



Discussing the Role of the Business School

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abstract

During the lead up to the publication of this Special Issue, we invited several figures to engage our original call for contributions in what ever way they saw fit. As these commentaries proliferated, it became increasingly apparent to us that it would be worth staging a virtual roundtable discussion – that being an online discussion co-ordinated and chaired by *ephemera* (in this case represented by Stephen Dunne) – devoted to the question of what today's Business School is for. With this end in mind, contributors to this feature were asked to debate the Role of the Business School, with particular emphasis being placed upon the opportunities and challenges that the very existence of something like a Business School presents to contemporary critical scholarship.

Stephen Dunne (henceforth SD) I'd like to begin with a question that will serve to put your contribution to this interview into some sort of context. That way it will be easier for your audience to explain your comments away with recourse to *your background!* Ok, the first thing that is apparent, on this question of *your background*, is that at the time of interviewing, you all work within Universities, indeed within Business Schools. For the benefit of the audience, then, can you please say a little bit about the history of your own relationship to the University in general and to the Business School in particular?

Stefano Harney (henceforth SH) I was born in Berkeley, California, while my father was finishing his PhD in History at the University of California. He held an appointment in history at the University of Toronto all his career. His brother studied for a PhD in English at Harvard University and became an English Professor on the North Shore of Boston. My brother holds an appointment in anthropology and history at the University of Western Australia, and my sister holds an appointment in art history at the University of Toronto. I hold an appointment at the University of London, and I hold a PhD from Cambridge. My brother and I, and both my sisters, attended Harvard College, as my father had before us. He was a working class scholarship kid, but you get the point. We are an academic family. I don't come to these conversations about the university from the outside. But I do come to these conversations about the business school from the outside. My first academic appointment was in anthropology, and my second in sociology. I was preparing my application for tenure at the City University of New York, in sociology, when I decided to apply for a position at the University of Leicester in the Management School in 2003.

I don't really know why. Part of the reason had been the political scene in New York, both Rudolph Giuliani at the city level, and George Bush at the national level. I was sick of it. Part of it was my growing interest in the connection between organising and organisation, politics and state. I sensed there was something going on in organisation studies in Britain that was not evident in organisational sociology, for instance, in the United States. So this is my pedigree. But there is also what the Italians would call the militant question, the question of how to be a movement intellectual. But maybe we should leave that for another answer.

Martin Parker (henceforth MP) My background, which feels like a foreground, is in English universities since 1988, but in the Business School since 1995. Previously, I worked in a Sociology Department. I didn't want to move into a Business School, because I felt that sociology was a discipline that promised radical social change, whilst management was a running dog of capital. But I did. Now, sometimes, I feel that my doubts reflected a misguided position that romanticized sociology and homogenized management. Sometimes. But when I am teaching a lecture theatre fecund with a million pounds worth of income, thanks to the sons and daughters of the Chinese bourgeoisie, it makes me feel nostalgic for sociology. Perhaps this is also nostalgia for sociology's supposed golden age, which happens also to be a recent golden age of dissent for the university. As for the university, it is an institution which has provided me with a living for twenty years, but I do not think it has a particularly glorious past or future. It has had periods of being a useful institution for certain radical purposes, but it has just as often been a place where power is reproduced, and the white sons of the imperial classes persuaded of their burden. But then I read something beautiful, or listen to a remarkable person saying something amazing, and it makes me pleased to be here. Indeed, I find it difficult to imagine being somewhere else.

Tony Tinker (henceforth TT) My relationship with Universities reaches over 30 years. Without an undergraduate degree, I obtained a professional accounting qualification which gained me admission to an MSc Program at Bradford. Having suffered several clerical jobs intermittently, I relished life in academia and proceeded to a doctorate at MBS. After a miserable few years as an Assistant Lecturer at the University of Sheffield (dominated by economists) I took up a visiting position at the University of Washington. In a good job market, I moved (up) to UCLA, then NYU, and ultimately CUNY (where I've worked for over 20 years). I am now Professor of Accountancy on several faculties at the City University of New York, including the Graduate Centre, Baruch College, and the School of Professional Studies. I've held distinguished Visiting Professorial Positions at St. Andrews University, Scotland, and have served as Visiting Professor at Leicester University, the University of South Australia, and as Research Fellow at Glasgow-Caledonian University, as a founder-member of Ralph Nader's Association for Integrity in Accounting Group, founder-member of the CUNY Faculty for the Development of On-Line Programs and Fellow of the Chartered Association of Certified Accountants. I've been twice past-council member of the American Accounting Association and twice past-chair of the AAA Public Interest Section. I have authored and co-authored several books and published numerous academic articles and have served as co-editor of *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, *Accounting Forum* and Associate Editor of *Accounting in the Public Interest* and have been on the editorial board of several major accounting journals.

Working in a business school, I enjoy the largess of that institution, but also must play a savvy political game. Mainstream Business Schools in the U.S are politically and scholastically very right wing. Most of their research is a valorisation of the market (and thus the accumulation process) and an implicit denigration of all state and ‘social’ interests that may stand apposed to the accumulation process. My politics involves using institutional tools (such as journals and membership/offices of organizations like the American Accounting Association) to wage combat over specific crises of capitalism (e.g, the realization crisis of credit cards and sub prime).

SD Thank you all for that – now to the discussion! I suppose it is fair to say that with any discussion of the Role of the Business School, or, indeed of the University more generally, it probably makes sense for us to acknowledge that we are by no means treading upon previously uncharted terrains. Indeed in many ways, the attempt to assign a purpose or set of purposes to these institutions is a project that is at least as old as these very institutions. To be clear, the intention here is not to determine the role of these institutions. The intention here is rather to discuss the manner in which that role has and can be understood. So again, for the sake of contextualisation, I would like to ask you to outline what you believe to be the considerations that are indispensable to any such discussion.

SH Well, first, the innovation of the business school is to present itself as a self-service warehouse. We know in the past the way schools have been used to house labour that needs to be ready, to exhibit the potential to labour, as Paolo Virno would say, but for which there is no immediate need, other than to act obviously as a threat to those working. Now with the business school we find that people volunteer to be warehoused. And this is important at a time when politics is being privatized and individualized in ways that threaten the management of populations. So the business school is a triumph of what Foucault would call security: it takes the risk of letting people warehouse themselves and wins. This is especially true with graduate business programmes, but also given the expansion of the universities in the UK, it is also now true of the undergraduate programmes, with students who might have gone into the trades going into marketing. More and more of the population now knows when it is not needed, and this complements those parts of the population that do not need to be told to re-invest in themselves as ‘the new fixed capital’ as Christian Marazzi points out brilliantly. This is a victory for capital. That’s the first thing to say.

But the second thing that follows immediately from this observation is that the point of a warehouse is to do nothing (visit a comprehensive school or a high school to see this in action). Nevertheless, universities have a strange way of escaping the functions they are set up to perform, even if they never escape them entirely, and even if often we find long periods and wide swaths of academia where there is nothing visible but conformity. It’s different in this way, but it’s also a workplace, and when people are thrown together in a workplace they start to recognize each other in a certain condition, and I am tempted to say thrown-ness. And of course it is the original immaterial workplace, together with the state and the church. Let’s leave aside what we mean by immaterial, other than the fact that (cognitive and affective) communication and information are central to the work.

