Rethinking Emancipation in Organization Studies.
In the light of Jacques Rancière's Philosophy[1]

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The demand for emancipation was once something we only associated with oppressed social groups such as Women, Workers or the colonized who were seeking to escape from various forms of domination which they had long been subjected to. Today, some of the most privileged groups in our society such as middle managers and professions talk about their thirst for emancipation. They seek this precious and awe-inspiring goal through participating in management courses (Gosling, 2000), reading various forms of management literature which promises to turn them into revolutionaries (Jacques, 1996), and engaging with various journeys to free themselves from the shackles of thought control and simply 'be themselves' at work (Fleming, 2009). Corporations routinely sell themselves as a route to emancipation for their consumers and employees. One only needs to think about the recent advertisement for Virgin which replaced the famous images of the revolutionary Ché Guevara with Richard Branson. The message seems to be clear – it is not just radical political movements that can provide emancipation, corporations can too!

The fact that emancipation has lost its anchor in radical political movements and now appears to be a kind of polyvalent term is certainly something that shocks and scandalizes some. For others, it is a kind of indication of how endlessly flexible and omnivorous capitalism is insofar as it is able to adopt nearly anything – including forms of virulent anti-capitalism – to further itself (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). While these two explanations are certainly appealing, we think that the widespread adoption of this culture of emancipation actually underlines the increasing uncertainty and fragmentation that has taken place around the term. For us, this is due to a shift in focus of understanding of emancipation. Previously, emancipation was understood as a form of wide-scale transformational change in society achieved through intellectuals enlightening people who find themselves dominated. This notion informed studies of emancipation for many years. The result was that research on emancipation tended to focus on either documenting large-scale challenges to capitalism and management or agitating for emancipation through a progressive enlightenment of the audience. This approach to emancipation began to fall out of favour as it was accused of being too grandiose - subjects were positioned as victims of managerial knowledge which they could only escape from through progressive enlightenment under the tutelage of critical intellectuals. Such disenchantment led researchers to turn their focus towards more minor forms of micro-emancipation whereby people momentarily escape from domination in their everyday life through minor activities (*e.g.* Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). This focus produced a deep body of literature that documented the various ways individuals seek out micro-emancipation in the workplace (*e.g.* Zanoni and Jensens, 2007). However, recently we have witnessed some important questions being asked around this research agenda. In particular, some are concerned that it has begun to fundamentally constrain how we think about forms of emancipation, creating a myopic focus on small-scale struggles and fundamentally ignoring many of the broader social struggles that challenge management.

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In this paper, we seek to overcome these problems associated with macro as well as micro-emancipation by positing a new conception of emancipation offered in the recent thought of Jacques Rancière. For Rancière, emancipation should not be seen as an ideal to be reached, but as a postulate to be actualised in day-to-day practice. He points out that equality can be actualized by interrupting the order of sensibility (rather than through everyday acts), through creating a sense of dissensus (rather than collaboration and attempts to create consensus), and attempts to singularize the universal (rather than through fragmentary struggles). By focusing on these three processes, Rancière enables us to see a range of emancipatory struggles that we were blinded to by both accounts of macro-emancipation (which went looking for grand revolts) as well as micro-emancipation (which focused on everyday transgression). In particular it enables us to register the kinds of emancipation movements that have frequently been left out of accounts of emancipation in organization studies. These include the self-education movements (Rancière, 1985), proletarian intellectual movements (Rancière, 1981), as well as forms of art (Rancière, 2006).

Rancière's account of emancipation allows us to extend how we think about processes of emancipation in and around organizations in three ways. First, it allows us to register activities in our theoretical gaze that we had previously ignored or discounted. Macro-emancipation focuses our attention on collective movements which are organised and micro-emancipation focuses our attention on often individual every-day activities which are not organised. In contrast, Rancière draws our attention to various emancipatory movements that are often collective, but are not formally organised. This broadens the range of forms of emancipation we can study. Second, Rancière allows us to rethink how exactly emancipation works. Instead of focusing on creation of new states of freedom (as studies of macro emancipation do) or attempts to seize fleeting forms of freedom (as studies of micro emancipation do), Rancière's work allows us to see how emancipation involves the transformation of the sensible. This re-orients our studies to how emancipation movements seek to change what and how we actually see the world. Finally, Rancière allows us to move beyond the assumption that contemporary resistance is fragmented and disorganised by registering how individual forms of resistance are experienced as an embodiment or singularization of universal struggles. Doing this allows us to recognise the link between the specific demands of many resistance movements and the more universal demands of equality. By making these three contributions, we hope to move beyond both an elitist account found in studies of macro-emancipation and the banal account found in studies of micro-emancipation.

In order to make this argument, we proceed as follows. We begin by reviewing the two dominant conceptions of emancipation. First we look at three different modes of emancipation that have been successively pursued – political emancipation, economic emancipation and ideological emancipation. We then look at the ways in which organization studies have suggested these struggles take place – through 'macro-emancipation' or 'micro-emancipation'. In this review we highlight the shortcomings of these two existing conceptions of emancipation. We then introduce a third conception of emancipation inspired by the work of Jacques Rancière. After we have outlined this, we then draw out its implications for the study of emancipation in organization studies. We conclude by sketching out what new areas of emancipation this allows us to understand and perhaps engage with.

1- Emancipation in Organization Studies

1.1 The concept of emancipation

Emancipation is the 'process through which individuals and groups become freed from repressive social and ideological conditions, in particular those that place socially unnecessary restrictions upon the development and articulation of human consciousness' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 432). Although it is difficult to find the concept in the index of most management texts, emancipation is an important phenomenon in organizations. In the introduction we noted that emancipation appears to be central to much new wave management discourse which places inordinate emphasis on self-discovery, freedom, and rebellion (Fleming, 2009). But emancipation goes beyond management talk. It has proved to be an important theme which has driven many struggles which are a central part of organizational life ranging from highly individualized forms of rebellion through to far more pronounced collective movements (*e.g.* Zanoni and Jensens, 2007). Further more, the experience of emancipation is one that many studies have widely reported as something which many employees seek and indeed sometimes find in the workplace. Finally, emancipation has appeared again and again as a important normative demand which intellectuals demand to put into practice through their research, teaching and public engagements. Put together this suggests that emancipation is not some kind of diversionary question designed to entertain tenured rebels, but is actually a central aspect of understanding organizational life.

In order to begin to acknowledge the importance of the concept of emancipation in what follows, we will trace the development of the concept of emancipation and relate it to work life. We will argue that there are three dominant conceptions of emancipation – political emancipation which is achieved through gaining rights of a citizen, economic emancipation which is achieved through gaining control of economic processes in society, and ideological emancipation which involves gaining control of processes of culture and subjectivation. Let us briefly look at each of these modes of emancipation.

Political Emancipation

Although the concept of emancipation is fairly new to management theory, it has deep intellectual and historical roots that can be traced back to at least the Enlightenment. As is well known, one of the central axioms of the Enlightenment involved the systematic application of reason not only to our explanations of the social world, but also to the design of social institutions. Central to this was the 'unveiling' of the various irrationalities and problematic assumptions which lay behind institutions as wide-ranging as systems of government, relationships between 'races', international relations, gender relations, various forms of culture and work-relations. The systematic application of reason in each of these spheres typically unveiled what had long been considered to be collective irrationalities in how we organize and co-ordinate these institutions. The result was wave after wave of ongoing critiques and attempts to over-throw many of these 'irrational' institutions that had long dominated our collective social life. Some examples included the emancipation of subjects from the rule of monarchy such as the French Revolution, the emancipation of peasants from forms of Feudal bondage to their landlords, the emancipation of slaves from their masters such as Abraham Lincoln's 'Emancipation Proclamation', the emancipation of

workers from dominated working conditions imposed on them, the emancipation of various subject peoples from their colonial oppressors which was associated with various forms of nationalism and anti-colonialism in the 'developing world', the emancipation of women from forms of masculine oppression, and the emancipation of Gay and Lesbian people from the demands associated with a hetero-normative society. In each of these widely varying cases, we notice a consistent theme: emancipation appears to involve the application of reason to social relations which were previously justified through appeals to tradition, the recognition that these social relations involve a form of domination, and the attempt to overthrow these forms of domination and replace them with more reasoned forms of social relationships. What is crucial here is the attempt to escape from relations of domination through the free use of reason.

