Critically Responsible Management: Agonistic answers to antagonistic questions

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Abstract

This chapter provides a constructive critique of responsible management. It starts by arguing that responsible management does little but extend managerial power and control over employees in more sophisticated ways. Moreover, in terms of enacting change, we argue that problems of limited agency are often overlooked in responsible management research leading to a naïve optimism in the power of individuals and a dismissal of existing political, organizational and cultural contexts. Subsequently, we suggest, via a discussion of the "third wave" of critical management studies and the idea of agonism, ways in which responsible management research could become more critical and more potent. In doing so, we highlight the need for responsible management research to look more at carefully selected collectives rather than individuals, both in the ways in which researchers try to enact change and engage managers and in the way they conceptualize responsibility in the first place.

Keywords

Agonism, antagonistic critique, critical management studies, critical performativity, critically responsible management

Introduction

This chapter aims to explore connections between Critical Management Studies (CMS) and contemporary research in responsible management. We start by critiquing responsible management research (Hibbert and Cunliffe, 2015; Laasch, 2018; Laasch and Conaway, 2014; Ogunyemi, 2012; Prahalad, 2010; Sharma et al., 2017) from a CMS perspective (Adler et al., 2007; Alvesson et al., 2009; Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Fournier and Grey, 2000) which views all management theory and practice as something to be problematized. From this perspective, making management responsible is futile as a variety of institutionalised networks of power and knowledge limit possibilities for change, but also dangerous, as it enables and can even mask the further spread of managerialism throughout organizations and society more broadly. However, recent debates around ideas of critical performativity (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016; King and Land, 2018; Parker and Parker, 2017; Spicer et al., 2009, 2016) have attempted to soften this hard-line position that is antagonistic to all forms of management. Such "agonistic" CMS, aims to maintain a critical edge but instead of focusing upon what CMS is against, asks what CMS can be for. Considering this perspective, we ask

the question “what would responsible management have to do to become agonistic” and subsequently, more critical.

In answering this question, we touch upon the importance of context, reflexivity, naming adversaries and the problems of balancing tensions. Our main contribution is to map out the two important steps that responsible management would need to make to become more agonistic. It should incorporate a critical appreciation of the context in which individual managers operate into its theory and practice, and find concrete struggles to engage with. Doing so would help the responsible management field to maintain its good track record of engaging with business organizations but also overcome the problem, both of its own and of critical performativity, that it is open to almost all organizations that unite under the rather equivocal banner of responsibility.

Critical analyses have thus far focused on responsible management education (Louw, 2015; Millar and Price, 2018; Painter-Morland, 2015) rather than responsible management more broadly. As we show in this chapter, this is partly so because from a critical perspective responsible management can be considered a further expansion of managerial capitalism into yet untouched areas of life and scholarship, which now includes society and the natural environment too. Critique of this encroachment of capitalism has of course been around for decades if not centuries but future research in this area might well consider if the establishment of responsible management as a new and distinct area of scholarly interest (Laasch, 2018), its impending emergence as a management fad, and its potential for academic activism can bring about something radically new. Responsible management researchers have already called attention to how organizations operate and are governed (Ennals, 2014; Painter-Morland, 2011; Verkerk et al., 2001) but the field is still overwhelmingly focused on the individual manager. Thus, critical research of the agonistic kind, which we outline in the second half of the chapter, should consider what exactly responsible management would need to do to facilitate the transformation of organizations, and consequently management within them.

In the next section, we provide an antagonistic critique of responsible management from a CMS perspective. This is followed by a presentation of critical performativity, which promotes engagement with organizations and managers, and its links to responsible management. Finally, we offer a critique of these approaches and introduce agonistic politics as a potential way to maintain both engagement and a critical stance. We conclude the chapter by highlighting how responsible management can become more agonistic.

