

CHAPTER 6

THE HISTORICAL AND
EPISTEMOLOGICAL
FOUNDATIONS OF
ORGANIZATION
THEORY:
FUSING SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY
WITH ENGINEERING
DISCOURSE

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IN THE 1950s, a new intellectual field, devoted to the study of organizations, came into being. Made up of sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, engineers, management specialists, and economists, it was (and is) known as 'organization studies', 'organization science', or 'organization theory'. At the point of departure,

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Organization Theory was mainly an American creation.¹ A newly established journal *Administrative Science Quarterly* (which was inaugurated in 1956) and three textbooks—March and Simon (1958), Likert (1961), and Blau and Scott (1962)—signified the crystallization of this body of knowledge into an independent field in the United States (Scott 1998).²

Probably more than any other scholar, Richard Scott contributed to the canonization of the field. In his oft quoted book *Organizations: Rational, Natural and Open Systems*, Scott (1987/1998) offers a brief genealogical construction of this interdisciplinary enterprise:

Within sociology the emergence of the field of organizations may be roughly dated from the translation into English of Weber's (1946, 1947) and to a lesser extent, Michels's (1949) analyses of bureaucracy. Shortly after these classic statements became accessible to American sociologists, Robert K. Merton and his students at Columbia University attempted to outline the boundaries of this new field of inquiry by compiling theoretical and empirical materials dealing with various aspects of organizations (Merton et al. 1952). . . . For the first time, sociologists were engaged in the development and empirical testing of generalizations dealing with the structure and functioning of organizations viewed as organizations. (Scott 1987: 8; 1998: 9)

It was in this context, according to Scott, that 'more recent forebears, such as Taylor, Barnard and Mayo, were re-discovered and reprinted' (1998: 10). Scott summarizes his description arguing that 'These central and other related efforts gave rise to the identification of a new area of study—organizations'.

My objective in this chapter is to provide an alternative historiography of the field of OT.³ Whereas I accept Scott's observation about the existence of the two different discourses that form the backbone of Organization Theory (a sociological discourse and a managerial discourse), I challenge his starting point ('degree zero') and his genealogy. Scott's depiction implies that the history of the field starts with Weber's translation into English as if there was no significant study of organizations in the United States prior to that date. In contrast, I argue that Max Weber's work was translated into a context ripe with discourse about organizations, mainly among engineering circles. Furthermore, Weber's work was incorporated into this American engineering discourse and was accommodated to fit its language and epistemology. A historical account of the emergence of the field needs therefore to start with this earlier engineering/managerial discourse, to show its carriers and institutions, and then to focus on the manner by which Weber's work was

¹ It was in the United States that a new class of salaried management first emerged in significant numbers (Berle and Means 1932) and set the blueprint for American management theory (Guillen 1994; Shenhav 1995; see also Locke 1996). Organizational discourse was partly an offspring of the American managerial revolution (Shenhav 1999).

² Gibson Burrell (1996) coined American OT as NATO: North American Theory of Organizations.

³ For a discussion of the linkage between historiography and archival data, see Mohr and Ventresca (forthcoming).

incorporated into it. This will provide a more comprehensive analysis of the fusion between the two discourses that were hybridized into one to create the embryo of what we consider today as OT.

I begin the search for an alternative historiography with the assumption that knowledge, any knowledge, tends to grow in chaotic, unorganized, and often hybrid manner. The anarchic nature of knowledge is best characterized by Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome (1987). The rhizome grows in all directions, multiplied in unanticipated directions and diverges at all ends simultaneously. A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic, chains or organizations of power, resulting in interwoven lines, junctions, intersections, and branches which present no definite beginnings or ends. Unlike the tree, the rhizome does not have structure and genealogy, and refuses to be represented or codified. Against the dynamics of the rhizome, science produces axiomatics:

it is the nature of axiomatics to come up against so-called *undecidable propositions*, to confront *necessarily higher powers* that it cannot master... axiomatics does not constitute the cutting edge of science; it is much more a stopping point, a reordering that prevents decoded semiotic flows... from escaping in all directions. The great axiomaticians are the men of State of science, who seal off the lines of flight that are so frequent in mathematics, who would impose a new nexum, if only a temporary one, and who lay down the official policies of science. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 461)

It is therefore essential, according to Deleuze and Guattari, to treat every genealogical reconstruction as an administrative task employing axiomatization, which is premised upon regulation, and requires the 'organizing conjunctions of decoded flows' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 451). Scott's historiographical construction signifies an attempt to affirm and canonize the identity of the field and his description is indeed based on two acts of axiomatization.⁴ The first refers to the importation of Weber's theory of bureaucracy and rationality into American sociology in the late 1940s. Scott's genealogical description implies an epistemological continuity between Max Weber's theoretical work and the American sociological paradigm prevailing at the time of translation. He describes Weber's 'translation' as merely a linguistic task, while Weber was in fact Americanized—'culturally' translated in the Latourian sense (Latour 1987)—to fit the epistemological rules dominating American sociology during the 1940s and 1950s.

⁴ Axiomatization is an administrative act, taken by administrators of science, which shunts the development of knowledge into a certain arbitrary direction. Such administrative acts (not necessarily intentional and not necessarily personal) involve periodization of 'stages', juxtaposition of divergent bodies of knowledge, definition of concepts, codification of enabling language and canonization of previous decisions. Historiographic decisions are acts of axiomatization, since they are not based on 'facts', 'experiments', or 'discoveries', but rather on such administrative procedures. For example, the distinction between the 'New World' and the 'Old World' ('Ancient Regime') in the seventeenth century, which extensively used in the science of history, is an act of axiomatization.

The second act of axiomatization pertains to the juxtaposition of early management discourse with sociological theory. Whereas Scott's account assumed that scattered classical managerial texts (such as Taylor's, Mayo's, and Barnard's) were revived and collected into the sociological paradigm after the translation of Weber's work, I argue that there already existed a systematic discourse about organizations in the United States. This discourse, that was already categorized in 1912 as 'a smaller sister of sociology, as a science of human nature' (*Engineering Magazine*, Jan. 1912: 481; Shenhav 1999: 127), preceded the translation of Weber to English, and was infused into American sociology 'from below' during the first half of the twentieth century. This engineering/managerial discourse invented the 'organization' as a reified epistemological concept⁵ and celebrated the idea that it is worthy of intellectual and academic attention.

