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This is the authors' version accepted for publication in *Organization*.

## **Brexitting CMS**

### **Abstract**

Brexit could be seen as the largest popular rebellion against the power elites in the UK modern history. It is also part of a larger phenomenon – the resurgence of nationalism and right-wing politics within Europe, the United States and beyond. Bringing in its wake the worrying manifestations of racism, xenophobia and anti-intellectualism, Brexit and its consequences should be a core concern for Critical Management Studies academics in helping to shape post-Brexit societies, organisations and workplaces, and in fighting and challenging the sinister forces that permeate them. In this paper, we consider how CMS can rise to the challenges and possibilities of this ‘phenomenon-in-the-making’. We reflect on the intellectual tools available to CMS researchers and the ways in which they may be suited to this task. In particular, we explore how the key positions of anti-performativity, critical performativity, political performativity, and public CMS can be used as a starting point for thinking about the potential relevance of CMS in Brexit and post-Brexit contexts. Our intention is to encourage CMS-ers to contribute positively to the post-Brexit world in academic as well as personal capacities. For this, we argue that a new public CMS is needed, which would 1) be guided by the premise that we have no greater and no lesser right than anyone else to shape the world, 2) entail as much critical reflexivity in relation to our unintended performativities as our intended ones, and 3) be underpinned by marginalism as a critical political project.

**Keywords:** Brexit, populism, racism, anti-intellectualism, public CMS, marginalism, unintended performativity.

# **Brexiting CMS**

## **Introduction**

Brexit is a complex and contradictory phenomenon-in-the-making, capable of transforming social, economic, political, legal, cultural and organisational norms not only within the UK but also on the broader international stage. Bringing together unlikely allies (from Lexiteers to proponents of the far right) and further dividing established groups and parties, it involves a broad spectrum of supporters and opposition (Davidson, 2017). As media reports and emerging academic commentaries struggle to make sense of this complexity, several themes begin to unfold. Firstly, Brexit could be seen as the largest popular rebellion against the power elites in the UK modern history. Secondly, political complexity notwithstanding, it is linked to the larger phenomenon of the resurgence of nationalism and right-wing politics within Europe, the United States and beyond. Thirdly, at least some of the events preceding and subsequent to the Brexit vote, such as the increased manifestations of racism, xenophobia and anti-intellectualism, are deeply worrying and require urgent critical scrutiny and opposition.

In this paper, based on the above points we argue that Brexit should be a core concern for Critical Management Studies academics in helping to shape post-Brexit societies, organisations and workplaces, and in fighting and challenging the sinister forces that permeate them. Following a brief overview of the background and unfolding consequences of the Brexit vote, we consider how CMS can interrogate the challenges and possibilities of this phenomenon-in-the-making. In so doing, we reflect on the intellectual tools available to CMS researchers and the ways in which they may be suited to this task. In particular, we explore how the key positions of anti-performativity, critical performativity, political performativity, and public CMS can be used as a starting point for thinking about the potential relevance of CMS in Brexit and post-Brexit contexts. Our intention is to encourage a wide spectrum of CMS-ers to contribute positively to shaping Brexit and post-Brexit worlds in academic as well as personal capacities. For this, we argue that a new public CMS is needed, which would be guided by the premise that we have as much and as little right as anyone else to shape the world, entail critical reflexivity in relation to our unintended as well as intended performativities, and be underpinned by marginalism as a critical political project.

## **Background and Consequences**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2016 the electorate of the United Kingdom voted by a slim majority to leave the European Union, setting the course for what has become known as 'Brexit'. However, Scotland, Northern Ireland, London and most metropolitan areas voted to remain. This momentous event has been called the largest popular rebellion against 'the establishment' (in the broad sense of 'power elites') within the UK in modern history. In particular, it has been described as a dramatic (and traumatic) comeback of those

groups and sections of the population most affected (and disaffected) by the worst of the austerity measures (Wahl, 2016; Worth, 2016) instituted in pursuit of neoliberal ideals of market fundamentalism (Pettifor, 2016). The shock waves generated by Brexit stretch to political, economic, institutional and organisational turbulence, provoking both utopianism and anxiety and fear, as the enormity of the impact on individuals, organisations, institutions and nations starts to unfold. The Brexit vote can be seen as a 'moment of suspended disbelief', creating a discontinuity where previous norms and rules of engagement no longer automatically apply, and where earlier accepted values and practices are up for negotiation (Guldi, 2016). Britain is poised in the balance between a multiplicity of conflicting and competing futures – ranging from the restoration of welfare state as advocated by the Labour Party Leader, Jeremy Corbyn, to further neoliberalisation, darker, more dystopian scenarios (such as the rise of the far right to new dominance), and to other, potentially yet unimagined possibilities (ibid.).

Brexit is still very much a phenomenon-in-the-making – being 'so polyvalent a notion and so complex a process that its present meaning is hard to define and its future trajectory hard to discern' (Jessop, 2016:7). As a conflicted and continuously evolving assemblage of politically incongruous allies and interests, it is a daily study in the complexities of radical change, the organisation and disorganisation of politics, and the political nature of organising and disorganising. With the questions of the unity of the United Kingdom and the continuation of the EU very much on the agenda, Brexit is also undeniably a phenomenon of global significance (Galbraith, 2016; Patomäki, 2016; Wahl, 2016).

