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How come the critters came to be teaching in business schools? Contradictions in the institutionalization of critical management studies

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Abstract

How is it that a collection of working class drifters, sociology graduates, and ex-leftist politicians have ended up teaching in UK business schools? Understanding the predicament of these 'critters' helps to explain the ironic contingencies that provide the conditions of possibility for institutionalizing critical management studies (CMS), in particular the historic 'defeat of the Left' and the lack of more practical activities for radical management academics. Unlike labour process theory (LPT), CMS has come to terms with its institutional location within business schools and has taken the opportunity provided by the continued expansion of research oriented UK business schools to institutionalize itself as a recognized business school constituency. This has even led to the creation of one or two critically oriented business schools in the UK, where the contradictions of CMS are played out. One such contradiction is that having provided an opening for a wider academic and leftist intellectual community to enter the business school, CMS now finds itself faced with an autonomist critique which insists that the mainstream management curriculum is 'worthless' and calls for nothing less than the abolition of business schools. Consideration of this critique provides an opportunity to explore the identity of critters and the cultural performativity of CMS in providing a sign for their disaffiliation from the business school.

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As critical management studies (CMS) becomes increasingly institutionalized the challenge of resisting incorporation while at the same time having an impact on organizational practice is exacerbated. But the growth and institutionalization of CMS should not be seen as an inevitable response to flaws in mainstream management teaching and research, or as a manifestation of an irresistible urge to generate radical alternatives to structural inequalities and to challenge prevailing systems of domination. Instead the institutionalization of CMS needs to be understood as a response by a particular group of researchers to their specific circumstances. Understanding CMS in this way highlights some of its limitations and contradictions.

In this article it is argued that the institutionalization of CMS can be seen as an accommodation to the institutional location of critters within business schools (the term business school is used generically to refer to a range of UK institutions, from fully fledged business schools teaching MBAs through to smaller departments of management). The first section of the article gives a fairly conventional institutional history of CMS, tracing its origins in labour process theory (LPT). The second section draws on the recent *Handbook of Critical Management Studies* (Alvesson et al., 2009b) to outline the institutionalization of CMS in UK business schools, including the creation of a few critically oriented schools such as Leicester and Queen Mary, which has allowed CMS to renew itself and open up a space for some unlikely business school recruits, such as autonomist Marxists. The recent success of these schools is closely examined in relation to the autonomist critique they have provided a platform for. In an effort to pull CMS back from reckless calls to abolish business schools, the third section makes the case that most critters didn't join business schools with a view to building CMS. In order to grasp the contingencies that led to CMS, a profile is offered of a UK 'critter' as a disaffected drifter. The term 'critter' originates from the Academy of Management, where it is used to refer to members of the Critical Management Studies division (Eden, 2003), but it has a wider currency even though not everyone likes it. It is used here loosely and inclusively, even including those who might prefer not to be called critters. But whether or not the term is used, it captures the sense of a cultural identity, especially in the context of elitist attitudes in UK higher education. The fourth section turns back to the autonomist critique and its elitist stance in relation to the instrumentalism of management students. The fifth section considers the performativity of CMS in signalling the critters' disaffiliation from the mainstream, which the institutionalization of CMS threatens to undermine. Finally in the conclusion attention is drawn to the dilemmas facing CMS and it is argued that autonomist calls for the abolition of business schools need to be vigorously challenged.

An institutional history of CMS

Roughly speaking there have been at least three waves of CMS (Adler et al., 2007: 123). The first wave, or forerunner of CMS, was labour process theory (LPT), which largely derived from debates over Braverman's (1974) reworking of Marx's critique of capitalist work organization (Adler, 2007: 1313). Initially, as might be expected, this debate was taken up in the UK by Marxian labour economists (e.g. Friedman, 1977) and industrial sociologists (e.g. Nichols, 1980) employed in economics and sociology departments. But LPT was institutionalized within UK business schools, with the first International Labour Process Conference meeting at the Department of Management Sciences, UMIST (now part of Manchester Business School) in 1983. UK Labour Process Theorists

note the irony of their conferences being organized by business schools, where the majority of their UK delegates are employed (Smith, n.d.: 2). This is generally attributed to the vagaries of the academic labour market, with cutbacks in sociology during the Thatcher era pushing sociologists to find employment, usually teaching some variant of organizational behaviour or human resource management, in the expanding business schools (Fournier and Grey, 2000: 14).

UK Labour Process Theorists tend to present themselves as sociologists who happen to work in business schools, little different from their American counterparts in sociology departments (Parker, 2000). For example, as the authors of one of the first, and arguably one of the best critical textbooks on organizations, largely informed by LPT, Thompson and McHugh see themselves as setting out an alternative to the 'orthodox writing ... found in most American and some British textbooks and business schools'. They attribute the narrow and prescriptive managerialism of the dominant mainstream partly to 'a shift in the study of organizations from sociology departments to business and management schools' over the last 25 years (Thompson and McHugh, 2009: 6–7). But they don't offer any discussion of how or why this shift has taken place, let alone any reflection on their own supposed immunity to being in UK business schools for the last 25 years. This lack of reflection is symptomatic of Labour Process Theorists' ambivalence about their institutional location, as if business schools merely provide a convenient temporary refuge, which is possibly how they appeared in the 1980s, when Thompson and McHugh were writing the first edition of their textbook.

