Against management, sure… Wait! Where is my toolbox?

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Abstract

This paper forms part of a performative attempt for intervening in the organizational dimension of CMS. Its aim is stimulating the imagination of CMS scholars by prototyping and depicting a new form of critical engagement. Suggests and applies a toolbox conceived as four bricolaged “paragrammes” (a “concept which entails something written down (‘gramme’) but not used as written (‘para’ as in paraphrase, parody and paradox”). It is not an exemplar, a model or a set of instructions, but a set of ideas which acts as a prompt and guide for action” (Gabriel, 2002). The toolbox pays attention to the symbolic structures of the organization, its forms of self-questioning and problematization, the way it gives rules to itself, and how members’ values are oriented to those rules. Instead of looking for a dominant factor, it understands the organization as a tensional and paradoxical relation between those aspects, and explores possibilities to intervene in management practices in such way that self-realization and micro-emancipation is promoted.
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The little systematization - being perhaps Hatch & Cunliffe (2012) the best attempt so far - and the non-accessible language of Critical Management Studies (CMS) scholars research makes its results barely reachable outside of the CMS movement, while the lack of a practice-orientation makes its knowledge not actionable (Voronov, 2009), even for the very same CMS community, which has made humble advances in transforming its own organizational academic milieu (Voronov, 2008).

In the meantime, societies and its organizations keep changing, ignoring - more or less - the struggles of academics. A new form of collaborative community seems to be emerging and spreading among organizations (Heckscher & Adler, 2006) alongside societal and technological changes, which also could bring the “potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism” (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 294). In this context, we should be able to identify a plethora of individuals and forms of organizations that refuse managerialism (Parker, Fournier & Reedy, 2007; Parker, 2002) and are already looking for, inventing, trying or testing new ways and tools for organizing activities and acts of resistance. Can we imagine a form of CMS research that not only pays attention to, but also assists them?

Asked about what to propose after critique, Foucault once said that no proposals had to be made: “What we have to present are instruments and tools that people might find useful [emphasis mine]. By forming groups specifically to make these analyses, to wage these struggles, by using these instruments or others: this is how, in the end, possibilities open up” (Foucault, 1990a: 197). I think that this position captures the concerns of this conference stream. So if the issue is the unsatisfying social impact of CMS and the problematic relation between critique and constructive intervention, I would like to make the case that discussing the C of CMS is like putting the cart of theory before the horse of praxis. And since my point is that CMS should offer toolboxes, I will not present a paper about how badly we need toolboxes (which is what I feel compelled to do as a CMS scholar afraid of the risks of performativity). Instead, I will present a toolbox that I see as a group of paragrammes, defining paragramme as “a basic stocks of ideas, routines, images and ingredients which may be selectively trawled, lifted and adapted to the situation at hand” (Gabriel, 2002). Therefore the toolbox presented is just an imperfect, ambiguous, contradictory, polyutopic, and still actionable bundle of ideas and concepts to rethink what management is and could be. I do not see it as “the” CMS toolbox but just an example of one. And I do not see it as a theoretical framework, but as a “paragrammatic unframer” of management theories and practices, with the strong encouraged invitation to be urgently modified, expanded, chopped, and re-bundled with other paragrammes. So before answering the question on the C of CMS, I want to use this unframer in the very same practices of the CMS community, for my approach is intended for all kind of organizations, especially those emergent ones with fuzzy borders.

Before presenting the toolbox, I would like to make an epistemological and methodological observation. My research is informed by the epistemology of complexity of Joe Kincheloe (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002), and his use of the concept of “bricoleur” (Kincheloe, 2001, 2005). But it was in the works of Gilbert Durand where I finally found the closest praxis to that epistemology of complexity.
So far, I include in the toolbox four paragrammes: the “reappropriation paragramme”, the “denaturalization paragramme”; the “paradox paragramme” and the “hacking paragramme”.

**Reappropriation paragramme**

The way we define management restricts how we can conceive it, imagine it, and therefore, intervene within it. After 14 years of working in the field of consulting in all kind of organizations I found a simple and open definition of what managing is that captures its insulting polysemy: dealing with the difficulties that arise in collective agency. People have dealt with those difficulties in very different ways, but the word “management” was coined as a discipline -as many others- in the beginning of the XXth century, and because of this, is still framed (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) in that context. If my definition of management is “dealing with difficulties of collective agency”, then I will be able to expose the situated nature of any form of management by characterizing the way of problematizing (i.e. identify difficulties), and the way of dealing with them.

