

Volume 9 Issue 1-2
03-06/2011
tamarajournal.com



The Art of Critique

Edward Barratt

University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK
edward.barratt@newcastle.ac.uk

Keywords

Socrates
Foucault
C. Wright Mills
Critique
Critical Management Studies

Abstract

The association of critique with distant historical sources has been highlighted by Michel Foucault. At the heart of what Foucault calls the ‘critical attitude’ are notions of parrhesia or philosophical criticism with roots in pagan antiquity. This article discusses the significance of these ancient sources for critical management studies. Recent times have seen a revival of interest in critique in this sense, suggesting powerful ways of framing the tasks of critique. Yet we suggest there may be other uses for the Socratic example in management criticism than have hitherto been recognised. We emphasize the distinctive challenges of critique today, turning to Michel Foucault and C. Wright Mills- both indebted to Socrates but as more than mere followers – to illustrate a tactical sensibility that can be of help to the challenges of management criticism today.

Introduction

A particular aim of history in the style of the genealogist (Foucault, 1982; Knights and Morgan, 1991; Jacques, 1996) is to respond to what the critic judges to be the problems of the present, enumerating costs and risks and inciting others to acts of political reinvention. If what is now accepted as common sense is the product of a definite but contingent process of historical formation, historical investigation can help to open a space for the political imagination. This is the path that, for example, Roy Jacques (1996) has followed, guided by a conviction that a new economy of power relations in the workplace is now required as employee knowledge comes today to be valued in new ways. Genealogy in this case seeks to disrupt the ‘given’ quality of contemporary commonsense and to incite new thinking. But history can also serve as a reminder of forgotten possibilities in the sense of practices, techniques or forms of knowledge which have been suppressed in the course of time but which can nonetheless be of relevance to contemporary debates. Reflecting on the activity of critique itself can be a way of shaking us out of unhelpful critical habits or perhaps pointing the way towards productive reframings of critique. It is this possibility that we try to follow in the following discussion, returning to and reflecting on episodes in what Michel Foucault (2001) calls the ‘critical attitude in the west’. There is, of course, a familiar history of critique in management and organization studies: the story of how the contested domain that we have come to know as Critical Management Studies (CMS) first took shape and came to be named (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Grey and Willmott, 2005). Here, however, we take the history of critique in another direction – returning to the earlier history of critique and asking what significance it might have for our own debates today.

Available histories confirm a long standing association between critique and juridical notions (Connerton, 1976). Critique in this familiar sense is ultimately a legacy of the point at which the term acquired the sense of authoritative judgments of

authenticity – initially in matters of philology (Connerton, 1976; Con Davies and Schleifer, 1991). The term would later acquire an additional, more inclusive and oppositional meaning, producing the core sense of critique that underpinned the two divergent critical traditions that came to dominate modern thought – one deriving from Hegel and Marx, the other from Kant. On the Kantian side, critique defers to a priori images of human rationality, seeking an authoritative, archimedean point from which to judge states of affairs or knowledge claims. Critique assumes an abstract passionless form, seeking out a vantage point from which to judge, a moral code that would be undeniable and immune to revision. On the Hegelian – Marxian side, the essential image is of the critic who discerns and reveals fundamental structures and relationships behind common or surface forms of understanding. Critique reveals the conditions that render humanity at war with itself – whether these be antagonistic class forces (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995) or competing modes of rationality (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972). Critique is not only diagnostic but remedial, aspiring to define the more advanced states of being that would resolve human antagonism and – in its most optimistic variants – the agents and the process of change. With only a touch of hyperbole, Reinhard Koselleck (1988, p. 118) argued that the rulers of divine right appeared ‘almost modest alongside the judges of mankind’.

Yet notions of critique did not always take this form. When Foucault alludes to what he sometimes terms ‘the critical attitude’ (Foucault, 2001), to a form of criticism that would not judge but seek to ‘light the fires’ (Foucault, 1996) – an alternative discursive formation is evoked. We reflect here especially on the birth of critique in this sense in pagan antiquity and especially the Socratic notion of criticism – the ideal of the turning around of the soul of an addressee. We will see such ideas have enjoyed influence in recent attempts to reframe the challenges of critique (Townley, 1994; Chan and Garrick, 2002; Starkey and Hatchuel, 2002; Wray Bliss, 2002; Jack, 2004; Bridgman and Stephens, 2008). Notions of an embodied ethics are invoked in this discussion and critique is associated with a particular relationship to political actors, to events and to oneself to be established and enacted by the management critic. More than the particular form of reflexivity commonly taken to be a defining feature of CMS is at issue here (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Cunliffe, 2003; Alvesson et al, 2008). Beyond a willingness to acknowledge the partial and interested nature of our truth claims, to acknowledge and reflect upon the critic’s social position and favoured vocabulary of theory and their consequences for scholarly enquiries, after Socrates management critics are encouraged to view critique as a way of life. The Socratic example, in effect, provides a way of responding to what is often taken to be one of the weaknesses of CMS: its lack of practical achievement and influence. The suggestion here is that there is indeed much that we can usefully take from the Socratic example – perhaps more than has been recognised in recent debate. We will also suggest that a particular image of the Socratic frank speaking critic – which some have recently advocated – appears to need significant modification in the context of the practical challenges we commonly face today. We turn to other examples, a seemingly unlikely pairing of Michel Foucault and C. Wright Mills – each we will argue indebted to Socrates but as more than mere followers – to suggest further ways of framing the challenges of management criticism.