So students start communicating and staff, sometimes, start communicating, and before you know it, the university becomes a problem, no longer the warehouse solution it was intended to be. And this happens in the business school, especially in these large undergraduate programmes, as it does everywhere in the university.

SD You say this set of dynamics is characteristic of the Business School. What is it about the Business School which marks it out as special in this regard? What is it about the Business School which has you making this sort of distinction?

SH If the Business School is special it is not because it is closer to capital, but because it is closer to labour. If one looks at what the Business School says it is teaching one quickly discovers that it speaks in the voice not of capital but rather in the voice of labour. It speaks of difference, of culture, of language and discourse. It speaks of accountability and responsibility. It speaks of power and politics. It speaks in the language of critique. I am not talking about the way the Leicester School of Management speaks, nor am I speaking of any other school that designates itself as critical. I am talking about LBS and Harvard.

Now what is going on here? Well I think something is changing with how wealth is extracted socially. And I will go further. This new way of extracting wealth means we cannot dismiss the way the Business School talks, by saying for instance that it just *sounds* like the voice of labour but really it is just capital animating labour. No, because even that would be interesting. I think the reason to be interested in the Business School is to track this voice. No doubt the Business School is at the heart of the becoming-capital of society, of real subsumption, if you like. But we ought to be interested in the tendency of capital to pull away from labour by drawing nearer and nearer, by sounding more and more like it. At the same time, how to be interested in capital when capital sounds like critique is the really important question.

SD We'll be talking about that very shortly, I'm sure. Beforehand, Martin, can you give me your take on what we need to be talking about when we're talking about the Role of the University and the Business School today?

MP At the moment, I think the considerations are probably three.

One is rationalization, which is to point to the uses of social and material technologies which increase the 'efficiency' of the university.

This, I believe, is largely driven by the second consideration, academic capitalism. Whilst, in the past, universities were largely tied to the reproduction of state elites, now they seem increasingly to be lock-stepped with the reproduction of capital. In the UK, the state is gradually withdrawing its patronage, and teaching and research is justified for its usefulness and sold for increasing sums of money.

Finally, there is the working out of a longer term tendency, though accelerated by the other two, which is something like the professionalization of academic labour. This might be exemplified by the sort of person who knows the impact factors of the journals that they publish in, or who will write any old shit with anyone in order that they hear other people calling them professor. This is the one that disgusts me most, and makes

me want to spit in their white wine at the publishers' reception. Business Schools, of course, intensify these three considerations. Which intensifies my disgust, but also makes it more remarkable when the beautiful, remarkable and amazing miraculously manifest themselves.

TT The business school is best viewed as the Trojan Horse of modern capitalism, that is to say the vent for transforming the University Institution from within. This is not to idealize the University; it is a remnant of a pre-capitalist era (in the UK and France, for instance). Nevertheless, the commodification of university labour, and the product of that labour, has been established by business schools in many universities. At NYU, they were termed the cash cow: a dim recognition of this transformative force.

SD So what do you think about the contribution of Critical Management Studies (CMS) to the contestation of the Role of the Business School? Before you answer, please allow me to frame this question somewhat. On the one hand there is the notion that advocates of CMS, despite its very many diverse formulations, collectively pursue a "critical" approach towards the study of Business and Management. In this sense, CMS, whatever else it means, means being "critical" towards the study of business and management.

But on the other hand, if we commit to calling everything we agree with CMS, we run the risk of forgetting that calling something "critical" doesn't actually make it critical, and that not calling something "critical" doesn't mean that it is not actually critical. I think Stefano identified something of the difficulty of all of this when he spoke about capital coming to sound like critique. Otherwise, we might also think of Žižek's image of the yuppie reading Deleuze (*Organs without Bodies*) or of the position held by *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (Boltanski and Chiapello) which suggests that modern capitalism in fact thrives upon critique.

So what, if anything, do you see as the role of critique within the business school? And to what extent do you think this role is achieved in the name of Critical Management Studies?

MP As I mentioned earlier, I think the University has always had a problematic relation with power. This is simply because it must rely on the state, or on a particular social class or occupational group, for money and legitimacy. Throughout history, the relative economic importance of its various disciplines and faculties can hence be taken to be some sort of indication as to the distribution of interests within a given social context. It shouldn't surprise us that the business schools, and big science, are the key players within the contemporary university.

Being fairly realistic, the majority of employees within such a context will be primarily concerned with career considerations, in terms of job stability, income, status and so on. This means that teaching, publications, public comment and so on will be subordinated to making a living. Biting the hand that feeds is rarely a good strategy for advancement in any occupation. However, particular social networks, institutions, and funding regimes might be able to encourage critical writing, teaching and practice. Journals can be built, conferences organized, sympathetic persons find places in university and state bodies and so on. But this guarantees nothing. It merely means that some academics

might be encouraged to voice some sort of oppositional politics. It doesn't mean that anyone outside that small group will listen, or that certain 'effects' will take place. Those things become possible, but never guaranteed.

I think this is important because I don't believe that 'critique' makes much sense if it stays within the business school. If a small group of academics publish obscure but bad tempered articles about management fashions and textbook ideas they can certainly call themselves critical, but so what? It's a bit like someone moaning about the new world order from the safety of the bar at the Dog and Duck. Their immediate neighbours might be forced to listen, but no-one else is likely to care very much. So, I suppose my sense of the 'role of critique within the business school' is that it should always be trying to be heard outside the business school, however hard this might be. If it is only 'within', it is inadequate. As for CMS, I think it is a case study that echoes a lot of other critical movements within applied disciplines. In the UK context, legal studies, education, social work, architecture and so on all have had their critical moments.

Some of these have lasted longer than others. Some have been allied with developments in other disciplines, such as sociology or philosophy. Some have been overtaken by cliché and careerism. My sense is that CMS is close to the end of its useful life, though I don't wish it dead. For a while, it seemed that it was tactically useful for some academics to label themselves in this way. As an identity project, and as a totem for organizing around, it had some enjoyable and interesting effects. But now, with emerging gurus and all the apparatus of institutionalization, it runs the risk of a certain sclerosis. Not yet though. Not yet. It would be easy enough for an individualist academic, in love with the romance of the outside, to imagine that they could do without institutionalization. I don't think that they can, so I would caution against any easy disposals of CMS.

That being said, I would contest much of what passes for critical in the context of CMS. For me, critical necessarily means left wing. For me, that means being committed to the redistribution of wealth, to localization, and hence to forms of ideology critique that are helpful to these projects. In that sense, merely writing and talking about 'identity', 'discourse', 'theory' and so on are not in themselves critical. They might be turned to critical uses, but then so can forms of positivism, functionalism and science. The point, for me, is effects, and no particular epistemology guarantees certain political effects. It is easy enough to be a radical in the seminar room.

SD Tony, how would you respond?

