

## Affirmative Critique

Raffnsøe, Sverre; Staunæs, Dorthe; Bank, Mads

*Document Version*

Final published version

*Published in:*

Ephemera: Theory & politics in organization

*Publication date:*

2022

*License*

CC BY-NC-ND

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Raffnsøe, S., Staunæs, D., & Bank, M. (2022). Affirmative Critique. *Ephemera: Theory & politics in organization*, 22(3), 183-217. <https://ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/22.3%20Raffns%C3%B8e%20Staun%C3%A6s%20Bank.pdf>

[Link to publication in CBS Research Portal](#)

**General rights**

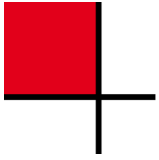
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us ([research.lib@cbs.dk](mailto:research.lib@cbs.dk)) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Download date: 12. Jun. 2024





## Affirmative critique

Sverre Raffnsøe, Dorthe Staunæs and Mads Bank

### abstract

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

### Introductory note

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

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

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

(America never was America to me.)

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

(It never was America to me.)

[...]

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

(Langston Hughes, 1936//1995)

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

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

## **Introduction: Critique in organizations and of management/leadership**

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

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

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

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

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

MB: What came out of it?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

## The age of critique

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

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

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

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

MB: What are the consequences when critique is generalised?

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

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

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

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

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

### **Critique's caricature**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Negative and affirmative critique**

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

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

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

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

MB: How has this happened?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **The dream of affirmative critique**

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

I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would try not to judge but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply not judgments but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. (Foucault and Delacampagne, 1980/1997: 323)

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

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

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

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

### **Affirmations, hauntings and affect as critique**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Let America be America again

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Critique as a virtue**

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

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

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

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

### **What does this mean for CMS?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## references

Adler, P.S., L.C. Forbes and H. Wilmott (2017) 'Critical management studies', *Academy of Management Annals*, 1(1): 119-179.

- Ahmed, S. (2017) *Living a feminist life*. Durham & New York: Duke University Press.
- Alvesson, M. (2008) 'The future of critical management studies', in D. Barry and H. Hansen (eds.) *The sage handbook of new approaches in management and organization*. London: Sage.
- Alvesson, M. and H. Willmott (2011) 'Overview', in M. Alvesson and H. Willmott (eds.) *Critical management studies*. London: SAGE.
- Anker, E.S. and R. Felski (eds.) (2017) *Critique and postcritique*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Baldwin, J. (2017) *I am not your negro*. London: Penguin. Random House.
- Bank, M. (2016a) 'Bruger-indragelse og stemning i arbejde med unge og rusmidler: Socialt arbejde som ledelse af selvledelse', *Nordiske Udkast*, 44(1): 67-86.
- Bank, M. (2016b) 'Enacting (post)psychological standards in social work: From regimes of visibility to user-driven standards and affective subjectification', *Theory & Psychology*, 26(2): 202-222.
- Barad, K. (2010) 'Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations', *Derrida Today*, 3(2): 240-268.
- Berlant, L. (2011) *Cruel optimism*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Boje, D. M. (2012) 'Reflections: What does quantum physics of storytelling mean for change management?', *Journal of Change Management*, 12(3): 253-271.
- Böhm, S., C. Jones and C. Land (2001) 'Castles made of sand', *ephemera*, 1(1): 1-10.
- Böhm, S. and S. Spoelstra (2004) 'No critique', *ephemera*, 4(2): 94-100.
- Burrell, G. (2001) '*ephemera*: Critical dialogues on organization', *ephemera*, 1(1): 11-29.
- Butler, J. (2004) 'What is critique? An essay on Foucault's virtue', in S. Salih and J. Butler (eds.) *The Judith Butler reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.



- Descartes, R. (1647/1979) *Méditations métaphysiques*. Paris: Garnier Flammarion.
- Derrida, J. (1993/2006) *Specters of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning & the new international*. New York: Routledge Classics.
- Fassin, D. and B. E. Harcourt (eds.) (2019) *A time for critique*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fleming, P., L. Olaison, M. Plotnikof, J.G. Pors and A. Pullen (2020) 'Crawling from the wreckage: Does critique have a future in the business school?' [<http://www.ephemerajournal.org/content/crawling-wreckage-does-critique-have-future-business-school>]
- Foucault, M. (1997) 'What is critique?' in J. Schmidt (ed.) *What is enlightenment? Eighteenth-century questions and twentieth century answers*. California: University of California Press.
- Foucault, M., and J. Miskowiec (1967/1986) 'Of other spaces: Utopias and heterotopias', *Diacritics*, 16(1): 22-27.
- Foucault, M. (1981) 'Is it useless to revolt?', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 8(1): 2-4.
- Foucault, M. and C. Delacampagne (1980) 'Le philosophe masqué' (entretien avec C. Delacampagne, février 1980), *Le Monde*, no 10945, 6 avril 1980, *Le Monde-Dimanche*: I & XVI.
- Foucault, M. and C. Delacampagne (1980/1997) 'The masked philosopher' in J. Faubion (ed.) *Ethics: subjectivity and truth. The essential works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984. Volume One*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, Allen Lane: 321-328.
- Haraway, D. J. (2008) *When species meet*. London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hartman, S. (2019) *Wayward lives. Beautiful experiments. Intimate histories of social upheaval*. New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Hughes, L. (1936/1995) *Collected poems of Langston Hughes*. Vintage Classics.
- Jack, G. (2004) 'On speech, critique and protection', *ephemera*, 4(2): 121-34.