While the call for emancipation appeared to be a common strand among many struggles inspired by the Enlightenment, there often appeared to very different dynamics associated with this process of emancipation. These dynamics involved people becoming free in one sphere of social life yet remaining dominated in another sphere of social life. This was a particular concern for Karl Marx. In his review essay 'On The Jewish Question', he examines one particular emancipation – the debate about the formal emancipation of Jewish people in Europe from forms of oppression through the formal granting of political rights. This was widely celebrated as an important potential emancipation for a people who had previously been bereft of many of the basic human rights that citizens enjoyed. However, Marx pointed out that while this Emancipation was largely formal, it did not involve a complete application of reasoned reflection on all aspects of life. In particular, emancipation was only a form of 'political emancipation' whereby the Jewish people were freed from the various political restrictions which had been previously imposed on them relating to the fact that they were not considered equal citizens of the state. However, this was a limited form of emancipation that did not completely emancipate Jews from all the modes of restriction that they faced. Indeed, he points out that these forms of restrictions are internal to religion itself (something which is to be practiced in Civil Society after political emancipation). This leads him to offer a broader concept of 'human emancipation' which involves an attempt to extend the lessons and experiences of human emancipation into broader aspects of life and overcome the split between political emancipation and emancipation experienced in civil society. This is how Marx describes this broader 'human emancipation':

> "Every emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relationships to man himself. Human emancipation will only be complete when the real individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a species-being; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers [*forces propres*] as social powers so that he no longer separates his social power from himself as political power." (Marx/Engels 1956, 1, p.370, Marx/Engels 1978, p.46)

In this dense and rather abstract paragraph, Marx suggests that Human Emancipation involves the radical extension of the lessons and achievements of political liberation to all aspects of civil society including everyday life, work and personal relations. One way of formulating this is that it involves an attempt to liberate oneself from the various forms of unreasonable domination that are created in civil society. Indeed, Marx would claim that the only way this is possible is through emancipation from the concept of civil society as such.

Economic Emancipation

Marx's encouragement to examine forms of emancipation in (and indeed beyond) civil society gave birth to a whole tradition of political-economic theory, which examined the various possibilities for a more extended conception of emancipation. Perhaps the best known

of these claims came in the form of claims that emancipation in the economic sphere was one of the central ways in which a more complete form of emancipation could be achieved. Indeed, in the second part of Marx's essay on the matter, he highlighted the importance of such economic emancipation, and in particular underlined how one of the central problems with political emancipation is that it actually tightens the control of the economic sphere and what we would now call economic logic. Such an emphasis led theorists of emancipation to emphasise emancipation from capitalist economic relationships, and in particular dynamics associated with class (Olin-Wright, 1993). It pointed theorists towards a range of emancipations that might be achieved by the working classes. Initially the focus for many nineteenth-century labour activists was facilitating emancipation from the derogatory material conditions which were suffered by the working class. This led to a range of struggles for the reduction of working time (the eight-hour day movement), the improvement of pay, the improvement of basic workplace conditions (such as claims for safety), as well as struggles for general improvements in working class life (through model towns and the foundation of various workers' institutes and clubs). A second focus became attempts not just to improve life, but also to emancipate workers from the capitalist ownership of the means of production. This struggle came in many forms which ranged from large-scale revolutions (such as the Communist Revolutions), attempts to found worker-owned organizations (such as the Co-Operative movement), and attempts to socialize the ownership of some industries (such as the socialization of industries in Europe in the second part of the twentieth Century). A third focus involved an attempt to emancipate workers within the workplace from capitalist (and increasingly managerial) control over the labour process. This involves a whole range of experiments with forms of more participative forms of control over the workplace and, in some cases, an active attempt to escape from capitalist work relationships. These claims share a common concern with seeking to liberate employees from the demands associated with capitalist economic necessity.

Ideological Emancipation

It is obvious that many of the demands for economic emancipation have by no means been universally met. This is particularly striking if we look outside of the core of the economy in Western countries. However, some commentators in the 1960s and 1970s claimed that the working class had experienced, at least to an extent, some kind of economic emancipation. This had resulted in rising living standards, greater ownership of capitalist industry, and increasing influence on the organization of the labour process. Yet, at the same time, commentators claimed that these same people had become more, rather than less, dominated (*e.g.* Marcuse, 1963). The broad culture and life world in which they lived had become increasingly dominated by contemporary forms of ideological control that relied upon mass media and the manipulation of culture. The central problem became increasingly seen as escape not just from the lack of political rights or material depravation, but from the domination of one's sense of self through a whole slew of ideological mechanisms that were seen as restricting self-exploration and reflection. This entailed the manufacture of false needs, distorted patterns of communication, and warped understandings of oneself. In society more generally, this was largely seen to be facilitated by mass media that perpetuated false images of society. Within the workplace, this is manifest through the dominance of technocratic ideology associated with managerialism (Alvesson, 1985), but also increasingly through the dominance of corporate cultures which manipulated the employee's sense of self (Willmott, 1993). Indeed, many of these new forms of managerial manipulation of culture often positioned themselves as a form of emancipation because they would offer employees the opportunity for self-exploration and self-development (Fleming, 2009). In other words,

contemporary cultures of work actually seek to offer employees emancipation rather than being something that they seek emancipation from.

1.2 Modes of Emancipation

The paradox of workplace cultures that offer employees emancipation has set up a strange puzzle for organization theorists, in particular those who champion emancipation. It poses the question of whether we have finally arrived at a situation in some workplaces, through years of struggle, where some employees have finally found the emancipation that they have been seeking. While some might enjoy this prospect, others have questioned whether these cultures of emancipation are actually genuine. For instance, Alvesson and Willmott (1992) point out that 'much modern management theory is concerned with freeing employees from unnecessarily alienating forms of work organization' (p.433). Although they see these softer forms of humanistic management as an important step towards a genuine process of emancipation, they question whether it actually offers genuine possibilities of emancipation. For them, such attempts to emancipate the workforce are 'based upon a narrow and mystifying understanding of key prerequisites of emancipation. Such an approach mobilizes a discourse . . . of (bourgeois) humanism in which the emancipation of individuals is identified with the provision of opportunities for the fulfilment of their needs' (p.433). In particular, they are suspicious of forms of emancipation whereby managers seek to emancipate employees through strategic change efforts. Indeed, 'emancipation is not a gift bestowed upon employees; rather it necessitates the (often painful) resistance to, and overcoming of, socially unnecessary restrictions' (p.433). They therefore suggest that it is important to go beyond various forms of managerially imposed emancipation in order to offer a more genuine and sincere experience. In order to do this, researchers drawing on critical management studies have put forward two possible modes of emancipation – macro-emancipation and micro emancipation. Let use look at each of these forms of emancipation in some more depth as well as considering their shortcomings.