The second wave, and the emergence of CMS as the recognized title for a 'new sub-discipline' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Fournier and Grey, 2000: 8), came as a break from Marxian LPT (c.f. Jones, 2009; see Knights and Willmott, 1990). Theoretically CMS represented a move towards post-structuralism or post-modernism associated with the work of Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard (Cooper and Burrell, 1988). Institutionally the bi-annual CMS conferences that started in 1999 have, thus far, all been held at UK business schools, and many of the organizers and delegates were former stalwarts of the Labour Process conference. Labour process theorists have consistently defended Braverman's reading of Marx against post-structuralist CMS (Tinker, 2002), and have traced the intellectual trajectory from LPT to CMS (Beverungen, 2010; Hassard et al., 2001; Thompson, 2009). But an undertone to the LPT critique of CMS is that it represents an accommodation with the business school, an unacknowledged acceptance that there is no going back (Thompson, 2005). And of course for many up and coming critters, with degrees in business and management, there is no going back in the sense of returning to a home discipline.

In contrast to LPT (Thompson and McHugh, 2009: 439), CMS is preoccupied with the need to be reflexive about the contradictions of its institutional location in case the goal of social change is displaced by career advancement (Alvesson et al., 2009a: 13; Bridgman and Stephens, 2008). Critters are wary of 'repressive tolerance', whereby their 'dissent re-enforces domination' (Grey, 2007: 465), or of 'critical thinking' being watered down as it infiltrates the mainstream (Fournier and Grey, 2000: 25). It is tempting, especially for leftist Labour Process Theorists, to take a 'hyper-critical view of CMS' (Alvesson et al., 2009a: 22) as an accommodation with those 'who don't see themselves as political activists' (Cunliffe, 2008: 937), and prefer a 'conservative' kind of radicalism (Perrow, 2008) that eschews off-putting citations to Marx (Martin, 2002: 299) in order to engage with management practitioners (Voronov, 2008). The institutionalization of CMS might be dismissed as empire building by cynical careerists 'who will write any old shit with anyone' in order to get published (Parker, 2008: 274). But 'mixed motives' are inevitable for anyone pursuing an academic career (Alvesson et al., 2009a). It is worth noting that several leading figures in LPT, such as Paul Thompson and Chris Smith (2010), also hold senior positions in UK business schools, so adherence to LPT is by no means incompatible with a successful business school career.

Purists would need to provide an explanation for their own survival strategy, given the need to ‘temper’ any kind of radicalism in order to be accommodated in a business school (Meyerson, 2001; Meyerson and Scully, 1995).

The third wave of CMS is somewhat more disparate than the previous two and has picked up on a range of theorists such as Bourdieu and Žižek, and in particular Boltanski and Chiapello’s *New Spirit of Capitalism* (2007), along with Hardt and Negri’s two volumes, *Empire* (2001) and *Multitude* (2004). The latter are credited with introducing the Italian autonomist or workerist perspective into CMS (Fleming and Mandarini, 2009), and reviving interest in political economy (Jackson and Carter, 2009). An interesting aspect of this third wave is that critters in business schools have not only picked up on autonomist ideas, but through the institutionalization of CMS they have also provided a space for autonomists to enter business schools. The third wave may eschew formal organization, but its adherents are associated with the journal, *ephemera*, and a conference circuit, hosted by UK business schools (e.g., ‘Counter/mapping Queen Mary University’, 2010).

Autonomism has given rise to a renewed critique of the business school and the role of CMS within it. This autonomist critique represents a significant intervention because it combines optimism regarding the political prospects for CMS within business schools with an exploration of the contradictions of CMS, holding critters to account for not exploring the full implications of their own critical pedagogy (Harney, 2007). The autonomist intervention is credited with reaching a wide audience and ‘causing something of a stir’ within CMS (Contu, 2009). It is recognized as significant for revisiting ‘socialization’ as a key concept for critical pedagogy (Contu, 2009: 541), and stands out as an attempt to engage with students as ‘the managed’ (Fournier and Grey, 2000: 26), rather than taking it as given that they will all become managers. Backed by an impressive intellectual armoury, ranging from Marx’s *Grundrisse* through to Antonio Negri and Judith Butler, advocates of autonomism in CMS have yet to face critical scrutiny, although the precepts of autonomist Marxism itself have been questioned by business school academics (Toms, 2008). Fleming and Mandarini (2009: 341) present autonomism as a welcome invitation to ‘radical politics’, which Contu (2009: 547) sees as a counter to any ‘retreat from critical work’ in the business school, and gently mocks anyone who dares to demur as a cynic. A full-blown critique of autonomism is beyond the scope of this article (see Callinicos, 2006), but as a start it is worth exploring the contradictions of the autonomist critique in relation to the socialization of students as well as of critters themselves in business schools.