**“Paradoxes paragramme”**

While traditionally difficulties are taken as structured problems to be solved, I will keep true to an epistemology of complexity by embracing those difficulties as paradoxes that constitute the very nature of management (Clegg, da Cunha & e Cunha, 2002; Clegg, 2002). Scholars have also paid attention to the promising doors opened by paradoxes for management education and theory building, until the point that “research adopting a paradox perspective has expanded dramatically” (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Taking into account the rising importance of Asia, where its traditional integrative thinking have accepted paradox unproblematically (Chen, 2002; Sun, 2000), that importance may increase in the future. Therefore, paradox seems a fertile ground where workers, managers and academics of all signs can dialogue and find ways to grow new forms of management and organization. In this article, I will follow a relational view of the paradox for keeping a critical perspective, since the use of paradoxes may promote reflexivity but does not imply critical thinking (Clegg, da Cunha & e Cunha, 2002).

For this paragramme, I select four key and interrelated issues involved in collective agency that can be thought of as paradoxical: the Imaginary involved, the questions asked, the degree of autonomy achieved, and the values and moral orientations present in the organization.
As a rough illustration, I consider that the average company copies the four dilemmas by forming “directions” or departments” oriented to different stakeholders, and sometimes, specialized in concrete technologies (as I will define later). Marketing Department deals with how products and services are related to the values, the imagination, the questions and the autonomy of customers and clients, while Human Resources Department does the same for the members of the organization, and the Finance Department does the same for management and stockholders.

**Imagination Paradox**

The Imagination Paradox for managers is that, on one side, they enroll efforts in sense-making and sense-giving to reinforce things such a mission, culture or values, strategy, tools, norms, etc. - the instituted imagination- and at the same time, they seek to imagine a different way to adapt and change -the radical imagination- (Castoriadis, 1998).

**Questioning paradox**

The Questioning Paradox points to the fact that self-questioning is a necessity for adapting the organization to internal or external pressures, and at the same time, put its stability at risk. Not surprisingly, in times of change managers simultaneously use progressive and stability narratives (Sonenshein, 2010).

**Autonomy paradox**

It was Cornelius Castoriadis who, almost 40 years ago, corrected Marx by convincingly arguing what is actually the main contradiction of capitalism: “It requires that people, as producers or as citizens, remain passive and restrict themselves to performing the task it has imposed on them. When it notices that this passivity is like a cancer within it, it encourages initiative and participation, only to discover that it cannot bear them, for they question the very essence of the existing order” (Castoriadis, 1998: 95). The effects of this contradiction can be traced in
management theory as a sort of zig-zag towards collaborative interdependence which has unknown future because of the challenges it faces (Heckscher & Adler, 2006).

**Values Paradox**

The Autonomy Paradox portrays organizations in terms on how members are involved in rulemaking, in order to understand the level of autonomy achieved by the organization. The Values Paradox will inform about why rules are set that way, and members’ behavior towards those rules. While following the organizational norms seems an important issue for success in collective agency, we usually encounter unnumbered situations where breaking them is desirable (Warren, 2003).

The Paradox Paragramme includes a set of ideas and philosophical concepts for understanding how those paradoxes are faced in a certain organization, which give us a thick description of the organization, and lets us situate it on the continuum of Figure 1, (always in relation to others organizations). For the Imagination Paradox I suggest using Gilbert Durand’s symbolic hermeneutics (Durand, 1993, 1999, 2003), for the Question Paradox I use the concepts of “conflict of interpretations” (Ricoeur, 1977), “tragedy of culture” (Simmel, 1997) and “conflict of ethics”(Weber, 1994). The Autonomy Paradox follows the common ground found in Castoriadis and Foucault on the idea of autonomy (Potte-Bonneville, 2011; Rasmussen, 2011), and the Values Paradox use the developmental moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1975) in a very similar way as Habermas uses it (Klikauer, 2010).

Why these paradoxes and concepts instead of others? Among all of those that I learned and tried these turn out to be, according to my experience the most useful for engaging critically the members of the organizations I have worked for.