Macro-Emancipation

In order to affect genuine emancipation, many have turned to ideas about emancipation that can be found in the tradition of Critical Theory. At the heart of this work, at least as it has been received in Critical Management Studies, is a demand for the radical transformation of not only the workplace, but society more generally (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 435-438). This is premised on the assumption that critical social science should fundamentally contribute to liberating people from various forms of oppression and limitations that distort patterns of communication and construct a series of false needs within people as well as create questionable relationships between people. To achieve this, critical theory seeks to increase the capacity to both individually and collectives to reflect critically on not only the broad structures of society in which we live, but also how ideological structures have shaped and constrained our sense of self in various repressive ways. In the context of management this involves a through-going critique of technocratic reason associated with managerialism (*e.g.* Alvesson, 1987). Seeking to challenge such changes through incremental modifications to existing social structures is thought to be a questionable, if not illusory approach. This is because, at best, such piecemeal changes do not adequately challenge processes of domination that are deeply rooted in existing structures. At worst, such piecemeal changes are seen as a kind of alibi which can be used by the powerful to provide immediate satisfaction to the demands of the oppressed without actually transforming the most important underlying causes of oppression. Therefore, the only possible route to emancipation involves a radical challenge to existing social structures and ideological co-ordinates. Earlier accounts of this radical challenge point out it means fundamentally questioning dominate obsessions with the profit

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motive, constant growth, and the dominance of technocratic reason in organizations (*e.g.* Benson, 1977). Others pointed out that a fundamental reform and reworking on the broad social structure (such as hierarchical relations and the international division of labour) is an essential part of creating meaningful emancipation. More recent accounts have re-introduced many of these concerns by claiming that instead of indulging in minor acts of resistance, employees need to engage in more far-reaching forms of resistance which create real and meaningful breaks in their own experiences and commitments in organizational life (Contu, 2007). This involves a fundamental change in the social-symbolic co-ordinates associated with the organization. What is common to each of these approaches is that emancipation is understood to involve a radical break whereby the entire socio-symbolic structure is fundamentally changed. This change is thought to be facilitated by intellectuals encouraging critical self-reflection which would allow people to see the conditions of oppression which they suffer. They would then seek to change these through processes of individual change as well as collective action.

While this vision of emancipation certainly sounds appealing, it has been the subject of criticism. It has been called into question by Alvesson and Willmott (1992) for three reasons. First, they point out that grand approaches to emancipation have adopted an overly intellectual approach that assumes the unfettered use of human reason will result in opportunities for critical thinking and thus create widespread emancipation. They point out that this is not necessarily the case because many forms of domination are not just sustained through reason, but actually involve a bodily and emotional hold over people. Therefore, seeking to intellectually challenge a structure may do little more than create a kind of cynical distance from it that actually ends up sustaining it in practice (Fleming and Spicer, 2003). The second problem with grand conceptions of emancipation is that they often seek to totalize a phenomenon so it is treated as a coherent whole without attending to many of the ambiguities and contradictions that are often associated with such structures. The result is that a social structure that we seek emancipation from is treated as being highly integrated and solid, even when it may not be (Latour, 2004; Spicer *et al,* 2009). The final problem with grand conceptions of emancipation is that they can be overly negative. This means that they can utterly dismiss many of the important and relevant advances associated with management. It can also make it difficult, if not impossible for proponents of critical theory to reach out to wider social groups who might be attracted by potentially more hopeful and engaging visions. Indeed, the negativism presented by grand forms of critical theory can result in a kind of cynical resignation rather than inspiring the necessary hope which is required for emancipatory change (Spicer *et al*, 2009). Taken together, these charges of intellectualism, totalization and negativism have led many to be profoundly suspicious of the potential and possibilities associated with grand visions of emancipation.

Micro-Emancipation

In order to deal with the shortcomings associated with macro-emancipation, others have sought to develop more limited and circumspect understandings of emancipation in organization and management studies. Perhaps this is best captured in Alvesson and Willmott's concept of 'micro-emancipation'. Broadly, this involves not an attempt to radically change the entire structure of society, but a more narrow and focused search for 'loopholes' in current forms of managerial control that can provide temporary forms of emancipation. Engaging in such an activity involves focusing on 'concrete activities, forms, and techniques that offer themselves not only as means of control, but also as objects and facilitators of resistance and, thus, as vehicles for liberation. In this formulation, processes of emancipation are understood to be uncertain, contradictory, ambiguous, and precarious' (p.446). It does not involve attending to the kind of unidirectional account of progressive

liberation facilitated through the critical insights of intellectuals. Rather, it requires close attention to the various forms of everyday emancipation which people mobilize to challenge various forms of managerial domination. This call has led to three important shifts in how these forms of emancipation are studied. The first entails attempts to re-orient methods of research away from a process of intellectual enlightenment through distanced critical thinking towards a much more engaged form of research which involves close listening to research subjects in order to understand their own life world, more creative and engaged forms of writing, and seeking out emancipatory elements in apparently mainstream texts (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 453-460). While these elements have certainly been taken up in many critical studies during the last two decades, perhaps a more important aspect of calls to engage in the study of micro-emancipation has involved attempts to investigate and unveil all the forms of micro-emancipation which occur everyday in workplaces. One example is a study of how immigrant employees in Belgium sought minor loopholes in the managerially imposed employment practices (Zanoni and Jensens, 2007). These included changing working schedules or even using some aspects of management as a way of escaping from forms of domination that they felt marked their lives. This is just one study in what has now become a lengthy catalogue of various processes of employee micro-emancipation through practices as varied as day-dreaming, developing cynical counter-cultures, engaging in private activities in the workplace such as sexuality and sleeping, and strategically opposing managers on particular issues (for review, see: Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Fleming, 2005; Spicer and Böhm, 2007). In sum, the call to investigate micro-emancipation has involved a widespread attempt to examine and engage various minor forms of resistance in organizations.

The study of micro-emancipation has certainly provided an important and notable break in how we understand the pursuit of emancipation in organizations. In many ways it has brought us closer to understandings and experiences of people's lived experiences of emancipation in their everyday working lives. However, in recent years there has been an increasing number of questions about the usefulness of the term and the kind of research trajectory it has established for critical management studies.

The first of these critiques addresses the issue of banality. By this we mean micro-emancipation tends to train the attention of researchers onto increasingly minor and insignificant acts of resistance. Indeed, Alessia Contu (2007) mockingly refers to this as researchers seeking to find radical intent in the flatulence of employees. If we examine the foci of many of these studies, they tend to be issues which occur as part of the everyday life of the organization and many give employees a psychological sense that they are being rebellious and seriously questioning the structure or practical functions of organizations. This examination of increasingly banal activities has the result of shifting researchers' attention and interest from important collective struggles which seek to institute more meaningful collective change towards highly transient and individualized forms of resistance that may have little impact on creating a meaningful sense of emancipation – aside from momentary individual hedonic pleasure which might come from breaking the rules.

The second problem that is increasingly recognized with modes of micro-emancipation is that they may actually prove to be a form of collaboration. By this we mean that these forms might not actually lead to meaningful emancipation, but create the conditions which actually firm up relations of domination. This might be so in two ways. First, various forms of micro-emancipation could actually act as a kind of 'safety-valve' which discharges the pressure built up in an organization as employees routinely face forms of domination. This pressure is discharged through a variety of minor actors that do not have a profound impact on the daily functioning of organizational life. This means that by creating some space for various forms of micro-emancipation, organizations are actually able to ensure the relatively smooth functioning of the overall system. Another way that forms of micro-emancipation may

bolster existing forms of resistance and struggle is by acting as a kind of creative laboratory which actually gives rise to new forms of social organization and innovation which can subsequently be incorporated by the dominant groups in an organization. One recent example of this argument can be found in Boltanski and Chiapello's (2006) study of the rise of new wave management in France. They argued that the demands for authenticity and creativity associated with new wave management were actually created by many of the post-1968 social movements who actively set out to challenge management. They point out how resistance to the bureaucratic forms of management which dominated 1960s France actually created the cultures of flexibility and change which we see in contemporary managerialism. A similar point can be found in a range of studies of resistance to change which point out that various forms of minor struggles within organizations do not need to be opposed by management but actually embraced (*e.g.* Ford *et al*, 2007). This is because embracing resistance will help management not only to deal with troublesome dissent, but also to learn from the potential innovations which these dissenting groups may have created.