Foucault’s ‘Critical Attitude’

In Michel Foucault’s later writing the interest turns from the analysis and exposure of disciplinary or governmental limits to a concern with the contemporary conditions and possibilities for our freedom. This includes extensive reflection on his own contribution as a critic to such an ethico – political project. When Foucault (2001) refers to the idea of a ‘critical attitude’ the intimation is of a loosely coupled mode of thought and action which has materialized at regular intervals in the course of history. For the practitioner of this attitude, he suggests, the problem was not to try to guarantee the status of critical discourse as the definitive truth but to consider the questions about which it was important to speak truly to others, the consequences and political effects, as well as the moral and spiritual conditions of so doing. Critique in diverse ways has raised the problem of power. It is clear that we should conceive Foucault’s own project as part of that tradition. Of relevance here are his conception of the role of enquiry in ‘keeping watch over the excessive powers of political rationality’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 210). The goal of intellectual work is at once to transform the thought of others and one’s own thought. But there is an intimation in the later writing that his own project can be viewed as a development or extension of an older, pagan tradition of criticism in the West (Foucault, 2001).

In classical antiquity the term ‘critical’ possessed a variety of associations (Brown, 2007). The term was used in medicine to refer to the critical turning point in an illness. It would seem, however, that the dominant association was with a disorder in democracy, circumstances in which citizen critics would act to pass judgement and to propose formulae for restorative action. But it is to the crisis of classical democracy in the later 5th century BC, associated in particular with the later stages of the Peloponnesian wars and the figure of Socrates that we should look for the sense of critique that Foucault appears to have in mind. After the death of Pericles, the old Aristocratic elites and their allies challenged democracy as a basis for the good government of the city, highlighting the dangers for Athens of demagoguery and the baleful influence of the Sophists in political life (O’Leary, 2002). Argument intensified in the later stages of the Peloponnesian war. The anti – democratic problematization of democracy at this time seems to have taken a variety of forms (O’Leary, 2002), but in the case of Plato’s early Socrates (cf Nehamas, 1993)

it took the form of a questioning of the ethical impoverishment of the youth of the aristocracy and how they might be made fit to govern Athens. Ethics in this sense evoked an attempt to impose a style or taste on an existence, an effort through self care – daily work and reflection – to fashion an identity for oneself. The ancient Greek notion of an ethos suggested ‘a mode of being and a certain manner of being visible to others. This ethos was seen by his dress, by his bearing, by his gait, by the poise with which he reacts to events etc. For them that is the concrete of liberty’ (Foucault, 1996, p. 436). Free of the imposition of an imposed religious code, the ancient ideal which Socrates exemplified was to embark on a path of self mastery or self constitution.

Critique in the Socratic usage has been said to suggest a cutting through the common opinion of the many (Douzinas, 2005, p. 47) but in Foucault’s (2001) commentary the term is connected to a broader concept – that of parrhesia. Socratic parrhesia implied a form of frank speaking undertaken by the philosopher with a view to warning other individuals about the dangers of their existence and the threats to their liberty. Socrates thus lived a life of ongoing struggle against spurious opinion and false authorities, continually putting others to the question and his own soul to the test. The search for justice involved an unending labour of reflection, a constant revision of the ideal in the light of fresh circumstances and conditions. Above all, to speak frankly in this sense was to articulate to others what one truly believed, effecting a harmony of word and deed.

Parrhesia in its Socratic form was, according to Foucault, an important way of practising philosophy stretching from Socrates through to late antiquity. The conception and practice of parrhesia would undergo a series of profound changes. In the early Cynics of the later classical period we witness a radicalization of the Socratic disdain for the moral impoverishment of the Athenians. All forms of cultural constraint, social obligations and all markers of a civilized life were to be rejected in the name of independence, self mastery and a natural form of life. Accenting the Socratic notion of the personal example – the harmony of word and deed – Cynic parrhesia consisted of a public, visible and scandalous exemplification of an independent life. The parrhesia of the Cynics involved an attempt to engage with the public at large and the enactment of provocative dialogue – forms of speech in which the interlocutor was forced to recognise that he was not what he claimed to be (Foucault, 2001). In the Stoic and Epicurean philosophical schools which flourished during the Hellenistic period, the notion and practice of philosophical parrhesia became associated with pedagogical relations, the frank speech and incitement to self mastery of the master to a pupil or, in the case of the Epicurean communities, the frank speech of the pupil in the opening of the soul and the sharing of faults and weaknesses with other pupils in the community. Foucault distinguishes characteristically Hellenistic and Roman forms of philosophical parrhesia (Foucault, 2001). If the practice was enacted in the philosophical school or community in the earlier period, by the later Imperial Roman period parrhesiastic criticism came to be associated with personal and private relations – with friendship, patronage or clientage relations.

