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DEVELOPING CRITICAL ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY: CONTEXT, PRACTICE, AND IMPLICATIONS

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Introduction: The inherent uncertainty of the historic turn

It is easy to forget that Peter Clark and Michael Rowlinson presented the term 'historic turn' in 2004 exactly that way – in inverted commas. They referenced the term to McDonald's (1996) edited collection, which brought together accounts of how historical research methods and means of analysis had changed understandings of social science fields such as political science, law, and sociology. As Clark and Rowlinson noted, the term historic turn was developed as part of an embedded ontological and epistemological shift away from realist functionalism and empiricist positivism in the social sciences. Their interpretation of it, however, specifically sought to *narrow* the turn to focus on its implications for the practice of history only. In particular, their argument is presented as "a warning for business historians to be wary of the apparent accommodation of history in organization studies" (2004: 332), because of the unsatisfactory nature of the 'historic turn' in organization studies at that moment.

Their measures of plausibility of the apparent turn in organization studies were specific: first, does it signal the production of knowledge according to narrative epistemologies rather than those grounded in the natural sciences? Second, is the turn really towards history in the terms that practitioners of that discipline would recognise? And third, is there a meaningful

engagement with historiography? Some forms of organization theory were found wanting, on all three measures. To these, we propose a fourth in this paper – the ability of historical analysis to inform critique. We add this for two reasons. First, we read Clark and Rowlinson's original discussion as implicitly concerned with critique – in this paper we simply foreground that possibility. Second, our reading of current historical debate, both empirical and historiographic, suggests that there is considerable potential for historically-oriented research and education to inform alternatives to the forms of market capitalism and modernist organization that are responsible for globally and existentially threatening developments such as overconsumption and climate change.

We therefore revisit Clark and Rowlinson's arguments to address a related but different question to theirs. We ask what is critical organizational history? And what are its implications? This is a critical moment to ask these questions, because all who practise historical analysis of organizations with the purpose of change are currently involved in mapping its constitution as we write it. Though our proximity to and involvement in it does make it difficult to understand its shape as an abstract, we can reduce the uncertainty by referring to groups of researchers who have written about critical approaches to historical analysis (Jenkins, 1991; Trouillot, 1995; Munslow, 1997; Scott, 2007; Ermarth, 2007; Stoler, 2009), critical management studies (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Fournier and Grey, 2000), or who have produced what they and we label as critical organizational history scholarship (Burrell, 1997; Cooke, 1999; Hanlon, 2015; Jacques, 1996; McKinlay, 2002). These people have left traces that allow us to assemble a sense of critical organizational history. In this paper, we follow these actors with the intent of enacting critical organizational history as a manifestation of aspects of a 'historic turn' (Clark

and Rowlinson, 2004) that engages organization analysis with historiography in its generative and restrictive forms. Doing this is important if we wish to renew and preserve a vital tool for critique in organization analysis: the reflexive theorization of organization as a means of challenging unreflexive, ahistorical scientism.

As all engaged in historical thinking know, context is an important if insufficient condition of understanding. Before we flesh out what we feel could be central aspects of critical organizational history, we build a context to help convey the importance of our objective (McLaren and Durepos, 2019). In the early 1990s (Zald, 1991) and beyond (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Booth and Rowlinson, 2006), there were frequent calls for more historical research. Though these calls did generate attention and emphasise the potential significance of historical analysis, scepticism has developed recently over the magnitude, impact, and even advisability of pursuing a 'historic turn', leading some to proclaim its end as a useful ideal (Kieser, 2015; Mills, Suddaby, Foster and Durepos, 2016). There has been a somewhat unsuccessful attempt at a wholesale transformation of organization analysis; however, calls and responses did invigorate those working with historical perspectives informally (Taylor, Bell and Cooke, 2009), the historicizing of management thought and education (Cummings, Bridgman and Brown, 2015; Cooke and Alcadipani, 2015; Cummings, Bridgman, Hassard and Rowlinson, 2017; McLaren, 2018), and the conduct of historically conscientious research (Jacques, 2006). The raised profile of historical research quickly unearthed philosophical differences between communities of researchers engaged in history work, as Clark and Rowlinson (2004) perhaps intended in their provocation to debate. Suddaby (2016), for example, comments on the differences in ontology and epistemology that exist among those currently engaged in historical

research. Lamond (2008), past editor of *Journal of Management History (JMH),* also called for historical work to be transparent of its epistemological and ontological roots. For some, explicit and implicit philosophical differences in approaches to history work lead only to stalled conversations caused by paradigmatic differences and an overall sense of field level fragmentation (Toms and Wilson, 2010). However, we work from the premise that there is a need for distinctive communities to express their 'sense of self' if we wish to learn from one another and co-construct a more compelling historical research agenda.

Attention to history and historical research is perhaps more familiar to those working in the Critical Management Studies (CMS) tradition. A substantial proportion of early calls for 'more history' (e.g. Zald, 1991, 2002; Rowlinson, Jacques and Booth, 2009; Jacques, 1996, 2006) were informed by a clear sense that the development of organization theory is best achieved through critique in some form. The journal *Organization*, one of the 'house journals' of the CMS community, recently published an *Editor's Picks* featuring historical research illustrated in 10 exemplary papers published between 1997 and 2017 (Durepos and Mills, n.d.). Historical research, or at least a sense of historicized change or stasis, is central to the work of many philosophers and social theorists who have inspired CMS scholars. Most obviously this is evident in Marx's historical materialism and how neo- or post-Marxists worked with that during the twentieth century, and Foucault (1969/1982), through the practice and theory of genealogy and archaeology, but also less obviously in Derrida's (1996) work, through the notion of deconstruction and a late engagement with the idea of the archive.