UK business schools

The *Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies* (Alvesson et al., 2009b) represents a major contribution to the institutionalization of CMS as a distinct field, and it gives a good indication of the make up and location of CMS. It may not be a representative sample, but with 28 chapters from 45 authors it provides a useful cross-section of leading contributors to the field: 84% of the *Handbook*’s contributors are men, and 30 are based at UK institutions, with seven from Australia, three from the USA, two each from New Zealand and Sweden, and one from Switzerland. It is not so much that CMS hasn’t tried to shed its image as ‘male and Eurocentric’ (Cunliffe, 2008: 937), but as Bell and King (2010) argue, the critters’ oppositional identity in relation to the mainstream discourages them from examining their own ‘gendered practices’ of exclusion, such as ‘drinking rituals’ at CMS conferences. As one of the contributors to the *Handbook* puts it, CMS ‘tends to universalize the experiences, perspectives, and interests of mostly white, heterosexual, professional Western men and women—a profile that also coincides with the dominant composition of

the CMS community' (Ashcraft, 2009: 318). The age of some high profile contributors can be inferred from the occasional 'post-punk' cultural references — as when Thompson quotes Talking Heads to argue that the task for Labour Process Theory is 'the same as it ever was' (Thompson, 2009: 108). Of course CMS may well be changing, and the *Handbook* will undoubtedly be dismissed by some as the last gasp of the 'old revolutionaries' (Jackson and Carter, 2009: 139), or the self appointed 'church elders' (Burrell, 2009: 559), before they shuffle off into retirement.

In terms of their institutional location, at least 37 contributors to the *Handbook* are based in business or management schools of some sort. It is difficult to know what to make of the striking lack of contributors from North American business schools, and there is only one contributor from the 'new universities' in the UK, the less prestigious former polytechnics that champion access and diversity in higher education. But a few UK schools stand out. Fifteen of the contributors are from just three institutions, with five each from Cardiff Business School (including one of the editors, Hugh Willmott), the University of Leicester School of Management, and the School of Business and Management at Queen Mary University of London. Leicester and Queen Mary have both been identified as schools where the 'philosophy and/or faculty are explicitly "critical" in orientation' (Adler et al., 2007: 123; Grey, 2007: 468). It may seem parochial to readers outside of the UK, or not in business schools, but it is worth giving special consideration to the published deliberations on CMS from prominent members of these particular schools, such as Gibson Burrell, Pippa Carter, Stephen Dunne, Peter Fleming, Stefano Harney, Norman Jackson, Matteo Mandarini, and Martin Parker (Burrell, 2009; Dunne, 2008; Dunne et al., 2008; Fleming and Mandarini, 2009; Harney, 2008; Jackson and Carter, 2009; Parker, 2008). The editors of the *Handbook* suggest that it is 'perhaps only in a situation where CMS staff comprise a majority of faculty, or form a well-organized, energetic, and influential minority, that a more extensively radical curriculum can be supported' (Alvesson et al., 2009a: 19). It is in just such a situation that some of the contradictions of CMS's institutionalization are likely to become apparent.

It should be noted that Leicester and Queen Mary both did remarkably well in the last Research Assessment Exercise (the RAE) in 2008, the periodic audit of university research in the UK that determines the level of government funding for research at each higher education institution. But perhaps more importantly, the RAE allows a national ranking for every subject, which significantly affects the research reputation of each university. In the RAE for 2001 2,555 staff were assessed in Business and Management, and this rose to 3,338 for the next RAE in 2008, which gives some idea of the continuing expansion of UK business schools. In research terms, Manchester is by far the largest business school in the UK with 182 staff assessed in the 2008 RAE, Warwick is the second largest with 130 staff, and with 115 staff Cardiff is third. So although Cardiff may have a relatively large concentration of critters, they are still seemingly a minority within the school as a whole. By comparison, Leicester and Queen Mary are small by business school standards. Leicester submitted 36 staff into the 2008 RAE, up from 11 in 2001, and as a new entrant in business and management Queen Mary submitted 25 staff for the first time in the 2008 RAE.

In the all important ranking that appeared in the press the day after the 2008 RAE results were released, Queen Mary was ranked 25th equal out of 90 submissions in Business and Management, a remarkable achievement for a new entrant, and Leicester was just below at 28th. UK management academics in general, and critters in particular, complain that the RAE encourages conservatism and game-playing (Dunne et al., 2008; Macdonald and Kam, 2007), and can erode an individual's 'sense of purpose' (Berglund, 2008: 323). But Leicester and Queen Mary had a clear sense of purpose and were amongst the most adept players in the game leading up to the RAE in 2008. As an RAE strategy, their decision to expand by hiring faculty with a critical orientation, including a sprinkling of autonomists, was a great success.