Irresponsible Management: Antagonistic approaches to management and organization

In this section, we exemplify what CMS can do in the broader theoretical and political field of “management”. We do this by critically addressing the central phenomenon in this volume, “responsible management”, and deconstruct many of the assumptions underpinning it. We proceed by first discussing the problems of management and then outline some of the practical and theoretical concerns CMS would subsequently have with responsible management. Having provided a thorough critique, we then explore the changing critical landscape that is seeing critical scholars trying to engage and propose changes, rather than simply dismissing any attempts to engage with management and capitalism. We then discuss the potentiality of critical responsible management research based on these new discussions within CMS.

i) The problem with management

For much of the 20th century, management was seen as the solution to society's ills, a certain way to achieve a better life in which everyone can consume goods they had only dreamt about – and consume more of them. The concept of efficiency unheard of at the time was diverted from its roots in the early-20th century conservationist movement in the USA (Cummings and Bridgman, 2014), through the works of Taylor, Fayol, Ford as well as Mayo and the human relations movement (Hanlon, 2016), to be put in the service of capital that cultivated its own cadre of foremen whose job was to organize workers' life. Despite bureaucratic management's role in the Holocaust (Bauman, 1989) and the failed promises of post-war capitalism culminating in the 1968 protests, management has enjoyed an unquestioned status and expansion to all spheres of life. We are constantly reminded to manage our everyday lives (Hancock and Tyler, 2004) from the school run to streamlining our activities by quantifying our selves (Moore and Robinson, 2016). Far from being only a private pursuit, public institutions over the past two decades have also come to be managed in the name of performative efficiency, as exemplified by the NHS and various other government bodies in the UK and elsewhere (Davies and Thomas, 2002; Learmonth, 2007; Thomas and Davies, 2005). Moreover, not only are cases of mismanagement quickly forgotten (Mena et al., 2016) but the solution to any problem with management always ends up being more management (Garmann Johnsen, 2015).

CMS has long been sceptical of any specific form of management and the general trend towards more management described above. Wood and Kelly who first used the term critical management, expressed that "precisely because the bulk of workers are not totally inert and passive, as much conventional management researchers assume and/or would prefer, that we should be stimulated to seek alternatives to existing organizational theories" (1978: 23). The landmark book, *Critical Management Studies* (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992), presented a critique of management inspired by the Frankfurt School, which emphasized the increasing colonization of the organic lifeworld by instrumental rationality. The main gripe of CMS with management has been its propensity to quickly reduce various (alternative) forms of organizing social relations and activities to management as the supposed one best way (Parker et al., 2014).

It is this reductionist intent of organizing to management that is questioned by CMS. In their foundational paper, Fournier and Grey (2000) introduce three principles for CMS. These are anti-performativity, the idea of not judging organizational phenomena using the means-ends calculus of efficiency; denaturalization, i.e. an approach of uncovering hidden assumptions (of rationality) about management and a renewed focus on "discovering" alternatives; and being reflexive with regards to our claims and methods. These principles rule out many embedded assumptions within mainstream management research. For example, that management research should be aimed at increasing profit or productivity (at the expense of employees). Or that a "business case" should be crafted for actions promoting responsible behaviour. These assumptions would constitute a betrayal of the fundamental politics of CMS, which favours the promotion of degrowth, the democratization of work organizations alongside the withdrawal of power from management and, preferably, the dismantlement of capitalism. CMS has long tried to establish that management is irredeemably threatening. Regardless of what adjective precedes it in a sentence, textbook or new values of an organization, management is dangerous and we need less of it.

ii) The problem with responsible management

Responsible management authors have argued that it is possible to transform management and harness its organizational capacities for society's good. Likely the most influential management academic in favour of responsible management, C.K. Prahalad, writing in that most influential of management magazines, the *Harvard Business Review*, warns that "managers must remember that they are the custodians of society's most powerful institutions. They must therefore hold themselves to a higher standard. Managers must strive to achieve success with responsibility" (2010: 36). Ogunyemi (2012) concurs, stating that "Future leaders [must] understand that the reason to be ethical goes beyond self-interest and profit motives to the very foundations of human nature".

