

# Cultural Turns: A Matter of Management?

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## Abstract

In recent years *cultural turns* have had a considerable impact in the humanities and social sciences. How much potential can these turns unfold in inspiring (critical) management studies? Could they lead to a more concrete cultural framing of the field – by providing operative analytical categories and new spatial, performative, interpretive, iconic, translational, postcolonial etc. approaches? But a reverse question can also be asked: To what extent can we apply a managerial perspective on the *cultural turns* themselves? In which way could they be considered as a matter of management?

By highlighting the role of *cultural turns* for management studies, my paper explores possible impacts of the *cultural turns* on a new understanding and practice of management. But in the end, it probes the limits of management by asking: Are *cultural turns* themselves manageable at all?

## Management in light of cultural turns<sup>1</sup>

In analogy to Benedict Anderson's famous words about the nation as an imagined community, one could say that management must be imagined before it can exist and be practiced. To imagine management as culturally contextualized, symbolically conceptualized and collectively represented is not simply a matter of imagining an encompassing 'cultural turn' in management studies, including business and marketing (Ray and Sayer 1999; Gay and Pryke 2002: 1; Zotzmann 2010; Yaprak 2008).<sup>2</sup> Rather, this imagining must take several cultural turns into account. Within the last few years, cultural turns have had a considerable impact on the humanities and social sciences. But can these turns also bring new impetus to management studies? To what extent can they lead to a more concrete and explicit cultural framing of these studies, not only by

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1 I am grateful to Elizabeth Kovach for her help with the translation.

2 One of the main initiators of the study of culture approach in business studies along a specific understanding of culture as mental software and programming has been Geert Hofstede (2010).

drawing attention to new objects of investigation such as space, performativity, interpretation, images and translation, but also by developing them into analytical categories?

This article provides some suggestions on how to further reorient management studies by adopting a ‘cultural-turns perspective’. When it comes to cultural studies and the development of its turns, management studies has its limits. Both management studies and cultural studies could profit from a reconceptualization of management. This article proposes the consideration of management as an exploration of connectivities.

I would like to stress from the outset that I am employing a cultural-theoretical perspective, after having established the concept of ‘cultural turns’ a few years ago (see Bachmann-Medick 2016). Cultural turns signify new theoretical orientations and analytical categories in the humanities and social sciences. When applied to management studies, they have so far been considered epistemologically, as new conceptualizations. What seems to still be missing is a discussion of their implementation with respect to management practice, for which cultural turns can provide valuable analytical tools. They divide the increasingly complex field of managerial work into smaller components and enable the investigation of these components under specific foci – such as the spatial, the visual, the performative, the translational, or the interpretive dimensions of managerial work. At issue are thus not new subjects or themes but rather new analytical lenses. As such, the ‘turns perspective’ can also be applied to historical examples.

### **The interpretive turn**

The engraving from the seventeenth century (Figure 1) shows a management-customer relationship in a London pharmacy. It can be approached in light of several turns. To view this picture from the perspective of the ‘interpretive turn’ means to read it in terms of symbolic communication in economic relations. As historians have discovered, the new set-up of a pharmacy shop with facilities and material furnishings was key for innovating and changing the traditional notion of pharmaceutical products (Wallis 2008; Neu 2013). The new shop environment and the polite handling of customers helped to turn familiar *Hausmittel*, such as natural drugs, into new products of commodified medicine. This historical example shows how – merely through a certain display of products and style of shop – economic and material goods can be re-valued as cultural goods loaded with meaning and symbolic value, thus provoking new collective emotional responses, propelling desires, wishes and hopes. What we see in this seemingly

trivial representation is the contribution of a pharmacy shop to the “construction of social identity through consumption” (Mahadevan 2009); thus pointing to the formation of social and cultural meanings through processes of economic exchange and consumption. We can experience these powerful mechanisms at work even more today in the context of, for instance, fan cultures or the clusters of meaning in the production of lifestyles. In any case, what we can observe here is a change from a use-value-centered practice to sign-value-centered practice through a new style of management.



*Figure 1:* Frontispiece to Michel Morel: *The expert doctors dispensatory*, London: N. Brook 1657.

This change can be analyzed with the semiotic tools of the interpretive turn, which provides new insights into the interdependency of sense making and sign production. These tools can be usefully applied to processes of meaning formation in the context of “interpretive marketing” (Moisander and Valtonen

2012) which involves using ethnographic insights for a deeper, culturally contextualized understanding of branding and processes of consumption. They can also lead to new meaning- and narrativity-based conceptualizations of organizations in which organizations are not understood as mere repetitions of bureaucratic routines but also as semiotic formations. This goes along with a new conceptualization of management as “symbolic action”<sup>3</sup>. The semiotic approach of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz offers a source of inspiration in this context. It helps us to decipher ‘culture as text’, to consider culture as a matter of narrative identity formation, meaning making and, last but not least, self-interpretation. According to Geertz, cultures are systems of meaning and always contain their own interpretations, for instance by making their specific affective cohesion visible.<sup>4</sup> Applied to organization studies, this suggests that we read “organizations as texts” (Linstead 2003: 1) and apply textual analysis to organization studies to gain self-reflexive insights into inner symbolic structures and meaning-making processes (Linstead 2003: 2). We thus should no longer bind organizational culture to the idea of fixed and essential units and instead see it as involved in an open-ended web of shared meanings as well as plural interpretations and textual relations (see Altehenger et al. 2011).