In this chapter I follow the two discourses—the engineering and the sociological—and their merger, in order to historicize the epistemological assumptions of contemporary OT directly back into the professional project of social engineering around the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 6.1 presents the roots of the engineering-managerial discourse about organizations that dominated industrial America prior to the translation of Weber to English. This discourse was later incorporated into the work of early sociologists and management scholars. Section 6.2 presents Weber's project on rationality, and analyzes the manner in which his work was interpreted by American sociologists. I show how Weber's theory of rationality was translated, in the Latourian sense, according to the peculiar epistemological rules prevailing in US sociology, particularly emphasizing the ahistorical nature of the social science and the hegemony of the Parsonian interpretation. Section 6.3 discusses the epistemological ramifications resulting from the nexus between the two discourses, focusing on two of the key concepts in OT: rationality and uncertainty. These were central concepts in the construction of organizations as rational actors.

⁵ Just as the courts invented the corporation as a *persona ficta* roughly at the same time (see Roy 1997).

⁶ In Foucault's terms I employ an archeological and genealogical analyses. The archeological analysis focuses on the epistemological regulations and the discursive practices through which statements are generated, formed, shaped, and restricted (see Foucault 1973 and Foucault 1977a). The genealogical analysis usually focuses on the relationship between knowledge/power or the interplay between discursive and non-discursive practices (mainly Foucault 1975, 1977b, 1977c). It is concerned with the manner in which political, economic, and social scientific knowledge came to complement each other and the manner in which experts for a basis form their claim to 'objective and positive knowledge'. According to Foucault, these two lines of thought are based on different assumptions. While the archeological analysis explores the more organized and structured aspects of the discourse, the genealogical analysis focuses on dynamic, open-ended, controversial, and conflictual practices.

6.1 THE ENGINEERING/MANAGEMENT PILLAR: THE INVENTION OF AN INDEPENDENT DISCOURSE ABOUT ORGANIZATIONS⁷

As early as the 1880s mechanical engineers, mostly members of the ASME (American Society of Mechanical Engineers), were the leaders of an industry-wide movement that desired to standardize and systematize its technical environment. These individuals attempted to rationalize standards of measurement, nomenclatures, fittings, screws, nuts, bolts, and everything else with which they came in daily contact. Parallel to the attempts to standardize and systematize mechanical matters, the movement spilled over to cover organizational and managerial issues.

Based on their experience, mechanical engineers aspired to enhance their centrality within industrial firms and to extend the boundaries of their expertise to include the design of organizations. As Dunlap, editor of *Engineering Magazine* argued, ‘The cold logic of a mechanical demonstration may be more effective in industrial reform than any sympathetic appeal of the humanitarian’ (*Engineering Magazine*, Nov. 1902: 223–30). Dexter Kimball, Dean of Engineering at Cornell University and later a president of the ASME, suggested ‘the extension of the principles of standardization to the human element in production’ (Shenhav 1995), assuming that human and non-human entities are interchangeable and can equally be subjected to engineering manipulation.

Individuals such as Alexander Church, John Dunlap, and others—who were labeled by historians as ‘systematizers’—applied mechanical engineering methods to the administrative restructuring of firms, to design systems of accountancy, determine wages, and determine selection criteria in employment. They constructed organizations as ‘systems’ and suggested that ‘confusion’, ‘oversight’, and ‘neglect’ could be eliminated through the use of rational ‘systems’. The prominent engineer B. F. Spalding explained the systems ideology behind it: ‘The American system is based upon the perfection of the units that are combined in the total which the complete machine represents. It considers the whole as a combination of integers, rather than as the sum of added fractions . . . the excellence of the whole is assured by the attention which the system secures to every part’ (*American Machinist*, 6 November 1890: 2–4). ‘System, system, system’ wrote an enthusiastic visitor to Ford in the *Detroit Journal* at the peak of this craze (Hounshell 1984: 229). The extension of engineering practices and systems ideology to human organizations

⁷ For a more extensive discussion on the engineering roots of the managerial revolution, see Shenhav 1999.

was an act of 'translation', affirming an underlying unity between elements distinct from one another and creating convergences and homologies by relating things that were previously unrelated (Latour 1987; Callon 1981; Shenhav and Weitz 2000; Weitz and Shenhav 2000).

Despite objections to the systems ideology (e.g. Shenhav 1999: 112–15), the Progressive Era (1900–1917) in the United States was instrumental to the diffusion of this discourse for two important reasons. First, it provided legitimation to the roles for professionals, including engineers, as experts. The Roosevelt administration, for example, maintained close relationships with all engineering societies, and these societies supported Roosevelt's attempts to bring efficiency and rational management into industry and government. Hays (1959) maintains that 'efficiency', 'expertise', and 'system' infused the entire social order of Progressivism. This was congruent with the general trend of 'anti-chaos' reforms labeled by Wiebe as 'the search for order' and was characterized by 'bureaucratic vision' and a desire for 'perfect systematization' (1967).

The professional tools developed by the Progressives were perceived to be objective and rational and therefore above the give and take of political conflict. The struggle of Progressives to find a common ground for society as a 'whole' generated pragmatic culture in which conflicts were diffused and ideological differences ostensibly resolved. At the end of the Progressive period, business philosophy was crystallized around secular engineering ideals rather than around religious, philanthropic, or social Darwinist ones (Barley and Kunda 1992). With the engineering discourse, resorting to politics could be redefined in technical terms. Engineering expertise seemed most appropriate for the resolution of conflictual politics (Shenhav 1999).

Second, the spirit of the Progressive Era was congruent with the promise of systems to promote *progress* and *equality*. Images of progress were often expressed with the logic of efficiency and productivity. Images of equality were often expressed in moral terms and focused on the redistribution of wealth by means of welfare legislation, antitrust laws, and unionism. The development of rational organizational systems seemed to provide a perfect vehicle for reforms. In organizational systems, progress and equality were ostensibly harmonized through the objectivity of the system. Systems were perceived as a safeguard for the morality of organizations, of managers and of employees. They bind individuals in mutual relations of responsibility and accountability, depersonalized these relationships, and thus eliminated favoritism and nepotism. In systems the trajectory of progress can be charted both for individuals and for the organization as a whole, since authority is no longer derived from privileged social positions but is grounded in facts and techniques needed to perform and coordinate interdependent tasks (Miller and O'Leary 1989).