The autonomist critique treats the business school as a coherent category, referring to a pervasive Anglo-American model without significant ‘national, regional, and institutional variations’ (Harney, 2007: 143, 139). But the main reference point is the UK business school, which is allegedly characterized:

precisely by its indiscriminate admissions policies, drive for expansion, and its mercenary links to university income in a way no law faculty or medical faculty would countenance. In contrast to business schools, these professional faculties rarely trade in distance learning education, and their associated professional bodies enact a labour-regulating function. (Harney, 2007: 143)

It is difficult to avoid the elitist connotations in the suggestion that CMS should enforce rigorous admissions policies in business schools, resist expansion, avoid any involvement with university finances, try to emulate law schools by having nothing to do with distance learning, and attempt to enact labour-regulating functions through professional bodies. It is difficult to see what is critical in this stance, and it sounds much like a fantasy that the deans of many mainstream business schools probably share. In fact distance learning and on-line masters degrees in law are well established in the law schools at Queen Mary (QMUL, 2009), and Leicester (Leicester, 2009a). And Leicester’s School of Management itself also claims to be ‘the second largest provider of distance learning education’ in the UK, with more than 7,440 distance learning MBA students (Leicester, 2009b).

This means that critically oriented UK business schools exhibit precisely those characteristics of the Anglo-American business school model that autonomists object to. In the case of Leicester, the extensive distance learning programmes predate the adoption of an explicitly ‘critical orientation’, and provided the resources for recruiting enough academics to create its egalitarian ‘critical community of scholars’ (Law, 2003). The unacknowledged contradiction in the autonomist critique (e.g. Contu, 2009; Fleming and Mandarin, 2009; Harney, 2007; Harney and Dunne, forthcoming) is that it was the pursuit of growth in student numbers and a clear RAE strategy, implemented at particular institutions, that opened up the ‘institutional space’ (Harney, 2008: 279) for autonomists to migrate into UK business schools.

Disaffected drifters

As some commentators have noted, critical scholars ‘may find it more congenial to work in a labor relations institute or some sociology departments’ (Martin, 2002: 199). But this exaggerates the agency of individual academics, as if they are free to move from one department to another according to taste. Most UK critters are restricted to working in business schools if they want to continue working in a university. Autonomists are by no means the only ones to have noted the irony of radical sociologists ending up in business schools (Fleming and Mandarin, 2009: 331; Jackson and Carter, 2009: 136). But they are amongst the few who are open and honest enough to admit that they don’t ‘really know why’ they applied for a job in a business school in the first place (Harney, 2008: 272), or that they ‘didn’t want to move into a Business School’, but somehow just ‘did’ (Parker, 2008: 272).

Like Talking Heads, critters may well ask themselves—‘well, how did I get here?’ Examining the socialization of critters is one way to go about answering that question. From their published accounts a kind of composite profile can be built of a typical first generation critter in the UK, including several contributors to the *Handbook*. Many of them have a first degree in the arts or social sciences, rather than management, and some past affiliation to the left, or the far left (c.f. Harney, 2008: 271–272; Parker, 2008: 272; Tinker, 2008: 272). As one of the leading American

critters reminds us, we recall the past 'in a way that supports our concept of who we are' (Boje, 2008: 5). For some UK critters their working class background also seems significant. So, for example, in an account of his family 'lineage' Burrell explains how he 'gave up' his identity as the 'son of a coal miner' when the colliery in the village where he grew up closed in 1994 (Burrell, 1997: 81–80). In a UK context this was an identity which was once highly prized in terms of working class credibility. Of course it can't be claimed that all UK critters are left wing sociology graduates from working class backgrounds. There may well be many in CMS who would not wish to be identified with the left, even though most are probably committed to social change of some sort (Jackson and Carter, 2009: 144; Parker, 2008: 283). But if it is accepted that this profile fits enough UK critters to resonate with the cohort that entered UK business schools in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, then some of the classic sociological texts that they would have grown up with can be used to explore their experience.

It is hardly surprising that a bunch of middle aged, left wing, arts and social science graduates, many from working class backgrounds, are uncomfortable with mainstream management teaching and research. The sociological classics from the 1960s and 1970s seem to offer a prosaic insight into their predicament. In their classic *Education and the Working Class* (1966) Jackson and Marsden studied a group of people from working- backgrounds who started at grammar schools (selective state schools in the UK) in the 1950s. They found that the majority of working class children who went to grammar school developed into stable middle class citizens. But 'a small minority remained dissident', trying to benefit from the education that school offered without acquiring the middle class social attributes, such as accent, that went with it (Jackson and Marsden, 1966: 212).