For these reasons, we believe that generating a sense of what *critical organizational history* might look like is ever more important. A description of potential aims, scope, and practice might also be useful to the broader field, as historical thinking in the sense that Clark and Rowlinson (2004) proposed continues to settle into place. This exercise also serves to remind the CMS community of the power of history to enable critique (Scott, 2005), and draws attention to the type of historical research needed to maintain momentum in that area. We are also clear as to the difficulties in this – hence some words of caution. First, the value in surfacing some characteristics of *critical organizational history* is largely heuristic. In practice, these aspects merge into one another and will (likely) never be enumerated as we have done here. The exercise we engage in here betrays the multitude of ways that these aspects are connected, and fuel one another. Second, given these ways of practising come largely from the critical perspectives that have solidified as a systematic approach to theorising organization over the last thirty years, they may not be new or surprising to members of that community. Hence, we look to a sympathetic reading of our purpose (constructively reviewing) and our approach (assembling relatively well-established themes for *their centrality to history* and showing *the centrality of history to them*).

With these contexts in mind, the paper and our argument proceed as follows. To trace the shape of critical organizational history, we next list and describe seven aspects of theorising that could inform its practice and, three implications of their application. In this, we follow the observation that research is work like any other, in the sense that it has an 'underside' that can be useful to examine. We provide depth to the notion of the turn, in the hope that we can regain some of the momentum that Clark and Rowlinson provoked almost fifteen years ago. It is important to note

that the first seven aspects of critical practice are evident in published research. Implications a, b and c are more speculative; they draw and build on the previous seven practices but suggest more generative potentials for historical analysis. Finally, we offer some closing thoughts.

1. A 'radical' philosophical approach

We describe critical organizational history as rooted in a radical philosophy, which we argue is both heterogeneous and heterodox. The heterogeneity is explained by the multitude of research traditions, each with varied ontological and epistemological assumptions, from which critical organizational history research stems (Jacques, 1996; Burrell, 1997; Cooke, 1999; Suddaby, Foster and Quinn Trank, 2010; Marshall and Novicevik, 2016; McKinlay, 2002; Mills, 1995; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Cruz, 2014). Because research traditions are not static, their heterodox nature is explained by the many fleeting configurations that they have assumed in different places and throughout time, as broader political and cultural forces influence them. Far from comprehensively tracing these traditions historically, our goal here is to make a few illustrative comments about the diversity of philosophical lenses that could inform critical organizational history.

Research grouped within critical organizational histories has been inspired by Marxian historiography as well as traditions of the 'post' (Prasad, 2005). Examples include critical histories rooted in postmodernism (Burrell, 1997), also evident in Üsdiken and Kieser's (2004) reorientationalist approach, postmodern feminism (Mills, 1995; Durepos, McKinlay and Taylor, 2017), poststructuralism (McKinlay, 2002; Marshall and Novicevik, 2016), and postcolonialism

(Cooke, 1999; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Cooke and Alcadipani, 2015; Decker 2013, 2014; Cruz, 2014). Marxist historians, for example, have tended toward a more realist view of history, emphasising its structure and materialism (Jenkins, 1995). Because many Marxist historians embraced and fuelled postmodern thought after the work of Foucault, Derrida and Rorty, postmodernism has arguably been composed of those on the ideological left. But as Jenkins (1995) explains, postmodern thought is also composed of those from the liberal centre. In acknowledging the historicity of postmodernism, Ermarth (2007) emphasises the role of poststructuralism, as a strand of postmodern thought, in forging a path to practice history as critique. Scott (2007: 21) stresses this point in her argument that to engage in critique, "poststructuralist history is not only possible, but necessary." Critique has also been achieved by adopting a postcolonial lens to problematize the geopolitics of marginality, expose deep seated "degrees of humanity" and surface otherwise silenced peoples (Trouillot, 1995: 81; Stoler, 2009). Suffice it to say that the research traditions that inform critical organizational history are heterogeneous. Despite this heterogeneity, shared characteristics unite the research we group within critical organisational history.

A shared characteristic of the research we have called critical organizational history is its relationship with positivism, the dominant epistemological approach of the 19th century. While some critical organizational history research is anti-positivist, all of it is certainly postpositivist. Zald (2002) provides reasons for this in his explanation of the disciplinary trajectory of the social sciences from the 19th century onward. As the social sciences became increasingly aligned with the natural sciences and thus positivism, it moved away from the humanities and history. The

consequences of this disciplinary alignment have been significant. Zald (2002: 367) claims that positivism "marginalizes history."

Positivism marginalizes history through its preoccupation with objectivity (Scott, 2005, 2007; Munslow, 1997; Jenkins, 1991, 1997, 2009). In claiming that history can and should mirror the past as it actually happened, the subjectivity of referentiality and choices made by historians are ignored. Furthermore, positivism marginalises history in its focus on singularity (one version of the past). This approach denies the many choices of representation available to historians as they consider options of configuring the past into historical narrative. Postmodern researchers with an interest in history have emphasised that the past and history are socially and discursively constructed, but certainly not found (Foucault, 1991; White, 1985; Ermarth, 2007; Munslow, 1997; Jenkins, 1995, 2009). Their focus has been on narrative structures and modes of emplotment (White, 1973). Munslow (1997: 37) describes the latter as "strategies of explanation" which are socially created, historically contingent and thus continually shifting in composition (Jenkins, 1995, 2009; Munslow, 1997). Those who take an interest in the craft of historical construction select from a list of modes of emplotment (White, 1985) to organize the events and evidence in a narrative form. Far from mirroring the past as it happened, these narrative structures are infused with the ideological lens of the historian.

