Foucauldian Inspired Critical Management Studies
And Radical Political Economy -
Bridges And Boundaries

Stream 22: Radical Political Economy and Management

Craig Prichard
Massey University

Johan Alvehus
Lund University

Department of Management
Massey University
Private Bag 11-222
Palmerston North
New Zealand 5301
00 646 350 5799 Ext. 2244 (phone)
00 646 350 5660 (fax)
Email: c.pritchard@massey.ac.nz

Dept. of Business Administration
Lund University
P.O. Box 7080
SE-220 07 LUND
SWEDEN
Phone: +46 (0)46 2224349, +46 (0)709 740474
Email: johan.alvehus@fek.lu.se
Abstract

In this paper we address the neglect of class processes, i.e. redistribution of wealth, in critical strands of management and organization studies. We argue that this neglect is politically unfortunate and theoretically unnecessary. Through this paper we hope to promote an inclusive form of analysis in critical management studies where this issue can be addressed. One field where this neglect is particularly obvious is in Foucauldian-inspired organizational analysis. This neglect is due to the way Foucault has been picked up in organization studies as an exit from Marxian influenced analysis. More particularly, two entry points have mediated the reception of Foucault: one concerned with analysis of rich empirical material, and the other with broader political and philosophical investigations. Both these have effectively closed off discussion of issues of wealth distribution, and obscure Marxian elements in Foucault’s own texts.

As a means of addressing this closure we engage recent work from radical political economics. Here issues of economic re/distribution are neither neglected nor turned into a bottom-line explanation for the workings of organizations. Here, the notion of overdetermination is used to contribute to a dialogic encounter between these two fields thereby opening an analytical space where discussion of economic distribution, subjectivity and power can be addressed. This may facilitate class analysis in organization studies without resorting to essentialist or realist frameworks.
Introduction

In his introduction to *The Marx-Engels Reader* Robert Tucker suggests that Marx ‘wrote as though his pen were dipped in molten anger’ (Tucker, 1978: xxxviii). Tucker argues that what propelled Marx’s pen was his utter rage that seemingly reasonable economic theory and supposedly civil society could justify the theft and alienation embedded in the wage-labour relation. Since then, Marxist scholarship and activism has taken a number of different directions and drawn on different features of Marx’s work. Contemporary radical political economists Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff share Marx’s outrage, and his commitment to the elimination of this ‘economic crime against workers’ (1992:36). They suggest that ‘the class dimension of social life is as little recognized, as much repressed, today as it was in Marx’s time, and not only by theorists in the neoclassical tradition’ (1992: ibid.). This repression is, we would argue, present in organization studies generally and in some strands of critically informed organization studies. Recent Foucauldian influenced critical organizational studies have been challenged on this basis (Neimark, 1990; 1994; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995; Tinker, 2002). In this paper we will argue that while there may be some grounds for such a challenge, the repression is largely an effect of the ways in which Foucault’s work has been taken up in critical organization studies. Particularly, Foucault’s work has tended to be used as an ‘exit’ from a particular kind of Marx. Such works may, as Neimark suggested, be accused of '[p]lucking Foucault away from Marx [in such a way that it] removes his work from its ground, robs it of what could be its emancipatory potential' (1994:97). In this paper we suggest that closer and more productive approaches are possible. To support our efforts we draw on the strand of radical political economics Resnick and Wolff have sort to develop (1992; 1987).

This paper seeks to contribute to an encounter between Foucauldian influenced work in critical organization studies and this field of radical political economics. As Milchman and Rosenberg suggest (2002) such an encounter ought to involve dialogue and critical questioning, rather than a search for final resolution, agreement or the ‘destruction of one’s opponent’ (2002:132). The latter has, unfortunately tended to be the case to date in debates on these issues (see for example Frankel, 1997; Neimark, 1994; Thompson and Smith, 2001; Thompson et al., 2000).

The paper begins with an overview and investigation of particular texts influenced by Foucault’s work and locatable in critical organization studies. The aim here is to

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1 On this we can note immediately some similarities between both fields. The leading scholars in the field of radical political economy we discuss here are, in similar ways to the leading exponents of critical management studies, institutionally marginal to the dominant traditions in their respective fields of study (economics and management) yet each retains relatively strong institutional ‘bases’ in a small number of academic institutions (on the Eastern side of the Atlantic we might include here Management Departments at Keele, UMIST and Lund universities). Perhaps the most important similarity between these two fields of academic effort, aside from sharing links to the work of Marglin and Edwards, is an allegiance to what Zald recently identified as the ‘left critique’ (2002). In the CMS context such critique has a particular focus. As Zald continues, ‘the left critique within management education is more likely to deal with the internal structure of the firm and its policies than it is to focus upon the problematic of the larger political economy’ (2002:374-5). One perhaps unintended effect of this different focus is a seeming detachment in Critical Management Studies from what Zald identifies as ‘the problematic of the larger political economy’. Clearly such ‘problematics’ include the private appropriate, accumulation and concentration of capital, and the necessity of selling one’s labour to make a living. There is a danger we would suggest that this division of attention that Zald identifies might distract attention from a focus on the particular character of these dynamics within organizations e.g. the importance of property-ownership to appropriation and distribution of surpluses.
identify and summarize the way in which this body of work has been picked up in organization studies. The paper then discusses a limited selection of works in radical political economy as it relates to our overall purpose. It finally turns to discuss the implications of a critical encounter between these fields of academic work.

