 2000; Froud, Johal, Leaver, & Williams, 2006; Ezzamel & Willmott, in press). Inasmuch as economic behavior is "guided by such narrow goals, the firm is a structure of domination" (*ibid*); and the "shared commitment" of CMS participants is "to help people free themselves from that domination" (*ibid*). A more specific focus of CMS, then, is, "The development of critical interpretations of management—interpretations that are critical not of poor management or of individual managers, but of the system of business and management that reproduces this one-sidedness" (*ibid*).

Note the emphasis upon interpretations in the plural (see Parker, 2002). This pluralism has several dimensions. First, while CMS is broadly "leftist" in leaning, it attracts and fosters critiques reflecting the concerns of a range of progressive ideologies and social movements (extending to progressive religious and spiritually informed movements). Second, while the core of CMS

aims at a radical critique, there can be no sharp line dividing “really radical” from “merely reformist” criticism. The boundaries of the mainstream are not fixed but the subject of contestation: On the one hand, they expand as once critical issues and concepts are taken up in the mainstream; on the other hand, reformist criticism often opens the door to more radical change. Third, CMS accommodates diverse theoretical traditions, ranging from varieties of Marxism through pragmatism to poststructuralism. So the term *critical* does not signal a commitment to any particular school of thought, such as the Frankfurt School “critical theory” (CT; even though the latter has been an influential strand in the development of CMS; see the following discussion).

We have noted that CMS proponents are motivated by concern with the role of management in the perpetuation and legitimation of unnecessary suffering and destruction, especially in the spheres of work and consumption. Many mainstream management scholars share this concern, but tend to leave it to their private, or nonprofessional lives; others feel that these misfortunes and problems are much exaggerated, view them as part of the human condition, or regard them as the inevitable price of progress. For CMS proponents, much of this suffering and destruction is remediable, and the desire to remedy it is a central motivating factor in their work. This gives rise to several common themes in CMS research, which we review briefly in the following paragraphs (drawing heavily upon Fournier & Grey, 2000; Grey & Willmott, 2005).

Challenging Structures of Domination

We have noted that CMS is distinctive in the radical nature of its critique of contemporary society. However, this radicalism would be naïve if CMS proponents did not also believe that a better, qualitatively superior form of society were possible. The implied premise of CMS is that the current form of society—capitalist, patriarchal, racist, imperialist, and productivist* —is but the latest in a historical sequence and that it contains within it the seeds of its

* Since these terms recur frequently in CMS work and in this review, we should define them. *Capitalism* is a form of society characterized by wage employment (thus domination by the class of owners, as distinct from cooperative ownership) and competition between firms (thus domination by the anarchy of the market, as distinct from democratic planning). *Patriarchy* is a form of society characterized by the gender dominance of men over women. *Racism* is a structure of domination of one racially defined group over others. *Imperialism* is a structure of power relations in which the dominant class in one country exploits economically and dominates politically the population of other countries, even if the latter preserve formal independent sovereignty. *Productivism* is a structure of relations between humanity and the rest of the natural world in which the former destroy the latter in pursuit of their narrowly conceived self-interests, sacrificing both nature and noneconomic human values. CMS proponents often debate the nature of these structures and their interrelations but usually agree that they are all simultaneously operative today.

possible transformation. Considering the record and prospects of advanced capitalist societies, it defies reason that the current form of society be the best humanity can do for itself with the available capabilities. The record of political experiments pursued in the name of socialism in the 20th century may not offer much hope, but abandoning the possibility of a radical change—by which we mean a change in the basic structure, not the abruptness of the process of change, which is a different issue—is not realism, as many in the mainstream might argue, but at best defeatism and at worst myopic, self-serving cynicism. Considering the relatively privileged position of academics in the social and economic order, such a stance is readily comprehensible but morally dubious if not untenable.

Diverse strands of CMS research and teaching aim to highlight the sources, mechanisms, and effects of the various forms of contemporary, normalized domination represented by capitalism, patriarchy, and so forth. This focus resonates with—and radicalizes—a long tradition of humanistic critique of the depersonalized and alienating nature of work in modern bureaucracies and corporations (e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1966), of the passivity and infantilism of mass consumption (e.g., Ritzer, 2000a; 2000b), of the unequal life opportunities afforded poor and working-class people, women, and minorities (e.g., Ehrenreich, 2001). It also brings CMS work into contact with, and similarly radicalizes, a range of research on how market relations serve mechanisms of exploitation, domination, and rent extraction (e.g., Coff, 1999).

Questioning the Taken for Granted

Challenging the taken for granted is central to the CMS mission, as it is to all oppositional activity. Opposition means subverting the tendency for social relations—such as those between management and workers or between the sexes—to become taken for granted or “naturalized.” In the sphere of management, naturalization is affirmed in the common mainstream assumption that, for example, someone has to be in charge, and that managers are experts by virtue of their education and training, so it is rational for them to make the important decisions. CMS questions the self-evidence of these kinds of assumptions: Such patterns of behavior are neither natural nor eternal. CMS research portrays current management practices as institutionalized, yet fundamentally precarious, outcomes of (continuing) struggles between those who have mobilized resources to impose these practices and others who to date have lacked the resources to mount an effective challenge and thereby establish an alternative.

This theme in CMS work brings it into contact with, and radicalizes, neo-institutional theory (e.g., on schooling, Benavot, Cha, Kamens, Meyer, & Wong, 1991), specifically with its argument that much of the structure of the world we see around us represents the taken-for-granted dominance of ideas about what things are supposed to look like, rather than any technical neces-

sity. This theme also brings CMS into contact with international comparative research (e.g., Hall & Soskice, 2001): the discussion of different institutional structures and cultures—even if this discussion today is largely confined to different forms of capitalism—helps reveal the historically contingent character of the specific arrangements that prevail in any one place and time.

Beyond Instrumentalism

CMS proponents challenge the view, so deeply embedded in many mainstream studies of management, that the value of social relations in the workplace is essentially instrumental. (In the poststructuralist strand of theorizing discussed later, this assumption is critiqued as “performativity.”) On the mainstream view, the task of management is to organize the factors of production, including human labor power, in a way that ensures their efficient and profitable application. Accordingly, people (now reclassified as “human resources”) and organizational arrangements are studied in terms of their effectiveness in maximizing outputs. Goals such as improving working conditions or extending the scope for collective self-development and self-determination are not, therefore, justifiable as ends in themselves, but only if and insofar as they help improve business performance or bestow legitimacy upon oppressive practices. The assumption is sometimes explicit, for example, in “instrumental” version of stakeholder theory (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Sometimes, it is only implicit: As Walsh (2005) showed, it is implicit even in some of the classic, ethically framed, “normative” versions.

In the instrumentalist approach to management and organization, the goal of profitability—or, in the not-for-profit sectors, performance targets—take on a fetishized, naturalized quality. All action is then evaluated under the norms of instrumental means-ends rationality. Ethical and political questions concerning the value of such ends are excluded, suppressed, or assumed to be resolved. Instrumentalism means that other concerns—such as the distribution of life chances within and by corporations or the absence of any meaningful democracy in the workplace—are safely ignored or, at best, minimally accommodated by making marginal or token adjustments. As the result of proliferating business scandals, mainstream scholarship has become more sensitive recently to these issues; however, CMS scholars are skeptical of the mainstream argument that these scandals result from weak personal or organizational ethics: Critical research is more likely to point to the role of the broader structures within which managers and organizations function (e.g., Knights & Willmott, 1986a; Adler, 2002a; Kochan, 2002; see also materials at the Association for Accountancy and Business Affairs Web site at <http://visar.csustan.edu/aaba/aaba.htm>).

Instrumentalism also infiltrates the mainstream understanding of the purpose and value of research. Implicit in such thinking is the idea that research should be assessed by its contribution to the effectiveness of busi-

ness management. The influence of this instrumentalist view was documented by Walsh, Weber, and Margolis (2003), who showed the unrelenting shift in North American management research away from “welfare” related concerns toward profitability concerns. The instrumentalist assumption is similarly illustrated by the demand made by the editors of many mainstream academic journals that articles conclude with a discussion of implications for managers. Research seminars often proceed on the same assumption, where the critical scholar is often confronted with the challenge, “But how does this help managers?” This assumption tethers research to a management point of view, and the concerns of other stakeholders are therefore addressed from only this narrow vantage point. There is a conflation of research *on management* with research *for managers*.

Finally, instrumentalism also dominates the mainstream understanding of the role of business education (as signaled earlier in the quote from Ghoshal, 2005, and discussed further in the following section). On the mainstream view, the study of management should simply prepare people to take their place in efforts to improve corporations’ competitive performance. This vision of business education marginalizes efforts to equip students to think critically about issues of the public good and sustainability and ignores the fact that managers often feel themselves tugged in competing directions by their loyalties to various stakeholder groups and by their personal commitments to values other than profitability. Whereas instrumentalism assumes the virtue of an essentially technical training, CMS proponents argue that business education should at very least encourage a broader, more questioning (e.g., “liberal arts”) approach that aims to provide a wider range of ways of understanding and evaluating the nature, significance and effects of doing business and managing people (French & Grey, 1996; Zald, 2002).

Reflexivity and Meaning

CMS proponents argue for the importance of reflexivity in research (Woolgar, 1988; Alvesson & Sköldbörg, 2000). Reflexivity here means the capacity to recognize how accounts of management—whether by researchers or practitioners—are influenced by their authors’ social positions and by the associated use of power-invested language and convention in constructing and conveying the objects of their research. By such reflexivity, CMS aims to raise awareness of the conditions under which both mainstream and critical accounts are generated, and how these conditions influence the types of accounts produced.

CMS scholarship has argued, for example, that research on “corporate social responsibility” or “corporate citizenship”—like claims by corporations themselves about their performances on these dimensions—should be assessed in relation to the struggles to establish the meaning of such terms (e.g., Tinker, Lehman, & Neimark, 1991). Critical scholarship asks what mean-

ings can be attributed to such key terms as *trust*, *responsibility*, or *citizenship* (e.g., Knights, Noble, Vurdubakis, & Willmott, 2001)? How is it that certain meanings become dominant and taken for granted? What alternative possible meanings are excluded in this process?