Politics, CMS and the Crafting of the Self

Pierre Hadot (2002) has shown how as Christianity presented itself as the only valid way of life, the tradition of ancient philosophy was marginalized. Plato’s writings became merely theoretical discourses to be put to use in theological controversies. But if ancient parrhesia fell into decline after the third century AD, what Hadot calls the original and authentic philosophy (Hadot, 2002, p. 262) was never completely forgotten. It is possible to identify a variety of historical moments in which the basic Socratic impulse has been at work (Hadot, 2002).

It is possible, for example, to discern an ‘early modern’ moment for such a style of critique (Foucault, 1996; Foucault, 2007) associated with varied and diffuse challenges to Churchly authority. Beneath the constraining codes and practices of the Church – which intensified particularly after the Reformation – lay a subversive Christian tradition. Critique in this early modern form returned to the word of God, challenging the authority of the Church by a counter – reading of the scriptures. John Wycliffe is perhaps an essential source (McFarlane, 1972) for a practice which became widespread during the fifteenth and especially sixteenth centuries (Dickens, 1966).

Kant too, at least in the lesser known essay that attracted Foucault’s interest (Kant, 1996), can be conceived as an inheritor of the Socratic tradition. Here Kant (1996) invited his readership to exercise political maturity, to escape from tutelage and to question the dictates of authority. Philosophy in a distinctive way was directed to the contemplation of the present moment, the time and particular circumstances in which the philosopher lived. Philosophy was also inscribed in a certain relationship to an audience to which the philosopher appealed. Foucault’s reading thus relies on a bifurcation of the dominant Kantian interest in the formal limits of knowledge or morality from what can be termed a Kantian ‘enlightenment attitude’ (Foucault, 1984a).

Today, in Critical Management Studies (CMS) one can certainly sense much of the Socratic sensibility at work in Barbara Townley’s recent reflections on the art of writing in friendship (1994). The aim of critique, she suggests, is to challenge and disrupt taken for granted forms of thought and practice with a view to opening up the possibilities for different forms of existence. Yet in management studies, critical enquiry continues to be limited by the terms of reference of an ‘expert paradigm’. Writer – reader relations are constituted hierarchically, with the expert status of the writer being secured by the exclusion of

animating passions, the purpose, context or location of writing. Critique becomes an autonomous, solitary practice (Townley, 1994, p. 26). Beyond the characteristic moves of the expert, Townley argues, lies another way of practising criticism. Transcending the expert paradigm requires not only a reflexivity in relation to one's perspective, but a preparedness to clarify value positions, a willingness to engage with the practical concerns of social actors and to address one's readership on non – hierarchical terms.

But perhaps the inspiration of Socrates might encourage us to frame the challenges of critique in other ways. For Townley, the clarification of personal values becomes one of the central challenges of management criticism. Yet after Socrates, questions of value would seem to become more of a task and a personal challenge, involving an ongoing process of reflection and the active cultivation of an identity. Cultivating an identity demands that we should always be prepared to learn from others, to have our perspective widened or radically altered through listening. This would seem to suggest the need to avoid subscribing to 'given' political positions or the radical orthodoxy of an era. There is a possible implication here for critics today who associate critical management studies (Grey, 2005) with a 'left' political tradition. CMS is claimed to be diverse in its value and political commitments but nonetheless of the left in the sense of an identifiable and secure tradition on which the critic can draw, something to which he or she belongs, marking the critic out from others. Similarly, Martin Parker (2002) argues that critical management scholars commonly invoke loosely defined political sympathies – for example broad left, anti – imperialist and pro – feminist positions. Yet the elaboration of any ethico – political position would seem in the style of Socrates to be a provisional practice and to be willing to change or to be moved by reflection and the course of changing events would be integral to this process of self fashioning. Such an orientation appears to subvert any easy or stereotypical moves in finding one's path in ethico – political matters.