TT Obviously we don't need to accept such a silly and commonsense /co-opted notion of critique. It is reductionism to assume that 'critique' can be assimilated 'without remainder'. Recall Gramsci's notion of an intervention at the right historical moment ('when the contradictions reach their most acute level') and to 'negate the negation' (in Adorno's terms). As for "achieved in the name of Critical Management Studies"? Not much I'm afraid! Early on, CMS was taken over and diluted by decedents of the *Nouvelle Philosophie* – pseudo French radicals who confused Stalin/the Soviet Bloc and the French Communist Party with Marxism, and rather than read the latter, embarked on

a revisionist binge of Neo-Foucaudian atomism. The result: a mish-mash of identity politics in its most atomistic form.

MP Tony, why are you so easily dismissive of CMS? Why dispose of possible allies and linkages in such a high handed way? Why not do the politics that would make these people useful for the projects you imagine? And if, as you said earlier, the business school is the Trojan horse of capitalism, how do we know when to sabotage the wheels and block up the eyes? How will we know ‘when the contradictions reach their most acute level’? Why all this waiting?

TT Like Hegel’s owl, I wouldn’t claim to be playing an especially ‘savvy game’. Indeed, compared with that of some hyper-omniscients, my position is a heavily defensive one of a ‘negation of negation’ form. CMS has been hijacked by a labour process creed that has little to do with labour or (historical) process. Accordingly, its time to ‘Move On’. As for knowing when “to sabotage the wheels and block up the eyes?” What do you want, Martin, a global forecast of the future?

Let’s get back to firm ground. We all have a back yard, and if we keep our eyes open, we will find our own petite historical moments. In my back yard, opportunities present themselves every day. As a journal editor for instance, I try to help progressive colleagues publish, get promoted, and get tenured. Now I grant you, this isn’t like bringing down the Berlin Wall, but in the words of George Orwell, ‘Every joke is a tiny revolution’. Once in a while, we may get a chance to land a sucker punch. When Enron broke, the Neo-Con Academics in North America were stunned into silence. Like Fisher in 1929, they had been trained only to say ‘The market is sound’. Given that these idiots hadn’t even read Schumpeter, no-one was willing to go on the national news to explain Enron. So the task fell to yours truly – twice.

SD Stefano: critique, business school, CMS...

SH Marx wrote not a critique of economics, but a critique of political economy. This is a very important distinction for me. When Marx was writing, what he termed the vulgar economists held sway. But he did not offer a critique of them, at least not directly. He instead took aim at what they vulgarised: political economy. In this sense he was writing a critique of critique. Smith and Ricardo wrote critiques of economy, but they used a politics that had essentially arisen with capitalism to do this. The most obvious place to see Marx enunciating this is of course in his critiques of Proudhon, where repeatedly he insists that you cannot start a critique from the grounds of a politics based on the commodity form (a form moreover that is then twisted by the way these commodities were produced). Here, and in his attention to primitive accumulation, we see him doing a critique of those who would try to bring a certain historically blind politics to economics.

When I hear today that we ought to politicise the creative industries, or corporate social responsibility, I hear Smith or Proudhon, not Marx. And this point seems especially important to me in light of what I have already said about the business school as a place where critique is produced for capital (this is only one dimension of the business school but an important one, even if we could also say that many other university departments

are guilty of this, and even if we need to specify this capitalist form of critique including rejecting the analysis of Boltanski and Chiapello whose naïve pragmatism derives from their over-estimation of the power of capital). Certainly there are vulgar scholars at work in the business school, but there are also many scholars who either with or without the label ‘critical’ work away in the tradition of Smith or Proudhon, or indeed in the best traditions of bourgeois sociology, because let’s not forget this is a tradition of critique too, and I need to come back to this academic discipline in the second part of this answer.

Bringing politics into business scholarship, or finding the politics of capitalism in business scholarship, does not take us far enough. This remains a common move, unfortunately. A financial crisis occurs so we ask about the politics of finance, or terror occurs and we promise to talk about the politics of terrorism. It is as if no one had ever read Foucault, who is the scholar of course who really extended Marx’s critique of critique so productively. But I hasten to add that this is no reason not to work with people who have this impulse or to see what we can make of such discontent and anger. Its just that it is not enough, in my view. Nor is it enough to dispense with business and management to find the real politics.

What I mean here is that some have said that business and management are just mediations and really any critique offered should be a critique of capitalism. I feel sympathetic to this impulse. And so did Marx, who often lashed out directly at the vulgar economists, at state officials, and capitalist deprivations like colonialism. In this regard, I admire the book that Campbell Jones and Damian O’ Doherty produced on *The Business School of Tomorrow*. At the same time I am interested in the mediation. And I feel this mediation cannot simply be swept aside. I think this is the lesson of post-structuralism. But I am also interested in mediation because I am interested in a part of Marx’s critique we have not mentioned. Marx conducted not just a critique of critique but he also conducted an immanent critique. He found another politics inside the politics of political economy, and this was the politics of associated labour, of the emerging society of producers. To do this he stayed close to his object. He did not sweep it aside in search of something underneath.

Now this for me raises the question of how one would do this, how one would stay close to these mediations. Well for me I find this possible through attention to students and to the workplace I know best, the university. I feel that if another politics is to be found inside business and management, one place to look for it is among the movements of associated labour brought together in the business school, and in the university more generally. Indeed I think there is self-organisation going on all the time in the undercommons of the university, and with the help of traditions in self-organisation, like the Black Radical Tradition, I think we can come to identify the immanent politics of this self-organisation among students, and among the discounted and the dispossessed of the university workplace. I would even go so far as to say that under the conditions that my friends at the Edu-Factory Collective in Rome have been theorizing, that is to say under conditions of what I have called the Metroversity, staying close to this site is a way to stay close to a privileged tendency in the mediations of capital and labour. And this is also what I have tried to do in a series of articles, and

it is what I am trying to do in my work with new teaching and curriculum efforts at Queen Mary, University of London.

So for me, this is what critique would mean.

Now it should be clear that this is not what critique will mean for everyone who, as you have said, uses or does not use the term, and this brings us to the second part of your question, which I will rephrase as what can CMS do? Well the first thing to say is an obvious thing, but still important not to forget. To have a lot of people teaching and studying in the business school who think there is something wrong with the world is a good start, and it is a chance to talk to others and to write to others, to imagine the formation of movements, and to make something of our teaching. I do not come from this world of critical management studies, but I am happy to move through it on the chance that we can start something, that we can always start something. I value this space and I benefit from it. Having said that, we cannot make any history we choose from this formation of scholars and students. There is an institutional history to it which others will know better. But what seems clear from this history is that some institutional space was opened by sociology in the business school in Britain particularly.

So the first thing it seems to me that CMS can do is to say okay we had this space opened by sociology, by sociologists coming into the business school in Britain and defining a field in a way that included this tradition of bourgeois sociological critique, and bringing in with it even some Marxist labour process theory. Now that is over as a specific moment it seems, but it continues as space, uncertainly. What we need to do now is to say: how do we keep open this space? How do we now put corporate social responsibility, ethics, governance, accountability at the heart of the curriculum to keep open the space created through an older formation of organisational behaviour and workplace sociology? This is one thing CMS can do and it requires a concerted effort to work on curriculum and teaching across the formation of scholars and students, and to support each other across institutions in all the ways required, from being external examiners for each other to being references for promotion for each other, a lot of which goes on already, but perhaps not strategically enough, with not enough attention to the space we need to keep open across the business schools. Of course this is related for me to working with students and to paying attention to the university as a workplace and thus it is related to my idea of critique, but what else can CMS do beside keep open this space, especially for those who do not share my approach to critique?