The role of narratives and emic interpretations is of central importance when considering issues of cross-cultural management. Let us take as a case study the narrative practices of ChipTech, a German tech firm that outsources work to India. By conducting fieldwork, Jasmin Mahadevan (2009) has found that elaborate narrative practices seem to be productive tools for mediating the self-conceptions of engineers and managers in this firm. Narratives function as integrative tools that form an indispensable precondition for critically reflecting upon the categorizations of “‘We’ and ‘the Other’”. As Mahadevan (2009) states, “My main argument is that it is of prime importance for the field of intercultural communication to fully understand (narrative – DBM) sense-making in organizations before trying to influence unknown emic categorizations of the other through predefined etic categories of ‘We’ and ‘the Other’.” It seems that what is needed here and elsewhere is an ‘interpretive manager’ who listens, talks and interacts instead of mainly analyzes. In another study, Richard Lester claims that a manager “needs to act less like an engineer and more like the leader of a jazz combo” (Lester et al. 1998: 89), practicing various changing roles and improvisation skills in a web of meanings and tunes instead of staying caught in

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3 See, on an interpretive versus a functionalist approach in management studies, Demers (2007: 75-92, here 76).

4 Compare Geertz (1975: 453): “societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations”; on culture as text, see Bachmann-Medick (2012).

a fixed structure of economic dichotomies and laws. ‘Jazzing’ management leads us directly to the performative turn.

### **The performative turn**

The financial speculations and simulacra that characterized the recent financial crises have been shaped by a kind of performativity that constituted rather than merely represented (economic) realities. This mechanism of performative constitution is also effected by models that economists use to analyze markets, as such models ultimately play a role in creating these markets (see the stimulating volume MacKenzie et al. 2007). Such processes and analytical insights have certainly fostered the rise of a ‘performative turn’ in the analysis of economy as well as of business, marketing and management.<sup>5</sup> But how can we understand organizational and management studies as a ‘performative project’? This is a frequently asked question (Spicer et al. 2009: 537).

Critical management studies has developed a notion of ‘critical performativity’ that is applied to “active and subversive intervention into managerial discourses and practices” (Spicer et al. 2009: 538). This position implies radical resistance to the conventional notion of performance as efficiency and optimization between input and output (Spicer et al. 2009: 541). It instead investigates language use and rhetoric as central elements:

“The performative element, we suggest, requires researchers to ‘activate’ the language that managers use (see Austin, 1963). In this way, CMS scholars may support managers to ‘talk into existence’ new behaviours or practices (...). Here, language is understood as a medium that affects how people interpret their reality, how they assess things as important or unimportant, and how they feel and behave.” (Wickert and Schaefer 2015: 109)

This position on language use shifts attention away from large corporations and towards small-scale sites. By slicing larger problems into smaller manageable units, the performative (and emancipatory) potential of re-inscription and re-interpretation can be brought to the fore. This practice tries to enable and realize “small wins” (Wickert and Schaefer 2015: 120) instead of big changes and thus aims at a kind of “micro-emancipation” (Spicer et al. 2009: 553) by providing spaces for initiative and self-determination beyond overarching managerial

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5 Muniesa (2014), on the ‘performative turn’ esp. 7-16; on a comprehensive overview of the approaches to “provoke a performative turn in OMT (organization and management theory – DBM)”, see Gond et al. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ijmr.12074/pdf> (online-Version July 2015: 1-24), here 2.

domination and control. Furthermore, by establishing a specific rhetoric of social responsibility (Wickert and Schaefer 2015: 109) – like a speech act – a step-by-step transformation of behavior as well as new managerial practices could be achieved. However, this rhetorical strategy might only be a first step, as changes in language use and rhetorical practices alone do not necessarily lead to changes in behavior. Additional strategies have also become the focus of the performative reorientation of management, such as narrativity, storytelling and the use of metaphors. Some have begun to speak of a ‘narrative turn’ in management, management studies and organization and marketing theory.<sup>6</sup> A much stronger ‘political theory of organizational performativity’ has also been added to this perspective.<sup>7</sup> It emphasizes that performativity is more than a subject’s intentional expression through language use. The subject itself – as Judith Butler (2006: 25) claims by referring to the performative construction of gender – is constituted through repeated performances and iterations. Thus not merely language use but also the constitution of the subject within organizations (through discourses, institutions, and markets) and their changeability should be the focus of critical performativity in management studies.