It may be helpful to illustrate what is at stake here by the use of example. The obvious instance is, of course, Michel Foucault himself. Ideals of freedom and autonomy evidently occupy an ambiguous position in Foucault's thought. In the writing of the early 1970's (Foucault, 1977), the cost of humanist and liberal notions of the autonomy of the sovereign subject are highlighted for the potential to obscure practices of disciplinary control and normalisation. Yet traces of other more affirmative ways of conceiving autonomy can also be discerned from the very earliest work. The idea of a 'radical liberty' first emerges in the earliest work on the regulation of madness (cf Bernauer and Mahon, 1994) but is conceived in humanist terms as an essential but alienated creative potential in human beings. As philosophical humanist notions are called into question and with the developing interest in language in the 1960's, interest turns to the transgressive potential of the avant garde: the questioning and inventive relationship to norms and limits that characterise certain forms of art and especially literature. In the 1970's Foucault was profoundly influenced by the various spontaneous political movements that began to emerge in France towards the end of the previous decade. Diverse movements – around such issues as gender, sexuality, the prison, crime and race – called into question hitherto unrecognised forms of domination, challenged the privileges of knowledge especially in relation to the definition of human selfhood and subjectivity. In a similar way, we can infer from Foucault's writings that in diverse fields, contemporary power relationships significantly restrict the extent to which the human subject can be the author of his own existence. Yet I have tried to show elsewhere (Barratt, 2004) that there was always a certain distance in Foucault's relationship to the social movements with which he was associated in the 1970's. Especially from the middle years of that decade, Foucault came to challenge many of the common commitments of this 'second left' (Senellart, 2007) – for example, the favoured language of war in their political analyses, the obsession with the boundless promise of the revolution or of liberation in matters of sexuality. The interest in ethics, the revaluation of the state and of liberal rights, hinted at in the later writing (cf Gordon, 1996), should be understood in relation to unresolved political questions raised by the experience of the second left as well as the failure of actually existing socialism. Forging a political identity for Foucault involved a work of careful composition, a willingness to stay close to events and to be moved and affected by them (Foucault, 1994). And practices of freedom take on an increasingly practical and concrete form in his thinking – without straying into the provision of detailed political programmes matters or policy. Political alternatives are not announced in a 'radical' style but take the form of an intimation born of an assessment of current conditions and constraints.

Perhaps more contentiously, we would suggest that a very similar sensibility can also be discerned in a well known figure in the pre – history of CMS: the American critic C. Wright Mills. At first sight the idea of connecting Mills to the 'tradition' we have been considering looks unpromising. For Norman Denzin (1990) Mills's well known diagnosis of post war America (Mills, 1959), with his ideas of a new distribution of power or a 'main drift' associated with the hegemony of business, political and military elites, the ascendancy of bureaucratic logics and the mass society represent merely a repetition of familiar grand narratives borrowed from classical sociology. The imagery of power Mills favours is certainly top down, centralised and in many ways deeply anti-Foucauldian (Foucault, 1980; Townley, 1994; Barratt, 2003). But Mills has other tendencies and influences. He can be considered an inheritor of the ancient pagan tradition of self mastery and critique (cf West, 1989). Mills, as one

commentator argued many years ago, can be conceived as a ‘noble gadfly like Socrates’ (Casanova, 1964, p. 66) seeking to warn American citizens of the 1940’s and 1950’s of the dangers of their era. The enactment of a ‘politics of truth’ (Mills, 1963), aiming to rouse individuals to exert pressure, to facilitate change and the exercise of the political imagination became the primary responsibility of the intellectual in the academy.

Mills’s political identity is crafted from various sources, reliant on a labour of reflection and subject to ongoing examination, as can be seen clearly in the work of personal reflection – or to evoke Foucauldian (Foucault, 1994) terminology ‘self writing’ – he undertook in the recently published diaries (Mills, 2000). In the early study of labour Mills (2001) attempts a meticulous conjunctural analysis of the characteristics of those labour leaders who might offer a challenge to the ‘main drift’ of his era and the various publics that constrain and condition their behaviour but also suggests new political possibilities. Mills intimates a freedom that would allow and enable the active and intelligent participation of the citizenry, optimising their direct role in the collective direction of the social institutions which affected their existence. He writes also of the possibility of a ‘new free man of a free society’ in the workshops of America (Mills, 2001, p. 252). Mills gestures towards a long left inheritance of political thought and practice and the uses to which this might be put in new circumstances (Mills, 2001, p. 251). His own position at this time is selectively and critically crafted from diverse sources, embracing elements of Jeffersonian republicanism, Marxism, more recent syndicalist and guild socialist contributions as well as ideas borrowed from the more advanced sections of the American labour movement (Geary, 2009). Each in their own ways had intimated the possibility of an expanded form of workplace democracy. Allowing for adaptation in fresh political circumstances, there was still a possibility, as Mills saw it at this time, that such a tradition could be revived in America in the immediate post war years with the American labour movement in the vanguard of this process of change.