Well, I think it is helpful to look at CMS comparatively to judge what else it might do. As I have said, I associate more with cultural studies, through my work on the collective of the journal *Social Text*, a journal of Left tendencies, as Andrew Ross once called it, and I associate more with post-workerist thought in Italy and recently with the newest generation of social centres. These spaces, rather than CMS, represent my politics, but as I have said I also use and benefit from the space of CMS, and as a result I often compare spaces. One space that is instructive to compare to CMS is this regard is critical legal studies, a mostly American movement of the 1980's and 1990's (despite the importance of Unger), in the law schools. Critical Legal Studies is useful because of the similarity of its object, of its mediations. Like business, law ought to be dispensed with from a militant perspective, as the codification of the violence of primitive

accumulation and the ongoing privatisation of social wealth, or perhaps as something produced by criminality. But I would say, like the object of business and management, it is instead also productive to work with these mediations in search of a new politics, and indeed especially those working at the intersection of critical legal studies and critical race theory did exactly this. What came out of this was a critique of democracy. There is an infamous paper by Lani Guanier, for instance, that prevented her from becoming attorney general under Bill Clinton, because it argued against representative democracy and for racial justice. Resistance is prior and this provocation eventually produced capital's state response, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, democracy and equality reunited.

Now this is something CMS could do. It could provoke a crisis in the discipline and try to interrupt the flows between the discipline and the state. It has not done this yet, evidently, but there is no reason it cannot. There is nothing about working in the business school that makes it more difficult than working in the law school. Now I think we should start by saying the name of labour in the business school, the desire that dare not speak its name in the business school. This is the name, by the way, that both the business schools, and those who dismiss CMS as hopelessly out-gunned by capitalism, prohibit us from uttering, a curious coming together of an authoritarian tendency on the Right and the Left.

What else can CMS do? Let us return again to the law school. Those who work defending death row prisoners in the US may not always be providing the kind of critique found in critical legal studies, although they may well be, but certainly they are doing something politically important. CMS could be doing something similar, providing cover for instance to NGOs that have to certify they are run in a certain way to get funding and work around the world. Now I have a problem with most NGOs but I still think this can be important for what I would call movement NGOs for whom we could be providing both cover and space. Those in accounting and finance and worthy examples are Christine Cooper in Glasgow, or, of course, Tony Tinker, can use their skills to expose corruption and policy-based theft. Those who are in marketing can do sub-vertising, and so on.

This is something CMS can do, and it would take us closer to the mediations, and closer to that critique of critique we need. And CMS should do all of the things it continues to do to keep open space, conferences, publishing, infiltrating professional bodies. CMS is a possibility. When it fails to do any of this, just as when the Left fails, then we do not go home and wait for a crisis in the system or some workers elsewhere to win. We instead find some friends, we drink for strength, and we get up and try again. That's why they call it struggle.

MP Stefano, do you think you are a movement intellectual? If so, which movement, and have you told them? I have always admired your attempts to be positive about business and management ideas, even when they appropriate languages of creativity and revolution. But it still seems to me that the majority of business and management writing, in the texts and the magazines, is mere hypocrisy, or lies that are repeated so often that they become common sense. In that sense, I don't want to understand, but simply condemn. Am I making an old left mistake here?

SH I will take the first question very seriously and the second perhaps not as seriously, maybe reversing the spirit in which each was asked!

Disavowal is a common trait among some of our colleagues today in the critical schools, and not just in CMS. I have never been one for that. I am formed by two serious movements and I don't disavow them. I've not out-grown them, and I am not embarrassed by them. I am more than anything else, not smarter than them. I think you get the idea of the kind of disavowal I am talking about but bear with me while I get to why I am talking about this (it's not to portray myself as loyal and others as careerist).

Throughout my formal education, I was deeply influenced by the black radical tradition in the United States, chiefly through its embodiment in Professor Martin Luther King, who was and is a mentor to me. My exposure through my father, to 'history from the bottom up' and his studies of the oral histories of immigrants, prepared me for this black radical tradition, at least in part. It is interesting to me that this happened to me in the university, and I will come back to that. On the other hand, I am deeply influenced by a tradition exiting the university, the Italian workerist and post-workerist movement, initially through reading Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's *Labour of Dionysus* and Michael's *Radical Thought in Italy* collection (a kind of thunderbolt at the time), and later through a host of friendships in Italy, through my visits to social centres there, and through invaluable collaboration with PhD students working in and on this movement.

But what would it mean to consider myself part of these movements rather than merely being influenced by them? This is where the question of the university seems important to me and ties to some of the other comments I have made here so far. I encountered the black radical tradition in the university because this was one of the terrains of its struggle, the creation of black studies departments, and what were called the culture wars and the canon wars across numerous fields in the university. Now there has never really been anything like either culture wars more broadly or canon wars specifically in the curriculum inside business and management studies. So there has been no struggle uniting (or causing divisions!) a movement inside and outside the university in the field of business and management. Of course it is important to stress the idea of struggle here, because it is the struggle and not any kind of swapping of one set of texts for another that is important. Actually replacing a canon is a retrograde move.

A few scholar-activists, some associated with this journal, have thought about this, but for the most part there has been no challenge to what texts should be taught or to whom a business school ought to be responsible. So in terms of the black radical tradition my claims to be part of it must be quite tenuous (assuming here you understand I am talking about a radical tradition of blackness centred on black people but not exclusive to them) because I cannot actualize any kind of struggle on my terrain, except in my scholarship and episodically beyond that. But the Italian movement suggests to me that I should find other ways to struggle on this terrain and as Fred Moten and I said 'steal from the university' as it would steal from us. I think my comrades in this movement would understand me as someone who does that with them and for them, stealing resource, space, time. So that perhaps is my overly serious answer to your first question.

My second answer perhaps connects to this question of why there has never been something we could call canon wars in business and management studies, nor is there any serious contemporary effort to set up in the business school the study of 'that which is left out but makes possible and always haunts' our business world. You say that I take management studies seriously to the point perhaps of ignoring its ideology. You are right to think that I do not take it seriously to show simply that it cannot stand up to such scrutiny. I do think there is something in the business school that is more than management, more than business. But this does not mean that I do not see business and management studies as ideology.

I would go further, and I have with Stephen Dunne recently in an article. I would say that business and management is technically, logically, specifically, about nothing. The formula we used is this: capitalism=struggle but business=capitalism-struggle therefore business=zero. When we say this what we mean is that business casts matters of struggle as externalities. As you know, the study you Stephen and I did together shows how rarely top scholarship in our field ever addresses these externalities. When business extracts struggle from the real business of business and considers it an externality (even one that must be accounted for or dealt with) it is essentially defining itself as nothing, or more exactly as the science of managing wealth-making without wealth-making, the science of nothing or worse still perhaps, the science of managing nothing! We might say that the reason we both feel so exasperated by business ideology, but also so enervated by it, is that it is precisely about nothing. It hides nothing, and marshals nothing in its interest, at least at one level, and it is therefore a very tricky ideology I must admit.