However, many in the field of CMS see any attempt at making management more humanistic, friendly, or responsible as a futile exercise as it has not fundamentally transformed the underlying dynamics of managerial control. Hanlon (2016) shows that the juxtaposition so often made between the machine-like rationalism of scientific management and the caring organism of the human relations school was actually a rather smooth development in an effort to confiscate the worker's soul. Even firms that offer the promise of freedom and encourage being oneself have been shown to partly do this to achieve a neo-normative form of control (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). In such firms, workers will be encouraged to exert their inner selves, thus rendering their cynicism and opposition part of a heterogeneous organizational culture, the freedom of which typically condemns them to work harder than before, safe in the knowledge that they are somehow "resisting". Extending this argument, we could say that any attempt at presenting management in a better light, much akin to the development of CSR, is just a strategy to placate, control and bamboozle (Costas and Kärreman, 2013; Fleming, 2009). This is because management, acting on behalf of the firm's owners, will always be structurally opposed to serving workers' interests under the conditions of market capitalism. Management's responsibility is all too often locked in place, besides token gestures.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a case in point. It is indeed a captivating idea that businesses could and should be encouraged to help in fighting climate change, poverty, malnourishment, lack of access to education, and so on. This is a noble aim, and we do not mean to argue that working toward it cannot yield considerable benefits, the same way as working in a "caring" and fun firm may actually feel good at times when the stress of never being off work is bearable (Gregg, 2011; Land and Taylor, 2010). The SDGs are strenuous goals that could nevertheless be achieved, and there is certainly plenty of room for corporations to give back more to the people and for new social enterprises to be set up.

Alongside the superficiality, bamboozlement and the powerful means of controlling individuals via an aspirational morality lies a fundamental contradiction between capital and labour that precludes the possibility of making management responsible. In order to be able to "give back", firms will first have to take away. It is this moment of the enclosure of a commons, the accumulation of nature, and human capacity turned into private resources that management will always be complicit. Paraphrasing Butler's (1991) argument concerning the relationship between copy and original, we could say that for any form of responsibility to be possible, there has to be some form of irresponsibility preceding it. In other words, responsibility is predicated on irresponsibility and, unless anything espousing responsibility as a remedy acknowledges the deeper causes of irresponsibility within organizations, it is merely tidying the boundaries and aesthetics of late capitalism. Responsible management does not address this fundamental contradiction in society and the economy – and that is problematic.

Another problem with the responsible management literature rests on the two interrelated issues concerning a reliance upon and an optimistic belief in individual power to enact change and act responsibly. For instance, the ascendance of philanthrocapitalism, in which corporate moguls (from

Soros to the Gates to Chan and Zuckerberg) take on the role of society's benefactors, is precisely based on such an idea of having accumulated a great amount of wealth (not surprisingly rarely described as "taking away"). Billionaires turned responsible find it important to solve social problems. As Aschoff (2015) demonstrates, these "new prophets of capital" can and deliberately do fundamentally influence which social issues receive attention. Not surprisingly, they never choose to take on issues that they do not already feel responsible for. Thus, it is not necessarily the most pressing or global problems of the day that get their attention but the ones they feel an affinity towards or can actually tackle. This trope continues as we look at millionaires and CEOs in smaller corporations, and there always appears to be a selective morality. Making responsible management worthy-of-the-name would have to mean making it responsible under any circumstances for any unexpected or unimaginable event. Not only does responsibility, reduced to certain events and issues determined by an individual, fall short of this criterion, but it also overlooks how much and how quickly particular cases of corporate irresponsibility tend to be forgotten (strategically or naturally) resulting in very similar issues having to be revisited over and over again (Mena et al., 2016).