In the emerging organizational discourse during the Progressive Era the concept of system assumed coherence and autonomy and became an object of independent inquiry. As one systematizer wrote ‘the important details of factory work are cared for by systems which are homogenous, flexible and efficient; systems which leave nothing to chance, but which care for the smallest and the most important details of factory work alike’ (*Engineering Magazine*, Apr. 1902: 15–18). The editors of the *American Machinist*, a major outlet for engineering writings, suggested: ‘there is not a man, machine, operation or system in the shop that stands entirely alone. Each one, to be valued rightly, must be viewed as part of a whole’ (*American Machinist*, 3 Mar. 1904: 294–6). In 1906 the editors of the *Engineering Magazine* recalled: ‘It is almost ten years since the *Engineering Magazine* laid down the first clear definitions of that system of manufacturing which has come to be known as distinctively American’ (*Engineering Magazine*, Sept. 1906: 801).⁸ Preoccupation with systems was so pervasive that one systematizer put it succinctly: ‘You must have a cost system. You can’t retain the respect of the manufacturing public if you don’t have one. . . . A cost system is as necessary to your industrial prestige as a pair of pants to your personal dignity’ (*American Machinist*, 3 July 1913: 15). Likewise an editorial in the *Engineering Magazine* announced: ‘America . . . is God’s own country—for any man who has a new system’ (*Engineering Magazine*, Aug. 1916: 678).

The efforts to view organizations as systems received public visibility with the work of Frederick Taylor and his followers (Taylor 1911). Taylor’s conceptualization of industrial bureaucracy—the extension and codification of mechanical engineering—involved an explicit attempt to systematize the firm. His suggestions were made under the banner of ‘social physics’, ‘a science of production’ that was supposed to be ‘objective’, ‘systematic’, and ‘rational’.

In 1912, the study of organizations was defined in the engineering literature as a separate scientific field, ‘a smaller sister of sociology as a science of human nature’ (*Engineering Magazine*, Jan. 1912: 481–7). This ‘science’ invented the concept of rational organization and emphasized the constructive/visible hand of

⁸ American creation of management grew out of engineering practices that were different from the European experience. The US engineer-managers were attuned to the economic and organizational constraints of the enterprise and the management of production processes. This was not the case with European engineers, especially with the French, British, and Germans, who were more concerned with technical issues in line with their scientific traditions (Locke 1984; Gispén 1989). Germany’s economy was organized around ‘rational lines’ that were borrowed from the German army and state administration (Guillen 1994). But it did not enjoy the professional discourse that developed in the United States during the Progressive Era. To the extent that managerial and organizational thought developed in Germany or Britain to its current form, it was an American influence. For example, in the mid-1920s Germany’s acute economic problems drove engineers, manufacturers, and academics to make pilgrimages to the United States in order to unravel the American romance with modern management (for more details, see Shenhav 1999: ch. 7; Djelic 1998).

management and the universality of its ideals. In 1915, John Dunlap, the editor of *Engineering Magazine* and the most active journalistic sponsor of the management movement, documented what he labeled as ‘the historic events in the development of a new science’ (*Engineering Magazine*, May 1915: 163–6). This systems discourse, which first entered engineering literature in the 1880s, rose to an average of 26 per cent of the literature on management during the Progressive period. It was a critical moment in the history of the field ‘the point at which a particular discourse emerged from these techniques and came to be seen as true, the point at which they are linked with the obligation of searching for the truth and telling the truth’ (Foucault 1980, cited in Rabinow 1984: 7).

However, as mentioned earlier, the rationalization of organizations as systems was not naturally and universally accepted. Indeed, engineers and managers faced bitter opposition from unions, on the one hand, and objection from capitalists, on the other (Shenhav 1999). To the capitalist mind the idea of ‘systems’ did not seem to be natural. To many manufacturers, systems appeared costly and superfluous, and seemed to generate red tape, unpredictability, lack of control, conflict, and instability as one explained: ‘they had every man in the place running around with a pencil over his ear, and we didn’t get the work done’ (*American Machinist*, 29 Apr. 1915: 750). Manufacturers viewed systematization as a strategy employed by engineers to expand their professional territory.⁹ In their attempts to convince these capitalists that rational systems were necessary, engineers turned to the issue of labor unrest.

The fear of unrest was common to manufacturers, politicians, and the public at large and threatened private property, the state, civil order, and the ‘free market’ ideology. Building on this fear, mechanical engineers framed¹⁰ labor unrest in technical terms, and suggested that, under a perfectly rational organizational system, unrest would be rendered unnecessary. They sought to position their rationality as impartial and above class prejudice and suggested that management systems could put an end to labor unrest.

According to this systems rhetoric, the properties of the machine-like bureaucratic system were expected to transform chaos into order, ambiguity into certainty, and irrational into rational behavior. They minimized the political significance of unrest and marginalized its ideological foundations, depicting them as ‘technical’ rather than political issues. Thus, the politics of labor unrest and the rationality of organizations formed a dialectical relationship. Labor unrest was used to justify the rational reconstruction of organization and in turn, the emergent systems perspec-

⁹ More detailed empirical description on the objection of manufacturers and capitalists, see Shenhav 1999: ch. 4.

¹⁰ On the issue of framing of social issues, see Gamson 1992.

tive depoliticized labor unrest, translating and describing it in ahistorical and apolitical terms.¹¹

During the first half of the twentieth century, the rhetoric and practice of organizational systems have traveled from engineering circles to additional fields and became widely known in American industry and academia. In 1916, John Dunlap the editor of *Engineering Magazine* inaugurated *Industrial Management* which was devoted to issues of organizational systematization and became a professional outlet for organizational thought. Dunlap remained an editor until 1927, when *Industrial Management* merged with *Factory* to form *Factory and Industrial Management* a joint venture of the McGraw-Shaw and the McGraw-Hill publishing companies. In 1933 *Factory and Industrial Management* merged with two additional magazines *Maintenance Engineering* and *Manufacturing Industries*, to form a new periodical titled *Factory Management and Maintenance*. Simultaneously, new schools of managerial thought emerged in the United States, particularly the Human Relations school with its emphasis on industrial psychology (see Trahair 1984). *Industrial Management* established a regular section on personality and employment issues and more specific magazines such as *System: The Magazine of Business* and *Personnel* were established (see Business Periodicals Index and Abrahamson 1997). Many of the subsequent scholars of organizations were readers and writers for these magazines.

The embryonic engineering/management ideas that were published in these magazines were later collected and collated in books, written by individuals such as Harrington Emerson (1909), Henry Gantt (1910), Alexander Hamilton Church (1914), Charles Bedaux (1917), Chester Barnard (1938), Luther Gulick and Lyndall Urwick (1937), James Mooney and Alan Reiley (1939), Fritz Roethlisberger and William Dickson (1941), or George Terry (1953). These books were read by sociologists, psychologists, engineers, political scientists, and became the seedbed from which discourse on rational organizations grew.