And now, Martin, I've two questions for you!

The first is about movements and sectarianism and is prompted by an earlier comment you made as to how most of CMS is not, if one is to judge by conference panels gathered under this label, in fact a 'left wing critique.' I agree with you, but I also think that you and I share an abhorrence of sectarianism that I think comes from our horror at watching the in-fighting of the generation before us. So often I find myself torn. I know the people on the panel are not putting forth a left wing critique, but I don't know how to deal with this. Do I tell them bluntly their work is just a shill for capitalism (as often it is)? Because at the same time I think a movement starts in difference as much as in what is already common. Is there a way to build a left movement of scholars in the Business School today despite all the conditions you cite in your contribution (since neither of us would hold to an idea of capitalism as powerful enough to prevent such movements)? And does it require finding a way to urge or encourage some CMS people towards a left wing critique? Is this possible or should we be looking elsewhere for left wing critique at this moment?

Secondly: what about teaching? What are the emancipatory possibilities here? What special conditions are held in the business school? Your institution, Leicester, has taught a lot of unfortunate MBA students in its distance learning programme, but at the same time, the School of Management at Leicester has produced 'a golden generation' of new, critically minded PhDs who now inhabit half a dozen business schools around Britain. Is this tension not suggestive of a certain set of potentials?

MP I think that the big tent, broad church, or fat arse of CMS is simply too expansive. I assume that CMS is not the same as ‘good social science’, which is a line that some people like to take. Though I enjoy positioning a lot of management research as bad social science, it effectively means that a methodological distinction has been substituted for a political one. So that doesn’t really work for me. Further, if CMS is defined by an interest in what language does, then anyone who writes about narrative, identity, discourse and so on is effectively CMS too. And that doesn’t work for me either. Showing that we are constructed by the social might be an opening for control, just as it might be an opening for liberation.

So, though your acknowledgement of the dangers of sectarianism is taken, I think I do want to be sectarian, though in rather a liberal way. It’s all very well talking about difference and so on, but my understanding of politics involves a commitment to pointing out the differences between my position and that of others. To subsume that difference beneath the multi-coloured flag of CMS seems a cop out, largely because it allows an increasing number of people to pretend that being ‘critical’ (as an academic position) is only contingently related to wider public senses of politics. I am not hostile to, for example, discursive understandings of organization and management, but I see no reason to assume that they are ‘critical’. Nonetheless, I don’t particularly want to shout or exclude. I’d rather just carry on doing what I’m doing, and engaging with people and institutions that interest me. They can carry on doing what they are doing too, but I’m not going to term that ‘critical’ work.

Now I’m interested in quite a few different things, but for the purposes of this conversation, one of them is institutional change towards forms of organization that are based on localized forms of exchange, collective decision making in all institutions, and cultural pluralism (I won’t bother listing the things that I’m ‘against’). If we broadly call this ‘the left’, and I’m including most forms of anarchism here, then yes, I expect people who call themselves critical to share these sorts of positions. Telling me that leadership is a narrative, or that identity is multiple, is hence interesting enough, but tells me nothing about how this knowledge might work towards social change. So, if I read or listen to ideas that don’t seem to share this ‘left’ position, then I don’t think it should be called critical. This means, by the way, that quite a few things that I write can’t really be called ‘critical’ either, but I’m fine with that because they aren’t really ‘management studies’ either.

Your question was how to build a ‘movement’. I don’t really have an answer to this, and in some ways I think that is because I am predictably worried that any movement will harden into another fashion, which in turn becomes another journal, book series, chair, department and so on. Academics gradually turn ideas into clichés, which in turn become careers, and eventually footnotes. But at the same time, the ‘left’ in a wider sense is a movement that (in my country) has achieved all sorts of gains over the past century. Having academics on your side doesn’t seem to have been a precondition of success in this wider arena however, so I don’t think we should assume that we are particularly needed or wanted. Nonetheless, if we could help, through our activities at home, work and in our public lives, we should do so. The more of us that help, the more likely some enduring changes might happen. But I’d say that to anyone, not just academics.

As for emancipation through teaching, well, it's too soon to say. Most of the time, I teach large groups in lecture theatres, and I think this means that my students are usually an audience. As a lecturer I am pessimistic, largely because I don't see much effect from my attempts to be critical on the podium. I do it, because I can't really do anything else and feel good about myself in the morning. And I think I do it well, in the sense of an old stager being fairly skilled at making an audience respond to them. I enjoy it, when I'm doing it. But I'm often rather depressed afterwards. I've heard all my tired old jokes, and I see nothing new in my ringing condemnations of this, that and the other.

Flaubert said that 'Language is a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, while all the time we long to move the stars to pity.' I want to see the change happen in front of my eyes, but instead I just get board marker on my hands and a nagging headache from twenty two years of standing up in front of classes. But, people do tell me that I made some sort of difference to them, but then I assume that they are just being nice. Still, it would be daft to assume that teaching doesn't make some sort of difference. If we include supervision of dissertations, smaller seminars and learning from colleagues, then there is (for me) a clear sense of learning becoming collective, and part of a relationship. The longer the relationship, the deeper the learning on both sides. But the political economy of contemporary universities doesn't really encourage me to spend my expensive time in front of small groups or individuals. In order to do more of it, we would need to do less 'research' (perhaps not a bad thing) or have less students, or more staff.

Universities could be about teaching in this sense, and be vibrant and interesting places to be, but only if the question of who pays the wages can be settled first. Universities which employ academics and cleaners need to get income from somewhere. The answers begins with where, but rapidly leads into assumptions about what they are paying for, and hence about how much it should cost. Hence distance learning does make sense for a lot of people, and you may think they are 'unfortunate', when many of them seem to feel that they are rather lucky. If you live outside the global north, and have some cash, our universities might look like rather good places to be, and might teach all sorts of interesting things. Which takes me back to the question of audience, but in a more general sense. In order to know what a teacher might do to encourage thought, and perhaps emancipation from previous ideas, they would need to understand their audience first. Most of the time, I don't have the time to find out, so my teaching becomes performance, and I learn nothing and they learn little.

SD Tony, would you like to come in here?

TT The City University of New York (CUNY my 'home', one that I once shared with Stefano) also houses the Baruch Business School – one of the most acute examples of ruthless business school ideology. But this ideology isn't empty – it is instead riddled with contradictions and fissures that are also part of the contested terrain.

For instance, Neo-Classical Economics has radiated from Chicago/Rochester/AAA to provide the legitimizing framework/ideology for research, MBA and undergraduate syllabi for schools throughout the U.S. and frankly, large swathes of the UK (where

business schools often emerged as the unwanted stepchildren of many third rate neoclassical economics departments). So Neo-Classical economic ideology isn't empty, nor are many of its 'practical' extensions in (say) MBA programs. It is an ideology whose flaws have – and continue to be – exposed by attacks by Classical / Keynesian (and very important, Cambridge Controversy) exchanges. Nor are these just 'intellectual' struggles, these contradictions rather manifest themselves within the 'real' crises of capitalism (take the realization/credit/subprime fiascos for instance). Attacking these weaknesses – recognized as such, at times of crises that are partially registered in public consciousness offers magnificent opportunities for progressives in business schools. If there is a sense in which business school ideology is 'empty', it is in its inability to speak to these urgent material breakdowns in terms of social reproduction.