These decisions concerning how to represent the past are connected to how one chooses to *see* the past-as-history. These decisions have ontological consequences. The ontological lens of those writing what we have called critical organizational histories is heterodox, but shares characteristics nonetheless. We would argue that most critical organizational histories tend

9

toward nominalism. They are written with the assumption that there is no 'realist' past that exists in concrete form, and outside our mental appreciation of it. Thus, there is no past to which history corresponds, exactly. This is not to deny that the past happened. But given it is past, what we are left with are material and nonmaterial traces that we can use to reassemble it (Jenkins, 1995). Reassembling the past occurs textually, thus by writing and reading history (Mills, Weatherbee and Durepos, 2014). In their textual turn, many postmodernists and poststructuralists have emphasised that there is no reality outside of text (Jenkins, 1995; Munslow, 1997). Postcolonial scholars have emphasized the need to problematize the historical text and the archives upon which it draws to show that it reveals as much as it conceals (Trouillot, 1995; Stoler, 2009). All we have are representations which do not exist independently of the processes through which we assemble them in the present. Our representations rely on incomplete and ideologically positioned archival traces and are assembled against a background of cultural, political and economic forces that inevitably shape what is deemed attention-worthy (Munslow, 1997). Far from essentializing the past, many writing from traditions of the post argue that the past has no meaning in and of itself (Jenkins, 2009).

If critical organizational history is to develop as a genre, we argue that researchers must be explicit about the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that inform their work. Scott (2005, 2007) has critiqued the (mainstream) academic discipline of history for being resistant to theory. She notes that this type of history aspires to theoretical neutrality, with an assumption that the past can and should be described as it happened. Following White (1985) and Munslow (1997), we emphasise the impossibility of knowing the past as it actually happened. This is because the past is an ontological absence and writing it as history implies transformations by ideologically

situated historians who interpret, theorise and emplot it as narrative (Coraiola, Foster and Suddaby, 2015). Not only is using a theoretical lens to transform the past into history inevitable, we argue that it is one step on the road to using history as critique. As Lamond (2008) notes, understanding the philosophical assumptions that underpin histories is important and necessary.

2. Progressive ideology and agenda

Though the philosophical approaches that underpin critical management research are heterogeneous, we argue that critical management scholars are united in their 'leftist' progressive ideological commitments – a deep-seated set of values and beliefs that orient research towards development of better worlds. This point of view has implications for research agendas, the subject of study, and how that subject is approached. Zald (2002) offers that the 'left ideology' of critical theory has changed in time, but overall it has featured a critique of neoliberalism, as well as the dark side of capitalism and globalization. This includes, but is not limited to, a problematization of system rationalization, efficiency for the sake of profit maximization and, a widening income gap leading to increasing poverty, migration and displacement that comes with personal costs. It involves looking at power and power differentials. The point has been to write-in the narrative of those marginalized, missed or silenced including the neglected roles of gender, class, and ethnicity as well as the role of geopolitical boundaries in the construction of knowledge.

In following the agenda of CMS, doing critical organizational histories involve *writing from* the left. Following Cooke (1999) this also involves, w*riting-in* the left. Our point is that doing

historical research is an impactful vehicle to enact a leftist ideology. What does writing

historically from the left look like? Examples are plentiful, ranging from Marx to those found

within CMS including Jacques (1996), Burrell (1997) and Cooke (1999). Writing historically

from the left allows for problematizing hegemonies, inequities and situations of marginalization.

It allows us to surface histories "of the hidden" (Burrell, 1997: 14) including those of women at

work (Mills and Helms Mills, 2018) and voices from the global South (Cruz, 2014; Cooke and

Alcadipani, 2015). It helps us expose, through time, the conditions and practices that persist in

keeping some communities outside of popular perspective. Archival ethnographies (Decker,

2013, 2014; Coller, Helms Mills and Mills, 2016) have exposed how exclusions occur at the

archive. Exclusions and therefore silences are manifest because collection and preservation are

cultural practices (Farge, 1989/2013; Trouillot, 1995; Barros, 2016) and the collection

composition is often impacted by "survivor bias" (Schwarzkopf, 2012: 7; Manoff, 2004;

Coraiola, 2012). Aside from writing-in the past of those marginalized, Cooke (1999) reminds us

that a leftist historical agenda can surface the politics of knowledge creation that through time,

reify dominant narratives. Following Marshall (1992: 4), critical organizational histories are

and should be histories about those "forgotten, hidden, indivisible, considered unimportant,

changed, eradiated." Realizing critical organizational histories must necessarily rely on a more

theorized view of the archive (Schwarzkopf, 2012; Mills and Helms Mills, 2011).

Our point thus far has been to suggest that writing historically *from* and *in* the left fuels a critical

organizational history agenda, but it comes with a caveat. The caveat involves a need to be

explicit about the ideological intentions of organizational histories. This means including as part

of the narrative 'for whom' the history is written, in 'whose interests' it is constructed as well as

'by whom' is it authored (a point we take up below in our discussion of reflexivity). As Jenkins (1995: 22) notes, "History is always history for someone." If only due to logistics, the past cannot speak for itself and cannot study itself for its "own sake" (Jenkins, 1997: 16). It is always history for the ideological sake of someone or something whether women, race or ethnicity or, even neoliberal capitalism. This brings us to the deeper motivation supporting our caveat. Being explicit about our leftist ideology not only surfaces, in a reflexive way, our ideological intentions, but also a broader ideological spectrum along which the motivations of *all* histories can be traced. After all, the criticism that the 'left' is 'ideological' (biased) is only supported by comparison to those histories on the ideological 'right' or 'centre,' which arguably come with their own agendas and thus, ideologies (Jenkins, 1995, 1997, 2003). We agree with Ermarth (2007: 52) who (like Jenkins, 1995 and Munslow, 1997) has disputed that history can ever be a "culturally neutral task." Neither neutral or innocent are the archives upon which histories often rely (Manoff, 2004; Schwarzkopf, 2012). Being explicit about ideological motivations is the road to exposing an ideological spectrum along which all histories can be placed. Finally, it is the road to de-bunking the idea of ideologically neutral histories.