**Foucauldian critical organizational analysis**

It is certain that the mechanisms of subjection cannot be studied outside their relation to the mechanisms of exploitation and domination. But they do not merely constitute the terminal of more fundamental mechanisms. They entertain complex and circular relations with other forms. (Foucault, 1982: 782)

As both Neimark (1994) and Marsden (1999) note, many aspects of Foucault’s work can be understood as being influenced by Marx. Macdonald (2002) recently argued that Foucault ‘never intended to articulate a position free from a certain Marx, but rather one that was free from a specifically restrictive Marxism’ (p. 261). In organization studies however, it appears that a certain restrictive Marxism may have, paradoxically, had the effect of expelling Marx from Foucauldian influenced organization studies. In order to discuss this we present two common, indeed dominating, ways in which scholars have drawn on Foucault.

To analyze the ways in which Foucault enters organization studies is to seek to identify the analytical strategies of the author function (Foucault, 1998: 211) that is both brought to and draws from different parts of Foucault’s work. Such strategies can be identified as entry points to a particular author’s work. This may have the effect of also laying out an entry point to a field of study for a particular author’s work.

The Foucauldian inspired literature in organization studies is immense and we will not attempt to cover it all here. Instead we offer brief commentaries on a limited number of examples. Those chosen tend to engage in empirical work - in one sense or another. While other work has been concerned with assessing, introducing or criticizing Foucault’s approach, and mapping out directions for research (e.g. Burrell, 1988; Clegg, 1989, 1998), empirically engaged work more clearly reveals the use that has been made of Foucault in the organization studies.

**The empirical-analytical entry point**

The first entry point we identify as empirical-analytical. Here the main concern is the interpretation of empirical material and the ‘politics of existence’ in a specific location. The main contribution is the analysis that can be pursued through available empirical material.

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2 Our use of the notion of entry points differs slightly from Resnick & Wolff’s use of that concept (1987: 25). Their use focuses on the particular or dominant concepts used to engage in political economic analysis. While such an approach could be done here, we feel that an approach emphasizing the analytical strategies put to work unpacks the author function more clearly for our purposes.

3 Mirroring our concerns over the reception of Foucault in organization studies, Jones’ recent article (2002) puts it this way: ‘[t]he way that Foucault has been taken up to date in organization studies is the result of a number of decisions about how to inherit his work’ (2002: 234).

4 The labeling of this entry points as empirical-analytical, and contrasting it with a political-philosophical entry point, is not meant to imply that it is a-political. Rather, it is the main concerns of the approach that has served as ground for the label. Empirical-analytical strategies often have a political interest (perhaps best labeled as micro-emancipatory; Alvesson & Willmott, 1996), but this is no the main analytical concern.
Through this entry point research tends to investigate power and subjectivities in localized instances, e.g. specific organizations. One rationale for this line of inquiry is found in Knights and Willmott’s (1989) paper. This work frames Foucault in terms of both the (long and ongoing) debate over relations between agency and structure in sociology (e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Giddens, 1984; Habermas, 1984) and the lack of a theory of the human subject in labour process theory (e.g. Braverman, 1974). Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power, a power that ‘is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere’ (Foucault, 1978: 93), becomes a tool for overcoming this gap. Here ‘subjectivity […] understood as a product of disciplinary mechanisms, techniques of surveillance and power-knowledge strategies’ (Knights & Willmott, 1989: 554) creates a new or revised analytical space. This space provides a means of questioning and deconstructing deterministic or subjectivistic accounts of subjectivity, and, in turn, replaces them with an approach that stresses ongoing struggle and deployment of forces (Foucault, 1977a, 1978). Work by Deetz (1998), Coveleski et al (1998), Grey (1994) and Prichard (2000; Prichard and Deem, 1999) takes up this approach. It pursues and offers a detailed understanding of some of the mechanisms engaged in the production of subjectivities in contemporary organizations.

Also identifiable as using an analytical-empirical is a less common and separate line of inquiry informed by Foucault's historical analysis (Rowlinson & Carter, 2002: 530; see however recent contributions by McKinlay, 2002; Hassard and Rowlinson, 2002). In line with this Savage (1998) shows the possibilities. He identifies a major break in management thinking with the development of career ladders. Using research from the Great Western Railway Company, he identifies careers as a response to the sometimes chronic problems of ‘fiddling’ by workers, and the failure of centralized forms of surveillance and punishment described by Foucault (1977).

In general terms authors writing from an empirical-analytical entry point are concerned with applying different concepts deriving from different parts of Foucault’s work (most commonly Foucault, 1977a, 1978, 1988) and making these serve as theories or highlighters of specific issues. Rather than ‘make [his work] groan and protest’, as Burrell has suggested (1988: 229, quoting Foucault), the concepts themselves remain largely unchanged. One limit of this empirical-analytical entry point comes when attempts are made to identify broader views of societal processes. References to an assumed ‘general discourse’ of something are common while the emphasis is on the (re)production of these assumed discourses in a specific setting.