Power and Knowledge

The themes outlined in this section coalesce around the theme of the intimate connection between power and knowledge. Much CMS analysis is concerned with showing that forms of knowledge, which appear to be neutral, reflect and reinforce asymmetrical relations of power. This connection between power and knowledge is inevitable when researchers take existing realities as necessary givens rather than as the product of continuing struggles. It is similarly inevitable when researchers see their roles as servants of power (Baritz, 1974; Brief, 2000).

An important tendency within CMS, inspired primarily by Foucault, sees this interconnection as even deeper, using the expression “power/knowledge” to suggest the indivisibility to the relationship. On the Foucauldian understanding, power is not just a struggle between groups who have more or less of it. For Foucault, as for Gramsci (1971), power is much more pervasive; it is also a positive and not merely negative force: Power is that which enables certain possibilities to become actualities in a way that excludes other possibilities. It is, for example, what enables management scholars to assume and sustain some (e.g., mainstream) contents and identities rather than alternative (e.g., critical) ones. And inherent in the exercise of power is the unintended constitution of an Other that resists efforts to exclude or suppress it (e.g., critical scholars respond to efforts to exclude their points of view by developing critiques of managerialism).

In much HR research, for example, the problem framings, categories, and models reflect asymmetries of power between managers and workers (as noted by Nord, 1977); the Foucauldians add that HR theory is also a way of constituting and naturalizing these asymmetries (e.g., Townley, 1994). Absenteeism, for instance, is the object of a huge knowledge-power apparatus comprised of a sizable academic literature, a complex set of HRM practices, and a massive system of statistical capture and reporting. This apparatus defines absenteeism as a problem, an impediment to organizational performance. The oppressive nature of this framing has become more evident as concerns about “work-life balance” take a more prominent place in public debate. An emerging social movement is challenging the grotesque morbidity, mortality, and quality-of-life consequences of overwork and “presenteeism” (e.g., Simpson, 1998).

THEORETICAL RESOURCES

The theoretical resources used by CMS can be usefully characterized using Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) matrix of approaches to organizational studies.

On one dimension of this matrix, forms of analysis are differentiated according to whether they focus on order, regulation, and consensus, or on change, transformation, and conflict. On the other dimension, approaches that conceive of society and organizations as objective structures are contrasted with approaches that focus on the role of agency and on (inter)subjective experience in the reproduction and transformation of social relations.

In both dimensions, the dividing lines are somewhat blurred (Gioia & Pitre, 1990); moreover, new theoretical currents within CMS have complicated the picture considerably; both despite and because of these caveats, Burrell and Morgan's distinctions can be heuristically useful as way to locate varieties of CMS and their theoretical roots.

On the first dimension, the focus on change most clearly differentiates CMS from mainstream approaches. However, two caveats are needed. First, new social movements, notably feminism and environmentalism, have considerably enriched the CMS understanding of forms of order and dimensions of change. Second, the line between order and change is fuzzy insofar as some CMS proponents leverage mainstream, regulation-oriented theories to critical, albeit reformist, purpose. As emphasized earlier, what we might call the "radical core" of CMS sees the main problems we face today as the inevitable corollaries of the prevailing form of society—a form in which market competition forces firms to treat employees and environment as mere means toward the end of profit maximization. The "reformist" variant of CMS sees the root problem not in the profit motive itself but rather in the absence of counterbalancing factors. Reformists thus argue that considerable progress could be made if the profit imperative were moderated by government regulation, by the involvement of other stakeholders in corporate governance, or simply by more enlightened values among top managers.

On the second dimension of Burrell and Morgan's grid, CMS—in both its radical and reformist forms—has advanced both structuralist and agency-oriented theories. The main debates within CMS have been across this dimension; but connections have also been forged to their mutual enrichment. A scholarship that is motivated by opposition to domination is naturally concerned to understand both the conditioning aspects and the lived reality of this domination. As a result, critical scholarship has often engaged with the work in social theory on the structure/agency relation: Marx, pragmatist symbolic interactionism (SI), actor-network theory, Giddens, and Bourdieu were all important in this regard. There has also been some questioning of the necessity and value of the established dualism of agency and structure as an organizing power/knowledge template, or regime of truth, for social scientific analysis, because the former tends to assume an autonomous, centered agency and the latter tends to assume an autonomous, noncontingent operation of structures. Forms of poststructuralist analysis (discussed in the following section) have sought to deconstruct the logic which asserts the foun-

dational nature of this dualism in ways that were unanticipated by Burrell and Morgan.

The following paragraphs review the main currents of thought that have nourished CMS. We begin with those that CMS shares with more mainstream scholarship.

Leveraging Regulation-Oriented Structural Theories

CMS scholars can leverage a broad range of mainstream, regulation-oriented theories (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; 1986), although in doing so, it may prove difficult to articulate a radical critique. Many mainstream management theories aim to elucidate the conditions required for effective competitive performance, and critical scholars can use these theories to highlight the irrationality of organizations that sacrifice efficiency and effectiveness to preserve the prerogatives of powerful actors.

In this vein, critiques of bureaucracy, such as those that were advanced by sociologists such as Merton, Gouldner, and Blau, by psychologists at the Tavistock Institute, and by management scholars inspired by the progressive wing of the Human Relations school in the 1950s, continue to resonate in CMS research today. At a more microlevel, role stress theory has been used to show how workers lives are impaired by the role conflict, ambiguity, and overload endemic in capitalist firms. Similarly, needs-based theories of work motivation have served as a basis for critique of the alienating quality of wage work as antithetical to the need for self-determination.

Contingency theory argues that task uncertainty should lead to decentralization as a means of enabling flexible responses to volatile and unpredictable operating conditions. While mainstream theory draws instrumental conclusions from these premises, critical scholars can leverage contingency theory to point out that in practice it is common that top managers use their power to define the environment, the performance goals, and the internal organization in ways that reinforce their dominance, even at the cost of business performance (Child, 1972; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Similarly, more recent theories of learning, learning organizations, and complexity show how overly bureaucratic and controlling organizations suppress learning and miss performance-improvement opportunities. Perrow (1984) used mainstream contingency theory to formulate a powerful critique of nuclear power and other systems that make inevitable devastating “normal accidents.”

Resource dependency theory starts with the assumption that firms strive to preserve their autonomy; this assumption, while somewhat anthropomorphic, has the virtue of realism in suggesting that relations between and within firms reflect power concerns and not only efficiency concerns. While mainstream research draws instrumental conclusions from these premises, critical scholars invoke these same premises to advance a critique of the ideology of the market—the purported optimality and efficiency of the market as a form

of economic coordination, and the purported purification of politics and power from market relations (e.g., Hirsch, 1975; Hymer, 1976, 1979; Fligstein, 2001; Mizruchi, 1996). Like the other mainstream theories, however, resource dependency theory does not give us any vantage point from which to conceptualize the historical specificity of the capitalist structure or the other prevalent structures of domination; it is therefore difficult to use resource dependency theory as a foundation for radical as distinct from reformist critique.

Leveraging Classical Sociology

Critical approaches have drawn from classical sociology to analyze management and organizations as social, rather than merely technical, phenomena, deeply implicated in the production and reproduction of structures of domination. CMS scholarship found Weber, and to a lesser extent Durkheim, particularly useful. While mainstream scholars read these authors as conservative functionalists, their work is sufficiently rich to allow other readings that blur their location on Burrell and Morgan's matrix.

Weber was used by mainstream theory to naturalize the assumption that large, complex organizations must be organized in a bureaucratic form, even if, to many, such a form seems irredeemably alienating. CMS scholars found in Weber materials for more critical analyses. On the one hand, Weber was mobilized in the critique of market relations as vehicles for domination (of powerful firms over both less powerful employees and smaller firms) and in the critique of bureaucracy as embodying the "iron cage" of modernity and of the elevation of formal over substantive rationality (e.g., Edwards, 1979). On the other hand, some critical scholars returned to Weber's argument that bureaucracy can be a bulwark against domination (e.g., du Gay, 2000; Perrow, 1986; Jacoby, 1985) and others found in Weber an inspiration for exploring the lived realities of managerial work (e.g., Watson, 1994).

Durkheim was used by mainstream research in ways that naturalize the anomic conditions of the modern world; but critical research used Durkheim to critique these conditions and suggest that alternatives are possible (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Adler & Heckscher, 2006). Durkheim's later work was used by neo-institutional theory as a foundation for conceptualizing the power of shared ideas in shaping social structures and interactions: institutional arrangements that appear as natural, taken for granted can thus be shown to be shared illusions, a spell that can be broken (e.g., Biggart & Beamish, 2003). Durkheim's work on ritual afforded critical insight into the social structuring of emotions in organizations (e.g., Boyle & Healy, 2003).

In these efforts, CMS often overlaps with the critical wing of neo-institutionalism (see e.g., Hirsch, 1975, 1997; Clemens & Cook, 1999). In general, however, the predominantly functionalist interpretations of classical sociology

have made these traditions less attractive to critical students of management. In the main, CMS has found greater inspiration in Marx, in contemporary European thinkers such as Habermas and Foucault, in the work of pragmatists such as Dewey and Mead, and in various new social movements. We now turn to these.

Marxism and Related Theories

Marxism has for long been one of the main sources of more radical forms of structuralist critical scholarship. It has appeared in CMS in various guises, most notably as the foundation for labor process theory, but also in a range of other approaches.

Marxism

Marxist theory argues that the key to understanding work organization lies in the structure of the broader society within which it is embedded, rather than in human psychology, in the dynamics of dyadic exchange, or in any timeless features of formal organizations. Social structure, in turn, is seen as fundamentally determined by the prevailing relations of production—the nature of control and property rights over productive resources. The relations of production characteristic of capitalist societies derive from the nature of the commodity (the “germ,” or core, of capitalist production; Marx, 1977, p. 163). The commodity is something produced for sale rather than for direct use, and as such has two aspects: its use value—its qualitatively differentiated value as something useful to the purchaser—and its exchange value—its power to command a quantity of money in exchange. For Marx, it is the socially necessary labor time required to produce a commodity that determines this exchange value (this thesis is known as the “labor theory of value”).