Related to this fetishism of the powerful individual and his (or, occasionally, her) whims, it is also important to consider the role of power and subjectivity in responsible management research. Power has been a sensitive and popular topic for CMS over the years. In much of the responsible management literature we see "inspirational guides" (e.g. Ogunyemi, 2012) for responsible management, often speaking to managers directly about their capacity for good, the importance of treating your employees like human beings and the ways in which an individual may set more meaningful personal and professional goals. Others go further, Sharma et al. (2017) believe that if responsible management is to come to the fore, there needs to be a paradigm shift in the way we research and disseminate that knowledge. Although evocative and evangelical, much like the strategic CSR literature that seeks to promote pathways (Dunphy et al., 2003), implement and "make sustainability work" (Epstein and Buhovac, 2010) or embed sustainability in the workplace with trainings, workshops and visits to the field, there are structural, hierarchical, personal and cultural blocks to every attempt at change (Banerjee, 2011). Although initiatives can gather support, this support, however structurally engrained in the organization, can quickly disappear if the championing senior manager is side-lined or someone with a different vision is brought in (Parker, 2014; Racz, 2017). Outside the classroom, textbook or journal article, the problem of limited agency prevails (Painter-Morland, 2011). Indeed, any attempt at encouraging critical reflexivity (Hibbert and Cunliffe, 2015) or cultivating competencies related to responsible management (Laasch and Moosmayer, 2015; Prahalad, 2010; Schneider et al., 2010) will be stunted or shut down if the higher managerial echelons and broader institutional power dynamics are not supportive (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016), which they rarely are.

Context thus seems to be of uttermost importance for enabling and constraining certain forms of agency and performativity (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016; Parker et al., 2018). Practicing an antagonistic form of critique might be very powerful in certain contexts, be it amongst our own scholarly kin or done for a wider group of policy-makers – but it often does not achieve much outside of those circles with the organizations that could be considered our main constituents (Parker and Racz, 2019). In the next section we therefore present a more recent critical approach to management and organization, which has grown out of a renewed emphasis placed on engagement and dialogue and explore potential synergies with ideas of responsible management.

The "Third Wave" of Critical Management Studies: Critical performativity, alternatives and agonistic approaches to management and organization

The first wave of CMS research was inspired by labour process theory and focused on how control and discipline were established and maintained in the workplace. Drawing on Marxist literature this work produced a variety of insights into the labour process of workers and the controlling ways of management, technology and ideology (see Thompson and O'Doherty, 2009). The second wave of critical research stemmed from concerns that many of the subtle forms of power and subordination (see Fleming and Sturdy mentioned earlier regarding the power of responsibility to control employees) were missed in labour process research and there needed to be more of a focus upon issues of identity, the nuances of power and the importance of language in constructing domination and control. Eventually, using increasingly obscure continental philosophers' ideas to highlight organizational issues produced not only less theoretical insight but also less active engagement with organizational realities. Afterall, a worker co-op or social enterprise does not really care if you cite Foucault or Agamben.

Embracing a pragmatic approach, a third wave of critical research has emerged that is less driven by exotic thinkers and are more concerned with issues of greater public significance (Spicer, 2014), alternative forms of organizing and engagement with management and their struggles (Wickert and Schaefer, 2015). Amplified by recent debates around the question of impact (Bresnen and Burrell, 2012) and older ones around CMS scholars being "messianic mice" (Dunne et al., 2008: 290) who claim to have the solutions to organizational ills but whose voices cannot be heard, CMS appears ready to move towards a more engaged critique (see Langmead and King, this volume). Recently introduced by Spicer et al. (2009, 2016), the concept of "critical performativity" has been a popular attempt to describe an approach to studying management and organization, which both renounces the idea of non-performativity (see Fournier and Grey, 2000), widely (mis)understood in CMS circles as not engaging with the mainstream at all, and nevertheless maintains the importance of exhibiting a critical intent that should lead to tangible change in organizations.

Spicer et al. (2016: 233) propose four ways of engaging with management in a critically performative way: selecting issues to address that are of a "broader public concern", speaking about them in a dialectical way with groups beyond academia, building movements around particular issues in this wider public, and ensuring that the emerging range of progressive alternatives can be freely deliberated upon. Such an aim of seeking out alternatives, heterotopias and engaging critically with management would fit alongside attempts to address responsible management competences (Laasch and Moosmayer, 2015) and engage in a "positive" manner. For instance, Wickert and Schaefer (2015) propose that CMS scholars should attempt to generate incremental changes in managerial practice by using the performative power of language. This would entail awareness raising and conscientization through a dialogic process between critical scholars and practicing managers, the performative effect of which speech acts (Austin, 1962) is hoped to be the appearance of new managerial practices. Hartmann (2014) suggests that mainstream management theory should be subversively re-read and thus infiltrated by CMS ideas.