Another path that has been opened by the performative turn in the study of culture has concentrated, on the one hand, on theatre studies and the force of theatrical expression in acting, which has offered creative inspiration for the application of theatrical improvisation in brand communication.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the performative turn in the study of culture has directed attention to the ritual, staging and dramatic aspects of human action as in the work of cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, one of the main figures in ritual and performance theory. This latter focus emphasizes an important performative tool: the notion of liminality as a condition for innovation. ‘Liminality’ denotes an important phase in transition rituals. In anthropology it is considered to be the source of groundbreaking cultural innovations. Management studies could certainly profit from this concept. In fact, it has been taken up in management studies, by, for instance, Barbara Czarniawska, who understands performativity explicitly as a non-consensual, liminal practice and, accordingly, has suggested that one understands leadership as “a stage performance” in the face of an “organizational drama” (Czarniawska 1997; Czarniawska and Mazza 2003: 269: “consulting as a

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6 See, among others, Czarniawska (2004); Fenton and Langley (2011); Keulen and Kroeze (2012); Mein et al. (2014).

7 See Cabantous et al. (2015: 1-2); on the limits of the power of language in critical performativity and the necessity to include a “wider political analysis of organizations”, see Fleming and Banerjee (2015: 7).

8 See the stimulating essay on the importance of improvisational performance (including storytelling) for brand communication in social media, even claiming an “improvisational turn”, Singh and Sonnenburg (2012: 195).

condition of liminality”). The drama metaphor used here includes the notion of conflicts and tensions with an open ending, a notion specifically elaborated by Victor Turner (1982) in his concept of “social drama”.

The notion of liminality could also be central for management studies in another sense. When it is explicitly claimed, for instance, that the performative/performativity ‘turn’ is effective in management and organizational studies<sup>9</sup> – for example, in a new view of routines as sources of change and stability (Gond et al. 2015: 16-17) – one could also refer to Turner’s concept of liminality and look for ‘in-between’ liminal spaces. Such spaces bring actors into boundary situations that trigger moments of creative thinking and emergence. Consider the event of a business dinner (Sturdy et al. 2006): It suspends the organizational routine, blurs the boundaries between work/leisure, official/private spheres, which provides a liminal space for informal discussion of business. Business dinners can potentially create productive and innovative spaces between work and home, business and pleasure.

From organizational and management studies through to tourism studies, we find an important change in the understanding of agency that has contributed to the performative turn in the study of culture: the “shift from the gaze to the body ..., from authenticity to performativity ..., and from representations to everyday habits and practices” (Valtonen and Viejola 2011: 176; Harwood and El-Manstrly 2005). Beyond this new focus on embodiments, we are still faced with representations, with visual power and the gaze. Performativity often entails a high degree of visualization. This leads us to another turn: the iconic turn.

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9 Diedrich et al. (2013); Gond et al. (2015) on the attempt “to provoke a performative turn in OMT” here 2-3, see also 20-21.

## The iconic turn



*Figure 2:* Ford's ad featuring Silvio Berlusconi and tied up women (online source)

We are constantly exposed to powerful iconic messages, especially in the economy of global brands and their iconic self-assertion. Let us consider the highly provocative recent example of the Ford car company's controversial ad in India (Figure 2), which made use of Silvio Berlusconi's image and visual scenarios that insinuated rape, thereby alluding to the scandalous incidents of rape in contemporary India.<sup>10</sup> The ad features the cynical slogan "Leave Your Worries Behind". Image management seems to be one of the most important issues in our media-driven age, given the importance of visual communication and the demonstrative and mimetic effects of images. The management of images has been realized mainly in the contexts of marketing, brand images and corporate images. It is connected to the 'interpretive turn' in management, which registers the importance of visuality in cultural systems of meaning (Schroeder 2002: 5). It entails paying specific attention to the meaning-making capacities of

10 See, for example, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/03/24/ford-indian-car-ad-rape\\_n\\_2944574.html?](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/03/24/ford-indian-car-ad-rape_n_2944574.html?) (16 March 2016).

photography and the visual dimensions of travel, tourism, the World Wide Web and advertising. It is no coincidence, and proof of her truly trans-disciplinary work, that Barbara Maria Stafford (2012), one of the proponents of a pictorial/iconic turn in the humanities, has extended her art-historical expertise into the field of digital “behavioral tracking” of the visual traces of consumers. A critical point of her visual analyses is a main aspect of the visual communication in the economy of consumerism itself – namely, the phenomenon of product images having more presence than the products themselves (Schroeder 2002: 14-15). But what we definitely need, beyond this, is increased iconic responsibility.