As a system of commodity production, capitalist relations of production have two key features. First, control and ownership of productive resources is dispersed among owners of firms who confront each other as commodity producers in market competition. Second, alongside those who enjoy such ownership is a class a nonowners who, lacking alternative access to means of production or consumption, must sell their capacity to work (“labor power”) as if it were a commodity on the labor market. It is workers’ propertyless condition that makes it possible to extract surplus labor from them; but how, and how much, surplus value is extracted will depend *inter alia* on class conflict (Foley, 1986, presented Marx’s basic economic theory in a theoretically sophisticated but technically simple manner).

Marx characterized some distinctive developmental tendencies (“laws of development”) of such a form of society. First, coordination by the market is intrinsically unstable: competition among firms leads to a persistent tendency to overproduction and crisis. Second, the combination of interfirm competi-

tion and class conflict leads to increasing firm size and to the replacement of labor by mechanization, and these tendencies in turn put persistent pressure on profit levels, further exacerbating crisis tendencies. Third, the basic matrix of capitalism is resistant to change: Once the market mechanism becomes predominant, this limits the efficacy of alternative mechanisms—including mechanisms that might mitigate its crisis tendencies. Then, the dominance of market relations corrodes community, and it gives capital increasing international mobility that enables it to outflank governments and thus limit governments' efforts to intervene in economic affairs. CMS has used these Marxist ideas in the study of various themes.

Analyses of class structure. Marxism asserts the unity of interests of the capitalist class in its opposition to the working class. This unity is always precarious, since capitalists also compete against their peers; but Marxism is a useful platform for studying the ongoing centripetal and centrifugal forces as they affect, for example, the structure of corporate boards, the political role of business, and the emergent global managerial class (e.g., Fidler, 1981; Useem, 1982; Ornstein, 1984, Palmer & Barber, 2001; Murphy, 2006.). The Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1971), developed a sophisticated account of hegemony that has been influential in studying the class structuring of business elites and civil society (Gill & Law, 1993; Carroll & Carson, 2003; Levy & Egan, 2003).

Critique of the market. Labor markets, even apparently competitive ones, are the means by which the capitalist class asserts its monopsonist power over workers. Moreover, labor markets are typically structured to divide workers from each other, segmented into more and less exploited components, using race and gender to “divide and rule” (Edwards, 1979). Consumer markets are not the vehicle for consumer sovereignty, but means by which demand is created to satisfy artificial wants stimulated by advertising. Even where markets do function relatively competitively, the limitations of the market mechanism—externalities, instability—impose unacceptable costs on communities and nature (e.g., Adler, 2001; Benson, 1975; Marchington, Grimshaw, Rubery, & Willmott, 2005)

Critique of capitalist work organization and its ideologies. Marxist theory highlights the incompleteness of the employment contract; it thus brings into focus the exploitative role played by management practices and

capitalist ideology. Work is not designed to express human needs and values, but to maximize profit and/or to safeguard the privileges and control of managerial elites. This is not (just or principally) because managers may be greedy, but because their firms must compete for investment funds and because players in financial markets direct those funds to the most profitable firms. Management innovations such as employee participation are fundamentally constrained by this systemic pressure and by the basic asymmetry of power embodied in the employment relation (e.g., as compared to a partnership or cooperative structure; Mandel, 1992). Power within firms is not merely an overlay on a rational authority structure: the firm is essentially an exercise of coercive power. Work organization, management systems, and technologies are conditioned by an imperative to extract surplus labor (e.g., Warhurst, 1998; Clegg, 1981).

Workers' experience of work. When labor is hired and organized for the purpose of extracting a profit from its productive capacity, the meaning of work is precarious and ambiguous at best. From this perspective, workers' experience of work in the capitalist firm is one of both objective-structural alienation and subjective-experiential alienation (Hodson, 2001). If they internalize corporate interests as their own, the alienation is even more thorough for being hidden from its subjects or cynically accommodated by them (Collins, 1995; Miller, 1975). Workers can organize to improve the terms and conditions of their employment: that has been the historic function of unions. However, unions tend to become part of the machinery of advanced capitalism, channeling workers' discontent into demands for higher wages, and suppressing demands for improved quality of life and radical change (Thompson, 1989).

The new emerges within the womb of the old. In traditional Marxist theory, the development of the forces of production, once it reaches a certain level, renders progressively more obsolete the capitalist relations of production. The anarchy of the market—its instability and externalities—becomes progressively more costly and less tolerable. Cooperation becomes more important than competition and exploitation in facilitating the further development of the forces of production. These new forms of cooperation cannot fully

flower under capitalism; nevertheless, cooperation develops, representing germs of a new form of society within the womb of the old form, and creating new progressive demands. This view has encouraged Marxist-influenced scholars to see progressive, prefigurative significance in new forms of organization such as networks and teamwork (the influence of this logic can be seen in work by authors as diverse as Bell, 1973; Kern & Schumann, 1984; Kenney & Florida, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1984; Castells, 2000; Adler, 2001).

Marxism of course has been the object of numerous critiques, both from critical and from mainstream scholars, both in the social sciences in general and in management studies in particular. It is said that capitalism has evolved so much since Marx's day that his analysis is surely obsolete. Marxism must be faulty if its central predictions have not yet been borne out and if efforts to build socialist societies have been such failures. By emphasizing conflict, Marxist scholarship overlooks the everyday reality of collaboration. Marxism downplays the real margin of autonomy workers enjoy in modern society—autonomy in switching employers, in shaping their work roles, and in fashioning their identities—and the pleasures derived from work as well as consumption. Marxism gives primacy to economic interests, and this materialist view is said by some critics to understate the power of culture and values not only to shape the course of events but also to become media and fields of capitalist expansion. By giving considerable causal efficacy to social structures and to collective actors, Marxism is also criticized on epistemological grounds from several different quarters.

The Marxist response to these criticisms is that Marx's theory identified the basic structural features of capitalism that still characterize the most advanced economies today and that his theory predicted with remarkable prescience the main lines of its evolution: concentration and centralization of capital, acceleration of technological change, destruction of the traditional middle class and the peasantry, incorporation of women into the work force, rising education levels, expanding state sector, recurrent business cycles, imperialist expansion (or globalization), and environmental destruction (e.g., Adler, 2004; Jaros, 2005; Foster, 2000). Eagerness to see radical social-structural change led Marx and many of his followers to imagine that capitalism by now would have collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions (which it nearly did during the 1930s Great Depression and the ascendancy of Fascist regimes) or would be swept aside by a working class mobilized in revolutionary action. However, stripped of voluntaristic overoptimism and of theoretical dogmatism and overreach, Marxism continues to inspire creative critical research (Burawoy, 2003; Burawoy & Wright, 2002; Smith, 2000; Van der Pijl, 1998).

Labor Process Theory

Using key elements of Marxist theory, labor process theory (LPT) argues that the market mechanisms alone cannot regulate the labor process: Since the employment contract is incomplete, capitalists must actively control the labor process against potential worker resistance. In its earliest expressions (notably Braverman, 1974; Zimbalist, 1979), LPT argued that capitalist imperatives of labor control and cost reduction create a built-in tendency toward deskilling and degradation—fragmenting jobs, reducing skill requirements, and replacing worker autonomy with management systems. Taylorism was taken as the paradigmatic form of modern capitalist work organization.

LPT has broadened over successive generations of research. It now argues that there are a variety of managerial strategies of control beyond deskilling, such as work intensification, skill polarization, and efforts to make workers feel responsible for productivity (Littler, 1982). It also recognizes that the workplace is only one part of our complex form of society and as a result, workplace conflicts do not necessarily translate into broad social conflict (Thompson, 1990; Edwards, 1986, 1990). LPT thus acknowledges that empirically observed situations reflect a host of local factors specific to firms, markets, institutional contexts, the ideologies of the various actors, and the history of their interrelations. However, LPT proponents argue that this variation is an outcome as well as a medium of capitalist relations of production. A persistent theme has been deep skepticism of arguments that assert upgrading trends in work or the emergence of genuinely “new paradigms” in work organization.

LPT in its more recent forms takes two steps away from classical Marxism.^{*} First, whereas more traditional readings of Marx (e.g., Cohen, 1978)—as indeed many non-Marxist theories—give a key role to technological change as a driver of social change and a determinant of work organization, labor process theorists have been adamantly opposed to anything resembling “technological determinism.” LPT argues that attributing any basic causal role to technology would be to naturalize historically specific, capitalist relations of production (e.g., Burawoy, 1979, pp. 14ff, 220): Technology is itself shaped by these relations of production (e.g., Noble, 1984).

Second, in arguing that the formation of class consciousness is influenced by many factors outside the labor-capital conflict in the workplace, LPT takes its distance from more traditional Marxist-based superstructure accounts. Thus, more recent LPT research explored the role of broader changes in global political economy that constrain firm-level management policy (e.g., Thomp-

* In this nuanced relation to classical Marxism, LPT is just one of several contemporary approaches that should be noted, albeit the one with the greatest impact to date on management research. We do not have space to address others, such as the anarchist Italian Autonomists (see Wright, 2002) and the efforts of the scholars around the journal *Rethinking Marxism* to develop a nondeterminist, nonreductionist form of Marxism.

son, 2003). It has devoted more effort to understanding the formation of employees' subjective self-understandings (e.g., Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995; Knights & McCabe, 2000; Ezzamel, Willmott, & Worthington; 2001; Stewart, 2002). In this work, LPT researchers built on Gramsci's (1971) thesis that hegemony "is born in the factory" (p. 285) and on Burawoy's (1979) observation that the interests pursued by, or attributed to, a group (e.g., "labor," "capital") are not given but are organized through practices such as the shop-floor game playing in which Burawoy participated. This line of argument opens LPT to ideas from Frankfurt School CT and poststructuralism (Knights & Willmott, 1989).

Marxists criticize LPT's abandonment of Marx's labor theory of value and his characterization of the laws of development of the capitalist system. They argue that these elements of Marxist theory add another, deeper layer of intelligibility to social analysis, and that without these elements, the Marxist "critique of political economy" dissolves into a theoretically weaker matrix of Weberianism (Rowlinson & Hassard, 2001; Hassard, Hogan, & Rowlinson, 2001; Tinker, 2002). LPT proponents respond that such a move away from Marx enriches critical scholarship: It abandons some of the less readily defensible elements of Marx's theory and affords critical analysis a richer account of social structure and consciousness (Thompson & Newsome, 2004).