3. Reflexivity

Critical organizational histories aspire to reflexivity and give us an opportunity to write reflexively. This point is related to our two previous points about philosophical positioning (critique of objectivity and positivism) and ideology (historian writing-in their vantage point). The need for reflexivity has been noted in business and management history (Rowlinson, Jacques and Booth, 2009) but also more broadly in postmodern (Ermarth, 2007) and postcolonial

historiography (Trouillot, 1995; Stoler, 2009). Reflexive writing can be achieved by writing in a "personal voice" (Ermarth, 2007: 64) as opposed to adopting a neutral, third person voice that promises "vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully" (Haraway, 1988: 584). Reflexivity involves presenting research as a situated outcome (both in time and place) of a researcher, who is influenced by her professional background, training and ideology. It involves active reflection and explicit comments in the research write-up on how the research was shaped by the researcher, thus how the researcher engaged in choices of representation. Alvesson and Willmott (1992: 456) comment on the importance of reflection, including on representations of the "object" but also on the "authority of critique." They warn about the "dangers associated with an exchange of the authority of one account for the authority of another" (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 456). If this authority is achieved through the hallmarks of positivism, including an appeal to generalizability in which research results are deemed applicable universally, then situating research as an outcome of a time, a place and a community would serve to limit its applicability, respectively.

Our suggestion for critical organizational histories to (continue to) promote an ethic of reflexivity is based on two related points. First, there exist excellent examples in CMS on which we can draw to show what is reflexive historical research (Barros, Carneiro and Wanderley, 2018; Stutz and Sachs, 2018). A classic example is Burrell's (1997) Pandemonium. Burrell (1997: 6) states explicitly that he refuses "to hide behind the impersonal authorial mask" and he urges us "to reject all those who seek to do so." Instead, Burrell (1997: 6) encourages us to celebrate our "own self-aware journey through reality." If we accept that organizational historians are inescapably a part of the narrative of the past they construct, then writing

reflexively is the way to reveal histories' moulding hands. It is the way to expose 'authorial masks,' and thus, expose the author of supposed neutral third-person histories (Jenkins, 2003). Illustrating histories as constructed and ideological destabilizes claims of history as reality. As Jenkins (2003) notes, it is the appeal to the authority of the 'real' that hides the organizing framework responsible for its emergence, composition and representation as 'real'. Reflecting on the process of constructing our research becomes central to both debunking appeals to the 'real' and writing reflexively. And this brings us to our second point: reflexivity necessitates an engagement with history. To be reflexive, we must examine the past.

Being reflexive in research requires reflection on past choices of method, epistemology, ontology, historical traces, literature and etc., beyond a passing justification. It involves reflecting on how those past choices, and the researcher who made them, have shaped the resultant narrative. This involves exposing the process and various decisions through which the research has been shaped. It situates research as a product of a present-centered researcher, whose worldview, choice of words, academic categories, dialect and concerns are shaped by conventional discourses. Barros et al., (2018) explain that not only is reflexivity needed at the moment of writing history but also in relation to the archive. Alvesson and Willmott (1992: 460) suggest the danger of a lack of "critical reflection" is overlooking how ones' "ideology and autonomy is historically (situationally) accomplished." Being reflexive exposes the limits of the research and the boundaries of its applicability. To the extent that it creates an opportunity to question or debate past choices, reflexivity could be said to involve continuous self-critique. Based on this, one could claim the objectives of CMS, reflexivity and historical research as mutually reinforcing.

4. Denaturalization

Denaturalization is a significant theme of CMS research (Fournier and Grey, 2000) and we suggest it could be central to the agenda of critical organizational history. Denaturalization in CMS implies showing that research and its results could be otherwise. It involves problematizing a present composition or event as not 'natural' and not 'given in the order of things'. It means disturbing the 'false necessity' of a condition, event or situation to propose, "things may not be as they appear" (Fournier and Grey, 2000: 18). In CMS research, there is concern to expose the "un-naturalness" (Fournier and Grey, 2000: 18) of phenomenon and situations by presenting alternatives that, historically, have been effaced by conventional (mainstream) management practice. We suggest that pursuing research to denaturalize management and organizational phenomena is done most effectively through an appeal to history: denaturalization is achieved by historicising.

Historical research is well positioned to denaturalize management knowledge and organizations by re-writing their past-as-history in a way that disrupts what seems obvious, taken for granted and self-evident. Doing history is one way to show *how* it could be otherwise and *what* the otherwise might be. (Re)writing history allows for problematizing origins, to show that starting points are not natural or given but constructs effected culturally and sedimented through time. Problematizing what is presented as having *naturally* and *linearly* evolved from its origin has been a focus of ANTi-History, as developed by Durepos and Mills (2012a, 2012b). Tracing an alternative path from the past can aid in destabilizing what is taken as given in the present. We

offer that historical denaturalization can happen in two ways, first by denaturalizing dominant organizations and second, by denaturalizing dominant historiography.

Denaturalizing dominant organizations implies (re)doing or (re)writing organizational histories that expose their alternative and potentially problematic pasts. The objective is to destabilize a conventional organizational memory, heritage, legacy, image, power, and legitimacy. Denaturalizing dominant organizational histories implies (re)writing in what has been left out to help fill voids and provide a voice to those silenced or marginalized. It can also be done through problematizing the voids and silences by tracing, through time, the politics of knowledge construction that have led to the erection of dominant and current taken-for-granted accounts. The point is to trace the past of an organization to outline counter-narratives, to offer alternative accounts of the organization's history that disrupt its conventional constitution and image today. There are excellent examples of historical denaturalization in CMS. These include Mills (1995) who problematizes the historical treatment of gender at British Airways, Shaffner, Mills and Helms Mills (2019) who surface problematic (non)representations of women and aboriginals at Qantas, Ruel, Mills and Helms Mills (2019) who reveal the marginalized experience of women in the space industry, Rowlinson (2002) who exposes slavery at Cadbury as well as Booth, Clark, Delahaye, Procter and Rowlinson (2007) who illustrate the role of Bertelsmann in the Holocaust. These researchers rely on creative methods and draw on theorized uses of the archive to expose silences. Coller, Mills and Helms Mills (2016) explain the process of surfacing gender at British Airways in their ANTi-History inspired archival ethnography. Ruel, Mills and Helms Mills (2019) supplement their archival based history with an autoethnography that draws on Ruel's experience as a space flight manager.