The iconic turn in the humanities clearly supports this aim. Images are taken as media of cognition through which one can question the image-believing defaults in our understanding of reality. Exploring the image and the visual as analytical categories enables us to uncover the ways in which images manipulate reality. In addition, we can critically scrutinize the assumption that images are media of immediacy, showing and evidence. Even invisible, unseen, overlooked and marginalized ways of seeing as well as techniques of gaze, surveillance and control can be brought to the fore by new attention to the visual dimension of management and organizations as is presented, for instance, in a phenomenological analysis by Wendelin Küpers (2014).

Given “the growing recognition of the visual turn in management research as a counterweight to the linguistic turn” (Bell and Davison 2013: 167)<sup>11</sup>, one could indeed say that what had been an under-estimated aspect of visibility in management studies has the potential to compete with the currently dominating linguistic turn. But has the discovery of an iconic dimension of management already developed a new analytical category (by the way, this question has to be posed in relation to every turn)? I would say yes, as long as the visual lens is acknowledged as reaching beyond pictorial and visual objects. Attention to the visual as an analytical category opens up new areas for management studies that could explore emotionality, embodiment and corporate branding. This new critical mode of ‘visual thinking’ can also illuminate a general phenomenon: Images are connected to experiences of embodiment and emotionality and reach directly and deeply into our memories. They can also be used for representing work experiences via photography, for “visual autoethnography” (Bell and Davison 2013: 174), and for highlighting and analyzing tourist experiences. Of course, one must always remain aware of the danger of falling into the trap of “the myth of transparency” (Bell and Davison 2013: 175) by mistaking pictures for immediate windows into reality.

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11 Especially informative is the Teaching and Learning Guide attached to this article; also Bell et al. (2014: 2): the “visual turn in organizational analysis”.

But what does it then mean for management studies to make use of such culturally sceptical image critique? It motivates us to reflect upon societal visual regimes, to acknowledge the cultural formation of visual perception as well as the regimes and taboos of the gaze, which go along with social and gender-specific forms of visibility and non-visibility which are certainly co-constituted by advertisement and marketing. Such critical image reflection seems to be especially relevant in reflections of the tourist gaze (see the interdisciplinary volume by Crouch and Lübbren 2003). Here, too, management studies should not merely rely on ‘naked’ seeing but should rather take discursively predetermined ways of seeing into account: “Seeing is what the human eye does. Gazing refers to the ‘discursive determinations’, of socially constructed seeing or ‘scopic regimes’” (Urry and Larsen 2011: 1-2). It is precisely this activation of culturally and socially established visual regimes and their specific power structures that should be considered in management studies. One cannot flee from the task of reflecting upon the close entanglement of consumer icons and images of violence in (Indian) reality. This dimension of power and power inequalities in images and icons leads directly to the postcolonial turn.

### The postcolonial turn



*Figure 3:* Yolanda Domínguez: “Fashion Victims“, Installation Madrid 2013. (online source)

This disturbing installation by Spanish artist Yolanda Domínguez in front of a Mango fashion store in Madrid is entitled “Fashion Victims” (Figure 3). The woman depicted is not the main victim of exhaustive shopping and consumption. The real ‘victims of fashion’ are the textile workers from Bangladesh. More than 1,000 workers died in the horrible collapse of a garment factory on April 24, 2013, the same year of this installation. The Spanish brands Mango and Zara, as well as H&M, were directly involved in this catastrophe of neocolonial capitalism. The installation makes this involvement visible to the European world. It thematizes the exploitation of third-world workers by Western textile companies. These workers have risked their lives for a ‘Hungerlohn’. We cannot close our eyes to the continuation of colonial exploitation and the unequal division of work resulting from continued power asymmetries. Reflection of this issue from the perspective of the postcolonial turn reaches even deeper: It opens up a critical stance to hierarchical binaries in general as well as the continuation of neocolonial relations and asymmetries between the markets of the first and third worlds. In this sense, the postcolonial turn is more than merely a new aspect or perspective in management studies. As a recent manifesto has claimed, it aims to fundamentally reconceptualize the entire field (Westwood and Jack 2007: 247; 2010).