Other critics of LPT have argued that other conflicts (e.g., gender and ethnicity) are neglected by LPT even though they can be a significant basis of conflict that is not reducible to class conflict. More fundamentally, poststructuralists challenge all efforts, Marxist or otherwise, to reduce self-identity processes to the subject's ostensibly objective position within social structures (O'Doherty & Willmott, 2001). These arguments have been attacked by proponents of traditional LPT as obscuring rather than clarifying the key contradictions of capitalism (for rejoinders from different perspectives within LPT, see Thompson & Smith, 2001; Tinker, 2002).

Frankfurt School Critical Theory

Many CMS proponents have drawn inspiration from the so-called Frankfurt School tradition of CT reflected primarily in the writings of Adorno and Horkheimer (for overview, see Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972; Jay, 1973; related management research reviewed by Alvesson, 1987; Alvesson & Willmott, 1996). CT aspires to provide an intellectual counterforce to orthodox social theories that, in the name of science, legitimize the technocratic administration of modern, advanced industrial society. CT assumes the feasibility and desirability of greater autonomy for individuals, who, in the tradition of enlightenment, are able to master their own destinies through collaboration with peers.

One of the key goals of the early Frankfurt School program work was to explain why the revolution Marx predicted had not materialized. In the eyes of

Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), and their colleagues, the proletariat had long since become divided and weakened—if, indeed, it had ever had the power and vision necessary to overthrow capitalism and establish a genuinely socialist society. Thus, the Frankfurt School's efforts have been largely directed at understanding how the working class has been disempowered by the cultural, ideological, and technological attractions of modern capitalism. To this end, they have incorporated Freudian psychoanalytic theory and other strands of sociology. CT has thus sought to remedy the relative neglect of culture and ideology in Marxian analysis, without reverting from Marxian materialism to some kind of idealism.

A key theme in CT is the critique of the authority vested in a value-free notion of science by positivist epistemology. Positivism argues that knowledge simply reflects the world. According to CT, this leads to the uncritical identification of reality and rationality, and as a result, it encourages us to experience the world as rational and necessary thus impeding attempts to change it. CT argues that positivist ideology has diffused far beyond the professional boundary of science, insofar as people are taught to accept the world “as it is,” thus unthinkingly perpetuating it. CT thus sees positivism as pivotal in an ideology of adjustment, undermining our power to imagine a radically better world.

During the past 2 decades, the tradition of CT was carried forward by Jürgen Habermas (for overviews, see McCarthy, 1981; Finlayson, 2005). One of Habermas's central ideas was that human communication presupposes a benchmark reference point of free and equal communication embodied in what he called the “ideal speech situation.” This idea has been useful to CMS scholars in understanding the ways in which forms of planning in firms and public agencies either support or suppress democratic deliberation (Forester, 1993; Burrell, 1994). Within CMS, there is some debate over whether the ideal speech situation is indeed a workable ideal or—as poststructuralists argue—just another form of hegemony (Willmott, 2003); in recent years, Habermas himself edged away from what some critics see as an unwarranted, foundationalist assumption. Other writers in this tradition have also had echoes in CMS, most notably Beck (1996, 2002) and Honneth (1995).

Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism

Pragmatism has been an important inspiration for CMS, especially for U.S. proponents. Arguably, pragmatism plays a background role for much U.S. CMS similar to the role played by Marx for U.K. CMS work (Sidney Hook, 1933/2002, famously argued that pragmatism and Marxism shared a common core; see Phelps, 1997). Two pathways of influence can be discerned.

The first pathway starts with John Dewey. Dewey has been important to CMS in two ways. First, his attention to our practical engagement with the world and his rejection of mind-body and self-other dualisms have informed

research on practice, knowledge, and learning. In this, Dewey was close to Marx, Vygotsky (1962; 1978) and contemporary activity theory (Engeström, 1987; Cole, 1996). This work has had an important impact on thinking about experiential learning, including in management education (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Kayes, 2002). It has also influenced work on ethics (Jacobs, 2004). Second, Dewey developed a powerful critique of corporate power (see Dewey, 1935/1999). Mary Parker Follett (1941/2003) carried Dewey's commitment to community and participatory democracy into organizational studies. It has been recently revived in public administration (Evans, 2000; Snider, 2000), after having been stifled as a progressive perspective by the absorption of pragmatism by logical positivism (greatly aided by Simon, 1976). Dewey's critique also lived on in C. Wright Mills. Mills stands for many CMS proponents as an exemplary public intellectual. His intellectual roots were in pragmatism, but he was also deeply influenced by Weber. His work on the middle class (*White Collar*, originally published in 1962), the ruling class (*The Power Elite*, 1956), and the tasks of sociology (*The Sociological Imagination*, 1959) displayed deep radicalism and powerful human empathy, and they continue to inspire critical management research (Mir & Mir, 2002).

The second pathway of pragmatist influence starts with George Herbert Mead and the symbolic interactionist tradition of sociology that his student, Herbert Blumer (1969) codified. SI has been important in CMS research because it allows for a more "social" form of psychology and for a more "psychological" form of sociology. It rejects forms of variable analysis that assume a pregiven social world, in favor of the study of meanings and the negotiated and contested nature of social realities. Burrell and Morgan (1979) located SI in the structuralist-regulation cell of their matrix because it has often been used to study the reproduction of existing structures through everyday interaction. Nonetheless, some scholars have used it for more critical, change-oriented research. Barley's (1990) study of CT scanners in two hospitals illustrated the power of SI to make visible the role of pragmatic actors in shaping the impact of a new technology on local social structures. The critical edge comes here from revealing the contingency of the social structure, our abilities to change it.

The limitations of SI for the critical project lie in its lack of a theory of the broader social structures that condition local interaction. SI is a powerful lens for tracing the impact of these structures, and for showing how actions reproduce or change them; but it offers no theory of its own of the structures themselves (for overview, see Ritzer & Goodman, 2003; on efforts from within SI to respond to this critique, see Fine, 1991; 1993).

Postmodernism

During the 1990s, new streams of theory emerged in CMS, many of them collected under the umbrella headings of "postmodernism" and "poststructural-

ism.” As noted earlier, these streams problematize the credibility of Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) dimensions and the comprehensives of their framework.

The terms *postmodernism* and *poststructuralism* are used in various ways. Broadly speaking, however, postmodernism has sought to theorize the broad shift in Western societies beyond the limits of a modernist *Weltanschauung* toward greater flexibility and hybridity (e.g., Lyotard, 1984; on postmodernism in management research, see Hassard & Parker, 1993; Calás & Smircich, 1997, 1999; Kilduff & Mehra, 1997). It reflects and theorizes a growing disillusionment with established authorities, whether it be the authority of managers, of government, of science, or even of the figurative aesthetic in art. For postmodernists, modernity is exemplified by bureaucracy and suffers from an excess of instrumentalism: Modernity is premised on a generalized repression of spontaneity and creative imagination. In this sense, postmodernism is a new romanticism. Poststructuralism can be seen as part of a (postmodern) movement critiquing the rigidities of structuralist thinking that accord insufficient attention to contingency and undecidability. Where Marxists draw on the enlightenment tradition of reason as a force that can enable social progress, postmodernism and poststructuralism more often draw inspiration from Nietzsche’s critique of the use of reason as a mask of power. Following Nietzsche, they regard as problematic and potentially dangerous the enlightenment’s claim to secure universally valid knowledge. In their radical skepticism, these new streams of thought are responsive to, as well as reflective of, the historical demise of the left over the last two or three decades of the 20th century. We discuss postmodernism here, and leave discussion of poststructuralism to the following section on critical epistemologies.

An important feature of the postmodernist mood is its questioning of the imperialistic, totalizing claims of “metanarratives”—overarching schema that purport to order and explain broad social and historical patterns—including both Marxist and mainstream management theory. Postmodernists argue that social scientists’ claims to objective truth as articulated in such metanarratives are discourses of power. Foucault was a significant influence (e.g., the selection of management studies inspired by Foucault in Calás & Smircich, 1997, Part III). Building on Nietzsche’s thesis, Foucault argued that, in the modern age, power is dispersed rather than centralized and, therefore, that the presumption of being able to cleanse knowledge of power is not simply fanciful but potentially dangerous. Power functions by shaping its subjects—our self-understandings and the forms and sources of our pleasure. An informed appreciation of this process provides the most promising way to advance freedom. Teamwork, for example, is a management practice that shapes the self-identity and desires of employees, thereby engendering a new kind of subjection to an instrumental organizational regime, harnessing not only employees’ bodies but also their souls. Postmodernists aim to make this subjection process less opaque and thus to facilitate resistance to it.

Postmodernism can be seen as an intensification of the modernist rejection of the confines of tradition: It is indeed more postmodern than antimodern. Postmodernism brings to our attention the limits of modernist ambitions to control every contingency. Such ambition is exemplified in both classical and progressive forms of management theory—such as in the claims of Peters and Waterman (1982) to manage and even exploit irrationality through the medium of “strong culture” and their advocacy of “empowering” teamwork. Postmodernism is about releasing us from myths of modernity by celebrating serendipity and diversity—not as a hypermodern instruments of “best employment practice,” but as a basis for valuing all kinds of beliefs and activities that are currently marginalized, devalued, and denigrated by modernist values and associated agendas.

The focus on the more subtle mechanisms of power has been tonic for several strands of CMS, in particular labor process (Knights & Willmott, 1989) and feminist research (Calás & Smircich, 2006). The chief objection to this development—an objection that is voiced by both mainstream and critical scholars—is that if on the one hand power is so dispersed, if it is always productive as well as repressive, and if on the other hand all discourses and all assertions of “interests,” including oppositional ones, are merely articulations of power, then it is difficult to distinguish emancipation from domination (see Lukes, 2005; feminist critiques, e.g., Fraser, 1989; Benhabib, 1992). The counterargument is that it is always dangerous when someone claims to distinguish someone else’s true and false interests: This opens to door to new totalitarian projects. The postmodernists’ intent is not to abandon the project of emancipation, but rather to reconstitute it in the light of dark historical and creative intellectual developments of the 20th century.

Feminism

Feminism and environmentalism are intellectual movements within CMS that draw on and develop a variety of critical theories, including those previously discussed, and that have developed since Burrell and Morgan (1979) constructed their framework. The literatures in these two areas prioritize the concerns of two of the most vibrant political movements in the contemporary world. As such, feminist theory and environmental studies are particularly significant to critical management studies scholars. In both cases, there has been productive tension between liberal-reformist views and views that are more radical.