The third problem associated with a focus on micro-emancipation is that it may lead to a fragmented understanding. By this we mean that by only focusing on a multiplicity of relatively minor forms of social change, we may begin to treat these struggles as entirely separated and local, thereby beginning to lose sight of the more profound and far-reaching dynamics which actually underlie or indeed connect such struggles. Perhaps the most important danger here is that by looking at these multiple different struggles, the researcher simply records a whole series of different social struggles. This may blind them to any common claims which each of these struggles might have. It could also blind researchers to actually offering any meaningful account of potential common causes or historical processes associated with various struggles for micro-emancipation. Finally, it may lead researchers to make the mistake of not looking at the actual, or indeed potential connections that could exist between these different struggles. This would involve a kind of blindness to what some have called the 'chains of equivalence' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Willmott, 2005; Spicer and Böhm, 2007) that actually connect these different struggles. This might mean missing out on potentially powerful forms of more collective and connected modes of emancipation of which different aspects of micro-emancipation may only be one manifestation. Indeed this could lead to a situation which is the opposite of that described by Fleming and Sewell (2002) whereby instead of ignoring micro forms of struggle because we only train out interest on large scale struggles, we actually miss accounting for the more collective forms of struggle against managerialism because we are so focused on detailing the minutiae of micro-emancipations in particular localities (Ganesh *et al*, 2005). The result is that the researcher develops a kind of myopic obsession with differences and locality without considering any important patterns of similarities.

The final potential problem with a focus on micro-emancipation is that it could give rise to a kind of latent conservatism. That is, by training our focus on only small-scale struggles we might begin only to include in our accounts and indeed vision of emancipation those struggles which have not fundamentally threatened existing structures of power and domination. By this we mean only examining minor struggles might lead to our not looking for larger-scale social struggles and including them in our account of emancipation. This would have the implications of not only creating a deprived and relatively empty notion of emancipation. It would also mean that the only forms of resistance that we actually see are those that have the most limited scope and ambition. The result could be that much of the radical tenor found in the concept of emancipation could be effectively emptied out. All that would be left is simply a collection of tactical manoeuvres. What would be left out is a whole history of utopian and wide-ranging visions of emancipation that have been an important part of many emancipation movements (no matter how deluded). By removing this, we would be effectively providing an

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emaciated empirical account of emancipation. What is more, we would be emptying the notion of emancipation of much of the sense of hope for radical change that has linked many emancipation struggles together throughout history.

2 - A Rancièrian Reading of Emancipation

Our goal here is to help elucidate the issue of emancipation in Critical Management Studies (CMS) through our understanding of the thinking of the philosopher Jacques Rancière. Rancière's posture does not provide us with ready-made solutions to the questions raised in debate on emancipation within CMS. Even so, it does offer fertile ground, in our view, for shifting and reframing a number of the aforementioned problematics by enabling us to reformulate difficulties faced in drawing up the critical agenda using the terms laid out in this philosophy. By radically redefining what politics is and by outlining the contours of democracy with notable acuity, Rancière's work can redirect our thinking on emancipation.

For instance, several scholars (*e.g.* Brooke, 2002) see in 'the emancipatory intention' of critical management theory a focus on the emancipatory process rather than on its outcome. Emancipation is understood as an ideal to reach, always situated in the future and always subject to the uncertainty of outcomes. In Brooke's view (2002), this process-oriented conception of emancipation, which primarily emphasises the pre-requisites for its enactment, explains the position of eminence granted to the works of Habermas in the field of critical management theories. Ascribing to this theoretical stream, most works in CMS accordingly think of emancipation through the concepts of the regulatory properties of dialogue between equals, participation, and the search for consensus. These alone are deemed likely to set the necessary pre-conditions for enacting the emancipatory intention to establish a democratic egalitarian society.

Rancière's radical philosophy stands in stark contrast to this conception of emancipation on three points. First of all, in Rancière's thinking, equality is not an ideal to reach but a principle to actualise. From this postulate it follows that emancipation does not pertain to whatever allows us to reach this ideal of equality, but rather, to a set of practices guided by the presupposition of the equality of anyone and by a relentless drive to verify it. Secondly, the guiding principle on which emancipatory practices rest is not the idea of consensus but Rancière's idea of dissensus and conflict. *Politics* (*i.e.* democracy, for Rancière) is not a set of processes whereby collective groups aggregate opinions and reach consensus. Instead, for Rancière, politics arises from the realm of the *police,* as do the processes governing the organisation of powers, the distribution of places and functions, and the systems that legitimise this distribution. Politics, and therefore the practice of emancipation, takes place whenever dissensus is expressed, meaning confrontation between police logic and egalitarian logic (Rancière, 1995). Lastly, emancipation is the disruption and the interruption of the ordering seen as flowing naturally from the share of the sensible between the dominant and the dominated; it is the claim to equality.

Short Biography

Born in Algiers in 1940, Jacques Rancière, Emeritus Professor at Université Paris VIII, is one of the best-known French philosophers of his generation. A disciple of Louis Althusser, he contributed to the latter's writing of the work *Lire le capital*, before publicly breaking away from his former master in May 1968. Subsequently in 1974, he wrote *La leçon d'Althusser* in which he explicitly criticises Althusser's approach. A Post-Marxist philosopher, he has published a series of works that raise questions about the identity of the working class and ideology. Notably, he has questioned classical representations of the proletariat in his studies on worker emancipation and on the nineteenth–century Utopianists, producing a number of works that contributed to his doctoral thesis, published in 1981 under the title *La nuit des prolétaires. Archives du rêve ouvrier*.

He is one of a very small number of philosophers to focus on the question of pedagogy, writing *Le maître ignorant*, published in the mid-1980s, which centres on the figure of the pedagogue Joseph Jacotot. From that work onwards, a common thread in Rancière's analysis is the issue of the status of the intellectual and the expert. More recently, he has moved on to exploring the links between aesthetics and politics in essays such as *Politique de la littérature* and *le Partage du sensible*.

Running through the wide range of topics he has worked on, one defining element shapes his thinking: the idea of emancipation. Indeed, his major works (*La nuit des prolétaires, Aux bords du politique, Les noms de l'histoire, La mésentente, etc.*) set out to bring down and to reframe ideological and social assumptions and to rethink the issue of democracy. Rancière never really prescribes exactly what must be done or how it can be done. Rather, he attempts to imagine 'the map of what is thinkable', of what is perceivable and, starting from the feasible, to expand the limits of what social structures define as possible.

2.1 The radicalism of the principle of equality and the absence of an 'enlightened elite'

Far from adopting the stance of the enlightened intellectual who "teaches" the masses to be aware of their own domination, Rancière instead formulates the postulate of equality forcefully and then proceeds to attack the hierarchy of intelligences.

Against reproducing the power of experts

One of the most original ideas in Rancière's works is his radical premise of equality between beings. Our starting point, he warns, should not be inequality but equality. In fact, the only way to achieve equality in a given society is to assert it, to place it there in order to force its realisation. This equality is not a goal to reach; it is a supposition to actualise. This fundamental reversal of what Rancière calls 'egalitarian syllogism' (2006: 509) is a major contribution of his work: he states equality as a founding premise and never sees it as programmatic (Badiou, 2006: 143). Within a society revolving around an unequal ordering, it is a matter of bringing into play another kind of logic between individuals. This logic is, however, not utopian but inherent, because, for inequality to work, the inferior must first understand her superior and therefore some sort of equality must be assumed.