So, how would this third wave of critical management studies appreciate responsible management research? Well, we think such approaches would sit fairly nicely alongside some of the existing responsible management literature. Laasch (2018), for instance, proposes three conceptual shifts that would establish responsible management as a separate field. The proposed move from the organizational level to that of the individual manager, from academic considerations to focusing on actual practice, and from looking at managers tasked with being responsible, sustainable or ethical to the general mainstream manager. These conceptual changes could as well be brought about using

the approach proposed by Wickert and Schaefer (2015). By showing that traditional mainstream management scholarship is compatible with the aims of responsible management and thus can be extended to also incorporate the latter, Laasch and Conaway (2014) adopt an approach similar to that proposed by Hartmann (2014).

Yet, problems, some of which were discussed earlier, still remain: a practical one concerning the actual outcomes and a more conceptual one regarding critique. The former is related to the potential failure of (critical) performatives in various contexts. King (2015) argues that the critical performativity literature is too focused on what *could* happen in organizations if such engagement were taken onboard by critical management scholars. However, using four case studies of attempts at a critical engagement with managers in a variety of settings, King (2015: 256) demonstrates that "direct attempts at engagement, are messy and complex". It is hard to achieve change on one's own as a manager (King and Learmonth, 2014) or CMS scholar (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016), there is not much guidance for practitioners about what exactly they should be doing and how to effect change (King, 2015), and even organizations that explicitly want to adopt a more democratic structure might eventually democratically reject this outcome (King and Land, 2018; Land and King, 2014).

Thus, the critical performativity literature is surrounded by a certain romanticism about what could be achieved. Fleming and Banerjee (2016) go as far as to say that it is the failing rather than the felicitous performatives that define the primary experience emerging from critically-infused change initiatives. The possibility of exercising change very delicately depends on the organizational context (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016; Parker et al., 2018), in which sympathetic actors should both be willing and able to stand up against existing ways of doing things. Otherwise momentum and path dependence will stall such initiatives, the dominant norms within the organizational domain will overwrite or hollow out emerging new understandings, and attempts at change may be infinitely scaled back as the path of least resistance is taken.

To use the language of performativity, a distinction can be made between illocutionary performatives, which are successful because of the power vested in the discursive position from which an enunciation is made, and perlocutionary ones, which can wield effects only if certain contextual conditions are met (Austin, 1962; Butler, 2010). Rhetoric by middle managers and scholars acting as consultants will rarely carry the illocutionary power that comes with organizational position, authority, or an established ritual, to bring what they say into existence. At the same time, the perlocutionary conditions may not be in place for a particular speech act enunciated from a non-authoritative position to be taken up by the organization. Practising managers can be turned into reflexive practitioners (Cunliffe, 2004, 2016), they can be exposed to critical seminars or case studies (Reedy and Learmonth, 2009), MBA students can go on retreats to discuss sustainability and ethics but these altogether may not be enough to create a context in which a change towards responsible management would be effected (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016; Parker et al., 2018; Reynolds, 1999).

The second problem with the approach to engagement proposed by critical performativity and efforts to extend responsible management concerns the nature of critique. Engagement with elites, however "disgruntled" they may be (Spicer et al., 2016: 238), and with managerialist organizations can stride too close to bedding in with the enemy and settling for understanding where they come from and how they think, like interpretative sociologists would do. One's critical edge may be easily lost when they get entangled in organizational reality. As it could be expected, the question of how the criticality of such an engagement can be maintained has become the focus of current debates surrounding critical performativity in the CMS community (Contu, 2018; Fleming and Banerjee, 2016; King and Land, 2018; Parker and Parker, 2017; cf. Spoelstra and Svensson, 2016). In all fairness, Spicer et al. (2009: 546) do claim that a strong normative base could help one decide what

managerial practices can be considered good or bad, but they "do not seek to proscribe a singular set of criteria". If history should serve as any guidance, it has been difficult if not impossible to establish such criteria through any process of open deliberation, however, without it, it is impossible to maintain a critical position and decide what organizational practices can be considered good or bad.