On an epistemological level, looking through the postcolonial lens reveals that even the concepts of business, management and development as such cannot be considered as congruent amongst Western and non-Western societies. The universalizing claims of Western forms and practices of management in this light seem highly problematic and contested. They should be ‘provincialized’ in reference to the proposal by historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (Westwood and Jack 2007: 248) and relativized by other knowledge systems, as the above-mentioned manifesto claims. In this sense a postcolonial perspective aims to open up “a space for knowledge systems that have been repressed, marginalized or silenced by the colonizing propensities of the West’s discourses, knowledge systems and institutions” (Westwood and Jack 2007: 254). This postcolonial commitment certainly can have an important impact on the practice of management studies, as it exposes the universalization of the Western knowledge systems that has occurred throughout the history of colonialism. This development cannot simply be blotted out, as it has been a decisive factor that impacts colonial and neo-colonial encounters in organizational processes (see Frenkel and Shenhav 2006; Prasad 2003; Banerjee and Prasad 2008). It accounts for the entanglement of Western, capitalist profit-making and the ongoing exploitation of human resources in the countries of the Global South. A stronger inclusion of non-Western forms of management and indigenous research practices could perhaps pave the way to a more balanced but, at the same time, difference-oriented, self-

reflexive, cross-cultural mode of management and organization; thereby also engaging the “reflexive turn” (Westwood and Jack 2007: 258; Gordon and Gurrieri 2014) in the humanities and social sciences.



*Figure 4:* Bangladesh 2013: Dead bodies of garment workers after their factory collapsed (online source).

### The spatial turn

An exemplary case for considering the spatial turn in organizational studies is an investigation of the “interconnectedness of organizational change and architectural design processes ... in the case of open-space (or ‘turfless’) offices” (van Marrewijk and Yanow 2010: 4). This involves, above all, looking into the spatial dimensions and changes of workplaces (Dale and Burrell 2008) such as open-space offices, virtual workspace, etc. In doing so, one also deals with implicit Western conceptions of built space. Open, flexible and collaborative office spaces, for instance, have been explicitly designed to promote creativity and establish a new spatial *Spiel-Raum* (lee-way) – so to speak – for managing ideas and projects. Spatial conditions such as these have inspired a new understanding of leadership (Ropo et al. 2015) “as a relational construction between people, issues and the environment rather than as an individual quality” (Ropo et al. 2015: 2; on the ‘spatial turn’ in organization studies, see 7-9).

The spatial turn becomes particularly relevant in cases dealing with the locations of office buildings. The example of a new office building in Jakarta into which its Indonesian employees refused to move, is eye-opening for its cultural implications (Marrewijk and Yanow 2010: 6). Why did employees refuse to move into the building? The building is situated between Muslim and Christian cemeteries and thus violates intercultural spatial taboos and threatens to arouse conflicts. In the end, a cultural intervention in the form of a ritual performed by a Shaman priest defused anxieties and conflicts.

In an even wider, global sense, management studies is confronted with problems of spatial proximity, created in the field of force in which global industries and their transnational (interorganizational) networks have to meet local conditions. Here, management is forced to incorporate local settings of production and consumption, matters of space and place. But places, spaces, districts and regions are not always matters of clear identification and localization. With the spatial turn, new attention has been directed at acts of mental mapping, what have been called imaginary geographies, and concepts of mental or cultural distance and proximity. What matters here is not “place or space per se, but the social quality of ... spatial proximity” (Sydow 2002: 1), for instance in regional interorganizational networks. In the study of culture, the dimension of the imaginary has proven to be an important element in the constitution of space. As a new focus on the “unfolding of brands in space” (Sonnenburg and Baker 2013: 10) in the wake of the spatial turn, it applies explicitly to the realm of branding and marketing as well. And the reversed recognition that ‘space’ itself has increasingly been unfolding as a brand – for example, regions, cities, places that function as icons, as “tourist destination brandings” (Gronau and Adjouri 2013: 63) – could impact the study of culture, generating a new focus that so far has not attracted much attention.

For the economy of ‘branded spaces’, in turn, it would be most useful to adopt the concept of in-between spaces and make it productive for the entire field of “spatial economy” (Fujita et al. 2001). In the humanities and social sciences, ‘*Zwischenräume*’ have long been considered as specifically challenging, innovative ‘third spaces’ created by cultural overlapping and mixing and as ‘play spaces’ for creating something new. In economic and management studies, such hybrid in-between spaces could be fruitfully reconsidered: on the one hand, physically, as contemporary materializations of third spaces in new public ‘co-working spaces’ that replace lonely home offices;<sup>12</sup> on the other hand, as cultural contact zones and ‘liminal landscapes’ in tourism and mobility studies (Andrews

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12 An article of The New York Times by Alex Williams (May 5, 2013) deals with this new concept of ‘co-working spaces’ by referring to places such as *NeueHouse* in New York or *Starbucks*.

and Roberts 2012) – as spaces of transitional liminality<sup>13</sup> and translation in which intellectual and material values are created which demand especially sensible and reflexive management efforts. In addition, liminal ‘transitory dwelling work-places’ in organizations, such as bathrooms, stairways, corridors, cupboards – anthropologist Marc Augé (1995) would call them “non-places” – direct attention to the importance of places in organizations that unfold as productive, informal, ‘unmanaged’ spaces for free and alternative forms of communication and cooperation (see the inspiring article by Harriet Shortt 2015). Considering space in this dimension of in-between and transition is closely related to ideas that are central to the translational turn.