The historiography of OT claims that scattered managerial writings were revived after the middle of the twentieth century with the translation of Weber into English. In the following I discuss Weber's theory of rationality and show that this translation was in fact a cultural act of 'Americanization' resonating with the well organized, systematic engineering discourse about rational organizations. At the time of translation American sociology was predisposed to interpret Weber in a peculiar way, that diverged from the original assumptions of his theory. Weber's peculiar translation and its tremendous influence on the emergence of American OT should be understood in this ideological and epistemological context.

¹¹ This is not to say that some canonical scholars were unaware of politics and conflicts. Scott for example, allows for more irrationality, and struggles in his 'natural systems' or 'open systems' approaches as the title of his book implies.

6.2 THE SOCIOLOGICAL PILLAR: THE 'TRANSLATION' OF WEBER'S RATIONALITY INTO AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY

Max Weber provided one of the first systematic, secular formulation of rationality and rationalization in sociology.¹² Integrating liberal social theory with Neo-Kantian philosophy and the German institutional school of economics, his work resulted in methodological as well as historical observations about rationality.¹³ In his methodological writings, Weber suggested that systems of rationality can be reconstituted as ideal types for the study of social objects (Weber 1949; Bendix 1960). In his historical writings, he examined different aspects of rationality (e.g. action, decision, and systematized world views) and applied rationalization—the cultivation of rationality in western society in particular—to diverse spheres of life such as religion, law, economics, and music (Weber 1921/1968). Weber used the term 'Rationalisierung' ('rationalization') to designate the process by which this historical transformation was brought about.

Weber's impressive legacy on rationality generated, however, unbridgeable contradictions for sociology. Most noticeable are those between the universality of heuristic devices, on the one hand, and the idiosyncrasy of social processes, on the other; between the intentionality of action, on the one hand, and its unintended consequences, on the other; between Kantian-like 'objective' ideal types and the subjective meaning of action. Weber's analysis established well-known contradictions between the peculiar historical aspects of charismatic authority and the ahistorical nature of its routinization; between free choice or moral judgement and the constraints imposed by the iron cage of rationality; between the towering threat posed by mass discipline and domination versus their contribution to stability in an efficient social order; between the impersonal nature of instrumental rationality and the highly personal nature of value-rationality (Bendix 1960). Weber believed that only the coexistence of such negating perspectives—historical and ahistorical, subjective and objective, idiographic and nomological, normative and value neutral—provide sociology with tools to analyze the richness of social action in changing historical patterns.

Weber understood the impossibility of his position, and he reconciled himself to the limits of sociology as a peculiar cultural artifact (e.g. Weber 1921/1968). Sociology, he suggested, should suspend belief in systems of rationality in order to study them in their culturally specific conditions. As Merleau-Ponty pointed out: 'Weber is well aware that history as science is itself a product of history, a moment of

¹² For additional early treatments of rationality in sociology by Comte, Tonnies, Simmel, see Coser 1977.

¹³ See e.g. Prendergast (1986) on Carl Menger and the Austrian Economic School.

“rationalization” or of the history of capitalism’ (Feenberg 1981: 75). This suspension—a sociological bracketing not unlike Husserl’s ‘phenomenological reduction’—was introduced by Weber as a constitutive, a priori foundation of sociology as a science. But Weber, again, did not abandon his incommensurable dualisms. On the contrary, he foresaw that the strength of sociology as a discipline lies in maintaining this ambivalence. Grasping the complexity of social life, and rationality in particular, requires the co-existence of epistemological contradictions.¹⁴

Many intellectuals were subsequently intrigued with the nature of Weber’s dualistic sociological thought, but often ignored one dimension of his work or another. For example, Hungarian critic Georg Lukács dissected Weber’s methodological writings. In *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), Lukács provided a cultural critique of reification, arguing that Weber’s sociological ‘bracketing’ of rationality was incomplete, since he did not include sociology itself in its scope. In that sense, society, as well as the social sciences that study it, is no more ‘rational’ than it is totemistic. Lukács proposed to include the formal rationality of the social sciences themselves in this bracketing. Rationality should be perceived as a cultural logic that was reified, and not as a predisposed epistemological condition (Lukács 1923; Feenberg 1981; see also Dobbin 1994). In other words, Lukács (and most Critical Theorists as well as Berger and Luckmann 1966) preferred the ‘reflexive’ dimension of rationality over its reification in a rationalized social structure.

In contrast, a generation of American sociologists refused to accept the Janus-face features of Weber’s formulation and relied on the exact other end. Following Parsons (1947, 1949, 1951), they perceived Weber’s work as a ‘generalized theory of authority’ (Gouldner 1954: 18). They borrowed Weber’s thesis of the ascendancy of rationality, and left out his critical views. They subscribed to a reified prescription that emphasized the consensual and ahistorical nature of rationality, and abandoned the historical and phenomenological nature of Weber’s rationality.

There were at least two reasons for the wide acceptance of this uncritical account of Weber among American sociologists. First, it was closely linked with the nature of American social science and the manner in which it developed since the beginning of the century. Ross (1991) attributed much of its spirit to the ideology of American Exceptionalism that dominated the United States at the turn of the previous century. According to this ideology, the United States occupies a unique place in the history of the western world, and has a distinctive mission to perform which marked it off from the rest of the world. America was perceived as the only country in the world that was born perfect, since it had no indigenous feudal institutions. Its ‘inherent’ political principles of rationality, liberalism, and

¹⁴ It should be noted that Weber is sometimes credited for overcoming these contradictions. For the influence of German Idealist tradition as well as German Historicism on Weber, see Bendix 1960; Coser 1977. Most relevant is the debate regarding the so-called ‘Methodenstreit’ between Gustav Schmoller and Carl Menger. Those debates, however, are beyond the scope of this chapter.

democracy—together with affluence and a broad opportunity structure—provided a basis for a society that could escape the miseries of class struggle. As Hawthorn explains, the American Revolution was not a revolution against the ancient regime, as was the case in Europe, but rather an attempt to secure what began in a historical vacuum. In his own words, ‘America seemed already to have reached perfection. The past had been consolidated in a future whose integrity lay in remaining as much like the present as possible’ (Hawthorn 1987).

