Call for papers

The Unfinished Business of CMS: Anthropology

Critical Management Studies beyond the Academy? 30th June – 2nd July 2027, Lancaster University

Session Type: In-person presentation stream (with possibility of hybrid presentations if necessary)

Convenors:

Antoine Inglebert-Frydman and Laurent Taskin, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium
Thomas Derek Robinson, Senior Lecturer, City St George's, University of London, United Kingdom

Management research has largely overlooked a fundamental question: What conception of the human being underpins managerial thought? Addressing this question is not just an abstract exercise. It carries tangible implications. Even when left unaddressed, our underlying anthropology (understood here as a philosophical conception of the human, not as a social science discipline) does not vanish. It merely operates invisibly, shaping outcomes in ways its proponents may not anticipate. This invisibilization of anthropology in management yields two key consequences:

- The prevalence of an anthropology of the human as resource (capital or agent), wherein individuals are objectified and their value subordinated to organizational hierarchy (Taskin & Ndayambaje, 2018).
- The need to retrospectively reconstruct the underlying anthropology in studies dedicated to tangential themes—such as language, ethics, or symbols (as exemplified by Chanlat, 2024)

What is perhaps most surprising is that, although Critical Management Studies (CMS) has engaged deeply with anthropologically informed questions—ranging from identity (e.g. Thomas, 2011) and subjectivation (e.g. Fleming & Sturdy, 2011) to embodiment (e.g. Bell & de Gama, 2019; Bell & King, 2010) and agency (e.g. Zanoni & Janssens, 2007) —it has not explicitly positioned anthropology as a core conceptual concern. This oversight may stem from CMS's focus on domination and performativity, which has led scholars to prioritize questions of positionality over those pertaining to the human condition. Yet, the denaturalization project central to CMS (Fournier & Grey, 2000) cannot be completed without interrogating our

conception of the human. Moreover, at a time when concerns about the exhaustion of CMS's research agenda are gaining traction (Spicer & Alvesson, 2025), we argue that revisiting anthropology offers a compelling avenue for renewal. We therefore call for anthropology in CMS to be made more explicit, systematic, and central than it has been in the past.

This perspective inevitably raises the question of humanism (Aktouf, 1992). Though the term was featured prominently in early CMS (e.g. Willmott, 1993), it has since become controversial for critters. Many scholars now dismiss traditional humanism as outdated, critiquing its anthropocentrism, exceptionalism, and masculinist biases (Gherardi & Laasch, 2022). Yet, the emancipatory promises of humanism—dignity, autonomy, and collective flourishing (Dierksmeier, 2016; Melé, 2003)—remain largely unfulfilled in contemporary organizations. To abandon humanism entirely is to foreclose its critical potential and, worse, to pave the way for dehumanizing logics that thrive in its absence.

This is why we deem it essential to call for a dialogue today between the key themes in contemporary CMS (organization of academic work, alternative organizations, control and resistance, and identity), the dominant analytical approaches (discourse analysis), and major schools of thought (Foucauldian studies, Marxism, feminism, post-colonialism, psychoanalysis) (Spicer & Alvesson, 2025) and the emancipatory ambition of humanism, mediated through the lens of anthropology.

Beyond the debate on humanism's place within CMS, we also encourage contributions exploring the question of philosophical anthropology from multiple perspectives—including humanism, anti-humanism, posthumanism, transhumanism, existentialism, (eco-)feminism, ecology, and postcolonialism while considering their concrete implications for research (which current assumptions are being revisited, and in what direction?), as well as for the researcher (what stance should be adopted, and what precautions should be taken?) and the methodologies to be prioritized in empirical research. Additionally, we welcome engagements that intersect with disciplines outside management, such as philosophy, sociology, or theology.

This stream identifies several interrelated avenues for exploration:

- Revisiting CMS's presuppositions through anthropology: What epistemological and ethical implications arise from interrogating the conception of the human in management? What challenges do ecological issues in organizations pose regarding conceptions of the human being?
- Reclaiming humanism for critical management: How can humanism be rethought to engage with material conditions while avoiding its historical pitfalls?

- Articulating divergent anthropological presuppositions within an emancipatory framework: among others, how might the assumptions of humanism (emancipation, autonomy) be harmonized with those of care (codependency, relationships)?
- Theorizing the situational dimensions (temporality, spatiality, etc.) of the anthropological question: How might these dimensions be systematically integrated into critical frameworks?

The overarching aim is to explore how humanism and anthropology can reconfigure CMS's research agenda. We invite contributions that engage with the following (non-exhaustive) questions:

- What anthropological presuppositions underpin management, and how can they be made explicit? What (taken-for-grated) anthropological assumptions shape CMS, and what relationship to practice do they produce?
- How do anthropological presuppositions in management influence research methodologies? What anthropological biases are embedded in critical management tools?
- What dehumanizing risks emerge when management processes are reconfigured through critical lenses? How can these risks be anticipated and mitigated?
- How can humanism and humanization be redefined within management and organization studies to avoid essentialist traps?
- What organizational practices embody a critical humanism? How can organizations institutionalize humanist ideals without falling into tokenism or co-optation?
- How can ecological, feminist, and postcolonial critiques be integrated into humanist frameworks? What tensions and synergies arise from such integration?
- What forms of resistance become possible when organizations adopt alternative anthropologies?
- What ethical dilemmas arise at the intersection of humanism and praxis? How can scholars and practitioners navigate these tensions?
- What are the risks of humanism being co-opted by capitalism? What strategies might critical scholars employ to resist such appropriation?

We welcome contributions that critically interrogate these themes through theoretical innovation, empirical investigation, or practice-oriented interventions. Our goal is to advance a CMS that is both critically rigorous and concretely transformative.

Stream Conveners Information

Antoine Inglebert-Frydman, postdoctoral researcher, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium (he/him). A French national, he graduated from ESCP before spending several years in the non-profit sector (sheltering refugees and migrants) and as a consultant for labour unions. His PhD examined humanizing management practices. He now focuses on Humane Management and caring management for women workers living with cancer.

Laurent Taskin, full professor, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium and affiliate professor, PSL University—Paris Dauphine. His research focuses on workplace communities, examining both the forces that erode them—including remote work and the so-called new ways of organizing—and those that sustain them, notably Humane Management, understood as a critique of traditional HRM, promoting human dignity and sustainability. His work has been published in outlets such as *Human Relations, Human Resource Management Review, Organization Studies, Journal of Business Ethics, Revue Française de Gestion.*

Thomas Derek Robinson, Senior Lecturer, City St George's, University of London, United Kingdom. His research sits at the intersection of Consumer Culture Theory, institutional theory, economic sociology, and interpretive consumer research, investigating how markets organise human and non-human existence through time, systems of governance, and processes of identity formation.

Contact email

antoine.inglebert@uclouvain.be

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