Efforts in the field of responsible management to establish such a global set of values, like the United Nations' Global Compact (UNGC) for tripartite action between the UN, businesses and the voluntary sector for addressing social challenges suffer from a similar shortcoming. Responsible management, as established above, is akin to critical performativity inasmuch as it wants to work together with businesses, to make them better global citizens, to enhance their engagement with sustainability, responsibility, and ethics. The UNGC originally intended to rely on sponsorship by the various UN agencies, major civil society organizations, and the private sector but, thanks in part to former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's intentional efforts, by now it has become almost exclusively dependant on support from businesses (Sethi and Schepers, 2014). Being Secretary General after all fundamentally intensifies one's illocutionary agency… It shouldn't be surprising then that enforcement, or even monitoring, of the implementation of UNGC values amongst its corporate signatories has been far from ideal and that it has been "misused" by signatories as a marketing tool (Deva, 2006; Sethi and Schepers, 2014).

Based on the above, from a critical position, it seems that responsible management does not go far enough in its attempt to change the world. We cannot simply rely on organizational actors performing responsibly, only on their performing responsibility. We think this is an important distinction as the former implies acting in a responsible manner, while the latter is a form of window dressing. As Laasch (2018: 3) states, "responsible management is distinct from *corporate* social responsibility, sustainable *business*, and social *enterprise* discussions as it moves the unit of analysis from the organizational level to the individual, group, and processual levels of responsible manager(s) and of managing responsibly". As we have argued, the individual manager that responsible management focuses on, is all too often caught up in a position where making an attempt at being a reflexive practitioner, speaking up or acting up, can only result in mental health issues, cynical distancing, or losing one's job. This does not mean to imply that such an effort is futile or unnecessary. It is just half of the equation.

Critical performativity, and responsible management given their similarities, does not resolve the critique presented in the previous section regarding responsibility, management, and agency. More emphasis needs to be placed on how such efforts fail and in what contexts they might flourish. Besides, it will take time and struggle to create the right contexts. Perlocutionary performatives can only bring about change in the existing reality "in time (and not immediately) if certain intervening conditions are met. The success of a perlocutionary performative depends on good circumstances, even luck, that is, on an external reality that does not immediately or necessarily yield to the efficacy of sovereign authority" (Butler, 2010: 151). Because of path dependencies and established practices, organizational self-regulation is a utopian goal, even if there is a cadre of responsible managers as long as they only perform responsibility. To be able to perform responsibly, we as critical scholars also need to help them by creating and maintaining stronger institutions and organizations, stricter regulation and control as well as a continuous reinforcement of not only the possibility but the actual existence of alternative organizing at a social scale. In the next section, we describe how we imagine doing this.

A Future for Responsible Management Research: Agonism and Engagement

So far, we have presented how a classical antagonistic CMS might problematize the idea of responsible management and how much more of an alignment can be found between this and the "third wave" of CMS. As we have shown, criticality is fundamentally important if we want to see any form of change in managerial practice, and antagonistic critique has an outstanding record when it comes to identifying and highlighting the underbelly of organizational practices. Responsible management already has a successful track record in creating popular global umbrella organizations based on a set of generic normative principles about what organizations and managers should not be like, i.e. irresponsible. To reiterate a point made earlier, we think it is very important to create reflexive practitioners (Cunliffe, 2004, 2016; Hibbert and Cunliffe, 2015) and sensitize individual managers to questions of sustainability, responsibility and ethics. What we have also shown, though, is that the managers sympathetic to such goals, who both critical performativity and responsible management treats as their primary change agents, can seldom play on an even field (Butler, 2010; Parker et al., 2018). Or, if they are in a position to introduce change, management scholars are not necessarily the people they would consult and so we are left hoping that an individual agent will create and maintain meaningful change.