In the later writing – in different political conditions and especially with the weakening of class forces (Mills, 1959) – the position changes. Mills invokes an image of a responsible American citizenry who would shape their own political ideals. A neo republican notion of the subject who would play an active role in the communities in which he or she lives is evident. But here again, we would argue, there are also traces of ancient ideals of individual self cultivation in his position. Such views were shared with Dewey and both ultimately took much from Emerson’s ideal of the self reliant American (West, 1989). Mills, as Cornell West (1989) has shown, certainly owes much to that practical, pragmatist tradition that has sought to transform the way of life of American citizens. But Emerson and the classical pragmatists – Dewey as well as William James – can be said to owe much to the ‘Socratic ‘tradition’ (Hadot, 2002) we have been reviewing. Seeking to impose a style or taste on his thought, critically engaging with a dowry of influences, Mills at least as much as Foucault, we would suggest, exemplifies a certain sensibility with ancient pagan roots.

CMS and the Practice of Critique

Today, as we have noted, calls for more practical forms of management criticism (Starkey and Hatchuel, 2002; Chan and Garrick, 2002; Wray Bliss, 2002) evoke the same ancient spiritual and philosophical ideals. The ideal of certain practical way of leading a critical scholarly life, analogous to the classical sense, is evoked. Such interpretations of the ancients, via a reading of the later Foucault, have encouraged an ideal figure of the management critic as ‘frank speaker’ – the image of the critic who would confront individuals with discomfiting truths, exercising the political imagination, effecting a harmony of word and deed (eg Chan and Garrick, 2002). Through the presentation of Socrates, the Stoics and Epicureans (Foucault, 2001) we are ultimately left with the challenge of practical critique as an immediate, everyday activity and through the Cynics, as a public activity (Jack, 2004). Critique in this sense has sought to challenge what may be seen as the disengaged orientation of management criticism. Critics, it is claimed (Parker, 2002), are all too often engaged in interminable, unproductive boundary disputes – especially between those taking their cue from marxist and post – structuralist thought. Preferred forms of intellectual work – the preference for high theory – leads to practical marginalisation. Critique may be little more than a fashion or a passage point for petty careerists (Bohm, 2002). Management critics are, in effect, taken to task for their failure to ‘live’ critique.

There is much of value, we would suggest, in such criticism – the challenge to the inward looking nature of much written in the name of CMS, the failure to reach out to wider audiences and to address the specific problems of the present. Much like Parker (2002) we share a concern with the abstraction of much ‘critical’ work in management studies (CMS) and a preference for more concrete forms of criticism and experiments with the possibility of going beyond prevailing power relations. Yet there would seem to be questions of power and constraint that are being obscured here. Sometimes referred to as a problem of ‘de – contextualisation’, the relative indifference to the context of power relations in the assessment of the possibilities for freedom in the present has become a familiar line of criticism of the later Foucault (McNay, 1994; Newton, 1998). There is in the presupposition of a world in which all, with some redirection of their capacities, could engage in a practice of ‘self stylization’, a seeming disregard for the limitations on human capacities imposed by prevailing configurations of power. The force implicitly

assigned to critique in the later writing seems to raise related questions. Having abandoned the terms of reference of epistemological discourse, Foucault ultimately reinstates philosophy as a privileged discourse. Again it is as if all our 'silent habits' (Foucault, 1988), the narrowing limits that contemporary power relations impose on the modern subject can be overcome with ease (Simons, 1995).

To the extent that they imply an arbitrary suspension of constraints in the vectors of power relations within the academy and related fields, similar issues now seem to be raised by appeals for more 'philosophical' or practical forms of critique. At times, it is as if critique might somehow transcend power relations, rather than being an activity shaped by and conducted within such relations with all the constraints and difficult choices they impose. As others have argued an array of prosaic normative constraints at work in the business school – including the manner in which performance is measured and audited, the journal system, constraints imposed by the expectations of managerial gatekeepers in practical research settings – represent significant constraints (Parker, 2002). As Perriton and Reynolds (2004) argue, we are compelled to appropriate orthodox technologies of knowledge transfer in enacting a critical management pedagogy and commonly required to respond to the expectations of students or the demands of professional bodies with the consequence that a 'sleight of hand' is required in enacting a critical pedagogy in the business school.

A related sense of the immediate everyday challenges of the critically engaged emerges from recent commentary on the predicament of CMS in the context of the business school in Britain (Grey and Willmott, 2005). CMS, it is argued, remains a relatively marginal and vulnerable formation. In this setting, the discursive act of naming CMS as a loosely coupled field of scholarship, defining oneself as one of its practitioners, maintaining the complex of institutions – conferences, journals, discussion groups – which comprise CMS are important political acts in themselves, a way of helping to secure a still fragile formation in the unlikely circumstances in which it was born. Critique in this guise takes seriously the problem of securing a position in the academy from which to criticise management. The conditions which now make CMS possible in Britain, Grey and Willmott imply, should not be taken as given.