Denaturalizing dominant historiography, on the other hand, is focused on disrupting mainstream ways of researching and writing organizational history. Scott (2005) and Ermarth (2007: 64) note the idea is to "forswear any pretense of 'naturalness' in the enterprise of writing history." Thus, the intent is less to look at the image of the organization conveyed through the history (like denaturalizing dominant organizations) but instead to disrupt mainstream ontologies, epistemologies, and methods as well as the idea that they offer the *only way* to do historiography. We define historiography as the sum total of research, writing and conventional understandings in currency at a particular point in time and on a particular subject, as well as the multitude of mechanisms historians employ to transform the past into history (Marwick, 2001; Jenkins, 1995). We envision denaturalizing dominant historiography by disrupting the mainstream idea that history is objective knowledge of the past, and by destabilizing the ability and desire to truthfully represent the past-as-history (this is related to our first point on epistemology). This can be done in at least two ways. The first suggestion is to denaturalise chronology and its organizing principle of linearity as the dominant structural design used to configure past events into historical narrative form (Jenkins, 2009). As Burrell (1997: 8) warns, "linearity kills." The task we envision for critical organizational history is to systematically remove the mask of naturalness that plagues stories that link a previous event to a subsequent one in a linear and uncontested way. We agree with Foucault (1991: 88) who notes, the "traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracting the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled." The second suggestion is to explore alternative modes of emplotment or structural designs on offer to organize past events into a historical narrative. White (1973, 1985) provides a historical description of the many

18

modes of emplotment on offer to configure past events into a narrative form, many of which are grounded in epistemologies and ontologies informed by the left or traditions of the post. The goal is to theorize historical narrative (Mordhorst and Schwarzkopf, 2017; Rowlinson, Hassard and Decker, 2014) to expose that "narratives are necessarily emplotted in a way that life is not" (Trouillot, 1995: 6) and counter potential instances of "narrative imperialism" (Maclean, Harvey and Stringfellow, 2017: 1218). What using alternative modes of emplotment and theorizing narrative teaches us, is that the past configured as history can always be otherwise if only due to our shifting choice of emplotment or our ever-changing present vantage point which frames how and what we see of the past (Rowlinson, Casey, Hansen and Mills, 2014). To summarize, we suggest that denaturalizing dominant organizational histories (including the archives upon which they rely) and dominant historiographies could feature on the agenda of critical organizational history. In addition, these objectives show how CMS and history are inextricably bound.

5. Anti-performative

Another significant theme of CMS as noted by Fournier and Grey (2000) is anti-performativity. Fournier and Grey (2000) explain a performative agenda as one where knowledge production is inspired by and contributes to an ethos of efficiency as envisioned by neoliberal capitalism, thus maximum production (output) with minimum resources (input). The ethos of performativity has become naturalized in mainstream management, such that it "is taken as an imperative towards which all knowledge and practice must be geared" (Fournier and Grey, 2000: 17). Thus, management and its daily practice have become taken-for-granted as performative. This means the very definition of management has come to imply creating knowledge of and engaging in

practices that improve efficiency and effectiveness. Knowledge that contributes to these aims, in the spirit of capitalism, is often assumed to serve the ends of business. But, because it is disinterested from any one businessperson's agenda, it is assumed as objective. Through time, the equation of capitalist management, which links efficiency with effective use of resources, has assumed a status of uncontested truth. When the ethos of performativity in management is questioned, if it is questioned at all, the critique is levelled at improving workplace efficiencies as opposed to a wholesale critical analysis of the negative impacts of workplace initiatives that reduce already squeezed human resources, but still expect maximal outputs. Anti-performativity, as a theme of CMS research, encourages us to view performativity as "morally suspect" (Zald, 2002: 379). Our goal, as reminded by Alvesson and Willmott (1992: 458) is to question any knowledge that, through time, "reduce[s] human nature to a more or less sophisticated form of economic rationality." Critical historical analysis can assist in disrupting performativity in at least three ways.

First, the idea of historical anti-performativity can be useful to question organizational histories that adopt an organizing framework of progress and profit accumulation. In the latter, events assume their significance and therefore feature in the organizational history by virtue of their role and importance in increasing efficiency and profit. Organizational events that bear no relationship to efficiency or profit are deemed less significant. For example, some mainstream business histories relay storylines that organize events around the accumulation or decline of wealth or profit. Organizational histories whose content features an overt focus on the economic function of business, and that adopt this storyline as their organizing principle serve to normalize business' primary function as an instrument of profit maximization. These business histories

fuel modern capitalist agendas by tracing past management practices in a way that draws on but also serves to justify current management practices as natural and uncontested outcomes of the past. To destabilize performative organizational knowledge through time, we must write anti-performative histories that decenter the profit imperative, both in content but also in plot (or, as White, 1973, 1985 has termed it, emplotment). Our suggestion is to write histories that do not privilege, elevate or celebrate the profit imperative, but focus on other organizational events like forgetting corporate irresponsibility (Mena, Rintamäki, Fleming and Spicer, 2016). Maclean, Harvey and Clegg (2016) suggest other purposes and emplotments for doing organizational history like conceptualizing and narrating. We see the goal of critical organizational history as slowly disassociating the notion of management from the profit imperative. A less subtle approach could entail rewriting performative organizational histories that expose plots which feature the organizations' rise to power or profitability as constructed but also contested.