Stefano provided a very valuable personal history that he carefully elaborated into historical and social contexts. I would like to offer a modest compliment to this analysis – using my Baruch, itself a bastion of arch-reaction, with faculty who wish they could get a job elsewhere, but whose lacklustre research record imprisons them in a 'teaching school'. Baruch's political Achilles Heel is its 90% state funding from a City with 70% minorities (for a school and faculty devoted to market capitalism). Baruch's Accountancy department has never hired, on tenure-track, or tenured, a black in its 70 year history. It hasn't been difficult to send torpedoes to Baruch on these matters: Congressperson Charles Barron (ex-Panther and someone who has brought some \$50 million to CUNY from Albany) helps with approaches to Matt Goldstein (CUNY Chancellor) about getting Baruch to clean up its act. Articles in the student newspaper *The Ticker* such as 'Its Official, we can Discriminate!' have also sent the Baruch/CUNY Administration running for cover. But, as Stefano correctly notes, 'it is never over' because we can't eradicate the basic contradictions, and – relatedly – the social intellect needs to mature. There is no closure here, only a series of (re)engagements and (re)transformations that must always be attuned to the present.

SH Tony is quite right that all of us feel the effects of business school ideology and in this sense it is certainly not empty. We feel this ideology enacting us. It does mobilize all kinds of efforts on behalf of further capitalist accumulation, and the further imposition of work as the necessary discipline for this accumulation. When I said business studies equals zero, somewhat histrionically I meant to point to the fact that inside the business curriculum, inside business scholarship, there is nothing we can actually use to understand these struggles around accumulation and work and therefore nothing we can use to understand capital. All we have are the questions business answers, to paraphrase Marx, as a way not to bring up other questions. Anything useful is ruthlessly excluded because whatever else divides business scholars, they are united around the principle that capitalist society is both possible and desirable.

At the risk of being obvious, I have never seen any evidence for these positions. Indeed all the evidence is that capitalist society is both doomed and compulsory, and since these are the very direct stakes of what it would mean to be critical in the business school, the critique really is all or nothing. As Gayatri Spivak said – without hesitation – when she spoke at the management school at Leicester – when asked what a good business school would be, she replied, the good business school would be socialism. One of the reasons that CMS can sometimes appear to verge on the frivolous is actually,

I think, because of this very serious problem of emptiness in business ideology. Whatever one would need to critique business, one cannot find it in business scholarship. This is the sense in which it seems empty to me, in a way that studying 19th century novels, or contemporary television, or public health would not be, whatever the actual limitations of scholarship in these fields. And this sense of something missing is at the source of why CMS appears so fashionable, picking up Bataille this year, and Deleuze next year, and see you in 2010 for management and the pre-Socratics.

There is a symptomatic search going on here. I think the reasons it often cannot simply tell itself that it requires a forthright critique of capital has everything to do with our very immediate conditions of work in the university. Critique in this particular discipline requires something that most disciplines do not. It requires one to be able to call for the abolition of the discipline. It asks of the workers to abolish themselves and we can see why this is not easy when down the hall literature has a socialist future! And yet, if we don't do it, we might as well just show up in 2010 for the management and the pre-Socratics conference.

Maybe I could just point to the most logical problem arising from the call for abolition. I could call for socialism in an English department, like Terry Eagleton for instance, without at the same time calling for the abolition of my subject area. Such a call for socialism, communism, or anarcho-syndicalism, might not make me popular, and the prosperity of a few figures like Eagleton should not deceive us of the difficulties, but it does not immediately put me at war with those around me. And as we know academic wars are surprisingly vicious. Nor does it give my enemies such a good weapon – why should we listen to his points on structural racism or patriarchy in business studies – he wants to abolish the field. Or why should we interview him on BBC – has he not disqualified himself as an analyst by announcing for socialism?

So this is one reason I have some sympathy for CMS, as much as I recognize in Martin's and Tony's comments the truth of its ineffectuality. But should we then sacrifice our critique for strategic reasons? I think this would be a false distinction.

I draw some inspiration here from the prison abolition movement – you can imagine in the era of knife crime and its accompanying negrophobia and in the era of terrorism and its accompanying islamophobia, and the ways both of these state generated phobias actually keep in place homophobia and patriarchy – you can imagine in this era calling for the abolition of the prison entirely as Angela Davis, Joy James, Ruth Gilmore and others have done. Perhaps this is not strategic. They will not be consulted by Obama and have the chance to make real change. It is certainly radical. Only the call for the abolition of the slave on a slave planet was a more radical call. But would we say about the original abolitionists that they lacked strategy? Would we say this of Frederick Douglas? Or about Lenin? And I would not say it about Angela Davis and I would not say it about anyone who stood up inside the business school and said the first step to socialism is the abolition of the business school, as Spivak did from outside the business school. It is a question of reminding ourselves that strategy and compromise are not the same thing. A difficult thing to say in this reasonable era, but not that difficult comparatively.

TT Forgive the selective response, as there is much that needs digesting (and much that is agreeable) in all of this. Perhaps I have suffered too much of a business curriculum – first hand – to feel that it is not empty in the way that Stefano describes.

When economics, accounting, and other business students/faculty draw a three dimensional graph of a production function, with land, labour and capital on the axis, they commit a fundamental logical flaw, that permits insiders the opportunity to critique. How does one draw, on the capital axis, a quantity measure of capital, without assuming a cost of capital? If the cost of capital is presumed, or set at the outset, it also fixes the distribution of income (between capital and labour). But this is what the graph is supposed to decide (the efficient frontier of income distribution between labour and capital). The end result is determined from the outset.

In short, neo-classicism isn't hermeneutically sealed or empty. There is a vent or fissure for criticism. Once it has been shown that the distribution of income must be determined exogenously (a la Ricardo) then we put Economic Sociology back on the map (Maurice Dobb) because we now need to investigate the sociological conditions of income determination. And you know what that means? Class conflict!

SH Yes Tony, I absolutely agree that criticism of the business curriculum is possible, and necessary, for the reasons you illustrate so well. Even to read the great economists immanently (never mind vulgar business school economists) Marx had to bring with him the workers struggle and Hegel. We will need Maurice Dobb at the least! And for me the main reason to resist the operation of business scholarship as it externalizes struggle and the main reason to read struggle back into it immanently, as you do, is because again 'the good business school would be socialism.' What I mean is that the business school is a gathering of resources as I have said, of labour, of material, even of knowledge, despite itself. The last thing I want to do is to destroy it or disavow it, as I have sometimes been accused. I want to embrace it and make it into socialism. I want to bring struggle to the heart of its scholarship and teaching until it actually teaches us something about organization, about accounting, about strategy, even about management.