There are echoes here of Roy Jacques (1999) image of the critic as tactician: pursuing an opportunistic practice of struggling to 'manipulate events into opportunities' (Jacques, 1999, p. 220). Jacques speaks of a type of critic who is mindful of constraints, a tactician has his or her local struggles in the immediate workplace, over course content (cf Grey and Willmott, 2005), in attempts to enact an engaged consultancy or ethnography – always recognizing that interventions of the latter type are inevitably compromised by constraints, are demanding of a certain political skill in which reliance on inflecting the language of dominant discourses in subversive ways or exposing contradictions often prove to be effective forms of intervention (Jacques, 1999).

The evident implication is that a critical life – in the style of Socrates – needs significant updating to address particular circumstances and power relations. Evoked in the commentary we have been considering are tactical images of manoeuvres on inhospitable terrain, of calculations of forces and relationships, the cultivation of alliances, the taking of defensive measures – an image of daily struggle and of 'small wins' in the style of the tempered radical (Meyerson and Scully, 1995). Management critics will, of course, not all be equally touched by precisely the same configuration of power relations. Critique will always be pursued under particular life circumstances and different conditions of living will pose different problems and create different opportunities. Localised differences, variations in the national research assessment regime to which one is subject or differences in business school strategy (Bridgman, 2007) will influence the immediate work situation, inevitably shaping the course of a critical life. Nonetheless, to the extent that they aspire to enact critique, the work of the critic in the business school is always likely to be a compromised, risky one – demanding of considerable tactical skill.

Such a 'tactical' sensibility, as we term it here, echoes an alternative perspective on the practice of critique that can be found in places in the work of Michel Foucault. (eg; Foucault, 1980; Foucault, 1988; Foucault, 2007). As Colin Gordon (1996) argues Foucault leaves us not with one but several conceptions of his own practice of criticism. Effective resistance in this interpretation involves seeking to reverse particular configurations of power relations and is inevitably enacted and constrained by particular political circumstances. And the enactment of critique, as a public practice, assumes a distinctive form. It is here perhaps – for the way that it might suggest a certain style of intervention, of seeking to stimulate wider debate beyond the work situation and intervening in broader political struggles – that tactical criticism, after Foucault, has its distinctive quality. Guided by a responsiveness to changing events and political conditions, a key aim is to furnish instruments of analysis for sympathetic political actors engaged in the field of struggle. The critic seeks to sharpen or enhance their struggles by providing tools of analysis and criticism, suggesting struggles to be fought according to objectives and by methods that these political actors themselves are to determine. The tactician is always on the move, responding to the changing dangers of the moment, calculating politically, continually raising the question of how he or she might be best heard and the likely consequences of intervention in the field of struggle. It is, however, in the domain of thought – in the sense of providing analyses that try to stimulate the political imagination (Foucault, 1988) – that the scholarly critic has a distinctive contribution to make. The orientation is therefore distinct

from that proposed by others (Bridgman and Stephens, 2008), the management critic who would seek to speak plainly to authorities on any relevant matter. Critique is an endless labour not least because the actions of our supposed political allies – whether they be, for example, social movements, NGO's, trade unions or political parties – may themselves be the source of unanticipated danger that require criticism and transgressive practice. Ethico – political dogmatism is alien 'to the hyper but pessimistic' activist (Foucault, 1984, p. 343). The critic plays his or her part by furnishing political actors with instruments of analysis for a possible struggle but any form of 'public' intervention is always a provisional practice, open to change and rethinking as political circumstances alter, as allies falter or as new possibilities open up. Foucault in this guise leaves us with no rules to follow, but an example of a public, 'observable' always provisional practice of criticism on which we can reflect, perhaps especially if we aspire to combine intellectual and activist interests. We have in mind those who in different ways now seek courageously to take their critical knowledge beyond the academy, who, for example, aspire to pursue dialogue with activists (Bohm,2002) or, in other cases, with more orthodox political agents (Thompson,2001; Grey,2005) as a way of advancing the prospects for change. Here, rather than a particular political path to copy or follow, it is perhaps more an attitude to any form of 'intellectual activism' that we might take from Foucault.

Perhaps again we can refer to the example of Mills for we would suggest that there is an element of this same sensibility in his practice. For Mills – especially in the study of labour and the later writing (Geary, 2009) – the practice of critique implies the identification of political interlocutors, reaching out to the wider political field. Critique aims to address definite publics, real agents rather than imaginary political subjects – a realistic appraisal of the world of powers of actual and potential adversaries and allies is required. Mills juxtaposes the imaginative attention to detail of the novelist with a sociology formed in an imaginative and critical relation to the traditions of which he is an inheritor. It is well known that in the final years of his life, Mills's interest turned to media and press appearances (Horowitz, 1985). But there is another story of practical engagement as others have recently highlighted (Geary, 2009). At the time of his interest in labour unions critique for Mills becomes a task to be enacted, to be lived, not only in scholarly research or teaching but in public arenas: in the little magazines of the left in 1940's and 1950's New York or groups such as the Inter Union Institute for Labour and Democracy (IUI) – a debating group bringing together academics, writers, politicians and union leaders in which he became involved in 1945.