Progress was perceived as a quantitative multiplication of its founding institutions, not a process of qualitative change. This rhetoric—which rendered history unnecessary—abounded in popular American culture, media, and the social sciences throughout the nineteenth century. It was ‘the discursive frame within which the social sciences worked, the language which set their core problem and shaped the logic of their solutions to it’ (Ross 1993: 104). American social sciences lost their historicist orientation and modeled themselves after the natural sciences with an emphasis on the positivist methods of inquiry, and the ahistorical direction embedded in the classical ideology of liberalism. Ross (1991) further explains that given the belief that social classes did not exist and that American society was harmonious and rational, the social and political theory that developed was narrowly defined by the bounds of economic liberalism. Social order was believed to be based on rationality, harmony, and progress (Ross 1991).

To be sure, this view of sociology dates back to August Comte. Comte’s progressive/positivist vision was incorporated into American academia as early as the 1890s by the first President of the American Sociological Association, Lester Ward. In Comte’s philosophy, the chief dynamic force in history is the advancement of knowledge; scientific rationality, the most advanced form of knowledge, is thus the key to future progress. Comte’s positivist project was based on the competency of experts who provide administrative, economic, and social planning. Any knowledge that does not follow the systematization and the generalization of the sciences must be excluded. After all, science is socially defined as a set of objective rules that appear to exist outside any particular social system. Such objective rules seem to be unaffected by power or resource allocations among the group of people that make up the society (Gouldner 1976).

Indeed, the second volume of Ward’s *Dynamic Sociology* was devoted to the study of ‘sociocracy’ (analogous to ‘technocracy’—the application of social laws to produce order and progress). Sociocracy was to replace politics as the mechanism for governing society (Ross 1991). In the late 1890s, Edward Ross published several articles in the *American Journal of Sociology*, in which he developed the idea of sociology as a mechanism of ‘social control’. To maintain itself, society had to modify individual ideas, feelings, and behavior to conform, and to subordinate, private interests to social interests. Consequently, William Graham Sumner, then the first vice-president of the ASA, stated in his 1906 book, *Folkways*, that sociology ‘could lead up to an art of societal administration which should be intelligent,

effective, and scientific' (quoted in Ross 1991: 221). Despite his controversial evolutionism and social Darwinism, this statement placed Sumner within the sociological consensus of the time. It was a vision of science that promised prediction and control, tools that gave a technocratic spin to their conception of social roles and positions.

The role of sociologists as agents of social control spilled over also to industrial practice. In 1914, when Henry Ford faced grave organizational problems, he founded a Sociological Department that employed 250 people. Aiming to reduce a daily absentee rate that exceeded 10 percent; a 370 percent yearly turnover rate, requiring nearly \$2 million a year to train new workers; and fierce negotiations with one of the most militant unions in the country, Ford designed a new program for loyalty and conformity which paid \$5 a day to every 'qualified' employee (Marcus and Segal 1989). The Ford Sociological Department assumed the role of determining who was qualified to receive this remuneration. These agents of social control visited homes, interviewed friends, neighbors, and priests to determine who conformed with the code of conduct stressing family values, community values, thrift, and personal character. They used strict criteria for unsuitability and norms of exclusion: single young men, men who were engaged in divorce, those who did not spend evenings 'wisely', those who used alcohol, or those who did not speak English. They also gave lessons in home management to workers, taught them how to shop, and how to preserve moral values (Marcus and Segal 1989: 236–8). The role of these experts in controlling the worker population was a clear sociological experiment in social design. The Sociological Department served as an agent in the moral bureaucracy of the Ford Motor Company. Sociology as a form of social praxis, sought to establish rational control over human nature and society.

The peculiar interpretation of Weber in the United States is also due to the nuances of Talcott Parsons's translation of Weber to English (Parsons 1947; Cohen *et al.* 1975; Weiss 1983). Parsons's interpretation of Weber was mostly in line with the theoretical perspectives existing in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. His translation presented Weber as more concerned with value consensus and effective functioning than with the role of conflicting material interests in domination (Weiss 1983).¹⁵ The most well-known difference between Parsons's translation and these of other scholars is over the interpretation of the term *Herrschaft*. Several scholars translated the term as 'domination' (e.g. Gerth and Mills), while Parsons first translated it to be 'imperative coordination' and later as 'leadership' (see also Parsons 1942). Weber did not develop a model for effective functioning as Parsons implied, but rather worked on historical modes of domination. He developed 'a "model" of what "ought" to exist to be carefully distinguished from the analytical construct, which is "ideal" in the strictly logical sense of the term' (Weber 1949: 91–2). Whereas

¹⁵ Recently Kalberg (2001) argued that Parsons's translation of the Protestant Ethic also distorted Weber's text to a great extent. According to Kalberg, Parsons turned Weber 'into a structuralist thinker' which toned down Weber's vocabulary of conflict (2001: 2–4).

the former is a normative concept, the latter is a construct ‘which our imagination accepts as plausibly motivated and hence as “objectively possible” and which appear as adequate from the nomological standpoint’ (ibid.). It is this sense of possibility that is missing in Parsons’s interpretation of Weber.

The crux of Parsons’s misrepresentation of Weber is his overweening emphasis on the normative and the nomological dimension which led him to expand what is but a part of Weber’s sociology and made it very nearly the whole (Cohen *et al.*, 1975: 240). For example, he interpreted Weber’s instrumentally rational action as normative because means and ends are normatively selected (i.e. actors use ‘efficient norms’). By so doing, Parsons abandoned a crucial aspect in Weber’s dualistic framework, and expanded the normative (which indeed existed in Weber’s analysis) to become his entire scheme. Nobody would claim that Parsons was intentionally distorting Weber’s meaning. It was the unintended consequences of his attempt to provide American-specific conceptual consistency, not very apparent in the original, since Weber was an observer with ambivalent qualities.