The political-philosophical entry point

In contrast to the empirical-analytical entry point, which is concerned mainly with localized discourses, a political-philosophical entry point picks up a more generalized notion of discourse. Here the political character of the analysis is more dominant.

5 Foucault was, at a number of times, quite explicit about the historical character of his empirical work (see e.g. Foucault, 1972: 130) although, as Rowlinson & Carter note, contemporary historians may not want to view him as an historian.

6 Mirroring footnote 4, the label is of course not meant to imply that the political-philosophical entry point is not concerned with empirical material. This, however, mainly consists of already publicly available material, which is put under new scrutiny with a Foucauldian problematization. Thus, the material in itself is less of a contribution than the political and philosophical implications of the specific readings made, whether the implications are of
A prominent, perhaps iconic, example of a political-philosophical entry point is Knights & Morgan’s genealogy of ‘the strategy discourse’ (1991). This addresses the production of different subject positions in strategy discourse and how these come to define what one must do and what it means to become a strategically orientated manager in modern corporations. In a similar vein Townley (1993) analyzes human resource management discourse as a specific set of knowledges and techniques (confession and examination) that produce subjects and organizes knowledge about these subjects. Rather than address the actual processes of subjection, the target of this work is a politics of the subject, as it is shaped by the discourses and technologies identified.

Alongside this work is that of Burrell (1984) and Knights (1992) where intra-discursive processes of exclusion and inclusion are highlighted in ‘discourses’ as identified by the authors. Burrell’s text points to the exclusion of a particular topic, sex, from organizations studies. The aim is to open up this theoretically excluded, but empirically important, area for investigation. In a similar vein, Knights questions the discourse on corporate strategy for its way of ‘constitut[ing] the “subjectivity” of management through their representations’ (Knights, 1992: 514).

Both texts unpack particular discourses and offer insights to how objects of knowledge are produced and excluded. A distinctive feature of these works is a political objective with respect to management knowledge. In Knights’ words the aim is

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\text{to disturb and threaten the stability of positive forms of management science and to disrupt both totaling and erudite knowledge, which offer political technologies in the name of technical expertise. (p. 533)}
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An historical dimension to the political-philosophical entry point has also been developed. Jacques (1996), for example, analyzes the emergence of ‘the employee’ in early 20th century America and the effects this subject category has had on the organization of labour and work. In a similar fashion Miller & Rose (1995) draw upon Foucault’s (1991) notion of governmentality and analyze the development of the identity of the worker during the 20th century. They show how different knowledges drawn from a wide array of sources have been deployed in different times, rendering ‘the worker’ and ‘the workplace’ analyzable and manageable. Foucault’s notion of governmentality serves as an empirical rationale for undertaking the investigation rather than an analytical tool mobilized in order to pursue a specific type of analysis. This work emphasizes a political reading of discourse. Miller & O’Leary (1987) take a similar route. They show how the intervention of cost accounting and budgeting during the early years of last century, is much more than a set of technical reporting devices, but form the basis of a broader socio-political practice of attempting to enmesh individuals in norms of efficiency (1987:262). This concern with discourse is in a ‘grand’ sense (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000) rather than investigations of everyday localized practices of power. It is therefore difficult to see how these available positions, and the exclusions of discourse, are materialized in specific empirical instances.

**Marx: a disinherited entry point?**

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general interest (as in Miller & Rose’s, 1995, attempt to picture the development of governmentality) or as a more internal critique to a field of study (as in Burrell, 1984).
The analytical strategies, or entry points, identified above make it extremely difficult to appreciate the Marxian strands of thought within Foucault. Work taking an empirical-analytical approach uses Foucault as an ‘exit point’ from a determinist and reductionist Marx, and work identified here as taking a political-philosophical approach tends to set itself apart from Marxian social science. The implication from this might be that Foucault and Marx must be posed against each other as their ontologies and methodologies amount to two strands of theorizing that belong to fundamentally different paradigms (Reed, 2000). This is not necessarily the case.

Macdonald (2002) convincingly argues that ‘a certain Marx’ (p. 279) is embedded within Foucault’s discourse. The way in which Marx ‘inserted a radical break in people’s historical and political consciousness’ (Foucault, 1998: 282) is a type of analysis that befriends Foucault and Marx. ‘To be a Foucauldian “Marxist”’, as Macdonald notes, ‘is to be observant of the “living openness of history,” a position that is radically antithetical to the practices of “total history.”’(Macdonald, 2002: 76). Foucault strongly reacted towards claims of a scientifically rigorous Marxism, and to a politically rigid application of his ideas. The Marx found within Foucault’s texts is a radical and questioning Marx, with an agenda directed towards helping to ‘make sense of the world and act within it - and not to a set of stale theoretical coordinates ossified within communist organizational structures’ (Macdonald, 2002: 275).

In order to articulate the Marx within Foucault, Macdonald warns us against an ‘additive/subtractive’ (p. 261) strategy (where the two theorists are viewed as external to each other). Instead he suggests we explore inter-relations between the work of both authors, and offers two entry points. One is hermeneutic. This one attempts to show how certain Marxian categories are integrated and dispersed in Foucault’s political theory. The second turns to the Marx embedded in Foucault’s texts to look again at Marx’s work ‘as a way to reread and enact Marx’s theory differently’ (p. 280). This latter approach will not be developed further upon here. The former, which is developed in Richard Marsden’s (1993; 1999; Marsden and Townley, 1996) work, will be pursued albeit in a slightly different manner.