Alongside more mainstream liberal approaches, feminist theories include radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, poststructuralist/postmodern, and transnational/postcolonial variants (for a comprehensive review, see Calás & Smircich, 2006). Notwithstanding important differences, all these variants share a common goal: “Feminist theory ...attempts to describe women’s oppression, to explain its consequences, and to prescribe strategies for women’s libera-

tion” (Tong, 1989, p. 1). Where reformist liberal feminism advocates workforce equity and equality and investigates the role of management values and policies, the more radical perspectives advocate more fundamental change and investigate the broader patterns and structures that condition the scope of management action.

Feminist analysis has generated new theoretical insights into—and new practical approaches to—work and organizational life. In their more radical forms, these insights go to the very foundations of our understanding of formal organization: They expose the gender hierarchies and discrimination that are constitutive of current organizational forms, and suggest how organizations might function if feminist critique informed their design and governance (see Ferguson, 1984, Iannello, 1992; Savage & Witz, 1992; Ferree & Martin, 1995; Ashcraft, 2001; Ferguson, 2004). Feminist perspectives have been used to critique and provide alternatives to mainstream understandings of basic organizational forms such as bureaucracy (Ferguson, 1984), employment selection (Collinson, Knights, & Collinson, 1990), pay equity (Acker, 1989), leadership and management (Calás & Smircich, 1991; Wajcman, 1998), technology (Cockburn, 1991; Wajcman, 1991, 2004) culture (Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman, 1998), and more recently work-life balance (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2006).

In addition to bringing concepts into the field that were once considered outside the domain of management theory (e.g., gender, sexuality, glass ceiling, sexual harassment, work/family balance, masculinities, and bodies), feminist theory examines organizational processes with sensitivity to the different ways people experience work and organization as a result of gendered and sexualized stratification (e.g., Hearn, Sheppard, Tancred, & Burrell, 1989). Through their work on standpoint epistemology, strong objectivity, situated knowledge, value-laden inquiry, and other alternative epistemologies (discussed further in the following section), feminist scholars have opened new epistemologies for research that exposes gender bias in science and that illuminates marginalized perspectives of women, people of color, ethnic and religious minorities and other oppressed or subaltern groups (Anderson, 2003).

For CMS scholars, feminist theory provides a rich resource for thinking about the cross-level interrelationships between subjectivity, discursive constructions, and macrostructural forces. Driven by their political commitments, more radical forms of feminism have developed some of our field’s most sophisticated social theory, and have served to correct crippling gender blindness in mainstream theory.

Feminism’s strengths, however, are also its limitations. Its heterogeneity has generated internal disputes that have catalyzed theoretical development; but these disputes have also slowed responses to changing historical conditions. Fraser and Naples (2004), echoing concerns of postmodernists, argued that the debates between “essentialists” and “antiessentialists” ultimately con-

tributed to the inclusion of many more voices as these debates “usefully served to reveal hidden exclusionary premises of earlier theories” (p. 1112). They also contended that these debates “unwittingly diverted feminist theory into culturalist channels at precisely the moment when circumstances [the wave of neo-liberal globalization] required redoubled attention to the politics of redistribution” (Fraser & Naples, 2004, p. 1112). There are nevertheless important tendencies in feminist research that seek to weave together different strands of theory to address the challenges of contemporary forms of capitalism and patriarchy (Calás & Smircich, 2006).

Environmentalism

The recently released Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), a massive technical report that reflects the opinions of 1,300 distinguished scientists from 95 countries, called attention to the alarming fact that 60% of the Earth’s ecosystems studied have been degraded significantly as a result of human activity. Not everyone agrees that natural systems have reached a crisis state, but the mounting evidence is increasingly convincing experts, the public, and the media that a global environmental crisis is looming.

This global environmental degradation is attributed to a variety of causes. Many analysts point to increases in human population (Brown, 2000; Kearns, 1997; National Academy of Science, 1994). Critical scholars, however, are skeptical of such apolitical explanations (for a review, see Foster, 1998). They do not see the root cause lying in population growth as much as in the way people exploit the environment for private gain with its attendant (obscenely) asymmetrical distribution of wealth and life chances. Marxist critics point to the destructive effects of decision making under the profit imperative (e.g., Foster, 2000). Other radical critics focus on the role of corporate interests in encouraging high consumption lifestyles, anthropocentric worldviews, exploitative-patriarchal culture, and other forms of domination (e.g., Hawken, 1993; Devall & Sessions, 1985; Warren, 1997). As with feminist theories, critical environmentalism draws on a wide variety of perspectives, and it has developed several variants, notably deep ecology, social ecology, and eco-feminism (see Zimmerman, 1994).

Of particular interest to management scholars is the rise of corporate environmentalism and the assertion that effective leadership in addressing the phenomena of environmental degradation should come from the corporate sector (e.g., Hart, 1997). Long blamed for despoiling the environment, corporations and their leaders have recently launched initiatives to not only conserve resources and curb the damage but also to restore and replenish the environment. They increasingly argue that they alone have the resources, access, and expertise necessary to promote practically effective environmentalism. Mainstream scholars have drawn on a wide variety of frameworks to make sense of these corporate practices (for a critical

review, Sharma, 2002; Jermier, Forbes, Benn, & Orsato, 2006). However, to date, the vast bulk of the scholarship on corporate environmentalism lacks the critical edge necessary to distinguish between incremental, reformist improvements and more radical innovations that come closer to matching the seriousness of the rapidly developing environmental crisis.

Taken together, several recent studies are beginning to form the foundation for a comprehensive critique of corporate environmentalism. Welford (1997) developed an early critique of the “hijacking” of the broader environmental movement by corporate capitalism. He raised questions about whether any form of corporate environmentalism can be compatible with the interests of government regulators, environmental NGOs, the broader citizenry, and the natural harmonies of the earth itself. A key orienting concept in the critical analysis of corporate environmentalism is *greenwashing*—constructing green symbolism without taking the radical steps required to deliver a full measure of green substance. Greenwashing is a central phenomenon in an era in which organizations face social pressure to address concerns about environmental degradation and resulting declines in human health. Studies on greenwashing have focused attention on how corporations contrive to convey a green image, perhaps by undertaking some highly visible campaign but without applying the lessons of environmentalism to their business processes. Consequently, a misleading representation of corporations’ environmental performance and initiatives is promoted (Athanasidou, 1996; Greer & Bruno, 1996; Tokar, 1997). Such studies highlight the role of corporate and related institutions in undermining genuine environmentalism through obfuscation and misrepresentation while supporting weak reformist programs, green marketing, and other image management techniques (e.g., Beder, 2002; Clapp & Dauvergne, 2005), and the development of theoretical perspectives on greenwashing behavior (Lyon & Maxwell, 2004; Forbes & Jermier, 2002). Other noteworthy critical resources include Seager’s (1993) ecofeminist explanation of business as usual and the ecological establishment, Newton and Harte’s (1997) critique of environmentalist evangelical rhetoric, Fineman’s (2000b) analysis of regulatory reinforcement, Levy’s (1997; Levy & Egan, 2003; Levy & Newell, 2005) critique of environmental management, Jermier and Forbes’ (2003) Marcusean CT analysis, Starkey and Crane’s (2003) postmodern green narrative, Banerjee’s (2003) postcolonialist analysis, and Castro’s (2004) radical reformulation of the concept of sustainable development.

Tasks ahead for CMS environmentalists include the critique of green imposters and the further development of green CT. Another challenge lies in overcoming the tendency of environmentalists, even radically critical ones, to narrow the focus on the natural environment in a way that decouples it from the broader context of capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and imperialism.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL PREMISES

While some empirically oriented critical scholarship proceeds from positivist epistemological premises common in mainstream research, the drive to critique mainstream theory often prompts CMS proponents to engage with debates on epistemology that were a hallmark of Frankfurt School analysis and that have been heated within the philosophy of the social sciences (e.g., Bernstein, 1983, 1986). Within the CMS movement, there are a number of partly competing and partly overlapping epistemologies at work. We discuss here the three main families of views—standpoint theory (ST), poststructuralism, and critical realism.

Standpoint Epistemology

Many management scholars believe that value-neutral objectivity is the hallmark of properly scientific work (Simon's, 1976, position, inherited from logical positivism, is paradigmatic). While some in the CMS movement would agree, some others have embraced ST (for an overview and comparison with other epistemologies, see Anderson, 2003; for related controversies, see Harding, 2004; for discussion of the relevance to management research, see Adler & Jermier, 2005). ST challenges the idea of value neutrality, arguing that it would require scientists to do the “God trick” by adopting a “view from nowhere” (see Harding, 2004). ST argues that all phases of a research study—how we identify research issues, theorize research questions, gather and analyze data, draw conclusions, and use the knowledge produced—are conditioned to some extent by the researcher's subjective and objective place in the various dimensions of the social order—by their “standpoints” (Jermier, 1998). This assessment is broadly shared by the other two epistemologies discussed in the following section. Scholars cannot avoid or transcend these standpoints; but standpoints are frequently unacknowledged, because those in positions of power, the victors in history, are able to naturalize their own perspective.*

This analysis leads proponents of ST to argue that the route to deeper and arguably more objective knowledge lies not in attempting to eliminate politics from science, but in embracing politics and (consciously) adopting a standpoint that offers more rather than less insight. In a world marked by structures of domination and exploitation, research undertaken from the standpoint of the dominant elites inevitably legitimizes and naturalizes the status quo. Although all standpoints are limiting and all knowledge is partial, according to ST alternative views “from below”—that is, from the standpoint of compar-

* CMS ST proponents, like other standpoint theorists, are divided on whether standpoints play similar or different roles in social versus natural sciences. Arguably, standpoints play qualitatively different roles in two domains, although even skeptics acknowledge that the case for ST in the critique of natural sciences is not easily dismissed.

actively oppressed or marginalized groups, such as workers, women, or ethnic minorities—has greater potential to generate insightful knowledge.