And yet Mills perhaps serves as an instructive example in another way, for his failure and the manner in which his life exemplifies the dangers of failing to appreciate and address local power relations. Mills argues that if the critic is to think politically 'in a realistic way he or she must constantly know their own social position' (Mills, 1963, p. 299). To forget this, Mills suggests, is to run the risk of 'exceeding one's own sphere of strategy so as to make impossible any translation of one's own thought into action' (Mills,1963, p. 330). But Mills's own critical practice – at least in his own immediate work setting – could be conceived a failure in this respect. His experience as an educator at Columbia in the 1950's was one of marginalization, exclusion from involvement in graduate teaching – suggesting a misreading of local political factors, an indifference to norms, the manoeuvring of the professional sociologists that came to dominate in his era and a failure to build affective alliances with sympathetic others in his immediate work environment (Horowitz, 1985). It could be said that we have here a cautionary tale in the enactment of a philosophical life in the academy – a failure of critique linked to a certain political – or tactical – insensitivity.

Conclusion

In relation to Socrates, Alexander Nehamas (1998, p. 185) has argued that critique as a practical art cannot follow examples exactly. To choose a model and try to repeat its features leads to so many pale, inappropriate imitations. To follow examples, Nehamas suggests, we should focus not on their particular features but on their more abstract higher level features (Nehamas, 1998, pp. 185 – 6) We would suggest that management critics have certainly used the Socratic example in this way – in so far as they have argued for a type of critique that answers to the problems of the present, that addresses an audience on non – hierarchical terms or is written to be read by a non – specialist audience. The value of critique in this sense is that it offers an alternative to certain self referential tendencies in CMS. Yet we have suggested that the Socratic example might help to inspire other orientations. The elaboration of an ethico – political position would seem, in the style of Socrates, to require on an ongoing work of reflection and self criticism – a willingness to be moved by events and by others. Accordingly, we have offered the image of the management critic who would seek to impose a style or taste in matters of value and politics, in place of what often seems an unthinking and undeveloped leftism in such matters – making use of the, in many respects, unlikely combination of Foucault and Mills as examples of an alternative.

Critique, we have argued, must always be pursued under certain life circumstances and different conditions of living will pose different problems and create different opportunities. The subject who practices criticism always moves within a complex field of power relations to which he or she must adjust – Socrates as much as ourselves. Perhaps above all it is this essential

point that we have tried to emphasize here. We cannot be Socrates, Foucault or Mills but there is a certain sensibility present, in some degree, in both Mills and Foucault – described here as tactical – which seems to have relevance for us today. For all the helpful reorientation made possible by notions borrowed from the ancients, we are compelled to recognise the distinct nature of the challenges we face today and it is a way of framing those challenges that we have attempted to offer here. Critique, in our sense, implies an ‘art’ and we use the term in two senses. On the one hand, we use the term art in an old sense, suggesting a need for shrewd fashioning and skill to be applied in the context of the local and broader political circumstances that the critic confronts. But critique, we have also suggested, might also benefit from a form of creativity in ethico – political matters – akin to the critical spirituality of Socrates. We have tried to capture some of the challenges of the present when the aims of critique are framed in this way.