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7 In studies identified here as taking a political-philosophical route empirical aspects that are not easily recognized as ‘discursive’ (e.g. class processes; Resnick & Wolff, 1987) have been underemphasized. Similarly, studies from the empirical-analytical entry point often, as noted above, fail to address broader social processes transcending the organizational form (Marsden, 1993).

8 There are numerous indirect references to Marx in Foucault core works. In Discipline and Punish for instance Foucault highlights the following:

> The accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital cannot be separated. It would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them; conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital. . . Each makes the other possible and necessary. (1991: 221)

9 In general terms, Marsden draws on a Marxian critique of organization theory (1993). He argues that organization theory is embedded in a relationship with microeconomics that fosters closure around ‘the organization’ as both a mediator of social action, and as an object of analysis. This closure makes it largely impossible to address broader social issues:

> The social relationship between the propertied and the propertyless transcends its corporate organizational form. It is only the categorical dichotomies of organization theory that prevent recognition of the causal connections between the behaviour of people within organizations and this broader social relationship structuring their interactions. (Marsden, 1993: 104).
Although Marsden notes the importance of Marx to some of Foucault’s texts, his justification for exploring relations between the authors is not made on this basis. Rather it is based on two claims, one analytical and one theoretical. Marsden argues that Foucault and Marx’s work is complementary because each provides compelling responses to two different kinds of questions: why things are as they are, and how things come to be the way they are.

Marx explains ‘why’, that is, he describes the imperative of the social structure that facilitates and constrains social action, but he does not explain ‘how, the mechanics of capital’s motion. Foucault explains ‘how’, that is he describes the mechanisms of power, but he does not explain ‘why’, the motive or purpose of disciplinary power. (1999:149).

However Marsden follows up this justification for an analytical division of labour with a much stronger claim. Using critical realist analysis as his entry point, he interprets the differences between ‘how’ and ‘why’ questioning as identifying difference between real laws (why) that govern economic processes, and the mechanics (how) of capital operations. In this approach Marx concerned himself with capital’s laws of motion and Foucault’s work provides the ‘missing mechanics of capital’s motion’. For example Marsden argues what is missing in Marx’s work is a means of explaining how the formal subsumption of labour identified by Marx, i.e. the establishment of relations between the buyer and seller of labour, is transformed into ‘real’ subsumption of labour i.e. the actual practices in workplaces that subordinates labour to the needs of capital. Central to this approach however is a critical realist reading of Foucault.

Marsden’s critical realist reading seems to imply that Foucault’s methods are concerned with unveiling the essences of objects. Archaeology is, for instance, presented as ‘a digging beneath present categories to uncover the object they represent’. This methodology is said to ‘extracts knowledge of general causal mechanisms, diffuse throughout society, from their particular manifestations’ (p. 112). This interpretation of Foucault’s methodology is highly questionable - as a reading of The Archaeology of Knowledge (Foucault, 1972) would render - and can be regarded as a consequence of Marsden’s attempt to marry Foucault with Bhaskar’s critical realism. Yet such a forced marriage is not a necessity for pursuing Marsden’s general aim. It is still possible to address the central issue - of connecting the ‘how’ of Foucault to the ‘why’ of Marx - without reference to any middle ground. He we follow Macdonald (2002) who argues that such an aim can be justified by unveiling a Marx within the texts of Foucault.

While we applaud and support Marsden’s work, particularly the way it demonstrates the importance of Marx to Foucault’s work and how each provides responses to features perhaps under-developed in the other’s work, we take a different course here. This alternate route, which has the same purpose as Marsden’s, involves a non-realist reading of Marx drawn from recent radical political economics. There are some important differences between the two. We remain unconvinced by Marsden’s strictly realist reading of Foucault, and we question whether the desire for an explanatory ‘wholeness’ in the work of Marx and Foucault might be counterproductive to theory development. While we appreciate and support Marsden’s efforts we wonder whether such efforts might constrain or close off contextual reflexivity in the ‘doing’ of theory development.

**Radical Political Economy: Anti-Essentialist Marxism**

The paper to this point has followed the following course. We have identified the analytical strategies enacted in Foucauldian informed critical management studies,
and shown how these lead away from an appreciation of the Marx within Foucault. While we welcome Marsden’s, as yet under appreciated, work in redressing this trajectory in organization studies, we remain unconvinced of the necessity of a strict realist interpretation of both authors, and worry about the implications of such a move. While we do not wish to take issue with critical realism here, we question the need for such an approach. Following Macdonald and others involved in recent radical political economics (RPE), we suggest a more direct approach. This questions the need to adopt a strictly realist Marx and explores the means for doing so. In the remainder of this paper we explore entry points and analytical strategies available in this strand of Marxist scholarship to provide some of the groundwork for exploring the possible ways in which anti-essentialist Marxism might connect with Foucauldian inspired critical management studies. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of implications of our discussion.