Whereas critical European theorists (e.g. Lukács) promoted critical reflexivity, Parsons—and subsequent American sociologists—mobilized a reified notion of rationality into the foundations of his sociological and theoretical praxis. Weber’s ideal type of bureaucracy was treated as prescription for formal organizations and a recipe for corporate managers. Thus, American sociologists, ‘translated’ Weber—through a ‘shuttle’ that they wove together entirely of a different set of epistemological assumptions—to create a hybrid of different theoretical cultures (Latour 1993). This ‘translation’ which converged with the contours of the engineering/management discourse presented above was based on four strong assumptions about rationality, about history, about epistemology, and about ideology.¹⁶

Early OT scholars such as Blau (1955, 1956), Gouldner (1954), and Thompson (1967) assumed that Weber equated bureaucratic rationality with efficiency. In the 1987 edition of his book Scott suggested that: ‘Max Weber used the term to refer to that form of administrative organization that, in his view, was capable of attaining the highest level of efficiency! (Weber, 1947 trans.: 339)’ (Scott 1987: 24).¹⁷ Or as Merton asserted: ‘In his discussion, Weber is almost exclusively concerns with what the bureaucratic structure attains: precision, reliability, efficiency. The same structure may be examined from another perspective provided by the ambivalence. What are the limitations of the organizations designed to attain these goals?’ (Merton 1949/1957: 198). Weber’s bureaucracy was reified and was used as an

¹⁶ As for rationality, the term was used in its constructive, normative, and instrumental sense. As for history, American sociologists attempted to tame it and to incorporate it into the analytic scheme of the sociologist. As for epistemology, they suggested a full-blown identity between rationality in sociology and rationality of its subject matter. As for ideology, they provided little room for conflicts and ideological differences operating under the premisses of the liberal thought (see Shenhav 1999, for more elaborated discussion).

¹⁷ Scott himself was gradually aware of this misinterpretation. He made this point beginning with the 3rd edn of his book (1992: 44–5) and then much more strongly in the 4th edn (1998: 48–9).

ahistorical framework for effective functioning implying a performative intent in his scheme (Lyotard 1984).¹⁸ Fournier and Grey (2000) summarize the point: ‘Weberian tradition in US organization theory has been utilized primarily in normative organizational design terms rather than in terms of the critique of rationalization with which it is often associated in the UK’ (p. 14). It was the reflexive quality in Weber—which had the ability to look behind those whom he termed ‘social actors’—that was missing from the appropriation of his legacy by American sociology. Thus, while admittedly useful for organizational analysis, Robert Merton (1949; Merton *et al.* 1952) and Peter Blau, among others, incorporated Weber into a functionalist perspective and begun to study empirically the ‘dysfunctions of bureaucracy’.

This formulation opened the road for a multiplicity of questions and research problems—such as overconformity, effectiveness, and organizational design—attempting to test the limit of bureaucratic structures and thus endorsing the functional epistemology of rationality. Merton (1949) and Blau (1955) turned to the study of the ‘manifest and latent’ ‘functions’ of bureaucracy. Likewise, March and Simon (1958) examined bureaucratic decision-making processes and goal formations, and Gouldner applied what he conceived as a Weberian perspective to the analysis of ‘a modern factory administration’ (1954: 16). In their frame of reference, rationality was not to be used in the service of social critique, but as an *a priori* construct in sociological analysis, and an instrument for social management. Put differently, in this version of sociology the logic of rationality has been reversed. Rather than constituting an external object of study, rationality had become the prism through which the (social) world was conceived and understood.¹⁹

This was apparent in the way early interpreters juxtaposed Weber and the early engineering discourse. It should be recalled that the central objective of Max Weber’s essay on bureaucracy was not to provide advice to managers. Rather, he was addressing a theoretical debate carried out by Hegel and Marx concerning the nature of domination in capitalist society. Weber’s work sends a strong political and conflictual message to those who study organizations. He perceived bureaucracy first and foremost as a form of domination, an institution that is embedded in the history of conflict in western societies. Weber was intrigued by the strength and power of bureaucracy, one may even say bewitched, yet he alarmed his readers about its unexpected consequences. Ideally ‘rational’ in the Weberian sense was not

¹⁸ Blau and Scott, for example, represent this confusion arguing that Weber’s ideal-type construct of bureaucracy is ‘an admixture of a conceptual scheme and a set of hypotheses’ (1962: 33). Scott further explained: ‘the difficulty being that Weber does not clearly distinguish definitions from propositions in his model’ (Scott 1987: 44).

¹⁹ This has been taken to an extreme by the Structural Contingency School in organization theory. It is an imaginary tool-box that is used by theorists to plan and manage organizations. This school reproduces ideological and managerial artifacts that are culturally insensitive, historically ignorant, and politically blind (see Donaldson 1995; Shenhav 1996).

concerned with efficient performance, a meaning that was given to English-language readers by Parsons. The ideal type of bureaucracy was not a managerial manual but rather an analytical tool.

Alexander Hamilton Church and Frederick Winslow Taylor²⁰—as representatives of engineering discourse—were enamored with the omnipotence of bureaucracy too but—unlike Weber—they sent a strong apolitical message to those who study organizations. They perceived bureaucracy as an end in and of itself. Rather than alarming one with the unexpected consequences of bureaucracy, they offered it as a solution to ideological cleavages, as a non-political entity responding to the war between the classes. To them, bureaucracy meant steady, efficiently performing, and goal-oriented organization.

Canonical sociology of organizations accepted unquestionably the textual project produced by the systematizers. By hybridizing the two discourses, American organizational theory broke away from the Weberian legacy and fell deep into the trap of reification. Organizational rationality rhetoric conveniently excised the political biography of its own project. It emphasized a social ideology with a strong commitment to engineering standards, scientific doxa, and adherence to the belief that American society was approaching the ‘end of ideology’ (Bell 1960).

It is therefore not surprising that organization theory says very little about the deceiving role of rationality. It also does not say—probably could not say—that this rationality was different from the rationality expressed by Max Weber or by other political European scholars.

6.3 THE ENGINEERING/MANAGERIAL AND THE SOCIOLOGICAL JUXTAPOSED: THE CANON OF ORGANIZATION THEORY

It was with this spirit that organization theory constructed the image of organizations as systems. The concepts that emerged in the engineering/management discourse were canonized in organization theory, which was now infused with the ideological parameters that were born during the efforts to establish the legitimization of management.

²⁰I urge the reader to note that in the historiography of organizations, the conflictual history that preceded Taylor is edited out, and most books on management and organizations begin with Taylor’s principles of scientific management (for elaboration, see Shenhav 1999).

During the 1950s-1970s, a systems paradigm flourished in the organizations literature and it stimulated the imagination of enthusiastic researchers. It brought together sociological (Yuchtman and Seashore 1967), psychological (Katz and Kahn 1966), engineering (Galbraith 1973), and business school analysts (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967) to create a hybrid discourse. System was used in this literature as a heuristic device, a prescription, an analytic tool, a metaphor, a category of the mind, and an overarching analogy. This paradigm was congruent with the most common and intuitive expectations from functioning organizations.