This argument was developed first in Marxist theory (Lukacs, 1923/1971) and then adopted by feminists and others. Marx argued that the basic structure of capitalist society ensures that subjects within it are presented with an inverted image of reality, most notably because the subjects of our world—real, living, creative people, whose development should be an end itself—appear as objects, as mere means for the self-expansion of capital. According to Marx, it is only when we take the point of view of the workers—who are now identified as producers of wealth rather than as mere factors of production—that this inversion becomes visible and a critique of the commodifying logic of capitalism becomes possible. ST feminists have argued similarly that it is only when we take the vantage point of women that the structure and mechanisms of patriarchal domination become visible.

Many management scholars appear to think that to be a student, teacher, or researcher of management requires one to adopt the standpoint of managers and that such a standpoint gives one access to knowledge that is both objective and relevant to managers' concerns by using value-free methodology (see earlier discussion). Some advocates of this stance further argue that managers are obligated by their fiduciary responsibilities to consider social and environmental issues only insofar as they promote profit maximization. From that perspective, it would seem that CMS proponents, with their focus on social and environmental issues, are simply in the wrong field.

CMS researchers reject this logic, contesting as an ideological fantasy the neo-classical economic theory that enshrines shareholder value as the socially (Pareto-) optimal goal, and challenging the normalized role of management scholars as servants of power. Increasingly, mainstream scholars are paying attention to this critique of the narrowness of much management theory, of the blind spots in understanding that result from reliance on elite standpoints (e.g., Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006), but they generally remain wedded to a managerial standpoint, albeit now somewhat pluralized. From a CMS perspective, these concerns about “blind spots” cannot be addressed effectively without turning to more radical forms of analysis that are dedicated to remedying this blindness..

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism comes in many forms, but is centrally concerned with the critical role of language in organizing and performing our relation to the world (Sturrock, 1993, chapter 5; Belsey, 2002; Butler, Laclau, & Zizek, 2000). It radicalizes the basic insight that there is no theory-independent observation language. Poststructuralism recalls the value-laden nature of any assertions of facts, and rejects as authoritarian claims to objective truth—whether those claims are made by critical or mainstream scholars. But it also rejects

an “anything goes” approach: To say that all knowledge claims, including its own, are historically and culturally embedded does not diminish the burden on scholars to argue in ways accepted as convincing within that historical-cultural frame.

Poststructuralism can be approached—and has garnered some of its support—via its critique of ST. ST assumes that actors who occupy a given position in the social structure have common, objective interests that will provide them with a shared perspective. Standpoint feminist research, for example, assumes the existence of a single, coherent, feminist identity that could serve as the foundation for a feminist standpoint. This assumption was challenged by Black feminists, third-world feminists, and others who asserted their own identities and points of view and who thereby questioned what they saw as the hegemony of middle-class White women in the feminist movement. This challenge was theorized by poststructuralists as demonstrating the pitfalls of attributing essential interests to women—or to social classes, or indeed to any structurally defined social category. Standpoint theorists respond that a common identity and awareness of common interests are not automatic consequences of a common structural position: The latter simply afford the opportunity to forge common identities and interests (e.g., Jameson, 1988). However, the poststructuralists challenge even this more modest causal claim, arguing that such common interests cannot be determined by analytical fiat.

The critical value of the poststructuralist approach in organization studies is nicely demonstrated by Robert Cooper (1986; see also Willmott, 1998). Cooper drew attention to how our knowledge of organizations is framed by “method”—an endemic and powerful, yet often unacknowledged or silent, partner in the process of knowledge production. He showed that, in everyday language, the term *organization* could express two very different kinds of thinking. First, it can convey a *distal* understanding of organizations as things that exist “out there,” as objective, discrete entities. On this understanding, organizations can be studied as objects possessing distinctive characteristics that can be stated as variables. This is a deeply institutionalized understanding of organization. Upon it are based diverse forms of functionalist and structuralist analysis that provide knowledge based upon what Chia (1996) termed “being-realism.” In contrast, *proximal* thinking conceives of organizations as comprising diverse ongoing and open-ended activities. Researchers identify whatever boundaries or variables—or indeed, by participants themselves—are constructed and unstable, rather than more or less adequate reflections of the world “out there.” Whereas distal thinking encourages an understanding of knowledge as something like a map of a comparatively well-defined objective reality, knowledge generated by proximal thinking articulates and promotes an appreciation of the precarious and incomplete processes that constitute our taken-for-granted sense of the “out there.” In Chia’s (1996) terminology, proximal thinking is an articulation of “becoming-realism.”

In terms of its contribution to critical analysis, poststructuralist thinking is important for two reasons. First, the acknowledgement of proximal thinking provides for the possibility and legitimacy of deconstructing the claims of distal thinking, encouraging us to appreciate the dependence of the latter upon available, commonsense meanings that are idealized as “method.” Second, it invites us to reflect upon the role of power in fixing, or institutionalizing, a particular way of making sense, as if this way of making sense of things had universal, observer-independent truth value and authority (Willmott, 2005; Contu & Willmott, 2003; Calás & Smircich, 1999). Needless to say, the attribution of self-evidence to a specific, orthodox way of representing the world (e.g., as organizations with structures and goals) is a powerful means of reproducing the status quo; but poststructuralists point out that the dominance of this institutionalized form of understanding can never become total, not least because any exercise of power provokes resistance (as discussed earlier). What counts as “deviant behavior” is therefore a consequence, and not simply a condition, of control. Any attempt to control or fix the meaning of any word—including words like *management* or *organization*—is inherently precarious since reality is always in excess of what is signified by any particular set of signifiers. Poststructuralists in CMS celebrate this excess and strive to widen and deepen its scope and influence, seeing it as potentially subversive and emancipatory.

Poststructuralist epistemology politicizes/ethicizes all forms of knowledge. Poststructuralists do not aim to deny or discredit the claims of science to greater objectivity; but they insist on the importance, in the actual practice of science, of assumptions and practices that are established politically rather than impartially. Critics read this “postfoundationalist” stance as a form of relativism or irrationality, which gives no greater weight to science than to alternative forms of belief (Boal, Hunt, & Jaros, 2003). Such criticism sees poststructuralist epistemology as failing an elementary logic test: When people assert that there is no objective truth, it is unclear how they can claim any objective truth value for their assertion. Poststructuralists reply that their claim is not that there is no objective truth, but rather that claims to objective truth are themselves contingent, and that an appreciation of this contingency should form an integral part of our understanding and examination of truth claims. To believe otherwise might be reassuring and beneficial to knowledge producers—placing contingency at the margins rather than the center of knowledge production lends those who don the mantle of science greater authority and renders the consumers of knowledge (e.g., policy makers) less vulnerable—but, for poststructuralists, it is a view based upon wishful thinking rather than hard-headed reflection on the centrality of politics (lower case “p”) in social practice.

Critical Realism

Critical realism is appealing to those who are critical of the mainstream’s positivism but are unpersuaded or disturbed by what they see as the exces-

sive value dependence of ST and the illogical relativism of poststructuralist epistemology. Critical realist epistemology is compatible with a broad range of political viewpoints; a growing number of CMS researchers (as well as scholars in other disciplines, e.g., economics) found critical realism to be a fruitful way to conceptualize the challenges facing the social sciences as positivism loses its plausibility and as poststructuralism challenges the established, positivist basis of differentiating science from other forms of knowledge (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 1998; Fleetwood & Ackroyd, 2004).

Critical realism today is most commonly associated with the work of (1978; precursors and other variants are described in Verstegen, 2000). Bhaskar argued that what differentiates the practice of scientific investigation is the assumption that the object of its investigation has a real existence independent of the observer, an existence that is in principle available to objective knowledge. Where empiricism and positivism see science as finding patterns among observable facts, critical realism strives to identify the real structures that generate these facts and patterns—structures that are typically not visible to the naked eye. When scientists conduct experiments, they aim to trigger mechanisms that are attributed to the operation of these structures, and thus test their hypotheses concerning them. Critical realists understand reality to be layered: Beneath the *empirical* layer (observable by human beings), there is the *actual* (existing in time and space), and given that mechanisms may or may not be actualized, beneath the actualized lies the *real*. The real is therefore a set of structures that have causal powers from which observable events emerge.

Such a layered ontology is congenial to a critical structuralist perspective on management, where the observed regularities of organizational behavior are understood to hide as much as they reveal about the underlying social and psychological causes of domination (e.g., Tsoukas, 1994). In effect, critical realism aims to provide a basis for challenging the scientific standing of accounts that naturalize the social world by reporting its manifestations without regard for the underlying structures.

Poststructuralist critics contest the assertion that there are real mechanisms that science can detect (rather than construct; see Willmott, 1996). They argue that critical realism's universalizing claims result in an authoritarian view of science as the font of objective, impartial knowledge. Critical realists reply that science does not claim to possess objective knowledge, but that it has only developed procedures that offer reasonable hope of progressing toward it. On the critical realist view, the danger of authoritarianism is forestalled by the openness of science to rational refutation and debate, thereby affirming a benign, rather than potentially malevolent, conception of rationality (Willmott, 2005; Mutch, 2005).

CRITICAL PROJECTS

So far, we have discussed the main theoretical traditions and epistemological orientations of CMS. We now briefly survey what CMS scholars have done with these resources.

Critical Research

It is questionable whether there are any specifically “critical” methods or domains of research, or whether any methods or domains are antipathetic to critical research. As concerns methods, critical management studies embraces a number of epistemologies and these are compatible with very diverse research methods—quantitative as well as qualitative (see Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Nevertheless, Alvesson and Deetz (2000) provided a number of methodological pointers for the development of critical management research, arguing that these can offer important antidotes to “the managerialization of the world.”

In its contributions to our knowledge of specific domains of management, CMS has addressed both conceptual and empirical concerns, often simultaneously, as it has applied different theories and methodologies to investigate and illuminate a wide range of topics. (An extensive CMS bibliography is available at <http://www.criticalmanagement.org/>.) In the context of this chapter, it is not possible to do more than list a small number of the more widely cited books and articles within CMS, with the aim of suggesting some starting points for the interested reader. Figure 3.1 thus lists a few such entry points under each of several headings spanning most of the domains of CMS research to date.