A second way to leverage ideas of anti-performativity is in relation to corporate archives and the documents they contain. If we agree that capitalist business practices are performative, then so too are the documents they produce. It is these documents that eventually get housed in the corporate archive. Adopting an anti-performative ethos in our research allows us to think critically about what traces are present and absent in the archive as well as the stories these traces inevitably support. It attunes our focus to the socio-politics embedded in the archive's emergence and resultant collection.

A third way that anti-performativity can be mobilized by drawing on history involves questioning a popular mainstream justification for doing business history that is, studying the

past for the purpose of improving future efficiency and profitability. Anti-performative histories question the formula that knowledge of the past should assume utility to the extent that it can improve present and future business efficiencies. To destabilize performative histories, we must make explicit the aims of performative histories and ask who gains and loses when a history is only studied for sake of improving efficiency, where efficiency is informed and justified by a modern capitalist agenda.

6. Emancipation

Emancipation is a theme central to CMS research. Linking the concepts of emancipation and history was integral to the work of Marx (1932/1964) and Frankfurt School Critical Theorists, whose ideas have inspired generations of critical management scholars. Emancipation is understood as an individual or collective process through which freedom from constraints including oppressive social, ideological, and exploitive economic conditions are realized. Alvesson and Willmott (1992) explain the concern of critical theory with constraints on human consciousness and its potential to become liberated, and thus emancipate through self-knowledge and enhanced awareness. Alvesson and Willmott (1992: 438) note, "human reason is an emancipatory force that is constrained and distorted by historical conditions." It follows that historical analysis has an important role to play in the capacity for people to self-liberate through fostering an awareness of how their past imposes constraints on their (collective) consciousness. These efforts could lead to a transformation of collective human reason, but historical analysis would have to be leveraged purposively. We envision two ways in which the notion of emancipation can play a role in the critical organizational history research agenda.

We feel there is emancipatory potential at the very moment in which we make choices as researchers. Following this, our first suggestion involves exploring the *how* of history, that is, the process through which histories are constructed. This involves the choice of which archives to consult, historical documents to draw upon (in and beyond the archive), methods to use, as well as choices in how to write-up or even read history. In each of these decisions on how to conduct the research, we offer there is emancipatory potential in that one can liberate themselves from constraints of dominant ontologies, epistemologies, method selection or how they are used, choice of participants, as well as which and how the voice of participants are included in the organizational history publication. If we move away from the belief that our role as researchers is to accurately and truthfully (singularly) mirror the reality of the past of an organization to consider our role as one of creating plausible narratives, we can begin to welcome the idea of plural voices, recognize silences, and different versions of the past. This opens the possibility for including all types of organizational actors into our historical narrative and to describe events through actors' voices while lending (a cautious) voice to those silenced in the process of history production. Trouillot (1995: 26) suggests that silences enter the production of history at four moments: 1) where the fact is made; 2) where the facts are assembled (the making of archives); 3) where the fact is retrieved (the making of narratives); and 4) where "retrospective significance" is assigned. Each moment offers potential for emancipation. Surfacing silences and understanding individual actors' voices can be done through a focus on local meanings and beliefs while placing these within a larger social, cultural, economic and historical context (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). If we begin with the assumption that actors' versions of events are socially and historically contingent, we can reflect critically with actors on the nature of those

constructions. Additionally, we can support local voices such as those from the South, where actors speak for themselves (Cooke and Alcadipani, 2015). Either way, representations of actors' versions of events should be fluid and contingent. Not only should we expose as part of our narrative that the fixity of our words conceals the fluidity of our historical narrative, we can invite the reader to read fluidly. Connected to their point on the absence of foundational truths 'out there' waiting to be discovered, Jenkins, Morgan and Munslow (2007) note that reading must be done in a way that acknowledges that texts lack a universal and solid meaning. Jenkins (2003) encourages us to read creatively and engage in the moment of un-decidability. The latter implies embracing a moment of pause, where we weigh and construct alternative courses of action (to that which is found on the page). This means acknowledging the dominant and pre-formulated sets of rules that guide our academic enterprise and not de-facto falling back on these rules without thorough consideration (Jenkins, 1999). As Ermarth (2007: 60) notes, the moment of a decision to write and emplot a history is a "constrained moment of choice when we can either replicate conventional usage or depart from it." Acknowledging that we have choices (including those at Trouillot's (1995) four moments of historical production) and embracing the moment of 'un-decidability' when making research choices gives space for creativity in how we can become liberated (Stoler, 2009).

A second way that historical analyses can fuel an emancipatory management research agenda is by developing content (the *what*) that challenges class conscientiousness, improves self-knowledge and aids in heightening awareness about constraining social, ideological, environmental and economic constraints. Organizational histories can be written to influence, educate and create awareness surrounding marginalized populations. An example is Mills'

(1995) work on gender at British Airways. Critical histories of management thought can be

written to introduce voices from the South into the dominant narrative on the past of MOS, an

example being Wanderley and Faria's (2012) account of Furtado's role in the trajectory of the

academic field of strategy. The latter provides an excellent example of a history that can assist in

ideological emancipation. Critical organizational history can expose archival absences and aid in

the liberation from unnecessary "traditions, ideologies, assumptions, power relations, identity

formation, and so forth, that inhibit or distort opportunities for autonomy, clarification of genuine

needs and wants, and thus greater and lasting satisfaction" (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 435).

7. Beyond critique

A common criticism waged against CMS research has been its negativism (Alvesson and

Willmott, 1992; Zald, 2002); namely, that it infrequently moves the agenda beyond critique.

CMS has been reproached for engaging in critiques of positivist knowledge, neoliberal

capitalism, social irresponsibility, and inhumane workplace practices as well as systems

rationality, etc., with little effort dedicated to imagining and suggesting alternatives. Though

critique is central to any academic agenda, the large focus on critique in CMS research has been

said to reduce its relevance for mainstream audiences. In the same way that CMS researchers

have been encouraged to move beyond critique to imagine alternatives, so too should critical

organizational history. This can be done by constructing alternative histories that seek not only

to negate, but also to problematize and revise as part of the task of reimagining and rewriting.