Very much at the opposite extreme of the thinking of, say, Pierre Bourdieu who denounces the scandal of 'dispossession' and begins with the premise of fundamental social inequality between beings, Rancière rails against the idea that individuals' potentialities are determined

by their position and that individuals are assigned to certain places and to certain roles. Whereas Bourdieu maintains that the intellectual should lift the veil on the structure of the established order and bring to light relationships of domination, Rancière, in contrast, refuses to presume the imbecility of subjects. Breaking with his former mentor in *La leçon d'Althusser* (1974), Rancière contends that no vanguard of the proletariat exists that is apt to enlighten the masses.

His critique is levelled at all who emphasise the voluntary servitude of the dominated, who explain to people that they are alienated and that they do not know what is oppressing them, and who state that specialists are needed to 'access the meaning of experience'. According to this line of reasoning, because the dominated do not have access to language—and notably, to the language of politics—they need experts, scholars, intellectuals, and an 'endless process of mediation' (Rancière, 2006: 516) to serve their interests. Yet, for Rancière, what the dominated lack is not that their exploitation be revealed to them so much as 'a vision of themselves as beings who can experience something other than this destiny as the exploited'.

Although Rancière by no means denies the heavy burden of social inequalities, he considers that recognising these inequalities does not equate to progress and does not actually lead us forward.

Any conception grounded in the postulate that knowledge may be a means of reaching equality, that emancipation can be achieved through theory, thereby setting out a place for equality as a distant political ideal in the future, pushes equality away to an unreachable horizon. It turns the figure of the 'scholar', the 'expert' or the 'master' into a true impostor. As Rancière points out (2007), the theory that knowledge is necessary for emancipation is also the theory that eternally postpones emancipation. A traditional argument in critical sociology states that knowing the system of subservience is a pre-requisite to achieving liberation. Yet, for Rancière, you are not subservient because you do not know the mechanisms of subservience. After all, knowing a situation may also be one way of taking part in it. On the contrary, the possibility of emancipation arises from the fact of not knowing the sort of requirement that would otherwise compel you to stay in your place.

Attacking the hierarchy of intelligences

To bring down domination, the basic belief in the hierarchy of intelligences must be assailed and equality declared. This is the leitmotiv that runs through Rancière's work. The ordering of intelligences is neither self-evident nor should it be taken for granted. 'Our problem is not to prove that all intelligences are equal. It is to see what we can do on the basis of this presupposition' (Rancière, 1987: 78-79).

The pedagogical experience that Rancière recounts as an experiment in *Le maître ignorant* (1987) forms an empirical cornerstone of his thesis. *Le maître ignorant* is the story of the endeavours in 1818 of Joseph Jacotot, a French schoolmaster and revolutionary émigré living in Holland. His task was to teach pupils who did not speak his language, so he gave them a bilingual edition of Fenelon's *Télémaque* (1699). After some time, he asked them to express in French what they thought of what they had read. At first, he was not very optimistic about their ability to recount the text, but in the end he was very surprised by the quality of their work. His method, consisting of learning a section of the text in French with an eye on the Dutch text, proved to be highly successful. The pupils did not need an explanation, nor did they need a schoolmaster to guide them. They had learned on their own how to combine words in order to build sentences in French. By proceeding by association with what we know we don't know, as when we learn our mother tongue, the use of explanation is no longer needed, asserts Rancière. No doubt the schoolmaster fulfilled a function other than transmitting knowledge; no doubt, as Rancière underlines (1987), the schoolmaster was

master of the classroom 'due to his command imprisoning his pupils inside a circle from which they could only escape by removing his intelligence in order to let their own intelligence engage with that of the book'. What the schoolmaster did accomplish was to reveal to his pupils their own intelligence[2]. For them, it was not a matter of moving from ignorance to science, but of moving from something they already knew and already possessed to new knowledge, to acquiring something new. The 'ignorant schoolmaster' is therefore ignorant of inequality, he 'who does not want to know anything of the reasons for inequality' (Rancière, 2009a).

The aim of 'normal' pedagogy is for the pupil to learn what the master teaches her. However, the position traditionally granted to the teacher stems not from necessity but from a social hierarchy. Jacotot—and through him, Rancière—argues that the logic of the explanatory system must be reversed. The reason: 'the explanation is the myth of pedagogy, the parabola of a world split into knowing minds and unknowing minds, mature and immature minds, able and unable, intelligent and stupid' (Rancière, 1987). With explanation is associated inequality, a defining principle of regression. Moreover, it is the 'explainer' that makes the 'unable' unable. He pulls down the veil of ignorance that he himself then lifts (Rancière, 1987), which equates to dividing intelligence in two: a superior intelligence and an inferior intelligence. Yet explanation is not indispensible to tackle an inability to understand.

In Jacotot's view, equality arises from will power. An individual can learn on her own, driven by her own desire or by the constraints of a situation; and, in so doing, she can break away from the logic of the subordination of one intelligence to another. Intelligence therefore works autonomously and, states Rancière, it moves from knowledge to knowledge, not from ignorance to knowledge. In contrast, imbecility stems from an individual's belief in the inferiority of her intelligence. 'To unite humankind, there is no better link than this intelligence which is identical in all beings' (Rancière, 1987). All intellectual operations follow the same course. Any intelligence moves along this path from any particular starting point. Wherever ignorance is traditionally claimed to be, some knowledge can always be found. Yet the social world remains obsessed by a passion for inequality, where individuals never stop comparing themselves with others and where conventions separate human beings into hierarchies.

Emancipation refers back to the interplay of practices guided by the postulate of equality between anyone and anyone else and by a drive to constantly verify this equality (Rancière, 1998). The road to liberty, adds Rancière, involves trusting in the intellectual ability of every human being, because emancipation means learning to be equals in an unequal society. Accordingly, Rancière (2009a) constantly comes back to 'the power of those who are supposed incompetents and of those who are meant not to know'.

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[2] This approach, Rancière points out, has nothing in common with Socratic maieutics. What Jacotot was driving at was to show that the figure of Socrates was not that of the emancipator but that of the destroyer of thinking, because he staged his lessons in such a way that the pupil was confronted with the gaps in his own thinking and he, the master, would then lead the pupil to conclude that what he had said was either inconsistant or inadequate.

2.2 Making space for dissensus

The Rancièrian conception of emancipation equally rests on the central notion of dissensus—at the very heart of repoliticising social space.

Breaking the illusion of consensus

Rancière's philosophy neither accepts any posture of authority nor any overbearing thinking. But nor does it validate consensual conceptions of democracy advanced by proponents of an egalitarian approach to emancipation. Any theory of communicative rationality, in the Habermasian sense, assumes a common ground for recognising problems and ways of defining them. Yet for Rancière, what makes politics is the very dissymmetry of the positions taken. The scene for everyone's ability to speak out must always be set in a transgressive and conflictual way in opposition to the rules of the game as defined by the powers that be which lay down what the common problem is and who is able to talk about it (Rancière, 2007). In *Aux bords du politique* (1998), Rancière differentiates between the *police* as the art of managing communities and *politics* as the enacting of the egalitarian principle and, thus, as emancipation. The police lays out the order, assigns roles and places, and legitimises the ordering of existing social space. Politics is consubstantially anarchic. It disrupts the traditional democratic order organised around 'those who are entitled to govern' because of their birthright or their knowledge. It invites into the debate those who do not count, *i.e.* 'those who have no part'. The egalitarian postulate serves to bring down the separated worlds of the dominant and the dominated, to create 'polemical scenes' in the very places where the art of the police strives to depoliticise everything, to suppress political conflicts, and to neutralise debate. The common world that is built from the repetition of the egalitarian postulate is a space where those who are not traditionally authorised to venture begin to debate with the other. This space is polemical because it draws out the inherently conflictual character of realities perceived as obvious, natural and taken for granted. A case in point is the moment when a university can, in the event of organisational change or governmental measures, become the scene of a 'new polemical verification of the community, the chance to re-inscribe the egalitarian signifier'. 'The police says: *move along now, there is nothing to see*. Politics consists in reconfiguring space, what there is to be done there, to be seen there, to be named there' (Rancière, 1998).