‘Knowledge and Class’

At the core of this particular field of radical political economy is the work of Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff found in their 1987 book, Knowledge and Class; a Marxian Critique of Political Economy. This work is centred on elaborating a Marxian class analysis based on Althusser’s concept of overdetermination. ‘Overdetermination’ refers to mutually constitutive or mutually causal relations between social processes. Resnick and Wolff’s aim has been to develop a non-determinist, non-reductive and non-realist form of Marxian class analysis. As Cullenberg notes, Resnick and Wolff’s work is a ‘critique of the “depth model” of social explanation’ (1994:814) where one level of analysis (e.g. the ‘mode of production”) explains another or is thought to be prior to the other. Others suggest that Resnick and Wolff’s contribution amounts to the development of a Marxist institutionalist analysis where the commitment is toward analysis of complex relations and uneven development between a range of organizing processes that constitute class processes.

10 A close reading of Neimark’s critique of the Foucauldian critical accountants suggests that the Marx upon which she builds her argument is a form of non-determinist analysis that highlights the importance of both class and non-class processes to the analysis of social conflicts.

11 This work in Radical Political Economy is located among a group of scholars located in the Economics Department at the University of Massachusetts and in a small number of other institutions [California (Riverside) and the American University] (Lippitt, 1996). This group’s efforts to develop a broad field of scholarship in radical political economy scholarship can be seen as heavily indebted to earlier work of Stanley Bowles and Herbert Gintis, and that of Barren and Sweeney, which has more recently been inspired and shaped by Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff (Resnick and Wolff, 1987; Gibson-Graham et al, 2001). This field which is closely aligned with the interests and concerns of the broader Union of Radical Political Economics (its journal, Review of Radical Political Economy and more broadly the Journal of Economic Issues) sports its own journal, Re-thinking Marxism, associated conferences and an edited collection series.

12 Althusser himself, while not totally happy with the term ‘overdetermination’ (1977) – which is drawn from Freud - uses the term to firstly challenge what he sees as strand of mystifying philosophical puritanism in Marxism, and to stress the importance of detailed historically grounded analysis of the complex nature of social and political change (1977). In this vein, and in ways that draw attention to the aspects of Foucault’s historical work, given Althusser’s role as Foucault’s teacher, he writes: ‘The theory of the specific effectivity of the superstructures and other ‘circumstances’ largely remains to be elaborated.’ And a little further on, ‘Who has really attempted to follow up the explorations of Marx and Engels? I can only think of Gramsci.’ (1977:113-114)

13 While work in this field includes the traditional critique of mainstream economics (and affirmative appraisals of Marx’s texts), a much broader range of topics, issues and concerns is also present. Discussions of feminism, colonialism/subaltern studies and environmentalism are
For our purposes Resnick and Wolff’s position has three key features. Firstly, one’s analytical target is fundamentally a political choice and should be recognized as such. For their part Resnick and Wolff choose class relations as their preferred target of analysis and political action. Resnick and Wolff put their case for this ‘entry point’, as follows:

It is class that we choose to stress because, like many Marxists before us, we view its existence in society as an outrage. The strength of this feeling shapes in part our commitment to class as an entry point. (1992:39)

Theoretically this commitment is grounded in the view that theorizing is a social practice and consequently itself an effect of, and over determined by, social processes. One’s theoretical focus (e.g. power relations, accumulation, technology, property relations etc.), and one’s analytical strategy (e.g. determinism, realism), cannot be privileged in any real sense. Rather its part of a living tradition that is shaped and mediated by political and contextual processes.

Secondly, and following from this, analysis of social phenomena cannot assume a privileged position and must therefore take a non-reductionist and anti-determinist stance. Resnick and Wolff’s commitment to ‘the economic equivalent of theft’ (1992:24) demands neither a causal nor singular explanatory base for analysis of political and economic relations. Rather the theft of workers’ surplus labour is assumed to be

The combined effect of all the other non-class aspects of society which provide the necessary conditions of existence. (ibid., 24-25)

Class relations (economic ‘theft’) cannot be prioritized or subsumed to power relations, technological forces, accumulation, property relations or the complex ‘consciousness of workers and capitalists about themselves and their relationship to each other and the work process’ (ibid., 36). Rather class exploitation continues because ‘each of its conditions of existence must be reproduced’ (ibid., 37). Class relations and class analysis, that is the telling of the story of the theft of surplus labour from workers, is but one aspect in a totality of aspects ‘where each is conceived as a site of influences emanating from all the rest’ (ibid.).

And thirdly such a position should not therefore exclude an appreciation of the theoretical foci and analytical strategies used in seemingly reductionist, determinist and realist modes of analysis. As an overdetermined social practice theoretical and empirical inquiry is a site of social, political and economic accommodation and conflict. Non-determinism provides a basis for an inclusive reading of such contributions without having to resort to ‘the seductive simplicity of “the last instance”’ (Resnick and Wolff, 1992:36).