### **The translational turn**

The power of translation in global business transfer has been critically analyzed in many ways. One example of critical analysis is the website ‘Landscapes of Capital’, a collection of short video clips illustrating a sociology of advertising. A specific example on this website, particularly relevant with regard to the translational turn, is an IBM video clip entitled “Phones that Translate”<sup>14</sup>. It points to the ‘future of e-business’ by displaying a telephone that is able to transmit multilingual communication between global partners and immediately deliver language translations. The result is remarkable: global connection without any interference. But this advertisement seems to affirm an understanding of translation that is too easy and smooth. It equates translation with worldwide connectibility. The translational turn has complicated our view of translational activity by extending it beyond mere language transmission. It involves the posing of questions such as: How do we manage differences as well as shifts and transformations in context? How do we negotiate differences and misunderstandings and even acknowledge their productivity? How can we understand the movement and practical implementation of ideas and expertise at various places as a matter of translation?<sup>15</sup>

The main entry point to a translational turn into management has so far been offered by the work of Michel Callon and Bruno Latour in the sociology of translation (Callon 1986). Callon and Latour provide a fruitful framework for

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13 On adopting the notion of liminality in management studies as a spatial (not merely performative) experience and in-between practice, see Küpers (2011).

14 <http://landscapesofcapital.com/items/show/1218> (25 November 2015).

15 It is significant that there has been a call for papers for a forthcoming special issue of *The International Journal of Management Reviews* on “New Developments in Translation Research”, see Spyridonidis et al. (2014).

analyzing organizational change due to the implementation of new management concepts. Instead of understanding organizational change here as a general shift from one state into another, attention is paid to the micro ‘process of translation’. That involves single stages and steps taken by actors and their practices in a network and understands the dynamic processes in organizations as ‘a set of predefined sequential steps’ of change initiatives.<sup>16</sup> In this context, translation becomes a social dynamic of negotiation, action, adaptation and transformation between different levels of abstraction, between ideas and discourses, the structure of an organization and the initiatives, various interpretations and actions of its members. Translation reaches far beyond any linguistic or textual understanding of the term (Pettersen 2009: 12). In actor-network-theory, this understanding of translation has been shaped by “displacement, drift, invention, mediation, the creation of a new link that did not exist before and that to some degree modifies two elements or agents” (Latour 1994: 32). In this sense of movement, rupture and transformation, translation could substitute the traditional pattern of diffusion. It could become a model for organizational change as well as for transnational travel and local adaptation of ideas, such as ‘risk management’ and its translation amongst different countries as Barbara Czarniawska (2012) has shown by giving empirical comparisons.

This conception of translation as developed by actor-network-theory points certainly much more to possible breaks or even resistances than the model of the self-translating telephone. But it still tends to harmonize the motivation for translation in global management by evoking a “shared desire to arrive at the same result” (Callon 1980: 211) by looking for “various types of connections around the globe” (Czarniawska and Sevón 2005: 8). Shared desire in this context is a synonym for imitation, such as in fashion. But as we have seen from a postcolonial perspective, fashion is never far from becoming a matter of conflict and power inequality. It thus seems highly problematic to seamlessly substitute the older paradigm of diffusionism in the travel of ideas and goods with the newer category of translation as Barbara Czarniawska, one of the main proponents of a translational turn in organizational studies, has done. Translation does not only allow for transformation, but it also enables the transfer of ideas or goods into specific local frames, which could generate a surplus of meaning. As a Swedish example of city marketing shows, the implementation of an ‘experience economy’ and event marketing has been translated locally through new mixtures with elements of Swedish heritage, creativity and branding (Löfgren 2005: 27-28). Another surplus can be found in specific forms of

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16 See, in the context of a case study on the processual translation of a management concept (‘Lean Production’), Pettersen (2008, 2009).

knowledge translation, for example in transnational cooperation and transfers between firms across different organizational cultures and cultural contexts.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to taking note of this surplus, we should direct our attention to the translational turn in cultural studies. We could arrive at a more fruitful and complex conception of the uses of translation becoming aware of translation as a negotiation of differences by reflecting on modes of social addressing (which might be interesting for branding processes), pointing to shared reference points for better communication, and accepting and dealing with misunderstandings, turning them into productive opportunities (Fuchs 2009: esp. 26ff.).

As we learn from David Sixt's approach, conceiving of translation as a specific form of communication allows us to handle complex communication processes, for instance, those involved in brand communication (see Sixt 2013). In this context, translation can be seen as a strategy for managing complexity. It sheds light on reference systems and frameworks that exert their influence even before we can speak of brand communication. The translational strategy is to explore the perceptive conditions of the consumer, to gain a sense of his or her personal experiences in order to more effectively communicate brands. This problematic marketing strategy follows the same path as the effort to implement human rights in a global context (see Bachmann-Medick 2013). In both cases, we need to activate effective, shared frames of reference in order to localize and sustainably implement commodities and ideas, brands and human rights.