Productive critical organizational histories can engage with mainstream organizational studies by

historicising management knowledge and education, thus demonstrating its relevance

(Cummings and Bridgman, 2011; Cummings et al., 2017; McLaren, 2018). Critical histories

could assume importance in their potential role in keeping CMS in dialogue with current

theoretical and conceptual dilemmas in MOS. To the extent that critical organizational histories

are theoretically informed, the latter could engage productively with mainstream management

history to debate the merits of theoretical historiography (Coraiola et al., 2015).

The seven points above surface aspects of practicing critical organizational history. In the last

three sections, we outline implications that demonstrate the underside of theorizing historically.

We suggest the three implications are central to critical analysis and that, understood and

practiced collectively, would provoke considerably more critical organizational history.

a. History is enactive

To say that research is *enactive* implies that it participates in bringing into being what it

describes. Law and Urry (2004: 390) note that social inquiry, research methods and academic

categories are "productive" in that they do not simply describe social worlds but through that

very description, help generate realities. We have already hinted that our social and historical

inquiries are products of networks that include researchers, archival traces and research

participants. ANTi-History has shown that not only are they socially and historically situated but

as these networks produce history, they meddle in making and re-making certain 'realities' in a

variety of places (Durepos, 2015). Corrigan (2016), for example, traces three competing historic

enactments of the Black community of Africville, located in Halifax, Canada. In 1960, the

Halifax municipality destroyed Africville's infrastructure in the name of land re-vitalization and,

carelessly re-located its residents. Over the years, the Halifax municipality budget committee has engaged in a series of budgetary disputes concerning fund allocation to Africville. Corrigan (2016) explains that the municipality budget committee, over time, enacted three competing histories of Africville: historical neglect, historical aggression and historical romance. Funding decisions have varied based on the sensemaking of the budget committee and which of the three narratives were endorsed at that particular time. Corrigan (2016) shows that in providing his own version of the story of Africville, he meddles in the enactment of those realities of the past. The three stories performed in the Halifax municipality budget sessions and Corrigan's (2016) telling of them serve to reinforce those narratives and make the three realities (of the past) stronger. The suggestion that histories are enactive is an ontological claim. If social and historical inquiry helps to reinforce certain realities, then as researchers we can and should think about the worlds we wish to describe. This is because we participate in the decision concerning what can and should be brought into being through our research. We have choices.

Why is the proposition that 'research is enactive' relevant for organizational history? We propose that as pieces of research, organizational histories too are enactive. Beyond suggesting, as did Foucault, that language plays a formative role in the constitution of the past (Munslow, 1997), we offer that the emplotment of the past as historical narrative has a shaping role in how *we come to see* the past. Organizational histories help to bring into being what they describe. In recounting certain realities but not others, they help to reinforce those realities. This paper serves as an apt example in that it offers one account of the composition of a field which we call critical organizational history. This paper helps to bring into being what it describes. Histories, and the realities they describe are rooted in, formed by and enactive of the past and consequently, the

present. This is because, as Jenkins (2003: 35) explains, the past and history is like a "containing object" in which we are always immersed. We can never get out or away from our past because it surrounds us, but it is also in us (Jenkins, 2003). Our interpretation or enactment of our past frames our conditions of possibility for today. This brings much importance to how interpretations are constructed as well as the nature of those interpretations. Our interpretations of the past that get built into histories are not innocent, or neutral. We noted already that interpretations of the past are political. If organizational histories help to make realities, "is it possible to imagine developing" histories "that strengthen particular realities whilst eroding others?" (Law and Urry, 2004: 397). This question must feature on the research agenda of critical organizational history.

b. Open conditions of possibility

We envision critical organizational histories would acknowledge the need for, and participate in, opening up conditions of possibility. The capacity and desire to imagine what can be or become, the ability to conceive of courses of thought and action unconstrained by conventional rules and norms is what we mean by opening conditions of possibility. This involves resisting falling back on ideal and pre-formulated plans because they represent a usual course of action (Scott, 2007). Jenkins (2003: 13) describes a condition of openness as one where decisions on interpretations and analysis are "always in a state of play." Critical histories open conditions of possibility when they are written without a definitive tone. They aim for plausibility, but are crafted with the assumption that the "end will never come" (Scott, 2007: 26). Histories without definitive and authoritative endings allow us to imagine futures unimagined. Being open in our endings is a

logical research assumption when we consider that our present time and space is an ever-changing vantage point through which we frame the past (Burrell, 1997). With each contextual change comes a slightly altered frame. Though the content of the past is always our focus in history, our interpretation of it is open and changing because of our shifting vantage point (Munslow, 1997). Poststructuralists have long sought to reveal and problematize how text achieves a sense of closure (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). Inspired by Derrida and Rorty, Jenkins (2003: 5) proposes an historical discourse characterised by an "open-ended democracy that grasps the impossibility of enacting a total historical / historicising closure of the past." If we accept that histories are unsettled and un-closed (Jenkins, 2003), then we must write them in a way to acknowledge their fluidity and uncertainty. Writing openly about closures should help critical organizational historians open conditions of possibility.

Another way that critical organizational historians can open conditions of possibility is by adopting an ethic of continuous (self) critique. Like Scott (2005, 2007), we believe critique implies pointing to thought beyond it/our self, to invite ideas that question its own grounds for being. Critique does not necessarily involve analysing imperfections and flaws followed by identifying ways to make a discipline better. Instead, it entails questioning the roots upon which the historical discipline stands by debating its own nature in addition to debating what happened in the past (Munslow, 1997). Munslow (1997: 131) notes that history should strive to continually re-envision "itself as a literary and ideologically self-conscious process of thought." In this exercise, disciplinary possibilities are imagined. Logistically, we envision the ethic of critique to involve continuously questioning the role of choice and action in history,

problematizing the limits on licences to write history, as well as imagining how to be open in writing and reading history.