Within such a framework, discussion plays an important role but, contrary to the model of rational deliberation, any discussion occurs on the basis of dissymmetry between positions and focuses on recognition of what the object of discussion is and what the abilities of the interlocutors are, thereby becoming itself the object of controversy (Rancière, 2007). In Rancière's view, consensus harks back to the idea that there is objectivity and univocity of sensible elements. Through consensus, issues are identified and objectified, pertain to expert knowledge and to decisions that flow from such knowledge. In line with this way of thinking, politics is often falsely viewed as being the art of pacification or seen as a lever to ensure concord between citizens. It is understood as a way of erasing dissensions and conflicts, without ever considering that this process 'throws certain human beings over board' (Ruby, 2009: 93). Yet, politics occurs precisely and only as long as there is no agreement on the elements of a situation.

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Repoliticising the public space through conflict

Consequently, democracy, for Rancière, signifies the community of sharing in both meanings of the term: 'belonging to the same world which can only be said through polemics, assembling which can only be said through combat' (1998: 92). Conversely, the emergence of totalitarianisms is the result of a shrinking of the political space. It is associated with the rise of consensus culture, which restricts debate to the political elites and to the experts. In Rancière's view, democracy can only be promoted through the development of political discussion and of 'dissensus', not through consensus. Politics comes into play once imaginations are deployed and the 'temporality of consensus is interrupted' (Rancière, 2009b: 9).

Accordingly, politics must be understood as a 'transgression of the rules defined by official political oligarchies', a struggle between perceptive worlds, a combat between the world of the experts, who naturalise the elements of an issue, and the world of 'those who have no part', who must fight to define what should be the object of discussion. Thus, politics is conflict insofar as there is disagreement on the very elements of the situation and on the subjects deemed fit to designate them. It divides rather than unifies. This is precisely what Rancière calls 'dissensus' (1995: 12), this 'conflict between one who says white and another who says white but doesn't mean the same thing or who doesn't understand that the other is saying the same thing by using the word whiteness'. Emancipation thereby refers to 'an activity that goes beyond the logic of management or of common meaning fictively stated as being present' (Ruby, 2009: 51). The various social movements that come together to fight against the dismantling of the old systems of welfare or to confront international economic institutions share one thing in common: they profoundly question consensual dogma. 'There is politics only in interruption, the first twisting that institutes politics as the deployment of a wrong or of a fundamental conflict' (Rancière, 1995: 33).

2.3 Sharing a common world

Reconfiguring the share of the sensible

In his works, Rancière relentlessly reasserts that where there is equality, it must be verified by practice and by acts that we do ourselves, understood to be systems of reasons. We do not ask for equality from another, nor do we exert particular pressure; rather, we give ourselves proof of our equality (Rancière, 1998). If emancipation is the way out for a minority, then 'no one leaves the social minority but on his own accord' (Rancière, 1998: 90). Accordingly, emancipating oneself does not mean engaging in disruptions but playing in a common space with one's adversary. Although we are often told to know our place and stay there, emancipation involves speaking out and maximising all that is given of liberty and equality, stresses Rancière. Becoming a political subject means speaking out when you are not supposed to speak, it means taking part in what you normally have no part in. Democracy—this 'government of anyone' (Rancière, 1995)—is thought of as the paradoxical power of those who are not entitled to exercise power. Rancière (2009a) redefines a 'territory of shared thinking' in which the frontiers that outline identities are moved and transgressed. Such transgression consists in 'putting your feet or shifting your gaze into places other than those supposed to be your own' and in raising the question of *sharing the sensible.*

The sensible refers to the 'system of sensible evidences that allows us to see at the same time the existence of something common and the cutting up that defines the respective places and

the parts therein' (Rancière, 2000: 12). It is the way, in a given space, that we order the perception of our world and how we tie one sensible experience to intelligible modes of interpretation. Acting on the lines of sharing between those who are supposedly competent and those who are not equates to questioning the existing order and to rising up against the *status quo* and domination. Political action therefore splits open a sensible configuration and places at its heart the concept of human beings acting (Rancière, 1998: 16) which is embodied in interruption and reconfigures the share of the sensible (Ruby, 2009: 21-22). This idea is notably embodied in the realm of art and aesthetics. For instance, in the world of workers and popular culture characterised by the predominance of oral communication, entering into a world of writing—and, in particular, of poetic writing—constitutes genuine emancipation because it goes beyond the world of popular culture. This emancipation is, then, the reconfiguration of territories, bringing down the evidence of the visible and drawing up a new topography of the possible.

This is what is emphasised in the emblematic scene of the Plebeian secession on the Aventine to which Rancière often refers (2009a: 176):

> *"The patricians do not hear the plebes speak. They do not hear that it is articulated language that comes out of their mouths. The plebes must not only argue their case but also set the stage on which their arguments are audible, on which they are visible as speaking subjects, referring to a common world of objects that the patricians are required to see and to recognise as encompassing both parties".*

Characteristic of the plebes' speeches is a 'hidden endeavour to re-appropriate institutions, practices and words' (Rancière, 1976). It is, then, a question of transforming the map of what is conceivable, sayable, and realisable by stepping out of the places we are assigned to in order to make ourselves seen and heard. Examples that Rancière provides in his works are numerous. There are the proletarians who take time out from work to read and there is Joseph Jacotot, the pedagogue who reconfigures the teacher/pupil relationship. Their endeavours sought to gain ground in areas forbidden to them in their times and their efforts were certainly neither minor nor banal nor insignificant. Such acts transformed them into genuinely political subjects.

Singularising the universal

Police and politics come into confrontation when politics disturbs the police system by fabricating political subjects with a view to universalising a conflict (Ruby, 2009). This is what Rancière calls *the singularisation of the universal*, *i.e.* individuals' ability to 'construct cases' and to move away from pre-established social identifications. If the police ordering is a 'privatisation of the universal', then politics de-privatises the universal by re-enacting it in the form of a singularisation (Rancière, 2006). Neither politics nor political theory exist in a broad sense; rather, there are circumstances and contingencies that each time force us to discern politics, to spot the places and the times when it intervenes, the objects that arise from its action, and the subjects that take part in it (Rancière, 2009b: 14). In this sense, the space that Rancière invites us to occupy is not the space for institutionalising practices that carry forth the ideal of emancipation. Here, his thinking stands in contrast to that of the pedagogue Paolo Freire, an oft-cited reference in the field of CMS, on two related points.

The first line of demarcation relates to the conditions for thinking about emancipation on the collective (or general) plain. For Rancière, emancipation is an eminently individual process that can have nothing in common with the collective order. What makes emancipation political is not its own anchoring in the collective but the subject's ability to universalise the construction of her own singular case. In this sense, social emancipation is firstly a modification of abilities and behaviours (the singular) and not a finite horizon to reach (the

universal). It is not the historical ends that create the dynamics of thought and action but rather, it is these dynamics (individual and singular) that create the ends (political, universal) by disrupting the map of what is given, what is thinkable and, thus, what is imaginable as the goal of a given strategy (Rancière, 2007). On this point, Rancière is particularly subtle in the way he conveys the quest for the universal advanced by proponents of macro-emancipation and portrays the invention of novel practices by situated individuals in contact with particular circumstances and contingencies.

The second line of demarcation is the conception of the institution. In Rancière's thinking, no institution is in and of itself emancipatory. In contrast, Freire's thinking is fundamentally a reflexion on institutionalised education designed to order a progressive society. He does not think of emancipation as having the potential to interrupt the harmony of a social order.