**“Denaturalization paragramme”**

It was only when I started to work on my Phd project when I realized that underneath the “paradox paragramme” breathes the foucaldian pair knowledge/power (imagination-questioning/autonomy-values that guide our acting towards others), which I will connect to Castells perspective of Power in the Network Society. Dealing with difficulties in collective agency, that is, managing, articulates the way meaning and power relations arise to makes possible the existence of the organization. Castells, a keen reader of Foucault, states that power is exercised through coercion and the construction of meaning in the human mind through communication processes (Castells, 2009: 416). According to him,

“In a world of networks, the ability to exercise control over others depends on two basic mechanisms: (1) the ability to constitute network(s), and to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network; and (2) the ability to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources, while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation”(Castells, 2009: 45).

The “programmers” are those actors that exercise power through the first mechanism, while the “switchers” use the later. Castells emphasizes that what generates programs are cultural materials: “ideas, visions, projects” that hide frames (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003); and that the switchers “are not the old boys”, but “specific articulating the
actual operating system of society beyond the formal self-presentation of institutions and organizations” (p. 46). Bringing those social constructs to the field of organization would be arguable if I had not found very similar ones in the field of the practitioners of organizational network analysis (Cross, Parker & Cross, 2004; Cross & Thomas, 2008).

But Foucault is, indeed, the author that more clearly stated that any form of power must be studied by analyzing the rationality that supports it. He coined the term “Governmentality”, by linking “governing” (“gouverner”) to modes of thought (“mentalité”), in order to describe a form of power relations which originated in the Ancient Greece, and are developed still today (Foucault, 2006: 67). In his words, “Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself” (Foucault, 1993: 203–204).

Foucault reserves the word “domination” for what it is commonly understood as power. Power, in first place “is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault, 1990b: 93). The idea of Castells that “power holders are networks themselves” (Castells, 2009: 45) is even better reflected by the words of Foucault: “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1990b: 93). There is no power, but power relations. Even more important, Foucault does not consider power as something intrinsically bad: “to live in a society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible and in fact ongoing. A society without power relations can only be an abstraction” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982: 208). Power is always a strategic game between liberties that limits the possible field of action of others, but that does not imply that it is against the interest of them, or necessarily signifies “a removal or options available to individuals, on the contrary power in the sense Foucault gives to the term, could result in an “empowerment” or “responsibilisation” of subjects, forcing them to “free” decision-making in fields of action” (Lemke, 2002: 5).

This is why, adapting from Lemke, I will distinguish three types of power relations: open strategic games between liberties, government, and domination. In the open strategic games between liberties, individuals are involved in power relations that are not fixed and that can serve dynamically to the purpose of different forms of reasoning. Government, as stated above, is a much more established and permanent limitation of the action field of others, “following a specific form of reasoning (a “rationality”) which defines the telos of action or the adequate means to achieve it” (Lemke, 2002: 5). Finally, domination is a power relationship fixed and difficult to reverse. “Domination refers to those asymmetrical relationships of power in which the subordinated persons have little room for maneuver because their margin of liberty is extremely limited” (Lemke, 2002: 5–6).

It is possible to relate these three types of power with the two mechanisms that Castells identifies for exercising power: institutional coercion, and the construction of meaning (Castells, 2009: 10).
While domination is based on power relations where the plurality of frames available for the individual is low and the institutional coercion exercised over her is high; the games of liberties presents exactly the opposite situation, and government holds an intermediate position.

The toolbox helps to identify the situation of any organization on this continuum - where the end of the extremes are pure abstractions- by dynamically interrelating the conclusions obtained by looking at the organization with the four lenses of the “paradoxes paragramme”: imagination, questioning, autonomy, and values. In my experience, presenting the lenses in the form of paradoxes or dilemmas fosters and facilitates dialogue and reflexivity, for they induce acceptance of a partial validity on both sides of confronted views. We could also say that using the toolbox constitutes a practice of management where a triple dimension of managing is continuously exposed and questioned in a collaborative manner: the management of meaning, the management of power relations, and the management of the relation between meaning and power relations. This way, it should be possible to avoid the perspective of the organizational engineer that produces organizational models without producing freedom (nur herstellt, ohne freizu stellen) (Gadamer, 2006).