The role of choice and action in historical analysis has been of concern for postcolonial, postmodern and poststructural historians. Foucault (1991: 91) suggests that a "characteristic of history is to be without choice." Following Foucault, Ermarth (2007) critiques traditional history for its inability to harbour choice and action but only perspective. She argues that perspective and hindsight can describe a course of action clearly but it does not "sponsor creative action" (Ermarth, 2007: 57). Perhaps suggestions for creative action could feature in critical organizational histories.

Opening conditions of possibility in historical analysis could also entail lifting the limits on licenses to write history. Critical organization history is arguably a fusion of three disciplines: critical theory, MOS and history. The discipline of 'History' has an established tradition in training on historical conventions, through which a historian assumes an identity as such (Coraiola et al., 2015). The fusion of disciplines has meant trained historians have presented their research alongside MOS researchers (Decker, 2013). In our experience, this has come with questions concerning the historical qualifications of MOS or CMS scholars. But through indulging in their historical interest, many MOS and CMS scholars have developed archival skills and a general awareness of what is historical training (as trained historians might have for MOS conventions). The awareness of one another, created through fusing three disciplines, has the potential to lead to an overall condition of openness, but only if we collectively agree to remain somewhat un-trained or disobedient. Being disobedient involves resisting the de-facto

use of pre-formulated "historical conventions to explain" the past (Ermarth, 2007: 51). It means embracing "the idea of history writing as an act of both fidelity and rebellion" (Jenkins, Morgan and Munslow, 2007: 1). Jenkins (2003: 6) has advocated for an "attitude of radical analyses" that "disregards convention" and "disobeys the authoritative voice." In this condition, there are fewer limits on who is issued a licence to write history (Ermarth, 2007). In opening up management history to untrained or disobedient researcher/historians, we open it up to new methods, and new modes of emploting the past into history (Ermarth, 2007; Jenkins, 1999). Representations become unlimited (Jenkins, 1997).

With the increased availability of licences to write history comes an invitation to read histories creatively. As Burrell (1997: front matter) notes, it is time to "escape from the discredited and dated idea that any author has authority over the 'real meaning' of any text simply because they wrote it." Since Foucault proclaimed the death of the author, many postmodern scholars have emphasized that meaning in text lays dormant until readers breathe life into it. This opens conditions of possibility for reading history creatively and imaginatively (Jenkins, 2003, 2009). It also acknowledges that any reading will necessarily be unfaithful as meaning-making is made against a background of shifting experiences (Jenkins, 2003).

c. Problematizing the (self)legitimating capacity of history

The historiographical enterprise legitimates itself through a host of academic and non-academic activities including its position as a university department, its participation in leveraging but also contributing to the cultural status of books, its teaching and its function and reception in public

discourse. Though some self-legitimating activities seem politically neutral, Munslow (1997) cautions that the legitimating authority of history is often based on rational claims to truth and objectivity. Jenkins (1997) has extended his critique of the self-legitimating agendas of empiricist histories to include any and all histories, modern (empiricist), postmodern and beyond. After all, any historiographical tradition that has legitimacy can draw on it to legitimate new dogmas.

If critical organizational history is to grow, our hope is that it will do so with an inherent ethic of continuous self-critique where there is will "to undermine even its own authority" (Scott, 2005: 129-130). We wish for critical organizational history to develop in a way sensitive to the terms and conditions by which it acquires legitimacy while also exposing the normative practices through which the more mainstream historical organization studies acquires disciplinary legitimacy. Critical organizational history can question what the mainstream of the historic turn has failed to do, which is to reflect on the conditions and practices through which the mainstream gets further engrained as the dominant stream, by for example publishing in top-tiered journals (Rowlinson, Hassard and Decker, 2014). As custodians of pasts and disciplinary futures, we have a responsibility to expose that systems of domination often have within them a tendency to proclaim their own normalcy (Trouillot, 1995). In short, the idea of perpetual self-critique concerns examining the ways that the discipline to which we belong become institutionalised, while offering means to think about them differently. A goal of critical organizational history could be to expose and under-cut the self-legitimating capacity of any discipline, including history.

Conclusions

We have alluded throughout that historical research now has a relatively high profile in organization studies, and organization theories are better represented in business history, thanks to increased interdisciplinary dialogue over the last decade. Historical organization studies is gaining momentum as an interdisciplinary field (Kipping and Üsdiken, 2014) and our paper has focused only on a narrow slice of organizational history approaches, that with an inherent critical edge. However, in this paper we have argued that in terms of the *original* definition of the historic turn, as a rejection of scientism, acceptance of more heterogeneous forms of history, and reflexive accounts of the social construction of historicized narratives, there has been little progress. We began by revisiting the idea of the turn in-depth to examine ways of doing history that might encourage a more substantial turn towards theory and towards history as a means of developing it. In particular, we suggested that an approach we term 'critical organizational history' remains under-developed, as a theoretically-informed, historicized approach to understanding how and why we come to be where we are in contemporary organized societies. In considering the potential of this approach, we argue that a more complete historic turn in organization studies has implications for practice in both historiographic and conceptual intent. Our aim has been to take stock of the historic turn's progress, reminding critically-oriented organizational scholars and practitioners of organizational history of the importance of completing the turn with the underlying purpose of critique. To do this we drew largely on insights from the critical management studies literature and surfaced seven aspects of practicing critical organizational history

and three implications that demonstrate the underside of theorizing historically. We

suggested these are central to critical analysis and that, understood and practised

collectively, can provoke considerably more critical organizational history to benefit all.

If anything, doing critical organizational history is important because "disarming

critique" secures hegemonies (Scott, 2005: 125). We hope fleshing out what is critical

organizational history will give "expression to the desire of a multitude" (Ermarth, 2007:

51). In this regard, perhaps the collection of ideas we have presented can be read as a

critical organizational history manifesto.

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