Bibliography

- Alvesson, M., Hardy, C., & Harley, B. (2008). Reflecting on reflexivity. *Journal of Management Studies* 45(3), 480 -501.
- Barratt, E. (2003). Foucault, HRM and the ethos of the critical management scholar. *Journal of Management Studies* 40(5), 1069 -1087.
- Barratt, E. (2004). Foucault and the politics of critical management studies. *Culture and Organization* 10(3), 191 -202.
- Bernauer, J. (2004). Religion: an introduction to the non fascist life. In J. Bernauer & J. Carrette (Eds.), *Michel Foucault and Theology*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Bernauer, J., & Mahon, M. (1994). The Ethics of Michel Foucault. In G.Gutting (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bohm, S. (2002). Movements of theory and practice. *Ephemera*, 2(4), 325 – 331.
- Brown, W. (2007). *Edgework*. Princeton; Princeton University Press.
- Bridgman, T., & Stephens, M. (2008). Institutionalising critique. *Ephemera* 8(3), 258 -270.
- Bridgman, T. (2007). Reconstituting relevance. *Management Learning* 38(4), 415 -439.
- Casanova, P.G. (1964). C. Wright Mills: an American Conscience. In P. Horowitz (Ed.), *The New Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Chan, A., & Garrick, J. (2002). Organization Theory in Turbulent Times. *Organization* 9(4), 683 – 703.
- Con Davies, R., & Schleifer, R. (1991). *Criticism and Culture*. Harlow: Addison Wesley.
- Connerton, P. (1976). Introduction. In P. Connerton (Ed.), *Critical Sociology*. London: Penguin.
- Cunliffe, A (2003). Reflexive inquiry in organizational research. *Human Relations* 56(8), 983 -1003.
- Denzin, N.K. (1990). On the sociological imagination. *The Sociological Quarterly* 31(1), 1- 22.
- Dickens, A. G. (1966). *Reformation and Society in Sixteenth Century Europe*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Douzinas, C. (2005). Oubliez critique. *Law and Critique* 16(1), 47 – 69.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish*. London: Allen Lane.
- Foucault, M. (1980). Truth and power. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Power/Knowledge*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. In H. L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester.
- Foucault, M. (1984). On the genealogy of ethics. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader*. London: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1988). Practising criticism. In L. Kritzman (Ed.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1994). For an ethic of discomfort. In M. Foucault, *Power*. London: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1996). *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews*. New York: Semiotext.
- Foucault, M. (2001). *Fearless Speech*. New York: Semiotext.
- Foucault, M. (2007). *Security, Territory, Population*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Fournier, V., & Grey, C. (2000). At the critical moment. *Human Relations*, 53(1), 7 – 33.
- Gordon, C. (1996). Foucault in Britain. In A. Barry, T. Osborne and N. Rose. (Eds.), *Foucault and Political Reason*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Grey, C. (2005). Critical management studies: towards a more mature politics. In D. Howcroft & E. Trauth (Eds.), *Handbook of Critical Information Systems*. London: Edward Elgar.
- Grey, C., & Willmott, H. (2005). Introduction. In C. Grey & H. Willmott (Eds.), *Critical Management Studies: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hadot, P. (2002). *What is Ancient Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T.W. (1972). *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum.
- Horowitz, I.L. (1985). *C. Wright Mills: An American Utopia*. New York: Free Press.

- Jack, G. (2004). On speech, critique and protection. *Ephemera* 4(2), 121 – 134.
- Jacques, R. (1996). *Manufacturing the Employee*. London: Sage.
- Jacques, R. (1999). Developing a tactical approach to engaging with strategic HRM. *Organization* 6(2), 199 – 223.
- Kant, I. (1996). An answer to the question: what is enlightenment?. In Schmidt, J. (Ed.), *What is Enlightenment ?*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Knights, D., & Morgan, G. (1991). Corporate strategy, organizations and identity. *Organization Studies* 12(2), 251 -273.
- Koselleck, R. (1988). *Critique and Crisis*. Oxford: Berg.
- McFarlane, K. (1972). *The Origins of Religious Dissent in England*. New York: Collier.
- McNay, L. (1994). *Foucault*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Meyerson, D., & Scully, M. (1995). Tempered radicalism and the politics of ambivalence and change. *Organizational Science* 6(5), 585 – 602.
- Mills, C. Wright (2001). *The New Men of Power*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Mills, C. Wright (1959). *The Power Elite*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mills, C. Wright (2000). *Letters and Autobiographical writings*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mills, C. Wright (1963). *Power, Politics and People*. Oxford :Oxford University Press.
- Nehamas, A. (1998). *The Art of Living*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Newton, T. (1998). Theorising subjectivity in organizations. *Organization Studies* 19(3), 415-447.
- O’Leary, T. (2002). *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*. London: Continuum.
- Parker, M. (2002). *Against Management*. London: Sage.
- Perriton, L., & Reynolds, M. (2004). Critical management education from pedagogy of possibility to pedagogy of refusal. *Management Learning* 35(1), 61-77.
- Rose, N., & Rabinow, P. (2007). Introduction. In M. Foucault, *The Essential Foucault*. New York: Free Press.
- Senellart, M. (2007). Course Context. In M. Foucault, *Society, Territory, Population*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Simons, J. (1995). *Foucault and the Political*. London: Routledge.
- Starkey, K., & Hatchuel, A. (2002). The Long Detour. *Organisation* 9(4), 641 – 657.
- Thompson, P., & Ackroyd, S. (1995). All quiet on the workplace front. *Sociology* 29(4), 615 – 633.
- Thompson, P. (2001). The best and worst of times. *Renewal*, 9(2/3), 1-7.
- Townley, B. (1994). Writing in friendship. *Organization* 1(1), 4 – 9.
- West, C. (1989). *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Wray Bliss, E. (2002). Abstract ethics, embodied ethics. *Organisation* 9(1), 5 – 39.