Organizational scholars juxtaposed early management discourse with the prevailing epistemology in sociology to form a body of knowledge which was then axiomatized as OT. Paramount in this effort were Robert Merton (1957) and Alfred Chandler (1962) (Talcott Parsons's student at Harvard), as well as Alvin Gouldner (1954), Peter Blau (1955). Their pragmatic and hybrid epistemology entered organizational sociology and shaped its contemporary canon (e.g. Thompson 1967; Scott 1981). The following paragraph which is taken from a contemporary OT textbook represents this deeply hybrid epistemology which is rooted in engineering discourse:

A well-designed machine is an instance of a total organization, that is a series of interrelated means contrived to achieve a single end. The machine consists always of particular parts that have no meaning and no function separate from the organized entity to which they contribute. A machine consists of a coherent bringing together of all parts toward the highest possible efficiency of the functioning whole, or interrelationships marshaled wholly toward a given result. In the ideal machine, there can be no extraneous part, no extraneous movement; all is set, part for part, motion for motion, toward the functioning of the whole. (Ward 1964; quoted in Scott 1998: 33)

Or:

As in a mechanical system, organization systems are designed with a specific goal in mind, their operations are predetermined and their outcomes are rationally controlled. As in machines, organizations are evaluated according to criteria of efficient performance and are perceived as instruments to convert raw materials into final products. (ibid.)

This view is the outcome of the combined discourse produced by engineers and accepted by sociologists. The essence of this epistemology is particularly evident in two key concepts which form the backbone of Organization Theory: rationality and uncertainty.

Rationality, though a multi-faceted concept implying values and maxims of thought, as the previous discussion suggests, was reduced in organizational theory to its instrumental-technical dimension defined as complete knowledge of the consequences of choices that are predetermined by structural constraints (Simon 1957).²¹ In this literature, rationality can be secured by structures that reduce

²¹ There are exceptions of course. For example: Selznick (1949). For a critical analysis of the use of rationality in various branches of organization theory, see Dobbin 1994.

uncertainty and ambiguity (March and Simon 1958; Thompson 1967). Richard Scott best describes this reductionist approach:

organizations are instruments designed to attain specified goals... How blunt or fine an instrument they are depends on many factors that are summarized by the concept of rationality of structure. The term rationality in this context is used in the narrow sense of technical or functional rationality and refers to the extent to which a series of actions is organized in such a way as to lead to predetermined goals with maximum efficiency. Thus, rationality refers not to the selection of goals but to their implementation. (Scott 1998: 33)

Scholars of organizations decided to set aside substantive rationality, morality, politics, or ideology, and to focus on the search for techniques that link ends and means in the most efficient way. In this view, human action is a subset of 'instrumental rationality' alone, as it is subordinated to unspecified and transient 'external' objectives. According to this definition, instrumental action is rooted in desired outcomes and in beliefs about cause and effect relationships (Thompson 1967). I invoke Weber, who argued that instrumental rationality should also be considered against its non-instrumental consequences and vis-à-vis its political and ideological context. Choosing one side of the equation, as organization theorists have done, elevates instrumental rationality to a supreme position that gainsays attempts at critical assessment.

The troublesome role of instrumental rationality as sole arbiter of reality can be demonstrated by the supreme role assigned to it by Robert McNamara in the Pentagon of the 1960s (Waring 1991). In implementing Operations Research techniques, which were growing in popularity during and after World War II, McNamara fostered the misconception that America was winning the war in Vietnam. Under his influence, and that of his 'whiz kids', American political leaders viewed the conflict in managerial terms, by the use of figures, numbers, charts, and mathematical analyses. They aspired to use resources efficiently and defined their efficiency as kill-ratios. As Gibson suggested: '[The] American defeat in Vietnam was inherent in the managerial thinking that was institutionalized in the Pentagon and American society. Managerial techniques were perfectly applied, but to problems for which they were unsuited, and that was why America lost' (quoted in Waring 1991: 33). The question, of course, is not whether America lost or won. The issue at hand is the omnipresence of managerial activism at the time, and the precedence instrumental rationality was given over other modes of thought. These examples, among many others (see e.g. Bauman 1989), shed light on the dangers of legitimizing unlimited authority to a 'universal' managerial rationality without introducing political, cultural, and moral balances. This is exactly why Weber decided to keep the epistemological contradictions of 'instrumental' and 'critical' rationality alive together.

6.3.1 Uncertainty

The legitimacy of instrumental rationality was reinforced in OT by contrasting it with the threat associated with uncertainty. Organizations are conceptualized in OT as instruments of uncertainty reduction in their ability to secure stability, predictability, and precision. According to this view, the prevalence of uncertainty creates irregularities and complications in planning, standardization, precision, consistency, and causal linkage between means and ends. James Thompson paradigmatically links ‘rationality’ and ‘uncertainty’ as binary opposites (1967: 159):

Uncertainty appears as the fundamental problem for complex organizations, and coping with uncertainty, as the essence of the administrative process. Just as complete uncertainty and randomness is the antithesis of purpose and of organization, complete certainty is a figment of the imagination; but the tighter the norms of rationality, the more energy the organization will devote to moving toward certainty.

The concept of uncertainty assumed almost mythical and magical characteristics for organization theorists. For an organizational narrative constructed around the notion of rationality, uncertainty represented darkness and undesirability. It became a Pandora’s box of troubles: opportunism, labor unrest, shortsightedness, competition, and other enemies of the organizational order. The engineer, the manager, and the planner were set to the task of slaying the dragon of uncertainty. Their authority derived from their ability to cope with and reduce uncertainty.

Oliver Williamson, a leading contemporary organizational economist, most explicitly elaborated the theoretical framework that adopted this ideological position. According to Williamson’s fourfold framework, uncertainty-reduction and bounded rationality hold crucial importance for the understanding of ‘market failures.’²² His scheme suggests that given ‘bounded rationality’ (i.e. the limits of the human mind), it is very costly and sometimes impossible to determine all identifiable future contingencies. Transactions and long-term contracts may therefore be supplanted by hierarchies, which Williamson calls ‘internal organization’ (Williamson 1975: 9):

internal organization permits adaptations to uncertainty to be accomplished by administrative processes in a sequential fashion. Thus, rather than attempt to anticipate all possible contingencies from the outset, the future is permitted to unfold. Internal organization in this way economizes on the bounded rationality attributes of decision makers in circumstances in which prices are not ‘sufficient statistics’ and uncertainty is substantial.