Reasoning in terms of institutions and institutionalisation refers back to a configuration of the order and pertains to the way that sharing is ordered, to the drawing of frontiers between those beings who have a part in power and others who have no part in it (Ruby, 2009).

Of course, not all forms of this 'police', constituted by institutions, are equivalent, and some configurations are more desirable that others if they enable the meeting and confrontation between 'political logic' and 'police logic' (Rancière, 2009c).

To wit, this spatial rather than process-oriented conception of emancipation, compelling us perpetually to reconstruct new spaces suitable to embrace conflict, sits well with the combat spearheaded by CMS against the hegemony of simplification, conceptual enclosure and locking down within expert knowledge. It does, however, require us to portray this combat more openly as a fight against the privatisation of the space for constructing and accessing such knowledge. In this respect, expanding the field for constructing management knowledge and for teaching it to other stakeholders, for other recipients, to serve other purposes, seems in our view one way of actualising the principle of equality. Turning management into a political space means opening up the possibility to those currently excluded from it of taking part in the debate and of contributing to the dissensus that will result from their claims to take part in it. The call from several critical scholars for a more polyphonic conception of organisations (Clegg *et al.*, 2006) and of the pedagogical space in management (Ramsey, 2008) may thereby find, in the light of Jacques Rancière's thinking, new and novel forms of expression.

3- Implications for Studying Emancipation in Organization Studies

By dismissing the two alternatives of macro- and micro-emancipation embraced in CMS, Jacques Rancière's thinking offers rich and stimulating material for us to rethink the issue of emancipation and to reassess the practices of the CMS community. Rancière's work enables us to put forward several ideas outlining the shape that conveying the political project of critical management theories might take (see Table 1).

Table 1: Beyond micro- and macro-emancipation: a Rancièrian reading of emancipation.

Main critiques with respect to:	Rancièrian conception of emancipation
The goal of emancipation - Ideal to reach, always situated in the future	- Postulate of equality to actualise
Macro-emancipation - An elitist and overbearing view	- Postulate of equality and absence of a hierarchy of intelligences
Micro-emancipation - Insignificance and banality - Collaboration - Fragmentation of struggles	- Interruption - Dissensus - Singularisation of the universal

3.1 Beyond macro-emancipation and beyond the expert/non-expert dualism: Rethinking the position of the CMS researcher

Firstly, emancipation as Rancière imagines it, should not be seen as an ideal to be reached, but as a postulate to be actualised in day-to-day practice. It also means beginning with the idea that any individual is able to resist, and actually resists, domination in everyday practice. In this sense, rather than making a claim to equality, it is a matter of asserting it from the outset. This is why resistance is not a way to reach a future macro-emancipation; it is in and of itself the very definition of emancipation.

Furthermore, Rancière's argument echoes the voices of others who seek to bring down 'macro-emancipation' by stigmatising the elitist and overbearing posture of the intellectual critic. For example, Edward Wray-Bliss (2003) suggests that eminent scholars in CMS often construct researcher and researched as independent rather than interdependent 'with the researcher critiquing and commenting upon, rather than co-constructing and contributing to the lives of the researched'. He particularly highlights the effects of such authorization of the expert academic and subordination of the researched (Wray-Bliss, 2003: 308). This conception, he says, reifies the researched as victims-passive in the face of the all-powerful researcher. Building on Foucault, Wray-Bliss enjoins us to reflect on how CMS constitutes this tacit superiority of the researcher and the subordinate status of the researched as 'ongoing subjugations' in the process of research. At the heart of these questions we find the

fundamental issue of the critical researcher's status as an authority of power and knowledge in the emancipation of the dominated.

It thereby compels us to reframe the debate raised in the field of CMS regarding the posture of authority. In this fight, the crux of the problem lies in the inability to produce emancipation when starting out from a posture that assumes that there are inequalities and that knowledge is indeed capable of fighting them. It also echoes Wray-Bliss' conception (2003: 318) when he argues that CMS constructs management as an oppressive force in organizations and tends to construct employees as being aware of this fact, yet unable to resist it fully or effectively. This construction, he adds, reinforces the authority of academics who can position themselves as knowing better than the workers what form of resistance is or is not effective.

Rancière's response to this problem has the unique feature of placing the postulate of equality between beings at the centre of analysis. Therefore, emancipation does not imply 'a change in terms of knowledge, but in terms of the position of bodies' (Rancière, 2007). Here, it is the principle of equality that must be the starting point for thinking emancipation in organization studies and for acting. The scientific assumption that it is the intellectual's mission to 'demystify' and to provide the dominated with real explanations for why they are dominated must therefore be rejected. It is not so much a question, as Thomas (1998) suggests, of providing 'discursive resources' and communicative competences to those who do not possess them. For politics—and therefore emancipation, according to the Rancièrian conception—is the rejection of the idea that one must have a specific competence in order to take part in the debate. Contrary to the overbearing posture of the scholar who is there to uncover domination, we argue that the dominated are endowed with reflexivity, intentionality and reason, all of which enable them to become aware of their exploitation (Rancière, 1998). To assert the expert's power would be to amplify the asymmetry between actors who are viewed as alienated and ignorant, and a researcher who is able to emancipate. Yet, no knowledge and no institution can ultimately ensure this endless task of reducing inequalities (Greco, 2007).

3.2 Beyond micro-emancipation

'Interrupting' to fight against banality and fleeting forms of freedom

In the Rancièrian conception, the political subject is the one whose 'words break in, because they are the words of those who are not supposed to speak out' (Rancière, 2009a: 113). Politics occurs through this act of interrupting an established social place (Ruby, 2009: 7). In this sense, every social movement seeks a place in the common space and fights to break through the frontier, to redraw the line of sharing between authorised voices and unauthorised voices.

We may reinterpret the critical works of Knights and Morgan (1991) in light of this posture. These scholars note how often places are allocated in management and how often roles are assigned through discursive devices that establish the social order and naturalise it by neutralising any divergences of interest. For instance, they highlight how strategic discourse constitutes the very problem it claims to set out to resolve, but equally how this self same discourse creates the strategic subject by constructing the subjectivity of actors. These scholars thereby show that strategic discourse often consists in defining what the organization's 'true' problems are, in setting the parameters of the solutions designed to solve these problems, and in identifying the actors deemed suitable to take part in the decision-making process. The discourse develops and reproduces itself through the constitution and application of expert knowledge that defines both what the problem is and what its strategic solution is.

It is in this terrain that Rancière's thinking allows us to make some programmatic proposals that have meaning with respect to the issue of emancipation. He invites us to imagine possible reconfigurations of the field of management that would result in interruption of its order through the irruption of claims to equality by those who are not usually counted. This conception may allow to 'bring onto the scene' those actors who are traditionally forgotten, 'those who have no part', subjects—such as workers, middle managers, consumers, and social movements—surplus to the organization's list of usual stakeholders. Or, to put it in words that echo Rancière's, to 'bring them out of the minority'. This means rejecting the privatisation of managerial thinking as the province of authorised experts and fostering a more polyphonic vision of organizations in order to better understand their diversity and the opportunities they offer for greater openness and change. It falls to us to tear down the frontiers that define territories and power, to conceive of spaces where shifts can occur, thereby modifying the map of what is thinkable, what is nameable and perceivable, and therefore also what is possible (Rancière, 2007). This allows us to see how emancipation involves the transformation of the sensible and implies reframing the issue so as to leave behind the taken-for-granted nature of the exercise of government and of the share of places and powers within organizations.