And for me this starts with pedagogy. I don't agree with those who say we should teach 'business skills' and then offer the students some critical insight in the 9th and 10th week of lecture, as some kind of prophylactic afterthought. In fact some of my friends do this, but I think they shouldn't. Of course there are circumstances where one has to teach this curriculum to keep a job, and that's fine, and requires more subtle forms of resistance. But the business school curriculum is immoral. And teaching it under anything less than a threat to one's livelihood is immoral. There is no such thing as imparting a few neutral skills under capitalism, much less giving the students what they want (which is absurd unless you believe students want to kill other students). There is only one skill under the permanent emergency of capitalism, and that is the critical skill. Paulo Freire taught us this when he showed us that even at the very beginning of learning, at the first moments of literacy, pedagogy is political, the learning of words is about power.

From the very beginning skill is political, and teaching is critical or it is nothing. And it is not just literacy. From Einstein to Oppenheimer right up to Haraway we have been warned about the dangers of teaching numeracy uncritically, as if one can choose, in fine capitalist fashion, to consume neutrality or criticality.

‘I’ll take the neutral curriculum in financial management, and give me two critical marketing courses to take away!’

I am not saying anything new here but simply outlining how many critical management scholars ‘make a concession’ by teaching some straight business school curriculum, even if this is intended to be contrasted later, or tell themselves the students are not ready for the critical until the third year, or the second semester. But this is immoral. There are not two. There is one, the critical one (which itself may be divided of course, and indeed as Adorno taught us, this must be unhappy with itself).

Now I am not excluding the possibility that teaching the business school curriculum can be a set up for smashing it, but this is very different from giving equal time or weight to the business school curriculum and critical approaches, or from letting students make up their minds once they have heard the arguments. That is what I mean by immoral. But recognizing the one skill is not enough. Somehow we have to do this with students. We have to get to the point where students want to study because study, as Fred Moten and I have argued, is the one thing not permitted in the university, and therefore the necessary thing. And study is education considered from the perspective of the critical, a curriculum considered from the perspective of the political.

TT Your caution against the tactic of ‘wait until I get tenure’ before I do the right thing – is well-taken. This is a refrain offered across the board; it extends to those guilt-prone liberals whose bad conscience tells them that they should do better. One problem with their line is that they never acquire the skills or taste for critical politics in the academy. In my shop, these characters get tenure, and then sink into a morass of disenchantment eventually ending up as second class consultants.

MP Oh come on! This seems less like a debate and more like a back-slapping contest, a back-slapping contest combined with a few swipes at the bad people we don’t like...

SH Martin’s comments bring up for me an uncomfortable condition. When we make a critique of the business school it does often appear like we are criticizing colleagues ‘in the mainstream’ (or CMS colleagues who have moved to the mainstream) and that they are somehow easy targets, or that they are decent people who don’t deserve our ire, or that we do this to feel superior, or that we do this without examining our own compromises. But the fact is, long before I even thought to make a critique of the business school, the so-called mainstream was already destroying, discrediting, and ridiculing anything that did not ruthlessly exclude questions of class struggle, to say nothing of radical feminist, queer or anti-racist critiques, and that includes people not just writing. Through ruthless journal refereeing processes, through hiring and promotion, through monopolizing the curriculum, and through making alliances with the corporate publishers, press, and professional associations, the so-called mainstream has done nothing but seek to destroy critique.

This is to say nothing about what their curriculum does to the world or to the students (even if students must take some responsibility for this). It is not we who chose this battle in the business school, and it is not we who list people we dislike. Any history of anti-communism will tell you that. We did not declare this war with our critique.

This means, for me, that any critique of the business school is also war, as Negri says of communism. The Right who dominate the business school – let’s let them call themselves mainstream if they wish – know this. The surest way to be destroyed by their war is to pretend it is not there. But because they have persecuted this war since the inception of this subject, I do not make my critiques for them. I am more interested in my friends, in convincing them of some of these points about the business school, and in trying to develop some collective strategy too, trying, if you like to get them on to a war footing amid this epistemic violence. So my assertion that ‘the business school curriculum is empty’ is an assertion for my friends, not one for those on the Right who dominate business schools by what can seem like a huge margin, unless we count students. When I say it is empty I mean it is empty of anything we would need to analyze business and management as a practice today or to reflect on this curriculum.

Take as an almost random example Charles Handy’s classic *Understanding Organisation*. Now this is book often assigned at the beginning of a business education, and at the same time a book that is empty of what a student would need to understand organizations. Take just one chapter, but we could take any one, the chapter on ‘why people work’. This is a very intelligent chapter, very considered. It quotes Tolstoy and *A Winter’s Tale* and takes us through all kinds of ‘motivations’ for work. Not once does it talk about the freeing of wage labour that leads to the founding compulsion to work in our society (much less does it question whether everyone wants to work). How can a student be expected to understand anything about why people work without at least an acknowledgement, if not an explication, of how they would starve or be jailed if they did not work, indeed how they have been starved and jailed for such refusals? No. Students need to start with EP Thompson. This is not a matter of liberal pluralism for me. It is a matter of teaching a curriculum filled with the critical tools a student needs, or it is a matter of teaching an empty subject (and making one in the process).

And this is also a strategic point for me. I want to urge my friends to stop treating the business curriculum as an equal in their teaching. This is a difference of quality with literature or geography or history, not emphasis, despite all of the failures of these subject in bourgeois hands (although even the bourgeois critiques like for instance *Vanity Fair* are more than you will ever get from Charles Handy), and this is why saying it is empty is for me a first step towards its abolition.

SD Given the fact that we are discussing the business school, maybe it is indeed fitting to close upon a set of strategic considerations.

Martin, can you suggest how we might re-consider the role of the business school, and moreover of the role of critical scholarship within the business school, in a manner that does not result in the sort of self-congratulation which you believe this discussion has tended towards.

Stefano, can you please say something about how your proposed business curriculum, necessarily re-conceived from the perspective of the political in light of its inherent emptiness, might be fought for against a prevalent conservative tendency which holds this curriculum as pedagogically legitimate and morally defensible, morally commendable even.

Tony, can you elaborate upon some of the consequences of what seems to be your strategy of engaging the content of the business curriculum precisely in terms of its blind spots? In particular, I wonder if you think it might be possible to generate collectives around such a project?

MP I suspect that self-congratulation is a common disease for intellectuals. They know, these wise professors, and others don't. This sort of diagnosis has at least two features – that the professors think themselves to be special, and that their customers think the professors are special. So, in our tiny little worlds, we become superheroes, known across our local conference circuit and amongst the few people who read our comics and vanity publications. And then I am asked what my opinion is on various things, and I declaim loudly and confidently as if I know stuff that other people don't know.

Clever huh!?

But no-one listens. The cultural counterpoint to the wise tenured expert is the irrelevant boffin who uses ten words where one will do and leaves his umbrella on the train. This is the box that we are really in, one in which we can imagine ourselves to be important, whilst our squeaky mannered voices simply don't travel far enough for anyone to hear. And this diagnosis hurts the 'critical' people even more, because they so badly want to be heard. So they end up sounding like messianic mice, declaring that they can see through to the other side, and that others are blinded by selfishness or stupidity. And, when they talk together, their squeaky little voices share the outrage of 'no one listens', but ends up blaming those who don't listen.