While Resnick and Wolff make only passing direct reference to the work of Michel Foucault, we can note for our purpose here two points of connection. The most important is an underlying political and methodological commitment to a non-

set alongside works that discuss the nature of ‘class analysis’ via seemingly postmodern topics such as ‘aesthetics’, ‘desire’, ‘embodiment’ and the spatial character of contemporary existence. This range of topics marks the journal’s divergence from, for instance, that found in the Review of Radical Political Economy. Some might consider such work cultural Marxism, rather than radical political economy. The field includes work linked to the traditions established by the French and Italian Marxists Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci, and to the work of prominent French theorists Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.
determinist analysis of social relations - what Macdonald identifies as being ‘observant of the “living openness of history”’ (Macdonald, 2002: 276). The second is a concern with the nature and character of the forms of knowledge that make up particular fields of knowledge, radical political economic in Resnick and Wolff’s case. While Resnick and Wolff’s analytical technique (1987;1992) is of quite a different order to that of Foucault, they are concerned with identifying, as in Foucault’s early work, the rules of formation that have come to govern the production of knowledge. Resnick and Wolff’s approach is taxonomic of the targets of analysis, and analytical of the modes of argumentation. Through this they map the field of radical political economics, identify the determinist logic that underpins these fields and position their own work against this feature.

Resnick and Wolff identify six ‘entry’ points in radical political economics (1992). The first five take as their theoretical focus power relations (Marglin, 1979), property ownership (Callinicos, 1987), accumulation (Harvey, 1982), technological forces (Noble, 1984) and human consciousness (Thompson, 1963). Each of these adopts a determinism mode of analysis. With class analysis Resnick and Wolff stress the importance of a non-determinist or mutually constitutive mode of analysis. Their primary purpose is to distinguish a non-determinist approach from the determinist and realist logic that prioritizes each as these theoretical objects as the determining and real ‘motor’ or force that shapes and determines others.

Class as an entry point in organizational analysis.

What might be the implications of such a position for those concerned with the study of organizations? One would be that attention turns from the labour process toward the ‘distributive process’ or ‘distributive moment’. Analysis - and political action - is concerned with unpacking the political processes involved in the distribution of surplus labour to non-productive workers and owners. This is, we would argue, a theoretical and empirical ‘blind’ spot in Foucauldian inspired critical management studies, and also in some Labour Process studies. The ‘distributive moment’ is not, of course, the enterprise’s distribution of goods and services. Rather it is the enterprise level processes that mediate the distribution of surplus labour.

14 While their particular work is concerned with the theoretical issues, the inclusiveness of this position finds expression in the range of topics and issues taken up by their graduate students and in the pages of the group’s journal, Rethinking Marxism.
15 While they do not themselves address of what effects the determinist logic has had on Marxist political economic analysis and practice some of their colleague have become to address this (Norton, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 1996).
16 Read from a critical organization studies perspective, a full sixteen years after its publication the earlier sections of the book provide engaging and powerful support for the developing position. The latter sections meanwhile are highly unsatisfactory. Again read ‘after postmodernism’, so to speak, the text presents as a struggle by the authors to come to terms with their own position. The writing moves back and forward between seemingly realist and rigorously phrased analytical discussion of ‘class processes’, where mathematical equations are used to show such workings, and segments of text that reassure the reader than an anti-essentialist, non-determinist account of class is being offered. The authors’ taste for mathematical equations as ways to ‘concrete examples’ of organizational processes speak to a different audience. The work draws on no empirical material but instead provides a series of conceptual based discussions that might be regarded as theorizing in advance of such illustration (O’Neill and Gibson-Graham, 2000; Curtis, 2000). While on a first pass this mode of engagement appears to simply cancel out the author’s overall appeal for non-reductionist and anti-essentialist mode of engagement, we would encourage others to draw from the text those features that support the author’s overall purpose.
Resnick and Wolff’s own contribution to such work is largely conceptual (1987: 164-195). Using the concepts of fundamental and subsumed class positions, they plot the potential points of conflict between various positions - managers, owners, executives, bankers, and workers - as they might engage in the ‘problem of distribution’. The purpose is to show, without any necessity for empirical support at this point, how the contradictory character of these positions might provide rich grounds for the ‘intense conflicts and struggles over the distribution of surplus value’ (1987:192). Such relations over determine each other and make simple assumptions about the linear and stable process of such distribution impossible.

For empirical elaboration of the distributive ‘moment’ we need to turn to studies from radical political economics that address enterprise level distributive processes. In the remainder of the paper we explore these works. Our aim here is not to provide a detailed critique rather it is to identify the analytical strategies developed in this work. As with our earlier section, analytical strategies can be identified by the target of the analysis, the political positions take up in the work, the concepts used, the priority given to concepts and relations between them. In the previous section we identified two analytical strategies or entry points in Foucauldian studies of work organizations - the analytical-empirical and the political-philosophical. Each of these provides ways in which Foucault’s work has been taken up in organization studies. Apart from some notable exceptions (Marsden, 1999; Marsden and Townley, 1996) analytical strategies that address the Marx ‘in’ Foucault have been set aside, and those that might offer non-realist Marxian analysis have not been developed. As a way to sketch some groundwork for such an approach we include here short discussions of the analytical strategies found in work influenced by Resnick and Wolff’s non-determinist and anti-essentialist Marxian class analysis. Such work is located within Marxian political economy. It is based on non-realist and non-determinist assumptions. We conclude by drawing out some of the implications for developing such a position particularly as it draws on the highly productive features of Foucault’s work with regard to subjectivity, power and knowledge.