Critters from working class backgrounds may remain dissident, reminding themselves of their origins, but by becoming academics they inadvertently fulfil another of Jackson and Marsden's findings. Most of the working class children who stayed the course at grammar school 'were carried along by the momentum of the educational process from certificate to certificate, rather than because they'd made a series of informed and personal decisions' (Jackson and Marsden, 1966: 213). Jackson and Marsden described these as 'drifters', and many of them became teachers, not because they were deeply committed to teaching: 'But because they didn't want to move away from the academic succession that had become bound up with their identity' (Jackson and Marsden, 1966: 161).

For many critters who stayed on at university for a postgraduate research degree, becoming a university academic fits the pattern of the drifters who became school teachers. Competitive awards for funded doctoral scholarships represent a chance to indulge in more study and acquire yet another qualification without thinking about the implications much beyond that. For Jackson and Marsden there was something disturbing, even regressive about the high proportion of working class drifters who became teachers in the 1960s, partly because teachers were the only middle class role models that these people encountered, so they had little idea what other careers might be open to them. Jackson and Marsden asked what sort of teachers they would become, 'shaping other working-class children?' (Jackson and Marsden, 1966: 179) The same question could be asked about critters in business schools, since many of them, and not only those from working class backgrounds, appear to be accidental academic careerists, drifters who went into higher education because they didn't have much idea of what else to do. What sort of academics do these accidental careerists make, and does their background affect their research and teaching? Their affiliation to CMS could be interpreted as an expression of their own frustration with finding themselves in a business school rather than an indictment of the shortcomings of business schools.

While Jackson and Marsden focused on a minority of working class children who, like themselves, enjoyed upward social mobility through educational opportunities, in another sociological classic from the 1970s Willis posed the question of how and why it was that working class boys came to accept working class jobs ‘through their own apparent choice’ (Willis, 1977: 185). Part of his explanation was that ironically the pedagogical techniques espoused by progressive teachers at that time reproduced the cultural exclusion of disaffected working class kids coming from a culture of ‘non-conformism, rejection and instrumentalism’ (p.167).

The irony of cultural reproduction in CMS is that as a result of their backgrounds in social science, critics see themselves as outsiders in the business school but insiders in the university (Harney, 2008), defending ‘university values’ against the incursions of unsophisticated unreconstructed Thatcherite business sponsors (Burrell, 2009: 555, 557). Critics probably exaggerate the extent to which they provide ‘academic respectability’ for business schools as departments within universities (Alvesson et al., 2009a: 18), but in the UK this needs to be understood in the context of elitist attitudes towards management, especially in the ‘old’ universities. When a Saudi entrepreneur put up £20 million for a business school at Oxford University in 1996, academics initially voted against accepting the donation. There were two issues at stake: ‘whether and on what terms to accept private donations and whether management studies is a “proper subject”’ (THES, 1996). Writing in *The Times Higher* an Oxford professor of English explained his reasons for voting against. ‘And what about management studies?’ he asked, ‘Are they not just a phoney academic subject, a shallow contemporary shibboleth promoting a noxious cant that helped get Britain’s education and health services into their current wasteful plights?’ (Cunningham, 1996). John Kay, the director designate of the new school conceded that ‘the business school’s job would be to show that there was no disjunction between business and intellectual values’ (Midgley, 1996). These attitudes partly explain why, by comparison with their American counterparts, UK universities were reluctant to introduce management as a subject for most of the 20th century, although there was a tenfold increase in the number of management degrees awarded between 1980 and 2000 (Wilson and Thompson, 2009: 168, 171). Sussex was one of the last UK universities to set up a business school in 2008, when it was restructured by a new vice-chancellor who was criticized by some Sussex academics for ‘wanting to abandon the institution’s arts focused, left-wing ethos’ (Newman, 2008).

The critics’ so-called ‘anti-performativity’ (Fournier and Grey, 2000) reassures liberal humanist universities in the UK that they are academically respectable, sharing the ‘anti-productivist’ ambivalence towards business and industry that has been a longstanding feature of English middle class culture (Nichols, 1986: 10–11). By contrast Labour Process Theorists reject anti-performativity, with the assertion that, ‘Productivity matters to employees as well as managers’ (Thompson and McHugh, 2009: 439–441).

‘Not-managers’

Critters in mainstream business schools tend to promote a more critical approach to management education by emphasizing its value in socializing ‘critically informed managers’ (Learmouth, 2007). But even then they can find that they are blocked by colleagues and senior managers who prefer to deliver a more mainstream curriculum, as Choo discovered from interviews with academic staff trying to engage with critical management education in a range of UK business schools at both ‘new’ and ‘old’ universities (Choo, 2007). One interviewee explained that:

As a sociologist, I would like to have humanistic and liberal studies in all management programmes. It will help to broaden managers’ critical awareness and improve their abilities to manage organisations socially,

politically and morally. However, my colleagues feel more comfortable to offer modules where they are able to transfer prescriptive solutions and knowledge as objective fact to students where they have the expertise. (quoted in Choo, 2007: 490)

Thus unlike the privileged few working at critical business schools in the UK's research oriented 'old' universities, many critters are often compelled to use mainstream textbooks with students who 'might be surprised to learn that many of those who teach them ... have no faith in either the theoretical rigour or the practical relevance of what they teach' (Jackson and Carter, 2000: 2). Of course critters could follow the more radical advocates of 'critical pedagogy' and employ a strategy of "squatting"— where one openly takes an existing course and does with it something different' (Fish, 2009). But that would represent a kind of disengagement (Fournier and Grey, 2000: 24) that would undermine the institutionalization and academic respectability of CMS.