Apologies to Tony and Stefano for dragging them into my mice metaphors, but I think that the only way that self-congratulation can be avoided is if the university stops being a box that produces such thinking. 'We' (whoever we imagine ourselves to be) must try our hardest to de-institutionalise what it means to claim to be an intellectual, and work to open the university to become an institution that is free to those who want it. This works both ways. Academics must do their best to write for the popular press, and write books that people read, and become involved in whatever forms of public life enthuse them, and teach in the inclusive ways that Stefano talks about. But it must also be the case that 'higher learning' is deinstitutionalised. At the moment, the business school is an extreme example of printing qualifications for money, but I wonder what would happen if universities did not issue qualifications at all, but were just there for people who wanted them. With more than an echo of Ivan Illich, I think that the answer to the problem of insularity is to stop living in the institutions that produce it.

And yes, I know I'm one of the mice.

SH I think there is a level at which education is impossible today. It's impossible inside the university, never mind the business school. The time of the university is not the time

of study, not the time of collectivity. And the space of the university is occupied. The university is occupied today not by the demands of militant students or faculty. Nor is it just occupied by military and drug research. This latter has always been the case. It's occupied by its own labour process, its own schedule of production, turning out articles, books, students, exams, papers, marks, minutes, buildings, brands, patents. Trying to hold a reading group in the university today is like trying to hold one on the floor of a car plant or a discount trader. And this brings us to education outside the university, the flight from the university (or the floor). This is also impossible today. Because life beyond the walls of the university is just as busy and just as regulated, and it is poor. The wealth of resources gathered in the university are denied to the outside except through extensions of the labour process, as with spin-offs. No one can walk into a university library, nor access journals, unless they are producing labour in the university as a student, academic, administrator or plant worker.

Of course the reason for all this regulation and all this productivity is precisely in reaction to the fact the people keep trying to educate each other. They must be stopped. But they are never completely stopped. I love the dizzying height of the contradiction here – the university dedicated to the prevention of study. But of course especially self-study, collective study! So that is the context for any question of real curriculum in the business school. All this talk of objective business skills is part of this busy productivity. It's meaningless but effective – Bill Readings was right on this, on this meaninglessness when he fastened on the term 'excellence,' but he could not see yet its connection to work as control, to work set against study.

Whatever we do, and your question already hints at this, we cannot do it alone. This is a mistake made by those colleagues who try to quarantine the space of their lecture from the rest of the curriculum, and try to make this lecture hall, or seminar table, a place apart, a place of criticality. This never works. The university is today designed to make such people into freaks, and it does. Any curricular project must be collective – this is the strength of the premise in the Manifestos book I already mentioned. But the collective will also have to include students from the very beginning. Then it is a question of starting from scratch. As you can tell I don't favour an immanent critique in teaching in the business school, although I have tried it, and tried it in my scholarship. I favour junking it, especially at the undergraduate level, and building something new.

Let's see how long it is before we run into anything recognizable in the business school curriculum and its skills, anything even resembling it. I bet it will be quite a while. But let's make a curriculum about what it is like to be prepared for work in this society, to have to work in this society, to have been financialized, and what it is like organize, to try to go undetected and undisturbed, and to try to disturb and detect capital's resistance to our efforts. Start from the student labour process and start from the teaching labour process. If the university is a corporation let us take seriously what we know about corporations, what students know about corporations. Freire is right on this – we will have to make the road as we travel – and that travel must take us inside and outside the university, back and forth, for an impossible education. We must haunt what I have called the metroversity as it haunts us today, through its streets and its corridors.

SD As if to imply the position which he was perhaps going to allude towards, Tony has told me that he is not in a position to respond to this question because his time has been so severely taxed by calls for him to comment upon the causes and consequences of the financial crisis...

SH In that case, perhaps we might close on the question that was not asked by you here. How should we understand the relationship between the business school and the present crisis in finance capital? Well one thing we know is that a lot of people are going to be warehousing their labour in the business school in the next couple of years, if previous crises are indicative. Remember, crisis is the normal condition, not the exception, in capitalism, especially for workers – this is the real ambient terror, the daily terror of being waged or unwaged, a terror which is itself, like Brian Massumi's, below the level of the body in many cases.

What are all those who warehouse themselves going to learn here, in the business school? Richard Dienst says that television is not about a message or a medium but is instead a machine for socializing time, and we could say the same thing of the business school, that it is still a machine for socializing labour time, including teaching it to wait. We know what this involves: submitting students to extreme boredom, to random authority, and to operations and analysis without larger meaning – and these continue to be the important traits of any worker.

But the UK context is interesting. Finance is so important here as an industry, and with it in turmoil, even with the so-called bailouts, national economic hopes turn increasingly to the creative industries (including heritage and tourism) and the sciences (especially drugs and weapons). I think we will see in the business school a trend toward inter-disciplinarity both inside and outside its traditional borders as these industries and their disciplines entwine further with the business school. I fear that Martin's de-schooling will amount to this inter-disciplinarity in practice. The university is already going out into these industries of the arts and sciences and they are already coming in. I've called this the metroversity.

One of its characteristics is a strange enchantment hovering over in the city. David Harvey calls this enchantment the art of rent. Suddenly those in these industries of the arts and sciences are to behave like we used to, and some still do, in the university – they are to behave as if the general equivalent does not apply, as if they are not already abstract labour. But rather they are to act like their creations, whether chemical compounds or modern dance, are not yet commodified.

This is very much like the old history professor or literature lecturer who thinks his scholarship is his own, that he is in some kind of craft relationship to capital. Now this idea of craft is supposed to enchant the labour of the city as a whole, from tourism, to art zones, to the science parks on its edges. At the very moment the university is finally understood, thanks to Chris Newfield and others, as academic capitalism, the university spreads its most mystifying aspects into these industries, into the city, trying to convince people that they are starting with pure science and pure art, pure culture and pure subculture, and then entering into industry in these partnerships, in the

metroversity. This is simply a labour process technique, but it worked for years in the university, provoking all kinds of investment in an alienated labour of scholarship.

Thus the business school of tomorrow may look like the university of yesterday. This metroversity is not the place we would want to rest our analysis, or our militancy.

MP Which rather leaves open the question of how we, as critical Business School academics, respond to the financial crisis now. Because we are not yet at either Stefano's metroversity, or my de-schooled society. Tony, Stefano, Stephen and I have all recently been using our positions as 'Business School Experts' to make a variety of critical points about the present situation in a variety of media in the US and UK, and I do want us all to shout loudly if we are offered the microphone. As I've said, the sequestration of the university from wider forms of public discourse and debate is a really key issue in any evaluation of what 'critique' can achieve. But at the same time I am deeply suspicious of the idea that we become 'rent-a-quote' academics used to pad stories, and that our respective press offices count the number of times our universities are named. Professor Bighead isn't that much of a threat to the established order after all, and could even be a marketing opportunity for academic capitalism.

So, the paradox – which applies to CMS, to disciplines, to institutions – is that we can't do with them, can't do without them. The possibility of speaking truth to power is both constrained and enabled by where we stand right now. At the moment, disposing of the productive possibilities of that power would probably be a bad idea. We are in the middle of an extraordinary moment where Business Schools and a popular critique of capitalism can be conjoined in some very public ways, and all sorts of possibilities then begin to open up, both inside and outside our institutions. But we should never forget that power works on us, as well as for us, just in case we start to believe that we really are Professor Bighead. Because we really wouldn't be worth listening to then.