**Distributional flows and multiple class processes**

Empirical work that addresses the distributive ‘moment’ in organizations, and follows Resnick and Wolff’s lead, can be found in Curtis’ analysis of higher education (2000) and O’Neill and Gibson-Graham analysis of corporate governance (1999, Gibson-Graham and O’Neill; 2000; Gibson-Graham, 1996; O’Neill, 2001). Related work that draws out the complex relations between capitalist and non-capitalist class processes can be found in Fried and Wolff’s work on conflict between capitalist and non-capitalist truck drivers (1994), Van der Veen’s analysis of prostitution (2001) and Gibson-Graham’s analysis of gender relations in the class processes of coal mining towns.

Both strands share as a common orientation - the critique of the view of organizations as homogeneous and singularly purposive entities that is in line with assumptions that form the basis of organization studies. Both strands regard organizations as sites of multiple processes (cultural, political, economic and natural) and more specifically as a site of flows of wealth, some of which are for instance distributed to managers to maintain particular cultural, political and economic processes. Again, while the ‘entry

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17 Read from a organization studies perspective it initially seems astonishing that these authors can so quickly ‘step over’ the ‘exploitative moment’ (the dynamic relations that mediate the production of surplus) in organizations and turn to the distributive. Likewise Resnick and Wolff might find it astonishing that works in Critical Management Studies seem to stop short of engagement with the ‘distributive moment’ (1987:166).
point’ is the distributive moment, there is no explanatory nor causal priority given to class processes.

While both strands share a commitment to a reinvigorated politics of the distributive moment, each takes quite different empirical targets. Curtis’ paper addresses the distributional and political processes that make up the liberal arts college. Its primary aim is to challenge the comfortable assumption that educational institutions are not sites of class processes. To achieve this, the paper offers an alternative accounting formula, derived from Resnick and Wolff’s work, which shows that under average conditions the case study institution draws a 17.5 percent profit rate on the labour of members of academic staff. From this Curtis then identifies the relations between such class processes and the political processes of the college. For example Curtis discusses how the tenure system, a practice of granting job security, and the departmental structure are key political processes that, in various ways, support and constrain the exploitation of groups of academic workers.

The overall aim of this work is to invigorate debate and political action toward a more communal form of college organization where ‘surplus labour is appropriated and distributed collectively by the faculty performers of that surplus labour’ (2001:100). As such Curtis’ discussion presents a useful example of the kind of analytical work that might be undertaken when political and distributive processes are interwoven. 

As a second example of work in this strand we can turn to O’Neill and Gibson-Graham’s analysis of the distribution ‘moment’ in the multinational, Broken Hill Proprietary (BHP). Like Curtis they use an alternative accounting formula. In their case the purpose is to discuss the multiplicity of claims on the surplus labour appropriated by the corporation, and how this undermines a singular or unitary narrative of corporate profit making. They argue that an alternative accounting formula that privileges different distributive flows provides a means of developing a reinvigorated distributional politics of capitalist organizations. On this they encourage the reader to explore the forms of accounting found in the discourse of ‘rights’ developed and extended in recent times by indigenous peoples and environmental activists. These have enabled people to successful ‘make claims on resources and flows of wealth where previously they had none’(1996:204).

The second strand of work also queries the stability and coherency of the capitalist enterprise, but from a different direction. It questions the assumed dominance of capitalist class processes by demonstrating the mixed nature of industries (Fried and Wolff, 1994; van der Veen; 2001) and the centrality of non-capitalist economic activity - particularly household production - to the provision of capitalist class relations (Gibson-Graham, 1992; 1996).

In Gibson-Graham’s work the target is the centrality of non-capitalist household production and relations between men and women to the reproduction of capitalist class processes. Building their argument from empirical studies of the mining industry, they contend that the unpaid ‘feudal’ class processes of the household, built from a mix of cultural, legal, and political arrangements, are closely interrelated with capitalist class processes to the point where changes in the arrangement of one can lead to

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18 As a point of record the explicit numerical depiction of the appropriation of surplus academic labour potentially provides a more compelling analysis of the class basis of relations in higher education than similar work inspired by labour process (Dearlove, 1995; Longhurst, 1996; Willmott, 1995). At the same time the paper does not privilege, as Longhurst particularly has done, the class relations over political relations. Each shapes and influences the others in produce and constraining ways.
breakdowns in the other. For example they plot the efforts of one mining company to improve returns by extending miners rosters and working hours and how this exacerbated domestic crisis.

The introduction of new rosters has produced contradictions in the operations of feudal domestic class processes and has seen the beginnings of domestic struggles over the increased rate of feudal exploitation in the household. In some cases these struggles have resulted in family breakdown or divorce, in others they have taken the form of absenteeism by men from mine works. In still others struggle is being waged in various emotional forms. (1996:229)

Fried and Wolff meanwhile present an historical analysis of the US trucking industry that challenges assumptions about the inevitability and dominance of capitalist class process. They show how the US transport industry is marked by continuing conflict and struggles between self-employed truckers, identified as ‘modern ancients’, and capitalist firms. Case evidence shows that the ascendancy of one is never permanent and is due in the main to temporary control over non-class processes - legal, political and cultural processes – rather than the simple economic dominance of one form of production over the other. The case highlights the continual coexistence of non-capitalist and capitalist forms of production and distribution in some industries and the importance of a non-determinist and non-reductionist reading of industry development.