“Hacking paragramme”

The four paradoxes or dilemmas presented are constitutive of the human experience. Articulated in endless manners, they are always present. But in which concrete ways symbols and mythic narratives are transmitted, represented or performed in rituals; questions are formulated, framed or discussed; autonomy is promoted or avoided; values are reinforced or challenged? How does this constellation of ideas, concepts, symbols, objects, actions, etc. establish cooperative (reinforce) or agonistic (counterbalance) among them to assure the existence of the organization? The “hacking paragramme” is a set of ideas and tools that helps to map the main devices/technologies operating in the organization, which give us the opportunity for
hacking or redesigning them according to our aim. For that, I combine concepts from Foucault’s four-part classification of technologies (Foucault, 1988), Latour’s Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 1994), and Durand’s concept of Décor mythique (Durand, 1990) and actant model (Durand, 2003). The goal is to identify the precise mechanisms for institutional coercion and frame creation, that I consider teknes or technologies, more or less as Foucault defined them after Habermas (See TABLE I). Following Foucauldian terminology, management practices and tools, even organizations, could be seen as “devices” where four different kinds of technologies are articulated, and that can be connected to other technologies or devices in actor-networks. In the fieldwork I am doing for my doctoral research, I do not fix a concrete notation for representing the organization in form of an actor-network, allowing the groups discuss on the different technologies affecting the issue that constitutes a matter of concern, and finding afterwards the best way to represent them (when helpful). It amuses me, nevertheless, to realize that what work best with senior directors is using techniques (Schiffer, 2007) that were intended for illiterate participants in development projects.

Table I: Summary of the four technologies

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Technology - Tekne</th>
<th>Role in Networks</th>
<th>Role in traditional management</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technologies of Meaning (ToM) (also known as technologies of sign systems): “which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification” (Foucault, 1988: 18)</td>
<td>Allowing individuals and groups to create, identify, make available or impose new frames, which in terms of networks, means to program, reprogram and counterprogram its goals and means, and ensure the setting of strategic cooperation through the promotion of shared vision and goals (Castells, 2009)</td>
<td>Finding “matters of facts” that orient action (sensemaking) or influencing and seducing (sensegiving) (Weick, Sutcliffe &amp; Obstfeld, 2005). Produce “Regimes of Truth” for meaning framing (Phillips, Courpasson &amp; Clegg, 2006) Usually grouped by stakeholder: stockholders and management (finance), Costumers (marketing, sales), providers (purchasing), etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technologies of Coercion (ToC) (also known as technologies of power): “which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject” (Foucault, 1988: 18)</td>
<td>Networking power (deciding the exclusion or inclusion of members), the network power (establishing and enforcing the protocols), and above all, the networked power (the relational capacity to impose an actor’s will over another actors’ will) (Castells, 2009)</td>
<td>Disciplinary techniques for enforcement of norms or certain behavior (Townley, 1993), costumer and clients included (Kasabov, 2004). Usually grouped by stakeholder: workers (Human Resources Department), costumers (Marketing and Sales Department) and Providers (Purchasing Department)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technologies of Self (ToS), “which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness” (Foucault, 1988: 18)</td>
<td>In a situation of strong domination and government relation power, the ToS are mostly at the service of the primary frame. However, as coercion diminishes, self-conducting rises (along with the plurality of frames), and opportunities of resistance and creative self-construction increase in the same direction.</td>
<td>Managing oneself (Drucker): Oriented to and the improvement of productivity Self-Help Literature, training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technologies of Production (ToP), “which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things” (Foucault, 1988: 18)</td>
<td>Enablers in the physical world for all other technologies. In this way, they can equally being involved in physical coercion, self-transforming and meaning construction dynamics</td>
<td>Specific Product or Process, i.e. ToP for Sewing Department, ToP for the Milling Department, ToP for Assembling Department, etc;</td>
</tr>
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</table>
When analyzing any object, tool or management practice, it is important to understand that they can be used in several ways and for different purposes (Mackay, 1988), and connected to other tools or practices, which can change completely the aim for which they initially were intended. In Table II we can see the example of electronic mail. The main advantage of understanding the use of e-mail under such classification is that e-mail is no longer considered solely as a mean of communication. Methodologically, this forces us to study e-mail in the constellation of the rest of the technologies in use both at a personal and institutional level.