Where critters have influence they have tried to introduce a more 'critically oriented curriculum', where students are introduced to wider debates in social theory in addition to mainstream management theory (Land, 2008: 343). But according to the autonomist critique this 'pluralist approach' is completely inadequate, because instead of granting the mainstream curriculum any legitimacy, critical approaches need to begin with the premise that business and management scholarship is 'worthless', and nothing must be done which makes it problematic to insist on 'the worthlessness of the rest of the curriculum' (Harney and Dunne, forthcoming). This implies that if autonomist tinged CMS were ever to gain the ascendancy in a business school it would mean redundancy for any remaining mainstream business and management faculty (c.f. Grey, 2007).

An important point of the autonomist critique is that critters do not need 'to worry about the business school as a site of socialization for a class of people called managers' (Harney, 2007: 140), because:

If one thing is evident in the massification of business education, it is that most of the students in the seats are not managers, and will not be managers ... Students of mass business education will be managed in several ways. Most students will leave for jobs where they manage no one but themselves. (Harney, 2007: 142)

As if to compensate for the ever increasing demands of capitalist work, the autonomist critique offers 'the tantalizing prospect grasped by autonomist Marxism that labour might separate itself from an antagonism with capital and come to value itself without capital's intervention' (Harney, 2007: 146). More specifically 'the tantalizing prospect' is that management students might enact a separation of themselves from capital (Harney, 2007: 150). Critters are therefore urged to think less about themselves and their 'power as teachers and leaders, and more about how to support the self-organizing, self-expanding socialisms being launched in this struggle of socializations, even among the *not-managers*' (Harney, 2007: 151 emphasis added).

The autonomist critique suggests that if critters are teaching students in business schools who will not become managers, then they are under no obligation to teach them how to manage, and this realization is potentially liberating, both for the students and for the critters. The obvious objection to this is clearly set out by Grey, a leading advocate of CMS:

business schools owe their existence and growth to fundamentally uncritical claims about the functionality and utility of their teaching and research to effective business and management. To put it bluntly: they are paid for largely by the tuition fees of people who want, or believe that they want, or appear to believe that they want, mainstream, managerialist and uncritical education. (Grey, 2007: 469)

Even the ‘not-managers’ who enter university business schools under the most relaxed student admissions policies are likely to notice that something is amiss if they are mainly exposed to, “critical” ideas like alternative organization, self-management, and non-instrumental community’, rather than a curriculum focused on ‘organizations and firms’ (Harney, 2007: 150).

It is necessary to be a bit more specific about who exactly the ‘not-managers’ are who volunteer, or even pay, to be ‘warehoused’ in ‘our classrooms’ (Harney, 2007: 151; 2008: 273). The most obvious ‘not-managers’ are the working class and lower middle class, often black and minority ethnic UK students who fill the ever-expanding business and management undergraduate degree programmes. Many of these students are already well aware that their accent, gender, ethnicity, and social class will affect their future job prospects (Kirton, 2009: 13), so they hardly need the critters to tell them. Albeit unintended, a pernicious aspect of coining a term such as ‘not-managers’ is that it perpetuates the divisive sociological categories that it purports to unmask — compounding the polarization between business graduates who enter and remain in managerial jobs, and those who end up in relatively low level administrative and secretarial work (Kirton, 2009: 13).

There is a risk that if critters refuse to socialize students as managers they will reinforce the exclusion of those labelled as ‘not-managers’. Another researcher at Queen Mary, who is associated with the labour process conference rather than CMS, interviewed a group of Black and minority ethnic business graduates about their career aspirations. One of them, a Bangladeshi man, was bothered that at the supermarket where he works, which is one of the top four UK chains:

about 95 percent of the workers are Bengali and the highest position with a Bengali is checkout supervisor. There’s no department manager from a Bangladeshi background—no store manager, no duty manager. I find that astonishing that with 95 percent of your workforce Bengali, you can’t find anyone suitable for a senior position (Kirton, 2009: 22).

In a sense his observation confirms that he is a ‘not-manager’, and he knows it, so he hardly needs an autonomist critter to point this out to him. The dangers of doing so, however subtly, must be obvious.