The evidence suggests that the trucking industry displays no linear development toward adopting capitalist class structures at the expense of all others. The ‘capitalist’ nature of the class structure in the United States is both less universal than commonly supposed and less secure where it does exist. (1994:114)

Van der Veen’s (2001) meanwhile makes a similar point in her analysis of prostitution in the sex industry suggesting that different class processes are deeply embedded in the and shape the character of commodities themselves. Using secondary sources she compares prostitution produced under capitalist, slave and independent class processes. She argues that these different distributional processes have a strong bearing on, but do not determine, the nature of work relations and the nature of the commodity produced. For instance self-exploitation/self-employment (i.e. the independent prostitute) constitutes the commodity differently from capitalist and slave/feudal relations. Under capitalist conditions (e.g. brothels and escort agencies) the commodity becomes subject to management supervision and prostitutes may lack decision-making control over the types of work done. Prostitution may also be vulnerable to the intensification of work. At the same time capitalist class relations may avoid, as may be the case of independent or self-employed class production, being subject to cultural processes that stigmatize prostitution as degrading, or legal processes that identify it as criminal. Capitalist class production involves the distribution of some of the surplus labour to agents and agencies to address these issues (e.g. local authority regulation of brothels).

Van der Veen’s work highlights the importance of mapping the production of commodities as a ‘heterogenous economic space’ (2001:48). For our purposes the work emphases both the continuities and contestation between different class processes, and the importance of not reducing these to, or making others effects of seemingly dominant processes e.g. capitalist class relations. Rather the nature of work and the nature of the distributive processes is a complex and contextual outcome of multiple political, cultural, legal and class processes. In ways that mirror the work by Gibson-Graham on the household, Fried and Wolff analysis of the US trucking industry and Curtis’ work on higher education, Van der Ven’s work identifies analytical
strategies that regard work organizations as sites where cultural, political, legal and distributive class processes are interwoven in complex and conflictual ways. Here capitalist class relations are neither omnipotent nor denied, and analysis of the distributonal ‘moment’ of such relations is integrated with the complex set of other processes that overdetermine the outcome of any particular set of relations.

Implications

What are the implications of the discussion above? Leading on from the previous discussion we see no reason why class analysis – that is an analysis of the distributional ‘moment’ drawing on Foucault’s methodological approach – should be excluded from Foucault-inspired organizational studies. Just because Foucault himself took little interest in the practices by which surplus labour is distributed, obscured and possibly repressed, we see no reason why such analysis should not be undertaken. Furthermore, we would suggest that radical political economy provides an entry point to Foucault facilitating such analysis.

Foucault’s work directs our analytical gaze toward power, subjectivity and the discursive and non-discursive practices of ordering. There is no reason why this cannot be taken up to explore the distributive ‘moments’ where surplus is distributed, while not forgetting the exploitative moment. For example, Deetz’s (1998) close empirical analysis of workplace subjectification, lacks a complementary analysis of the distributional practices by which surplus is ‘uplifted’ and distributed. In a similar vein Covaleski et al (1998) show how ‘disciplinary practices and avowal transforms human beings into managed and self-managing subjects’ (p. 322) in the (at the time) Big Six accounting firms. While the empirical analysis is well grounded and detailed, highlighting expertise, gender and notions of professionalism, an analysis of these firms as entities of economic redistribution is peculiarly absent. Organizations, in this way, are mainly pictured as machineries of subjectivities rather than anything else. However, a focus on processes of subjection, and thereby possibilities of exploitation, cannot happen at the expense of analysis of the processes of distribution. To reiterate, neither the exploitative nor the distribution can be treated as determining ‘moments’, rather each should be treated analytically as contradicting and/or overdetermining the other.

It could be said that these two fields of academic work, alien to each other, sustain complementary weaknesses: where the limit of Foucauldian inspired organizational studies has been drawn, radical political economics starts. We are not suggesting, however, that these two fields should be seen as complimentary in the sense that the theories easily map onto each other. Rather, appreciating radical political economics as an entry point suggests a re-reading of Foucault for distributive relations. There are several locations in Foucault’s oeuvre where such relations appear. For instance, the discussion of the political and economic aspects of the construction of madness in 17th century France in Madness and Civilization (1977b) invites such a reading; likewise, the final chapters of Discipline and Punish (1977a) touch upon discussions of the reproduction of class in the punitive system in the 19th century. These lines are largely left unattended by Foucault; this does not mean that we necessarily should do so.

Our purpose has been to contribute to a dialogic encounter between these two fields of Foucauldian organization studies and radical political economy. Both literatures are ignoring vital and central features stressed but ignored by the other. Pursuing a line of inquiry based on finding a new, or at least underdeveloped, way of reading Foucault we hope to open up new ways of unpacking empirical material that reduces the enterprise to neither a machinery of subjectivities, nor a pure distributive process. We of course welcome the empirical sensitivity encouraged by Foucauldian studies...
(especially, perhaps, those working from an empirical-analytical entry point), while also recognizing that a neglect of economic redistributions can no longer be analytically justified. Theorizing, viewed as a politically informed activity, must be able to account for different views of e.g. power, subjectivity, gender, and economic processes. A re-reading of Foucault from a radical political economy perspective may be a way of opening such a line of inquiry: If it is, our efforts have not been totally wasted.
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