In this section, we would like to draw on an emerging discussion within the various discussions of critical performativity concerning agonism, that can offer something in terms of balancing the detached radicalism of the antagonistic approach and the loss of a critical edge in critical performativity. Agonism is a concept developed by Mouffe (1999, 2013, 2014) as an approach to politics that prefers to think of political adversaries as inevitably, thus legitimately, existing as opposed to the supposed illegitimacy of an enemy, and that favours continuous struggle and confrontation over a singular act of annihilation. Mouffe (1999) distinguishes between "politics", which is the composition of concrete struggles, and "the political", which is the contingent set of antagonistic relations always present in society. In their refusal to enter concrete struggles, the antagonistic position and critical performativity can be perceived as surprisingly similar.

The search for a strong normative base is in many ways laudable, and an agonistic approach to engagement would also need to make an attempt at distinguishing the organizational practices we like from those we do not. Critical performativity as described by Spicer et al. (2009) appears to require that through scholarly debate we arrive at one such set of normative criteria. This understanding is based on a belief in critical performativity scholars already knowing what needs to be done and having an agenda about how organizations would need to be changed. For an agonistic approach, such a normative belief in the knowledge of a set of actors (the group of critical performativity scholars) and having a set of universal normative criteria (their position arrived at after deliberation), is unfounded and unattainable, respectively. As Parker and Parker (2017: 1376, 1377) state, "when discussing agonism, Mouffe is suggesting that there is no final ground or foundation for knowledge or politics, there is only contingency" and "an endless struggle to fix meanings [and with it organizations, hierarchies, social distinctions, etc.] in a certain way".

It is this very struggle that responsible management would need to join to make the first step towards becoming agonistic. Joining the struggle starts by stating an adversary. Irresponsible business and management practices do not constitute such an adversary, just like an antagonistic CMS for critical performativity does not either, because organizations, positions, activities and so on cannot be inherently and timelessly deemed good or bad. We should be prepared to accept some irresponsibility that comes with a lot of responsible management if we don't have better options in the current political configuration. Political antagonisms will never disappear, and we can only contingently map these onto the responsible/irresponsible categorization at this time in history. But

entering concrete struggles, responsible management will come up against a tough decision about the form of engagement it would take. How is it possible to engage with business organizations and individual managers while we try to maintain a critical edge? If we leave aside education as the major access point to developing responsible managers, which is one of the conceptual shifts suggested by Laasch (2018), then it becomes rather difficult to critique the organizations we work with closely. Critical performativity tried to articulate a way to do this, yet it suffers from the same nuisance of trying to maintain distance and do more than just listen and nod.

What is responsible management for and against?

If responsible management is to mean something, it has to move beyond the very generic kind of values represented by the umbrella terms of sustainability, responsibility and ethics. Such "empty" terms (Laclau, 2005) are good for signing up people and organizations to a cause – but are all to easily hollowed out bent to the will of the powerful. Even in organizations that exhibit a democratic ethos and anarchist history, a shared and desired idea of "non-hierarchical organization" can collapse onto itself because of the fundamentally different understandings organizational actors attach to it (King and Land, 2018; Land and King, 2014). And by defining concrete adversaries in concrete struggles, or what it is "against", responsible management will also have to map out concretely, what it is "for".

Linking the two major points of our critique, the suggestion that looking at individual agents is not enough because they have to be understood in their "political" context and the consequent need to state an adversary, we want to suggest that the future direction of the responsible management field could be moved from an explicit focus on agents, managers and agency to the question of responsible organizations, discourses and context. The agency of individual managers is not in their possession but it is their capacity to act, allowed and constrained by the extent to which they reiterate already accepted social relations, their discursive position, and their audience (Butler, 2010). Without responsible organizations, the context will not be favourable for responsible managers, the social norms to reiterate will be against their ideals, they will seldom enter discursive positions that carry illocutionary power, and their audiences who could make their perlocutionary performative successful will not be sympathetic. One way of articulating what responsible management is, is to point to organizations that exemplify responsibility. Crucially however, responsible management researchers should not focus on individual leaders or managers, but point to the organizational structures, the shared values, and the wider organizational picture. Responsibility should be a collectivized, not an individualized concept.