It is thus important to take note of 'pre-translation' situations before putting brand communication in motion to understand the mental preconditions, 'inner worlds' and expectations of recipients and consumers in order to practice a softer form of management in the sense of aiming at 'mutual acceptance' instead of one-sided selling in brand communication. The aim is thus to find translational connectivities. This issue, however, points to the intention (but also to the danger) of understanding translation strategically, as "a rhetorical art of persuasion" (Sixt 2013: 10) or even manipulation, while at the same time conceiving of translation as the successive communicative development of brand images. This ambivalence can only be laid open by using the analytical differentiations and reflexive capacities that have been provided by the translational turn in the humanities and social sciences.

Do management studies simply gain new impulses by jumping from turn to turn? It could certainly profit from taking note of the transdisciplinary constellation of turns and by conceiving of management as a network of components and actors (ANT) in a flat scenario, so to speak, instead of fixating on an outstanding management position. This would allow those in the field to

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17 See, on the example of knowledge translation in the business acquisition between Korean Daewoo Motor Co. and Polish Fabryka Samochodow Osobowych (FSO), Choi (2001).

grasp the complex involvement of management in our contemporary times. An emerging turn in this context is that of the *material/practice turn* that draws on science studies to investigate the participation of objects (like Xerox machines, computers, printers, software, etc.) in the interactions and narratives of organizations by drawing on object biographies (Humphries and Smith 2014). This ‘post-human’ entanglement with objects and technologies points *to* and takes note *of* the limits of traditional management concepts, a point made clear by the dialogue in an e-business video-clip entitled “New Boss”<sup>18</sup>:

Male speaker: “This is your future – The next generation. They won’t settle for life in cubicles. They will demand access to information to innovate, collaborate. Their branches will rupture your walls. Their only boss will be the best idea and it can come from anywhere. [pause for dramatic effect] Will they want to work for you or the competition?”

Female voiceover: “PeopleSoft. Applications for e-business.”

The ‘new boss’ addressed in this multi-media video is a new type of manager who is connected by networks and the use of the right software. Linked to this new positioning of management in an unbounded field of ‘best ideas’, in connectivity and networking is the political reconsideration of implicit dimensions: a re-thinking of profit imperatives, patriarchy, racial inequality, ecological irresponsibility, as well as bundles of relations and associations that assist in enacting organizations as instruments of domination.

In lieu of a conclusion, I would like to pose some sceptical and critical questions: Does the appropriation of cultural turns in management studies perhaps merely amount to gaining some more sophisticated tools for profit-oriented manipulation? Does it thus lead to affirmation instead of critique? What could critique in critical management studies mean? What happens if critique is only a detour to enhanced profit, as exemplified by provocative advertisements such as the Indian Ford ad?

Regardless of what the potential answers to these questions might be, an ethical turn seems necessary here. The question as to how an ethical turn could promote the responsible development of management as well as cultural analysis remains open, important and challenging. In the study of culture at present, we observe a pullback from exaggerated constructionism and a move toward social responsibility that is linked to a new referentiality regarding reality. Could this perhaps produce a common reference point for a productive exchange between

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18 <http://www.landscapesofcapital.com/items/show/1045> (25 November 2015).

management and cultural studies on the further development of concepts of management?

**Afterthoughts: Can new concepts of management have an impact on the managerialization of the study of culture?**

Re-thinking management studies in the light of cultural turns poses exciting new questions not only for management studies itself, but also for '*Kulturwissenschaften*' or cultural studies. The most important question seems to be the following: To what extent is the study of culture and its turns themselves manageable? Is it worth considering the development of theories and discourses in the study of culture as a matter of management? While cultural turns come into existence before they can unfold their full analytical and critical potential, do they not also have to undergo certain stages of management? Are there, for instance, single theory 'bosses' or rather teams at work in cultural studies that are making the achievement of certain turns their main concern; what might be called their main industry? Perhaps the only model to be applied here could be the model of the 'new boss', since the development and impact of cultural turns, in the end, cannot be seen mainly as outcomes of personal strategies of theory formation but rather as the achievements of interdisciplinary networks and 'cutting-edge' connectivities.

