Proposal for a stream at the 10th Critical Management Studies Conference, Liverpool, July 5th to 7th 2017

Stream Convenors:
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Objects of Organisation: What does *Speculative Realism* mean for Management?

There has been increasing attention devoted to what has become known as 'speculative realism' in recent years, with a number of books and papers appearing across the philosophical, social sciences and humanities although, as of yet, there has been little direct incursion into the administrative and organisational sciences. We hope to begin to rectify this situation with this stream for we see much in speculative realism that offers potential to think anew many of the traditional objects of our inquiry such as products, services, assets (both physical and intangible), the derivative exotica of high finance (Lightfoot and Harvie, 2016) accounting and information systems, strategies, plans, formalised routines and the human resources that enact and embody them, to name but those that spring easiest to mind.

We are particularly interested in exploring the variety of 'speculative realism' associated with Graham Harman and his 'object oriented ontology'. This form of thinking builds upon developments in science and technology studies, particularly the work of Bruno Latour, but it also differs in key ways, most specifically in terms of its thinking of the 'objects' that are to be found at the intersections of 'actor networks'. 'Objects' are the building blocks of Harman's speculative realism. Objects, in this view, are made of parts and can themselves be parts of other objects. . This is a 'flat ontology', shared in large part with DeLanda (2006) and building on DeLanda, Harman sees objects as having the following characteristics:

1. An object cannot be reduced to the parts that make it up; and thus it follows that,
2. The parts of an object are not the object itself.
3. An object can have effects upon other objects but, just as in relation to its parts, it cannot be reduced to those effects; and
4. All objects are independent of other objects.

In short for Harman, despite being made up of other objects, despite unleashing effects on other objects, an object has a realness that exceeds any of these under- or over-pinnings. The habits of thought that Harman would like his philosophy to break with tend to either undermine or overmine the reality of an object *qua* object when they respectively seek to reduce the object to its components or see it merely as a part, and nothing more than a part, of some greater whole.

For Harman all objects have a dual nature. On the one hand, objects recede into dedifferentiated world. On the other, they make something of themselves present to other objects and make new relations, new objects. There is a double move here though. A partial, translated object rather than a real object is what makes itself present to another object to enable a relation to be formed; as a new object in itself, and as the potential for further new objects. The new objects so made are of course the same in their objectness as their progenitors and can thus either appear to other objects in partial translated form, or retreat themselves into dedifferentiated world. This is not just a 'what you see depends upon how you look argument'. For objects to be real and meet the criteria we

outlined above they have to be more than their relations to other objects, be those relations up, down or sideways.

Characteristics, including the agency, of objects have been typified and described by Harman as entailing multiple processes. New objects are combines of the 'notes' (Harman, 2005: 211) or 'sensual qualities' (Harman, 2011: 128) of their progenitors that are formed when one object 'allures' (Harman, 2005: 211) another into interaction. Interaction which, due to the intervention of the 'sensual objects' between the 'real objects' that are their cousins, is rendered by Harman as an aspect of the 'vicarious causation' (Harman, 2007) through which objects interact; real objects themselves being too much in retreat to interact directly and still persist as objects.

In essence then, Harman's moves build upon the decentering of human agency at the core of key strands of actor network theory but go beyond that theory in the ways in which the object itself is thought. Whilst for Latour everything of the object is given by the relations of which it is thus formed, for Harman, there is something more to the object in and of itself.

Our proposal is timely for Harman's latest work, *Immaterialsm* (2016), begins to approach organisations directly. Subtitled *objects and social theory*, the text explores the applicability of the authors developing ideas in relation to the traditional objects of the administrative and social sciences. Harman chooses to take the Dutch East India Company and its development in the early seventeenth century as his exemplary object and 'argues that this company qualifies for objecthood neither through 'what it is' or 'what it does', but through its irreducibility to either of these forms' (http://www.polity.co.uk/book.asp?ref=9781509500963). On the four hundredth anniversary of the Governor General, Jan Pieterszoon Coen's, imposition of enclosures on the native clove growers of the Dutch East Indies, we invite object oriented philosophical reflection on the business and managerial practices of today. Papers of interest to the stream could consider addressing the following themes (although we in no sense see this as an exclusive or exhaustive list of the possibilities):

- What are the implications for management of taking objects seriously (in the Harmanian sense)?
- How are the objects of (high) finance and more pedestrian concerns such as human shelter related?
- Where do 'products' and 'services' begin and end?
- How do administrative, accounting and information systems relate to the objects that they survey?
- What is revealed by approaching such systems as objects in themselves?
- What are the objects of strategy, policy, plans and operations? What is to be gained by approaching these domains as objects?
- W(h)ither ethics in an object oriented world whose 'flat ontology' significantly problematizes an easy attribution to agency?

The Conveners

Simon Lilley is Professor of Information and Organisation at the University of Leicester in the newly formed School of Business. He served as Head of the School of Management at Leicester, a major constituent of the new business School, where he is also a founding member of the Centre for Philosophy and Political Economy. He also served as a council member of the UK's Chartered Association of Business Schools. He works on the intersections of value and information in our increasingly digitized work places and the markets in which they operate and has published extensively on these themes. Recent funded research has taken the form of collaboration with organisations developing ubiquitous data capture and analysis tools. He has co-convened at previous CMS conferences, was editor of the Routledge journal *Culture and Organization* from 2008 – 2011 and has supervised over 20 PhD students to completion.

Professor Jean-Luc Moriceau Professor Jean-Luc Moriceau is responsible for the Management PhD programme at the Institut Mines-Telecom/Télécom Business School. His publications are in organizational creative sense-making (*L'Art du sens*, forthcoming), and especially, on the themes of affect, performance and performativity. In his research he integrates French philosophy (especially, Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault) and ethnography (of artists' collectives in Paris, disenfranchised youth in Brazil). He was a founding member of the French CMS group, is on the board of SCOS, has participated in past CMS conferences, and has been a convener at EGOS.

Dr Justine Grønbæk Pors is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School. She works at the intersections of policy studies, cultural theory and ethnography. Her work focuses on the contradictions inherent in contemporary public policy and the complex setting for professional practices these constitute. She is particularly interested in subjectivity, materiality, noise, affects and ghosts. She has published a number of books and articles dealing with the historical trajectory of public government focusing on how the current regimes of change and public innovation curiously deconstruct substantial notions of work, administration and professionalism.

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