Overall, CMS has been strongest in the area of work organization. As it developed, it has broadened to encompass a wide range of topics. The diversity of these can perhaps best be appreciated by consulting the programs of the meetings of the U.S. Academy of Management CMS-IG (see <http://group.aomonline.org/cms/>), the U.K.-based CMS conference (for proceedings of the first conference, see <http://www.mngt.waikato.ac.nz/ejrot/cmsconference/default.htm>; for proceedings of the second, third and fourth conferences, see <http://www.mngt.waikato.ac.nz/ejrot/>), and the Labour Process conference (<http://www.hrm.strath.ac.uk/ILPC/background/book-series.htm>).

Critical Approaches to Management Education

Given that CMS is largely the creation of academics working in business schools, it is not surprising that management education is an important target of CMS intervention. In this context, as we pointed out in the previous section, CMS proponents come up against the assumption that business schools are training grounds for a business elite and that the content of research and teaching in these settings is—and must inevitably be—dominated by the demands of corporate clients. This assumption is reinforced by the AACSB and other accrediting processes, which push toward homogenization in

1. Books

- Alvesson & Willmott, 1996
- Casey, 2002
- Perrow, 1986
- Parker, 2002

2. Edited volumes and special issues of journals

- Alvesson & Willmott, 1992, 2003
- Grey & Willmott, 2005
- Administrative Science Quarterly, 43(2) 1998 Special Issue on critical perspectives on organizational control
- Academy of Management Review, 17(3) 1992 Special issue on new intellectual currents
- Organization, 9(3) 2002 Special issue on critical management studies

3. Books and articles on specific topics

- *network theory: Grint & Woolgar, 1997; Law & Hassard, 1999*
- *aesthetics: Linstead & Hopfl, 2000*
- *alternative forms of organization: Fournier, 2006; Rothschild & Whitt, 1986; Ashcraft, 2001; Luhman, 2006*
- *body: Hassard, Holliday, & Willmott, 1998*
- *bureaucracy: Bauman, 1989; Adler & Borys, 1996; Ritzer, 2000a, 2000b; du Gay, 2000; Alvesson & Thompson, 2006*
- *business process reengineering: Knights & Willmott, 2000*
- *careers: Grey, 1994*
- *class consciousness: Jermier, 1985*
- *communication theory: Deetz, 1992*
- *control in organizations: Hyman, 1987; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985; Jermier, 1998; Taylor, Mulvey, Hyman, & Bain, 2002; Clegg & Dunkerley 1980*
- *corporate governance: Davis & Greve, 1997; Davis & Mizruchi, 1999; Mizruchi, 1996; Palmer, Jennings, & Zhou, 1993; Lazonick, 2006*
- *corporate social responsibility: Margolis & Walsh, 2003; Marens, 2004*
- *culture: Collinson, 1988; Alvesson, 2002; Martin, 2001; Smircich, 1983; Willmott, 1993 ; Kunda, 1992; Watson, 1994*
- *discourse analysis: Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Chia, 2000*
- *emotion: Fineman, 2000a; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Bolton & Boyd, 2003*

Figure 3.1 Some studies in the critical spirit

- environmentalism: Welford, 1997; Levy & Newell, 2005; Jermier & Forbes, 2003
- ethics: Jones, Parker, & ten Bos, 2005; Parker, 1998; Jackall, 1988; Neimark, 1995
- financialization, Froud et al., 2006
- gender: Martin, 1990; Knights & Willmott, 1986b; Calás & Smircich, 2006
- globalization: Hymer, 1976, 1979; Murphy, 2006; Cooke, 2004;
- human resource management: Townley, 1994; Jacoby, 1985
- identity: Pullen & Linstead, 2005
- Japanization: Elger & Smith, 1994
- knowledge management: Prichard, Hull, Chumer, & Willmott, 2000; McKinlay, 2006
- leadership: Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Calás, 1993
- learning: Contu & Willmott, 2003
- management education: Whitley, Thomas, & Marceau, 1981; French & Grey, 1996; Grey & Antonacopoulou, 2003; Summers, Boje, Dennehy, & Rosile, 1997; Grey, 2004; Reed, 2002
- management ideologies: Barley & Kunda, 1992; Abrahamson, 1997; Gantman, 2005
- management history: Jacques, 1996; Burrell, 1997; Cooke, 1999
- management learning: Reynolds & Burgoyne, 1997; Reynolds & Vince, 2004.
- masculinity: Collinson & Hearn, 1994
- methodology *Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Johnson & Duberley, 2003; Prasad, 2005*
- *participation and empowerment: Potterfield, 1999; Hales, 2000; Cooke & Kothari, 2001*
- *political strategy: Jacobs, 1999*
- *postcolonialism: Prasad, 2003; Banerjee & Linstead, 2004*
- *postmodernism: Hassard & Parker, 1993; Linstead, 2004; Calás & Smircich, 1997; Thompson, 1993*
- *power, politics, resistance: Clegg, 1989; Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006; Hardy & Clegg, 1996; Edwards & Wajzman, 2005; Jermier, Nord, & Knights, 1994*
- professionals: Cooper, Puxty, Robson, & Willmott, 1994; Armstrong, 1989
- project management: Hodgson & Cimil, 2006
- quality management: Wilkinson & Willmott, 1994

Figure 3.1 (continued) Some studies in the critical spirit

- race: Nkomo, 1992; Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh, & Vaslow, 2000
 - resistance and misbehavior: Collinson & Ackroyd, 2006; Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Jermier et al., 1994
 - services: Sturdy, Grugulis, & Willmott, 2001; Brewis & Linstead, 2000
 - skills: Warhurst, Keep, & Grugulis, 2004
 - surveillance: Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992;
 - teamwork: Barker, 1993; Sewell, 1998; Ezzamel & Willmott, 1998; Sinclair, 1992; Knights & McCabe, 2000; Batt & Doellgast, 2006
 - technology in organizations: Barley, 1990; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Knights & Willmott, 1988; Adler, 1990
 - universities: Parker & Jary, 1995; Prichard et al., 2000.
 - white-collar work: Smith, Knights, & Willmott, 1991
 - work organization: Thompson & McHugh, 2002; Knights, Willmott, & Collinson, 1985; Knights & Willmott, 1986a, 1989; Thompson & Warhurst, 1998; Felstead & Jewson, 1999;
 - work-life balance: Appelbaum et al., 2006
4. Critical studies in contiguous fields
- industrial relations: Hyman, 1987, 1989; Ackers, Smith, & Smith, 1996; Harley, Hyman, & Thompson, 2005; Edwards & Collinson, 2002
 - strategy: Smircich & Stubbart, 1985; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Levy, Willmott & Alvesson, 2003; Levy & Egan, 2003
 - information systems: Hirschheim & Klein, 1989; 1994; Lytinen, 1992; O'Donnell and Henriksen, 2002
 - marketing: Brownlie, Saren, Wensley, & Whittington, 1999; Alvesson, 1994
 - accounting: Miller & O'Leary, 1987; Tinker, 1985
 - management science: Mingers, 2006
5. Textbooks
- Thompson & McHugh, 2002
 - Knights & Willmott, 1999, 2006
 - Mills, Jean, Mills, Forshaw, & Bratton, 2006
 - Fulop & Lindstead, 1999
 - Edwards & Wajcman, 2005
 - Johnson & Duberley, 2000
 - Mills, Simmons, & Helms, 2005
 - Boje & Dennehy, 1994

Figure 3.1 (continued) Some studies in the critical spirit

curricula between professors within a college and among departments across universities (Jaros, 2001; Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006). Understood in these terms, CMS is a misfit, if not an oxymoron.

This skeptical viewpoint is a more common in the United States than in the United Kingdom. The predominant model of governance in U.S. business schools gives overwhelming weight to one key external stakeholder—the big firms that recruit most of the graduating students. This is somewhat moderated in public universities and in private schools with religious affiliations. In the United Kingdom, the weight of the corporate world is somewhat counterbalanced by stronger ties to the rest of the university and to a broader range of external stakeholders. Of these stakeholders, one of the most influential are the funding councils for the universities, which tie the resources and prestige of all departments, including schools of management and business, to formal assessments of research quality. However, even in the United Kingdom, CMS's commitment to the social good over corporate interests occasions considerable skepticism, if not opposition, from “users” who tend to assume that research should simply confirm and advance, rather than stimulate reflection upon, their priorities.

CMS proponents have proposed three main rejoinders to such evaluations (Adler, 2002b). The first rejoinder is a “militant” one: It is premised on a commitment to solidarity with the victims of corporate power and of other oppressive structures. This rejoinder embraces the oxymoron. Critically minded faculty can legitimately use their academic positions as a pulpit from which to challenge students to recognize the oppressive nature of the system they are being prepared to join. Such pedagogy may encourage some students to reconsider their career plans: A significant minority of students in business schools does in fact pursue careers outside business. Among those who do go into the business sector, such pedagogy might discourage blind implementation of corporate orders.

A second rejoinder is more “humanist” in nature. As humans who are endowed with empathy, notions of justice, and responsibilities as citizens, managers may feel profoundly ambivalent about the oppressive and exploitative dimensions of their roles. A critically oriented pedagogy can help future business leaders deal more productively with that ambivalence—productively, that is, not from the point of view of maximizing shareholder wealth, but from that of the students' personal development—helping them make more reflective choices. This view is similar to Mintzberg's (2004) position.

A third rejoinder could be labeled “progressive.” On this view, managers at all levels except the most senior of levels in a capitalist corporation play a contradictory role. On the one hand, they are part of what Marx called the “collective worker,” contributing expertise and assuring coordination. On the other hand, they are the agents of the intrinsically exploitative wage relation and of the coercive domination of the market. Therefore, managers, especially

at lower hierarchical levels, often find themselves torn in their loyalties. A critical pedagogy can help would-be managers to become aware of this contradiction, and help them reflect on how they can position themselves relative to it.

Inspired by one or more of these rejoinders, CMS scholars have produced a number of textbooks, both more basic and more advanced. Some of these are listed in Figure 3.1.

Political and Social Activism

One of the aspirations of critical management studies is to engage with the world to effect practical change. Many CMS scholars participate in unions, social movements, and political organizations. They also act as consultants to business, government, unions, and NGOs and as advocates in public forums. Through their scholarship, they can inform policy, connect with other activist groups across academia (e.g., critically oriented legal, accounting, and economics scholars), and reach audiences beyond their fellow academics. These engagements in turn shape CMS research, bringing to the fore new problems to study, highlighting the inadequacy of current theories, and suggesting new research strategies.