- Juelskjær, M., and D. Staunæs (2016) 'Designing leadership chairs: Experiments with affirmative critique of leadership and environmentality', *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*, 7(2): 35-51.
- Kant, I. (1781/1976) 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', in W. Weischedel (ed.) *Werkausgabe Immanuel Kant. Band III & IV*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Kant, I. (1785/1976) 'Kritik der praktischen Vernunft', in W. Weischedel (ed.) *Werkausgabe Immanuel Kant. Band VI*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Kant, I. (1790/1978) 'Kritik der urteilskraft', in W. Weischedel (ed.) *Werkausgabe Immanuel Kant. Band IX*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Kierkegaard, S. (2002) 'Afsluttende uvidenskabeligt efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler', in S. Kierkegaard (ed.) *Søren Kierkegaards skrifter*. Copenhagen: Gads Forlag.
- Latour, B. (2004) 'Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern', *Critical Inquiry*, 30(2): 225-248.
- Lorde, A. (1984/2007) *Sister outsider. Essays and speeches by Audre Lorde*. Berkeley: Crossing Press.
- Muñoz, J.E. (2009) *Cruising utopia. The then and there of queer futurity*. New York: New York University Press.
- Nielsen, G. B. (2019) 'Radically democratising education? New student movements, equality and engagement in common, yet plural, worlds', *Research in Education*, 103(1): 85-100.
- Pors, J.G., L. Olaison, and B. Otto (2019) 'Ghostly matters in organizing', *ephemera*, 19(1): 1-29.
- Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017) *Matters of care. Speculative ethics in more than human worlds*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Raffnsøe, S. (2015) 'What is critique? The critical state of critique in the age of criticism', *Outlines*, 18(1): 28-60.
- Raffnsøe, S., M. Gudmand-Høyer and M.S. Thaning (2016) 'Foucault's dispositive: The perspicacity of dispositive analytics in organizational research', *Organization*, 23(2): 272-298.

- Raffnsøe, S. and D. Staunæs (2014). 'Learning to stay ahead of time: Moving leadership experiences experimentally', *Management and Organizational History*, 9(2): 184-201.
- Schlegel, F. von and A. Arndt (2007) *Schriften zur kritischen philosophie 1795-1805*. Hamburg: Meiner Verlag.
- Schlegel, F. von and Eichner, H. (1967) *Charakteristiken und kritiken I*. Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Schöningh Verlag; Thomas-Verlag.
- Schlegel, F. von (1988) *Kritische schriften und fragmente 5*. Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Schöningh Verlag.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (2003) 'Paranoid reading and reparative reading, or you're so paranoid, you probably think this essay is about you', in E.K. Sedgwick *Touching feeling. Affect, pedagogy, performativity*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Staunæs, D., and S. Raffnsøe (2018) 'Affective pedagogies, equine-assisted experiments and posthuman leadership', *Body & Society*, 25(1): 57-89.
- White, M. (2007) *Maps of narrative practice*. WW Norton & Company: New York.
- Wynter, S. (2006) 'On how we mistook the map for the territory, and re-imprisoned ourselves in our unbearable wrongness of being of *dêsêtre*. Black studies towards the human project', in L.R. Gordon and J.A. Gordon (eds.) *Not only the master's tool. African-American studies in theory and practice*. Boulder London: Paradigm Publishers.

## the authors

Sverre Raffnsøe, Dr. Phil. is Professor of Philosophy at Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School. He is Editor-in-Chief of *Foucault Studies* and the author of books and articles on management philosophy, philosophical aesthetics, social philosophy and recent French and German philosophy. Forthcoming books: *A history of the humanities in the modern University: A productive crisis* (Palgrave Macmillan); *The human turn in management thought* (Oxford University Press); *Aestheticizing society: Decisive turns in the history of philosophical aesthetics* (Bloomsbury). Open access publications can be found at: <http://cbs.academia.edu/SverreRaffnsøe>; [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sverre\\_Raffnsøe](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sverre_Raffnsøe); <http://www.raffnsøe.com>

Email: sra.mpp@cbs.dk

Dorthe Staunæs is professor in social psychology at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University. Working within the intersections of feminist new materialism and poststructuralism she focuses on affects and subjectivity, diversity and leadership in educational organisations. Currently she is PI of two research projects *Diversity work as mood work* and *Affective investments in STEM at Danish Universities*. <http://pure.au.dk/portal/da/dost@edu.au.dk>

Email: dost@edu.au.dk

Mads Bank, Ph.D. is Associate Professor in Educational Psychology at Department of Psychology, University of Southern Denmark. His work lies in the intersection of Organizational studies and Educational Psychology, as he is interested in how professionals draw on post-modern and critical ideas from psychology develop standards and new ways governing subjectivity in educational and (drug)treatment practices. Recent publications include: Bank, M. (2021). Affect, stimmung and governing young drug-users: an affirmative critique of a Danish drug user treatment programme. *Subjectivity*, 14(4), And Bank, M., & Roessler, K.K. (2022). Therapeutic Environments in Drug Treatment: From Stigmatising Spaces to Enabling Places. A Theory-Based Qualitative Analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(9), 5005.

Email: mbank@health.sdu.dk