Fruitful attention could be paid here to the managerial dimensions of the turns themselves; that is, to their dimensions of competitiveness, specialization and excellence on the academic market, as well as their intellectual leadership, branding, networking, flexible production and cyclical development. In general, what is at stake is their critically (pro)claimed emergence from neoliberal changes in the field of academic research in the name of efficiency and accountability. In this sense, the academic field might be compared to the economic field: After the demise of the idea of the 'Humboldt-Bildungs-University' in favor of the corporate university in a market culture (Gould 2003; Gibbons et al. 2005), our focus can no longer be directed towards autonomous 'Gelehrte'. It has rather switched to networking researchers caught in the efficiency-driven conditions of highly competitive academic market production. Indeed, cultural turns themselves can be read as expressions of this new situation in the humanities and cultural studies, in which researchers submit themselves to the publish-or-perish-principle and the rhetoric of 'cutting edge' research that produces numerous 'studies' and 'turns' beyond the limits of the traditional disciplines. Sociologist and discourse analyst Johannes Angermüller (2004) has described this market-driven academic field's development in the U.S., but it

seems to be applicable to Germany as well. Here, too, we face a ‘zyklischen Horizont’ (cyclic horizon) of research production with its ‘Theoriekonjunkturen’ (‘trade cycles of theories’) and ‘konvertibler Theoriewährung’ (‘convertible currency of theories’). On the one hand this demands the strategic institutional management of academic production on the part of universities, which have said goodbye to the Humboldtian idealist model of higher education, the model of the ‘Gelehrtenuniversität’ (‘university of learning and research’), some time ago. On the other hand, this increased enforcement of institutional management has, surprisingly, not lead to an accelerated management or manageability of intellectual research ideas and theory changes.<sup>19</sup> On the contrary, the increased “Positionierungszwang” (‘compulsion of self-positioning’) (Angermüller 2004: 81) of intellectual producers is triggering an expanding production of theory by the rather uncontrolled and uncontrollable – indeed, exploding – creation of perpetually new turns. At the same time, this trend is subtly promoted by the researchers themselves and by their respective peer-networks.

The whole idea of centralized management seems impossible in the humanities when one acknowledges the fact that we can no longer rely on comprehensive and strategic orientation in the field. Rather, we are confronted by the punctuated production of interdisciplinary, ‘cutting-edge’ connectivities, as exemplified by ‘the turns’. In a “post-humanistic regime of knowledge” (Angermüller 2004: 81), turns are not to be considered a matter of management. A turn, after all, can in no way be proclaimed by a single intellectual. Instead, turns can only be established through wider, cross-disciplinary applications in which academic ‘leadership’ is strongly dependent on the adoption of a respective turn. Here we can speak of management only if our understanding of management is adjusted.

In an era of distributed knowledge production we are facing a new “management style (that) can be summarized in two notions – increasing permeability of boundaries and brokering” (Gibbons et al. 2005: 161). But we should go even further and develop a more concrete understanding of management as a practice of finding connectivities, of operating in a network of various human and non-human actors. Theory production can no longer be seen as resting in the hands of single minds or ingenious individuals. On the contrary, it seems to resist direct manageability and emerge within a broad, innovative intellectual field of systematic/interdisciplinary approaches that unfold between the disciplines – as, for instance, between management studies and the study of culture (*Kulturwissenschaften*) – to open up opportunities for new processes to

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19 On this ‘paradox’ see Gibbons et al (2005: 83): “Just when the university has become a more powerful centripetal institution, the knowledge which is its chief commodity has become diffuse, opaque, incoherent, centrifugal.”

emerge. Even if turns cannot be initiated by single individuals, they are nevertheless propelled by leading scholars in the ‘economy’ of the study of culture who provide respective turns with specific platforms and lend them emotional appeal and relevance. Can turns, therefore, not be seen as matters of branding?

In the monograph *Branding the Nation*, brands are characterized as having social value insofar as they attempt “to mobilize diverse peoples with diverse backgrounds into collective units in order to foster material and symbolic loyalties” (Aronczyk 2013: 9). Yet, scrutiny of this statement, in light of theoretical turns in the study of culture, can provide a more differentiated view. While cultural turns might indeed use some elements of branding, they are not conceived of as products for consumption. They are, instead, meant to stimulate a broad assemblage of intellectual producers (Angermüller 2004: 71) by providing common denominators for discussing, connecting, competing and struggling for interpretive and ‘symbolic capital’ (Pierre Bourdieu) in the intellectual field.

In the end, it is clear that the study of culture can learn a great deal from critical management studies and its new ‘turn’ towards a diversified re-managerialization and redefinition of management. Perhaps the study of culture can ‘profit’ from a new, non-instrumental form of management by searching for alternatives to mainstream orientations such as an effectiveness-oriented ‘knowledge economy’ and a complicity between research and industry – if only by developing a ‘slow science’, as philosopher of science scholar Isabelle Stengers (2011) maintains in her plea for a ‘slow science’ that resists the fast, competitive, benchmarked research that has become, seemingly unavoidably, the norm. In any case, the humanities and the study of culture have not yet been completely deformed by a simplistic view of strategic management. This gives these disciplines a chance to elaborate the achievements of a culturally rethought management concept in an ongoing, ethical re-thinking of management and manageability in a world of increasingly complex dependencies – not least between the disciplines.

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