The wider university is also an important locus of CMS activism. Faculty members support student efforts to connect to social and environmental movements through student-led campus activist organizations, for example by serving as a faculty advisors. Service learning courses or working with volunteer outreach projects can also serve to link students with social, political, and environmental problems. Critically oriented documentary films are frequently shown on college campuses creating openings for exchange, as do campus visits by politically progressive speakers and artists.

Notwithstanding these commitments and opportunities, the CMS movement has so far had only modest impact outside its academic home. Where critical accounting scholars have actively engaged public policy debates on accounting regulation (e.g., Mitchell & Sikka, 2005; Reform Club, n.d.), and where progressive industrial relations scholars are actively engaged in their corresponding field of practice (e.g., Kochan, 2005), other constituents of CMS have, so far, been less visible, in part because they have been focused upon challenging, and seeking to change, their immediate intellectual and professional environment. This emphasis may well shift in the future, particularly if world events continue to place in doubt the sustainability of the status quo. The neo-liberal celebration of the market over society, and the associated idolatry of the CEO would seem to be fading; the future likely holds more challenges than celebrations for business. In this context, CMS has an opportunity to acquire traction and legitimacy within academia, as policy makers and activists groups seek out management scholars whose analysis is more geared to their concerns and is less compromised by corporate involvement in, and funding, of business schools.

Relation to Everyday Management Practice

In many respects, and rather paradoxically, CMS often addresses topics and issues in ways that are less remote from the everyday worlds of practitioners than is mainstream work. CMS scores comparatively high on relevance and plausibility insofar as it acknowledges the centrality of conflicts of interest, power struggles, and contradictions—the familiar but often hidden features of contemporary work organizations. And CMS is also more inclined to make connections between topics and issues that have become fragmented and abstracted in mainstream research.

However, CMS does demand of its practitioner audience a willingness to suspend conventional wisdom and commonsense thinking—to leave the comfort zone of mainstream thinking. Consulting gurus who challenge the more backward and conservative sectors of business question and stretch this comfort zone; but these challenges typically carry tacit confirmation of the understanding that managers have a monopoly of relevant knowledge and an inalienable right to manage. CMS discourses push beyond those boundaries.

Precisely because CMS refuses to subscribe to a technocratic conception of management, practitioners and policy makers are often disoriented by, uneasy with, or downright hostile to its contribution. Privately, practitioners and policy makers may acknowledge the insights of CMS scholarship that address more directly the political realities and intractable dilemmas of management. Publicly, however, managers are often more inclined to scoff at CMS for its lack of comforting rhetoric and easy prescriptions, and/or to dismiss it as politically motivated and impenetrable (e.g., But can you teach it?, 2004). Those occupying positions of privilege in corporate hierarchies are often aware of the precariousness of their authority; it is hardly surprising that they may be deeply resistant to analyses that remind them of this precariousness. Accordingly, a challenge for CMS is to resist the translation of its demanding analyses into frameworks or languages that dull its distinctive contributions while, at the same time, redoubling its determination to make a difference in the face of skeptical audiences.

PROBLEMS

As the preceding discussion has made clear, *CMS* is a catchall term signifying a heterogeneous body of work, a body that shares some common themes but is neither internally consistent nor sharply differentiable from more mainstream analysis. In this respect, the term is of limited use; but its fuzziness also has advantages. The fuzziness brings together a community of management scholars who share a common critical sensibility. It is a “big tent” that accommodates diverse forms of analysis—from the outrageously radical to the almost orthodox—in ways that enable both diverse internal debates and common external engagements. Looking forward, we see two main problems that are likely to shape the intellectual program of CMS.

Negativity?

As with most countermovements, CMS proponents have been more articulate about what they are against than what they are for. There are some exceptions to this generalization: some critical scholars have found considerable inspiration for their research and for their teaching in, for example, Robert Owen of New Lanark and the cooperative movement, William Morris, and Edward Filene (Kanter, 1972; Jacobs, 2004) as well as in contemporary communal experiments (Rothschild & Whitt, 1986; Quarter, 2000; Fournier, 2006). Nevertheless, the generalization is valid, and in the eyes of some scholars, both outside and within CMS, the absence of a manifesto or a set of prescriptions for change is a problem that undermines the credibility and value of CMS. Others disagree.

For many outside CMS, the habits of managerial, technocratic reasoning are deeply ingrained, and as a result, a radically critical perspective that offers little in the way of immediately actionable prescriptions can have no value. The counterargument is straightforward: The most damaging form of utopianism is arguably that which imagines that the savage injustice and destructiveness built into the core of the current social structure can be remedied by modest technocratic reform. Wars, famines, mass un- and underemployment, discrimination, and the unfolding environmental crisis—such suffering points to the need for radical, not incremental, change.

For some CMS proponents, a positive vision of a desirable future would help motivate the critique and would help overcome the counterargument that the CMS critique is utopian. Even if the ultimate goal remained ill defined, some shorter term goals might galvanize support (Fong & Wright, 2004, represent one such model). The strongest response to this argument is perhaps to note that historically recorded instances of fundamental social-structural change have typically been protracted and chaotic and to argue that given this pattern it is neither necessary nor obviously useful to attempt to define or prescribe in detail and in advance the next stage of social evolution. While such a blueprint might help galvanize support for change among some groups in some specific moments, this reading of history suggests that major social changes proceed largely unguided by blueprints.

There is a second dimension to the negativity question: There is some debate within CMS about whether and how critical theories can address the progressive as well as oppressive aspects of capitalist development. On the one hand, some CMS proponents argue that when so much mainstream work is oriented, tacitly or explicitly, toward the defense of the contemporary form of society, the task of critique must remain essentially negative. On the other hand, others argue that if CMS cannot speak to the aspects of the prevailing system that people value, critique becomes shrill polemic (Adler, 2004). At the very least, it cannot be denied that around the world—from China to

Poland—the opportunities and lifestyles associated with capitalism exert a very strong appeal. Whether the reality fulfils its promise, and whether it is sustainable—these are of course a different matter.

Materialism?

A major tension within CMS has been between often Marxist inspired, structural-materialist streams and postmodernist/poststructuralist streams which place greater emphasis upon agency, language and contingency. No doubt, traces of their confluence and the associated “white water” are evident in the present text: Among the authors, there are significant divergences of view on this issue, and despite efforts to produce a well rounded and coherent paper, it would be surprising if our text did not betray these differences in some degree of unevenness in emphasis, tone, and orientation. In this respect, the chapter can be read as part of an ongoing dialogue with a series of critical commentaries on aspects of CMS (see Ackroyd, 2004; Thompson, 2005; Sotirin & Tyrell, 1998; Adler, in press).

The issue is partly generational. For older CMS proponents, the debates over Marxism and labor process theory prompted by the emergence of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and new social movements were formative. As we noted earlier, they coincided with, and in some ways reflected, a major shift in the overall political landscape, and therefore, these debates were interwoven with personal political biographies. For younger generations of researchers, however, these debates can seem remote and scholastic. Many younger scholars are more at ease with a less orthodox, more eclectic approach that favors rich diversity over rigorous consistency. For an older generation, different perspectives are associated with warring positions. For younger scholars, in contrast, points of disagreement and divergence often look less important, and the main task is to explore how they can all be mobilized, either in parallel or in creative hybrids, to advance the critical project. Diversity can be tonic.

PROPOSALS

CMS has an ambitious objective of contributing to a progressive transformation of management theory and practice. Our survey suggests four recommendations for strengthening CMS.

First, the development of CMS will benefit from a continued diversity of forms of critique. We can take the epistemology debate as illustration: It is likely that all these families of epistemology will continue to coexist in CMS. Perhaps standpoint epistemology will appeal more strongly to those who seek to generate knowledge based a commitment to particular issues. Perhaps critical realism will appeal more strongly to those who believe that social science should aim to deliver objective truth. And perhaps poststructuralism will

appeal more strongly to those who value more reflexive and playful forms of understanding in which alternative ways of knowing are opened up rather than closed off, perhaps prematurely. However, the overall field of CMS will benefit from continued pluralism.

Second, CMS should foster vigorous debate among its different approaches. In CMS, as in any other community of research, debate inhibits the atrophying of positions and thereby acts as a potentially progressive force. At its best, debate enhances mutual understanding and respect; it challenges the parties to articulate and offer some justification of their position that may then be subjected to critical scrutiny, resulting in greater clarity for all the participants. Such debate, however, requires norms that are honored only partially and patchily in academe in general and in the CMS movement in particular.

Third, CMS should promote dialogue and debate with the mainstream. To date, such engagement has been largely one way, with conspicuously few mainstream academics being sufficiently interested or prepared to subject constituent elements of CMS to serious or sustained examination (exceptions include Donaldson, 1985; Westwood & Clegg, 2003). CMS scholarship is, however, likely to benefit from sustained efforts to engage mainstream research in dialogue. “Ghettoization” would be debilitating for the intellectual vitality of CMS.

Finally, even though these debates within CMS and with the mainstream are important, engagement with the world outside academia is, we submit, even more crucial. Those committed to advancing critical studies of management will doubtless continue to refine their theories and to debate the merits of their different approaches; the bigger challenge, however, and the one that provides the warrant for this internal debate, is to contribute more forcefully to shaping public agendas. The mainstream of the U.S. Academy of Management has become increasingly cognizant of the importance of engaging public and private policy makers (e.g., Cummings 2006; Van de Ven as cited in Kenworthy-U'ren, 2005); we argue that, following a distinctively radical path, CMS should broaden the audience to include social movements of resistance.

In this, CMS can take inspiration from Michael Burawoy’s (2004) call for critical sociologists to develop a “public sociology.” Burawoy distinguished mainstream and critical sociology and their respective academic and non-academic audiences. Mainstream “policy sociology” reorients “professional sociology” (mainstream academic research) toward actionable knowledge that can support the technocratic efforts of policy makers. Likewise, Burawoy argued that “public sociology” reorients “critical sociology” away from internal debates within the field and toward public dialogue in support of struggles for emancipation. Such public dialogue can take more traditional forms (books that stimulate public reflection and opinion columns that address current issues) or more “organic” forms (see Gramsci, 1971) that engage directly with specific communities and social movements.

Developing a better balance between such public engagement and the historically dominant form of critical scholarship that is oriented to our academic colleagues would, we believe, help CMS fulfill its promise.

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