Table II: Electronic mail seen as different kinds of technologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Technology</th>
<th>Examples of electronic mail purposes and usages</th>
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</table>
| Technologies of Meaning | Medium for rich communication (Lee, 1994)  
Collaborative knowledge creation (Lichtenstein & Parker, 2006)  
Support/reinforce cognitive styles (Chakraborty, Hu & Cui, 2008) |
| Technologies of Power | Sponsor-ship, socialization, and social control (Markus, 1994)  
Coordination of a network of roles (Brigham & Corbett, 1997)  
Establish disciplinary frameworks (Snyder & Cistulli, 2009) |
| Technologies of Self | Self-shaping the democratic citizen – worker (Groper, 1996)  
Making life more satisfying (Caplan, 2007)  
Resistance of the technologies of power (Dupont, 2008) |
| Technologies of Production | As a part of manufacturing technologies (Boyer, Leong, Ward, et al., 1997)  
(Although it is not obvious how e-mail could be seen in such way, an example would be the use of e-mail integrated to automatized commands in a production or assembly line.) |

Hacking critical management studies

The fact that CMS are often defined as a movement (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Zald, 2002) or a community (as the manifesto of the CMS Division of the AoM) which certain degree of institutionalization (Grey & Willmott, 2005; Zald, 2002) points out that it is a sort of collective doing things together, which under the “Reapropriation Paragramme”, means that there is some kind of management involved. The toolbox is conceived for being used in a collaborative effort, but it is still possible to use it individually to grasp some insights around a specific concern (in this case, with the possibilities of critical engagement), by pretending to be in conversation with the available literature on CMS.

The analysis of the CMS Imaginary unveils a Weberian “battle of gods” that I have presented in detail in another paper currently under review. On the one hand, we find dramatic symbolic structures that admit ambiguity and invite to engagement (as the mythemes of Hermes). On the other hand, we find heroic symbolic structures that counterbalance the former, and invites to antagonism and disengagement (as the mythemes of Prometheus). The most obvious example is the insistence on the light/dark symbolism (the “dark” as not something to be accepted but rejected), which clashes with CMS’ concerns for minorities, unconsciousness, etc. (Prometheus brings the fire stolen from gods, Hermes CMS, in fact, are echoing debates rooted in metaphoric preferences that some historians of science and epistemologists have exposed before, as those between cytologist (which prefer heroic structures) and histologists (which prefer dramatic structures) (Canguilhem, 1992), or the famous
misunderstanding between Einstein and Bohr that confronted a “God of order” (heroic structures) to a “God that plays dices” (dramatic structures) (Holton, 1998).

Yiannis Gabriel recently pointed out in a blog post that “what reflexivity cannot replace is the active and inquiring imagination” (Gabriel, 2013). That is why, despite being a highly reflexive collective, (an academic elite in that aspect, in my opinion), the trace of Prometheus is reflected in what it is questionable and how it is problematized in CMS, as for example, identity and engagement.

For a community with such a blurry definition (“this thing loosely called Critical Management Studies” (Zald, 2002: 383) that has opted so far for a “big tent” approach (Adler, 2002), it has a great debate on the issues of identity, and the boundaries of who should be included in the CMS “brand” (Willmott, 2006) or not. In his interviews with different scholars in the UK on who could be considered part of this movement, Carlos Jesús Fernández found a wide spectrum of answers, including some that only considered CMS those scholars who coined the term (Fernández Rodríguez, 2007).

Engagement with managers has been another important focus of problematization that faces the epistemological obstacle that supposes the unnoticed attachment to heroic structures of the imaginary, because behind the “anti-management” or the “anti-performativity” antagonistic rhetoric, authors conclude that they are “pro-organization” (Parker, 2002, 2006) and open to “more engaged forms of practice” (Fournier & Grey, 2000). Still, the advances on CMS engagement are not really exciting so far, and that is why some authors seems to demand a turn towards an “ethic of care” based on meaningful engagement (Foster & Wiebe, 2011), instead of what could be seen as an “ethic of conviction”. As Weber put it, “the person who subscribes to the ethic of conviction feels ‘responsible’ only for ensuring that the flame of pure conviction (for example, the flame of protest against the injustice of the social order) is never extinguished” (Weber, 1994: 360), but not about the null or negative effect of their activity.