Creating responsible managers is an important means to an end. But the ends are as important, if not more, than the means. Responsible management would need to specify what it is concretely for because it needs to reconnect to substantive rationality. This requires the identification, selection, and promotion of natural, organic and well-meaning values, which are concrete enough because they stem from concrete struggles. Responsible management could thus be re-focused from a *means* to achieving responsibility in unfavourable contexts to considering how the *ends* of responsibility can be furthered. Doing so necessitates a lighter grip on the mutuality between profit and responsibility and a stronger position on issues like degrowth, social equality, localism, reduced discrimination and significant care for the natural environment. Such an act will allow managers and scholars to go beyond the false comfort and exoneration that reflexivity often provides (Parker et al., 2018; Reedy and Learmonth, 2009) and instead focus on the various (powerful and uneven) sites of (responsible) organizing and managing.

Agonistic responsible management research would seek to concretize the various theoretical and ethical discussions within a context and with an appreciation of the importance of that context with regard to successful perlocutionary acts of responsibility. Future research therefore should be focused on the empirical realities of responsibility with a more collectivist conceptualization of responsibility and with a normative judgement regarding whether the organization under examination is something the responsible management community would endorse, problematize or dismiss. For example, Griffin's work on democratic organizing and sociocracy (Griffin, 2019; Griffin et al., 2015), which leads on from existing research on co-operative organizing (Leca et al., 2014), explores the collective awareness of the ever shifting nature of "responsibility" by continually asking "responsible to whom?" and "whose voice is being silenced?" in communicative processes. This work is being conducted with charities, worker co-operatives and typical hierarchical structures seeking to transition to more democratic forms of organizing. Manning's ongoing research with Maya women in Guatemala provides another example that can broaden our understanding of responsibility (e.g. Manning, 2018). She examines what working collaboratively can teach us about decolonizing organizational research and practices. Communitarian organizing here becomes a way for these women to take responsibility for their lives resisting colonial and gendered inequalities by creating a community where members take responsibility for each other. Martin Parker is leading the "Inclusive Economy Institute" from the University of Bristol, aiming to explore the "forms of governance, finance, technological innovation and economic participation which can tilt the regional economy in the direction of inclusive, equitable and low carbon business ecosystems" (Ryan, 2019). This initiative has seen engagement with Bristol Pound (a local currency), an Employee Ownership Trust, Social Enterprise UK and Black South West Network.

Concluding thoughts

The way for responsible management to become more agonistic leads cautiously between its outright dismissal from an antagonistic position and a rather subservient engagement with business organizations and individual managers. In this chapter, we first presented a critique of responsible management from a classic CMS position, which would regard all management with suspicion as it tends to reinforce itself as a way of organizing without viable alternatives. Opening management back up to various forms of organizing social relations would constitute a step towards responsibility. Moving towards the particular, we showed that from a CMS vantage point *responsible* management is also problematic and it warrants critical examination. It implies an unequal power relation between those who can decide who to care for and how, and that (be it society, the environment or individuals) which is being taken responsibility for. It also privileges an individualized understanding of responsibility over the context that allows and limits certain forms of agency and the collective responsibility we have, as managers and scholars, for developing enabling contexts.

In the second part, we highlighted some important similarities between the concept of critical performativity, which has been a topic of heated debates over recent years in the CMS community, and responsible management. Both share the intention to engage with organizations, rather than just businesses or managers, and *do* something beyond presenting an important but largely disengaged critique. However, as we have shown, their drive to do so pushes them dangerously close to those business organizations they would like to critique and change, often to the extent of rendering their critique ineffective. Finally, we argued that agonistic critique might offer a way forward. This way is admittedly temporary, it only applies to the present political configuration. To become more agonistic, responsible management would have to reconsider whether it wants to

engage with responsibility as a means to an end, as its current emphasis on making individual managers responsible suggests, or as an end on its own.

We believe that if responsible management wants to become critically responsible management, which it should, it would have to re-focus on responsibility as an end in itself. This would require that it pays more attention to the configuration of "the political" besides the individual agent and engages in concrete struggles by selecting who it is for and against. There should certainly be more research done as to how this choice can be made wisely, where researchers' efforts should be concentrated, and which organizations may provide the best contexts for encouraging responsible managers to build a movement. We have offered some suggestions above but this is the moment to enter the struggle and make your own pick.

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