A problem for critters is that the not-managers are marked precisely by their instrumentalism, as is revealed by this candid complaint from a critter in a new university:

Cynically, it could be argued that business students get exactly what they deserve as many (but not all) of them are remarkably instrumental in their attitudes to their own education and personal development. My experience is that too many business students ... do not wish to be encouraged to think reflexively, reflectively or critically ... they just want to be trained how to implement techniques from a menu of patent nostrums, many of which are conceptually flawed and of dubious practical value. (Worrall, 2010: 10)

Of course critters are not alone in failing to see that there is an elitist aspect to their frustration with instrumental business students. Many leftist academics, such as the literary critic, Eagleton (2001: 96), bemoaned the ‘crass utilitarianism’ of Thatcherite undergraduate students who chose to study management rather than something they might enjoy, like English. Likewise in the US in the 1980s, lecturers in cultural studies decried the ‘profoundly anti-intellectual technocrats seeking credentials in business’ (Lipsitz, 1990: xii). More generously, it can be said that as a degree becomes an essential credential for many more careers, those without a passion for any particular subject opt for the less technically demanding business courses. The autonomist critique, like many others, misses the point that whether the mainstream business curriculum is useful or not in an instrumental sense, it confers social status on managers who study it (Grey and Willmott, 2002: 413). So critters should be wary of debarring students from acquiring the social status of managers by failing to familiarize

them, albeit it critically, with the mainstream management discourse, and especially not those students whose prior social status already means they are marked as 'not-managers'.

Interventions and disaffiliation

Leading critters explain their presence in business schools in terms of 'opportunities for critical interventions' (Grey and Willmott, 2002: 146), as if they surveyed the university and decided this is where they could intervene most effectively. This presents CMS as an advance, as a realization of the 'conditions of possibility' for its institutionalization within business schools rather than anywhere else (Fournier and Grey, 2000). From this perspective the creation of critically oriented business schools must represent the culmination of the critters' intervention. But as Jackson and Carter (2009) point out, after 30 years of critique, CMS has not delivered on its promise of change in organizational practice. This reflects the wider context in which CMS has grown up, the 'defeat of the Left' (Žižek, 2007a). Of course some variants of the Left, such as environmentalism, have enjoyed success during the last 30 years, but there can be little doubt that the Left associated with the organized working class has suffered a resounding defeat (Callinicos, 2006: 138). At the risk of capitulating to economism or naïve realism, it can be argued that this defeat is measurable in its consequences, in terms of rising inequality and the unrelenting increase in the share of national income for the top 1% in the USA and UK since Reagan and Thatcher were elected (Palma, 2009: 837).

At the turn of the century, Perry Anderson wrote that: 'The only starting-point for a realistic Left today is a lucid registration of historical defeat' (Anderson, 2000: 9–10; Eagleton, 1996: 1). One manifestation of the Left's defeat in the late twentieth century was the widespread migration of leftists into higher education. Anderson attributes this to changes in the occupational structure, 'the emptying-out of political organizations' and 'the stunting of counter-cultures' (Anderson, 2000: 23). Those who could, found refuge from the excesses of neoliberalism by working in the public sector, besieged as it was and still is. Not just academia, but teaching, social work, and the civil service, were and still are ideologically preferable to a business career for many leftists.

Ironically then, a condition of possibility for CMS is the defeat of the Left and the availability of a readymade constituency of leftist critters in business schools. To present CMS as a pre-planned intervention gives it an aura of being something more than merely a response to the predicament that most critters find themselves in. But the conditions of possibility for institutionalizing CMS are the very conditions in which the possibilities for engaging with management and having an impact on organizational practice are limited. This is not to say, as critters have pointed out, that many managers themselves will not find much of interest in CMS.

If CMS is predicated upon defeat, then the creation of critically oriented business schools appears contradictory. Both Parker (2004) and Burrell (2009), have given reflexive accounts of heading such schools in the UK, Parker at Keele and Burrell at Leicester. These are well worth reading for anyone considering such a role, whether or not they are a critter or at a critically oriented school. Critters cannot be alone in fearing that they might end up hating themselves if they become managers. Parker and Burrell both present management as if it is an 'activity that most of us undertake sooner or later' (Burrell, 2009: 554), but becoming head of a school is not something that just happens. Arguably the 'position of *permanent opposition*' that Burrell advocates (2009: 553), could or should entail a renunciation of management roles, as it once did for left wing trade union activists.

Parker and Burrell's accounts are depoliticized in the sense that they don't explain how or why, as iconic critters, they decided to become heads of department, or the political disagreements

amongst critters about whether this is the best way to advance a CMS agenda. It can come as no surprise to learn that some critters treat their colleagues badly (Burrell, 2009: 557), but to say so simply personalizes the issues. It is well known that what one critter sees as 'peer exploitation' of colleagues another one sees as resistance to managerialism (Worthington and Hodgson, 2005). Becoming head of department means having to confront or evade such conflicts in particular ways—as a manager. To be more specific, it would be interesting to know how Parker and Burrell dealt with the autonomists' insistence that mainstream teaching and research is 'worthless', which more or less amounts to a demand that critters should use managerial positions to drive mainstream managerialists out of their jobs.