This problematization of engagement can be seen as well through the lenses of autonomy. Following Bourdieu’s concept, CMS has been described as a “heteronomous field” because most of its activity is subject to the rules of academic institutions. This normative environment, among other things, perpetuates a traditional research-practice split, so embracing practice would be for CMS a “step towards autonomy” (Cox, LeTrent-Jones & Voronov, 2009). On the other hand, the reflexivity and self-criticism of CMS scholars has produced a vigorous literature on how to go beyond the constrictions of universities through critical management education (Boje & Al Arkoubi, 2009; Dehler, 2009; Grey, 2004) and critical engagement (Voronov, 2008; Foster & Wiebe, 2011; Cox, LeTrent-Jones & Voronov, 2009) (or more recently, critical performativity) (Spicer, Alvesson & Karreman, 2009). It is possible to find pessimistic perspectives related to the effect of higher education quality assessment agencies (Curtis, 2011), but others, for example, are systematically defying academic publishing conventions and publishers (Prug, 2010; Parker & Thomas, 2011; Li & Parker, 2013). CMS scholars may not be as autonomous as they would like, but they clearly conceive and work for an autonomous CMS movement. In that journey, they could choose between sacrificing themselves (like Prometheus) or sacrificing something (like Hermes). Speaking about the mission statement of the Academy of Management CMS Division, Professor Willmott wrote that “if CMS is to influence the mainstream, then being a player in the
Academy of Management is of some consequence, and providing a mission statement that distinguishes it from other divisions is part of the price of entry” (Willmott, 2006: 36).

Still, some voices claim that those sacrifices are not enough, for they rarely affect ones career but the opposite. For example, Alvesson wrote that “[…] the evil system can be handled. In a sense we can do what we want. A delayed promotion or a job at a place ranked 18 rather than 12 in UK will not be like a death sentence” (Alvesson, 2012: 89), and Fournier and Smith insist: “what makes our conduct morally incoherent is not the reward system itself but our choice to abide by its rules, to accept to be governed by it” (Fournier & Smith, 2012: 471). This indicates that the presence of a conventional moral orientation is stronger that we would expect in the CMS movement. As in other working environments “it is widely understood and accepted that one is free to pursue a postconventional morality at home or even 'in one's church', but not at work” (Kjonstad & Willmott, 1995).

A quick look at the technologies contributing to the polarization of the imagination, the questioning, the autonomy and the moral orientation of the CMS movement that I have roughly sketched above would not be very different from those of non CMS scholars except for in one category: the Technologies of Meaning. CMS maintains a rich, diverse and growing epistemological and theoretical palette that makes it certainly distinctive, but it has fail to make use of significantly different Technologies of Power, Technologies of Production, and Technologies of the Self. For instance, I am sure that in a collective brainstorming, CMS scholars quickly would find different technologies of the self (pharresia, autoetnography, meditation, a picture of an industrial factory in the wall, etc.) and we would be able to sketch some patterns of behavior. To my knowledge, they have never been shared, discussed or taught as such. When students suffer the same struggles as their teachers, CMS scholars fail to offer them any clue (Fenwick, 2005; Reynolds, 1999). In that sense, the couple of hours that two generous senior scholars spent with me at the Doctoral Workshop helped me dramatically more than the several dozens of papers I read about being the right CMS scholar. That is, in fact, the difference of acting as psychagogue with students (Hermes, dramatic structures), and stealing the fire for bringing it to them (Prometheus, heroic structures).

I will take the CMS International Conference as an example of a “device” that I would like to hack. Imagine that scholars are not the ones that set the agenda, but it becomes a collaborative effort with students, managed and managers. Imagine that the streams are defined by their everyday struggles. Imagine that they come to tell us the issue in their own words. Imagine we go nominalist and practical; imagine that we discuss together how to approach those concrete issues, and interdisciplinary and interuniversity networks of researchers are set ad-hoc to work with those topics, with the commitment of trying to intervene collaboratively in their organizations in such way that micro-emancipation is promoted while their struggles are eased. Imagine that for the next conference we do not look for keynote speakers, but for polynomials of students, managers, managed and scholars that present an experience that we think that captures the spirit of what CMS looks for. Imagine that the first conference shaped this way is a failure. Imagine that we take it as a prototype we should improve. Imagine that it is not that bad in the end. Imagine that different “toolboxes” are created and mixed. Imagine that we discuss the way to disseminate results, exploring
new practices of publishing and engaging in critical action research and Massive Open Online Courses. Imagine that we start discussing this proposal. Just imagine that we end up doing things differently, because “counter-ideologies work best when they are not just imagined but performed” (Duncombe, 2007: 173).

Conclusions

A conference paper is a short format for presenting in detail and applying a toolbox. It may look even ridiculous when that toolbox is intended for groups and not for an individual effort. What I can aspire to is to at least to introduce a different form of reflexivity which pretends the destruction and the deformation of mental images and radical openness to ambiguity and the other, in order to open new possibilities to CMS. I presented just one proposal that invites to rethink the technologies involved in the CMS International Conference. In a collaborative effort, could be hundreds.