The Rancièrian conception also reorients our studies to how emancipation movements seek to change the world. It enables us to register the kinds of emancipation movements that have frequently been left out of accounts of emancipation in organization studies. These various emancipatory movements are often collective but not institutionalized. They include acts of interruption of the social order that takes the form of social movements, which question, contest and transgress the established institutions. They also include acts of *re-appropriation,* as the resistance against management in the workplace or in civil society illustrates (Spicer and Böhm, 2007). It can consist in re-appropriating 'critical goods which the labour process systematically takes from the worker, such as time, work, products and their sense of self' (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). This involves struggles in everyday life through the re-appropriating of identities and daily rhythms that challenge existing patterns of legitimacy or develop new ones (Spicer and Böhm, 2007).

Dissensus to move beyond the police

The political ideal in some streams of CMS (*e.g.* Johansson and Lindhult, 2008; Reynolds, 1999), firmly anchored in the tradition of Habermasian thinking, makes dialogue seeking and consensus-building preconditions to establishing democracy. Research on forms of deliberative governance and their capacity to foster sustainable organizational behaviours (Benn and Dunphy, 2005) and case-study analysis of so-called Open Source communities (O'Mahony and Ferraro, 2007) and of collaborative groups (Adler and Hecksher, 2006) highlight the importance of the quest for consensus for the joint exercise of authority in organizations. This conception stands in radical opposition to Jacques Rancière's own definition of politics, which views dissensus as the main expression of democracy. The polemical space that Rancière invites us to construct relates at the same time to the objects that are there to be seen and to be taken into account in managerial situations, and to the subjects capable of taking hold of these objects, of speaking of them, of constructing an argument and of acting accordingly. The dissensus that Rancière advocates stems from the fact that data are never univocal and that there is always debate surrounding the very elements that constitute a problem.

Turning management into a scene of political debate implies moving away from the conception of the dominant democratic model grounded in building a space for integration and in searching for consensual agreement (Todd and Säfström, 2008). It implies rejecting all

forms—and the very idea itself—of collaborating with managers. It also invites us to reassess those egalitarian assumptions in favour of which proponents of a pragmatic orientation towards emancipation argue, and means our moving closer to actors and listening to their particular problems. Although 'the other' (student, manager, practitioner) may not be in a position of inferiority (or superiority), this is not the issue here. There is a dissymmetry of positions that must not be accommodated but, rather, debated, whereby dissensus should be instructed. Indeed, for Rancière, the logic of consensus seeks to boil down to one and the same logic the act of the scholar who knows, of the teacher who teaches, and of the citizen who works for equality. And yet, the philosopher tells us, there is no necessary link between these three dimensions: surplus to the requirements of any particular knowledge or social purpose, equality always remains a postulate to actualise. To preserve its radicalism and its actuality, we must learn, says Rancière, to separate functions. An emancipating act is a polemical act, an act that takes into account the absolute separation between what the academic does and what the practitioner does

Singularisation of the universal to move beyond fragmented resistance

Finally, Rancière allows us to move beyond the idea that resistance is forever condemned to being localised and fragmented. He invites us instead to examine in emancipatory movements—always contingent, specific and spontaneous as they are—the expression of their universality. His conception of emancipation encourages us to shift our focus onto the moments when and the ways in which all forms of struggles, action and intervention, both individual and collective, construct a 'political scene for dissensus'. This political scene is constructed from the moment the universal principle of equality is asserted and a space opens up for the reconfiguration of the sharing of the sensible. The principle of equality and the effects of actualising it are thus elements of a universality—at least theoretical, if not empirical—that separates political subjects from their local and community-based claims, whether they be ethnic, social, religious or sexual in nature. The construction of political subjectivation arises from demonstrations of capability and encounters several forms of exclusion and denial. Political work always involves dis-identification and can be viewed as a disruption of the system of social identifications.

In the field of organization studies, this Rancièrian conception of emancipation provides us with a key to unlock an interesting reading of various feminist works on management. For instance, it allows us to suggest a reinterpretation of the weakness of the political project carried forward by the women-in-management stream of research, so influential in organization theory. Calás and Smircich voice criticism of this movement in the following way:

> *'We argue that there is, in fact, a close relationship between feminine-in-management and 'globalization'. If approached separately, each of these managerial discourses appears to bring about fundamental changes in corporate America. However, when taken together, one — the feminine-in-management — maintains the domestic balance of power that allows for the other — globalization— to fight for continuing that same balance in the international arena.'* (Calás and Smircich, 1993: 72)

This feminist conception starts from a principle of inequality between man and woman that must be reduced, if not eliminated, without ever calling into question the issue of identity (man/woman) in which this inequality is grounded. This feminist posture, and the polemical cases it brings to light, can be understood to be a claim to and a fight for material goals and specific rights, but not the construction of a political scene. For Rancière, speaking out politically means setting out a capability to decide on what is common, and is not simply a

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claim to exercise a right. It also involves a reinterpretation of one's own position within a social or organizational space.

In contrast, this Rancièrien interpretation invites us to read into some, more marginal feminist movements in management an attempt to construct such a political scene through a work of dis-identification that the distinction between gender and sex introduces. This then becomes an attempt to singularise the universal that may been viewed as relating to the epistemological stance that Calás and Smircich advocate:

> *'We are not intending to suggest ways of organizing or managing from feminist perspectives. Rather, our intent is to foster feminist theories as conceptual lenses to enact a more relevant 'organization studies'; an organization studies which will bring 'into the picture' the concerns of many others, not only women, who are often made invisible in / through organizational processes'* (Calás and Smircich, 2006: 286).

Ascribing feminist research in management to this rationale assumes that we consider how this assertion of equality reconfigures the space of the sensible, that we spot the places and the times when it intervenes, the objects that arise from its action, and the subjects that take part in it (Rancière, 2009b: 14).

By stating the principle of equality and its effects as the universality of singular and contingent processes of emancipation we open up another dimension to the creative potential of some phenomena of micro-resistance analysed in the field of organization studies. For example, in their empirical study on micro-politics of resistance in the UK Public Services Thomas and Davies (2005) conclude their work as follows:

> "[…] by emphasizing the micro-level of experience, we offer a 'broad-based political resistance' (Hekman, 1990: 186), focusing on struggle and tension and on the everyday forms of maintenance and control, without recourse to meta-narratives of emancipation. […] The effects of such resistance are low levels of disturbance, leading to the destabilizing, weakening and greater incoherence of dominant discourses, such as NPM, and in turn creating greater looseness and opportunity to exploit spaces. It is these spaces that enable the construction of alternative identities and meanings within forms of domination […] We question the need for a utopian narrative of emancipation, valuing the small pockets of resistance that sound a liberatory note (Bartky, 1988) and make a difference to how people live their lives and live with themselves." (2005: 701).

Although it is indeed on the moments and places where these new spaces are created that Rancière invites us to home in, he nonetheless shows the universal character that may reside in them. Furthermore, he calls on us to defy the idea of resistance that reduces down the egalitarian assertion to a simple reaction to a system of domination (Rancière, 2009b: 167). For Rancière, speaking in terms of resistance in itself sets the system of domination we are resisting as the norm according to which our common affairs operate. It also means such a stance, which is fundamentally defeatist, takes on a connotation of heroism. In Rancière's view, we should instead speak in terms of assertion, of *'affirmation'*. In this sense, resisting means 'asserting the power of equality in every place where it is in fact confronted with inequality' (Rancière, 2009b: 168).

Jacques Rancière willingly acknowledges that these moments of emancipation are few and far between and that the 'police-politics' configurations seen in recent years only really provide us with examples of forms of partial subjectivation that encounter real difficulties in becoming forms of strong, broad-based subjectivation. And yet this does not prevent politics from manifesting itself in a whole range of actions (Rancière, 2009b: 182). Bringing to light the ways in which these forms of universalization are constituted and engaging in those forms

of subjectivation that break all categories wide open, in our view, provide an outline for a research agenda on and for the construction of an emancipatory conception of management.

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