As Grey (2007) provocatively suggests, the victory of CMS should mean the abolition of business schools. Parker (2005) himself speculates that if he woke up in a better world at some time in the future, he might find that business schools were derelict, or else were being used for something more useful, like nurseries or primary schools. As the autonomist critique spells out, a critical business school is a contradiction in terms, because critique in the business school 'requires something that most disciplines do not. It requires one to be able to call for the abolition of the discipline' (Harney, 2008). Unlike an English department, it is impossible to call for socialism in the business school 'without at the same time calling for the abolition of my subject area' (Harney, 2008: 286-287). It is difficult to see how this can be construed as anything other than wanting to destroy the business school from within.

When Parker says something like, 'Fuck the business school' (2005), it is obviously not meant to be taken literally. But it draws attention to the way that CMS is in fact performative in a cultural sense, and functions as a sign of the critters' disaffiliation from the business school, providing a repertoire of critical codes. As Parker confesses, a typical critter is a 'faux revolutionary ... a forty-something academic dad with a baggy belly', who still wants to signal his youthful disaffiliation from the mainstream, deluding himself that he can get away with saying, "Oh look at me! Look how radical I am! I am young at heart, and (though important and well paid) I am still an angry young man!". But like the ageing punk rockers that some of them are, critters need to be wary of looking completely ridiculous. Institutionalizing CMS and taking it too seriously risks undermining its cultural performativity for critters. Wearing an earring and not shaving for meetings with the Vice Chancellor is one thing (Parker, 2004: 53), but the autonomist critique confronts CMS with the logic of its disaffiliation, denouncing the mainstream curriculum as 'worthless', and calling for the abolition of the business school (Harney and Dunne, forthcoming).

Conclusion

The institutionalization of CMS confronts critters with a series of dilemmas, such as whether to take managerial roles in order to advance a critical agenda? Whether to create business schools with an openly critical orientation? And what to teach students if critical schools are created? Education in critically oriented schools then becomes a concern for everyone involved in CMS, not just those whose research interest is in critical pedagogy. Institutionalization also brings institutional power, including influence over hiring decisions, calling for critters to make and defend tradeoffs in the name of CMS. This article has begun to address some of these issues. It was prompted by the provocative autonomist critique of business schools which has served to highlight the dilemmas for CMS. So far the autonomist critique has been welcomed uncritically within CMS (e.g. Contu, 2009), but it cannot be left unchallenged. Labelling instrumental management students as 'not-managers' who will get what they deserve, i.e. not management jobs (Harney, 2007), makes critters complicit in a pernicious elitist form of cultural reproduction. As the autonomist critique

makes clear, CMS needs to relate to the rising numbers of business students in the context of a massive expansion of higher education in the UK, especially in the new universities. Many of these students will be the first in their family to enter higher education, and inevitably many will come to university with a highly instrumental attitude. Critters need to come up with a constructive response to these students. It belies any progressive posture to label the students as 'not-managers' and then cynically attempt to disabuse them of their aspirations for social mobility. Of course, as the autonomist critique also makes clear, an even more cynical response would be simply to give the instrumental 'not-managers' what they appear to want (c.f. Harney, 2007: 287), although it could be construed as a form of resistance through dumb compliance.

Critters might have a better understanding of instrumental business students if they were more reflexive about the irony of their own positions. There must be enough former leftists, sociology graduates, and critters from working class backgrounds, for CMS to appreciate how students can be made to feel like outsiders in a university. Instrumentalism is one response to that feeling. Critters are right to be wary of sharing their own personal stories of gender, class, race, and sexuality, but at least those who were around for the first wave of CMS can draw on the intellectual resources from that era (e.g. Sennett and Cobb, 1972). Students and faculty born in the 1980s might have more trouble telling their stories, having started their lives in a post-punk, deindustrializing, and disillusioned climate (Jancius, 2007: 165).

If CMS opens up to debate with the wider academic and leftist intellectual community, such as autonomist Marxism, instead of merely importing ideas, then it will inevitably face criticism (e.g. Fine, 2010: ch. 7). The autonomist critique is informed by an optimism that sees CMS as one amongst a multiple of struggles breaking out in society, and challenges critters to reinvent themselves as part of the broader anti-globalization movement rather than confining themselves to exploring their identity within business schools. This article outlines the scope for a more pessimistic critique of CMS in response to autonomism. From a pessimistic point of view (e.g. Žižek, 2007b), CMS is not so much an intervention, a great idea waiting for the right conditions, but a response to being in a business school. The conditions of possibility for institutionalizing CMS are the historical contingencies that compel critters to find an identity for themselves within UK business schools. If this position had to be given a name, and it probably shouldn't, it would be something like conditional, or contingent CMS, acknowledging that for the British Left, CMS, like cultural studies (Gilbert, 2007), represents one more, albeit rather minor, institutionalization of its defeat since the mid-1970s, and an attempt to redefine that defeat as victory. In this context calls for the abolition of business schools are about as meaningless as calls to overthrow capitalism.

Notes

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