When looking for examples of critical constructive intervention and tools in other fields, I found the most inspiring those of the critical engineers (Agre, 1997; Oliver, Savicic & Vasiliev, 2011) and artistic activists (Duncombe, 2007; Perucci, 2009). Both show clearly how the very same tools being used for oppression can be hacked for conquering spaces of freedom in a sort of reversed cooptation. For them, there is not a strict separation of performativity understood as Butler or Lyotard, for they need to be very effective in order to not be arrested before their action is finished (or, when possible, not being arrested at all!). For them, critique is always performative and it is important to share their knowledge (specially the “how to”) as a “commons”, and not through university fees and journal subscriptions, like any another marketable commodity. In fact, several CMS scholars have cultivated the Foucauldian tradition of observing organizational practices with technical lenses when studying “power” as regulated relations between individuals. I suggest taking Foucault’s toolbox further; not only to unveil devices and its technologies, but also to exploit or hack them, and to build new ones that open possibilities for micro-emancipation, or following the “Denaturalisation Paragramme”, moving organizations towards open games of liberties. On the other hand, this spirit allows engagement with managers in a manner that makes explicit that if our goal is to influence in management practices, we need managers as much as they need us. The radical dimension of human imagination is producing news perspectives and technologies of management that could be critically hacked in a collaborative way. The natural space for such collaboration may be non-profit and alternative organizations, as Parker suggests. But if the worst forms of oppression and domination are happening in private firms, we have the ethical duty to do something about it (Foster & Wiebe, 2011).

Thinking of ourselves as tricksters-hackers, we may have this productive engagement with managers ant academics that are looking to develop a more skillful, reflexive, creative and autonomous worker. We know quite well what can go wrong with that (Fleming, 2009), so taking that into account and finding technologies of the self for resisting is part of the journey. We can contribute to the path of self-realization that produces profound and sustained social change. Still, intervention in management discourses and practices has proven to be a tricky thing. To face complexity, we must have “hope in paralogy” (Czarniawska, 2001). I agree with the Hermesian idea that by helping organizations to develop the creative and autonomous worker they claim they
need will undermine their current practices. I consider that Paul Adler, who has re-imagined Marxism under dramatic structures of Imaginary, could not be more convincing about it (Adler, 2002, 2007).

What I like about this toolbox is how much CMS research feed its paragrammes. For instance, “the stupidity-based theory” (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012) has a lot in common with the “questioning paragramme”, and my current fieldwork for testing this toolbox reveals that introducing power analysis, symbolic hermeneutics and reflexivity prevents tools from being even considered by managers, let alone co-opted. But how much am I attached to this toolbox? As much as people find it useful. What Kholberg never fully figured out were post-conventional moral stages, “the truthful area of ethics” (Klikauer, 2010: 169). Foucault and its aesthetics of existence was an excellent lead but it was abruptly interrupted, and sadly, little explored afterwards (Barratt, 2003, 2008; Kosmala & McKernan, 2011). I join the intuition of Philip Hancock, who proposes an ethics of “embodied generosity” (Hancock, 2008). In Gilbert Durand’s mythocritique of Baudelaire (a paradigmatic “hermetic” poet), there is a wonderful reflection on his “ethics of possessing”. For Baudelaire, beauty is in possessing: “such beauty possessed its otherness, and its being is nothing more” (Durand, 1993: 308). The true dialectics are not the dialectics of being but the dialectics of possessing, and “Marx had the sense of it for an instant because of his innate economicism… and his Judaism!” (Durand, 1993: 309). There is a whole “ethic” to develop by paying attention to what students, teachers, managed, managers, etc. possess instead of what they are.

So, finally, what should the C of CMS should stand for? I say “critique”. As Ricoeur replied to Habermas, there is no point to oppose tradition and critique, since critique is a tradition (Ricoeur, 1990)... and a very performative one! It is only a matter of detaching it from heroic structures of the imaginary that are already saturated, and move to those that are more transformative nowadays (I develop this idea in another paper also currently under review). Structures that, on the other hand, will be saturated in some decades, so critique will be transformative under new ones. Dionysius (mystic structures)? Aphrodite (dramatic structures)? Nobody knows. That is what I love about humans: in terms of imagination, we are truly unpredictable (Castoriadis, 1998).

References


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