‘Uncertainty’ and ‘uncertainty reduction’ are used here to legitimize the use of an instrumental definition of rationality (Weitz and Shenhav 2000; Shenhav and Weitz 2000; Weitz 1997). The root metaphor of uncertainty spawned a variety of strategies

²² The four concepts are: ‘bounded rationality’, ‘uncertainty’, ‘opportunism’, and ‘small numbers’.

and frameworks to fight, reduce, or adapt to uncertainty such as ‘buffering’ and ‘bridging’ strategies within the ‘resource dependence’ perspective (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), or ‘information processing’ or ‘information reduction’ strategies within the structural contingency perspective (Galbraith 1973).

Again, I argue that the seeds for the ‘uncertainty reduction’ and ‘bounded rationality’ frameworks were sown in late nineteenth-century engineering/management discourse about organizations. For example, the editors of the *American Machinist* maintained that it was the role of engineers to ‘serve humanity in the elimination of chance . . . [as] there are innumerable uncertainties to be cleared up.’ (*American Machinist*, 14, Apr. 1904: 479). They conceptualized the business enterprise as a unified whole that needed to be controlled and coordinated in a systematic, rational fashion, in light of ‘the chaotic state of factory practices.’ (*Engineering Magazine*, Jan. 1911: 496). They argued that systematization of organizations implies an attempt to transcend dependence upon the capacity of any single individual; it is instead to build a solution into the formal system to achieve ‘greater predictability in coordination’ and ‘forecasting’.

The rationale for systematization was made explicit in connection with the limitations of individual actors. In numerous articles at the turn of the century, the system was portrayed as superior to individuals in handling uncertainty. Harrington Emerson, for example, suggested that ‘the object of [organizational] records is to increase the scope and number of warnings, to give us more information than is usually received immediately through our senses.’ (*Engineering Magazine*, 1900: 392). Systematizer Horace Arnold argued, ‘If all men had absolutely infallible memories, and were incapable of making any statement at variance with those memories, it would be possible, perhaps, to carry on a successful and prosperous manufacturing business without the use of shop books or factory accounts’ (Arnold 1901: 9). A related, bounded-rationality argument can be found in the formulations of Alexander Hamilton Church. In Church’s view, the justification for systematization in the newly developed factories of the late nineteenth century rested upon the limitation of the human mind faced with exploding complexity. He argued,

The necessity for coordination is an inevitable result of the evolution of the factory, no one mind can grasp and hold all the details. (*Engineering Magazine*, 1900: 392)

And,

It is hardly too much to say that the evolution of a science of management was inevitable as soon as the scale of industrial operations became so great that no single manager, however, naturally gifted, could continue to control personally all the activities of the plant. (*Engineering Magazine*, Apr. 1911: 97)

Canonical organization theory—shaped by the epistemology of American sociology and the engineering discourse—adopted and disseminated the rhetoric, logic,

and epistemology that was produced by the agents under its study. Despite the ideological overtones embedded in ‘uncertainty’ and ‘bounded rationality’, in organizational theory the concepts were made neutral and universal, without reference to the specific cultural conditions of their origin. The conflict-laden history of management and organizations was edited out of the canon as represented in the reconstruction of the field presented in the outset by Scott (1998).²³

How can organization theory break away from the incestuous isomorphism with its subject? Berger and Luckmann, who were most concerned with this phenomenon, suggested that ‘reification is a modality of consciousness, more precisely, a modality of man’s objectification of the human world’ (Berger and Luckmann 1966). For phenomena to be taken as objects of social scientific explanation, they must first be stripped of the natural and concrete immediacy in which they appear to everyday consciousness. A reflexive sociology that rejects the reification of rationality—exerted by a growing corps of trained experts and enlightened bureaucracies—seems to hold the answer. Rather than viewing rationality as the ontological basis of society, it should be formulated as a cultural system with explicit reference to its capitalistic, bureaucratic, and scientific sources. This reflexive position undercuts the assumption that instrumental rationality is a universal ontological feature of nature and society.

A growing body of literature has begun to critique management along these lines in recent years. Following intra-paradigmatic (see Locke 1996), neo-Marxist (Marglin 1974; Braverman 1974; Edwards 1979; Clegg and Dunkerley 1980), and post-modern (Burrell 1988; Clegg 1990; Grey 1996) critique, this literature has established an alternative epistemological position for NATO (North American Theory of Organizations). Likewise a new critical outlet *Organization* was established mainly by European entrepreneurs-academics to give voice to heterogeneous views other than that found in the *Administrative Science Quarterly*.

Fournier and Grey (2000) offer a detailed analysis of this new body of literature known as ‘Critical Management Studies’ (CMS), the title first appearing in Alvesson and Willmott’s (1992) edited collection. CMS is mostly a tradition that emerged in the United Kingdom following the non-positivist, non-functional, and postmodernist trends prevalent among sociologists who joined the business schools during the 1980s and 1990s. Business schools, it should be emphasized are new to the United Kingdom, dating roughly to the 1960s (Whitley, Thomas, and Marceau 1981). Unlike the traditional American business schools they allowed for other voices to be heard and a wider range of theoretical options were opened: neo-Marxism, critical theory, post-structuralism, feminism, cultural studies, post-colonial theory, and deconstructionism (e.g. Czarniawska and Guje 1996;

²³ Labor and Industrial Relations and Organization Theory are two distinct academic research fields as if work is not occurring in organizations.

Czarniawska 2000). Fournier and Grey offer three criteria for the demarcation of the critical from the non-critical management studies.

First, they suggest that CMS are not governed by principles that subordinate knowledge to production and efficiency. In other words they do not seek to contribute to the effectiveness of managerial practice and organizations. As they argue: ‘the invocation of notions such as power, control and inequality typically betoken some form of critical approach, whilst efficiency, effectiveness, and profitability do not’ (p. 17). Furthermore, ‘what unites the very disparate contributions within CMS is the attempt to expose and reverse the work of mainstream management theory’ (p. 18).

Second, they suggest that CMS are engaged in deconstructing the reality of management and de-essentializing organizational discursive and non-discursive practices. As they argue: ‘whilst in mainstream management theories various “imperatives” are invoked... to legitimize a proposed course of action and to suggest... That “there is no alternative, CMS is committed to uncovering alternatives that have been effaced by management knowledge and practice”’ (p. 18).

Third, Fournier and Grey suggest that CMS employ philosophical and methodological reflexivity with the objectives of unmasking power relations and control structures. This critical endeavor is still in its infancy²⁴ and its impact is yet to be determined. I regard this chapter as an effort in this direction.

²⁴ Only in 1996 the British Academy of Management and only in 1998 the American Academy of Management established CM sessions for the first time (Fournier and Grey 2000: 28).

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