Despite the multiplicity of political motivations driving it, Brexit has been widely reported to have given a boost to populist parties on both sides of the Atlantic and contributed to the Trump vote in the US presidential election on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 2016. Along with 'Trumpism', Brexit has been interpreted as the first stark evidence to the claim that Europe and USA are now under an unprecedented sway of a new, 'heritage' form of right-wing populism (Reynié, 2016). This new form of populism is said to emphasise the nativist preservation of material and cultural heritage and is characterised by 'unbridled demagoguery, xenophobia, condemnation of the elite, and stigmatizing rhetoric' (Reynié, 2016: 48). It exploits and is fuelled by anger and anxiety of those most disadvantaged by the West's growing economic inequality in the context of globalization and neoliberal austerity policies, and of those lashing back at the rapid progressive cultural erosion of traditional norms, privileges and status in the context of multiculturalism and liberalism (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Zakaria, 2016). As right-wing populist parties continue to gain ground within and beyond Europe, there remains a foreboding that 'any minute now we could be living in a very different world' (Williams-Grut, 2016, see also Giroux, 2016). As a sign of its times as well as a radical political event in its own right, Brexit and its consequences are thus in need of urgent critical examination.

One of the most apparent and shocking features in the wake of the Brexit vote has been the surge in hatred attacks, including those engendering racism, xenophobia, and homophobia, with some media reporting as much as a 147% rise in July, August and September 2016 following the June referendum (Lusher, 2016). Although racism, xenophobia and associated behaviour have always been present in the British society, Brexit seems to have legitimised the expression of belief in their legitimacy (Stewart, 2016), showing Britain as deeply divided along the lines of not only race and nationality, but also age, class, education, regional differences and urbanisation (Hobolt, 2016; Toly, 2016; Worth, 2016). The violence unleashed as a result has found manifold expression on British streets, public transport, social media and in workplaces in the form of daily written, verbal and physical abuse of those looking or sounding foreign, and in more serious attacks, including the brutal murders of MP Jo Cox and Polish worker Arkadiusz Jóźwik. Conversely, anti-racist and anti-hatred campaigns and movements, such as the #SafetyPin campaign, the Avaaz 'Reject Racism' campaign and Not Foreign (which has collected more than 10,000 signatures to their open letter to the Prime Minister calling on her 'to put a stop to her government's bitter, racist and divisive language') point to the consolidation of forces rising to oppose the hatred surge.

As well as stirring up the murky waters of hatred, Brexit has also been blamed for breeding what the press has been swift to describe as 'a sinister strain of anti-intellectualism' (Wright, 2016). The role of experts and intellectuals has been spurned and ridiculed by some politicians – most notoriously when as part of the Leave campaign Michael Gove was reported by the media as refusing to name any economists supporting Brexit, stating instead that 'people in this country have had enough of experts' (Mance 2016). Leading figures in Brexit debates, and especially Leave campaigners, have been said to take unprecedented liberties with facts in general and referendum promises in particular. In return, the anti-'anti-science' backlash seems to have been quick off the mark, with the labels of 'postmodern politics' freely attributed to the Leave campaign and the government's management of Brexit, along with accusations of denials of the existence of 'objective truth' and permitting 'relativism to let rip and damn the consequences' (Wright, 2016). The editors of Oxford Dictionaries named 'post-truth' ('relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief') the word of the year in 2016, based on the 2,000% surge in the use of the word in 2016 compared to 2015. The surge peaked around the EU Referendum and the US presidential election (Flood, 2016). Brexit can thus be understood not only as the latest flare-up in the 200-year struggle between the expert-led state rule and the participatory democracy (Guldi, 2016), but also arguably as the latest salvo of the long-standing 'science wars' (Sardar, 2000) playing out in the broad political arena.

The questions over the legitimacy and relevance of experts and the nature of their knowledge make Brexit a core concern for academics in terms of reflecting on our own knowledge, practice, impact and relevance. Added to this are concerns over our workplaces. The consequences of Brexit for UK universities are manifold, as many of us

question the possibility and expediency of following academic careers in the UK, European funding starts to be curtailed, the flow of European students starts to shrink, and European academic links and partnerships become harder to forge (Cressey, 2017). Yet, as academics, we face the challenging task of not only living and working through Brexit, but also making sense of it as a phenomenon, of influencing policy and public opinion during and after Brexit negotiations, and of questioning and reinventing what we research and who and how we teach in Brexit and post-Brexit times. Fournier and Smith (2012) point out that reward systems in universities discourage academics from making a difference in the wider community by creating a conflict between public and individual interests and privileging the latter. So in addressing Brexit and the broader phenomenon of populism we have the added challenge of ensuring that the imperative to protect our professional interests vested in academic careers in local HE institutions does not replace the need for a broader and deeper reimagining of our practice as researchers and educators, and – conversely – for our contribution to addressing global issues in which we are seemingly less directly implicated. (The latter, we might add, is an illusion that is all too easily maintained (Dunne et al, 2008).)

### **Brexit and CMS**

For CMS, as an academic community that studies and questions many of the root problems and issues surfaced by Brexit in relation to organising and organisations, now is the time to demonstrate its own worth. Armed with its long-honed theoretical tools (e.g. theories of leadership, change, power, resistance, race and class), critical methodologies and epistemologies, as well as developed critiques of elites, neoliberalism, market fundamentalism, managerialism and economic inequalities, CMS is potentially well-prepared to confront the organisational and societal aspects of Brexit, its impact on working lives, and its implications for the role of researchers, educators and intellectuals. Now is the time to put these arms to the test in the context of radical political upheaval in order to establish what can help to foster constructive debate, challenge deep underlying racism, class, regional and other tensions, and dissipate the damaging effects of Brexit whilst helping to grasp the moment of potentialities it represents for building alternative futures and societies. On the other hand, it is also time to examine what within our intellectual arsenal is found wanting, or, indeed, absent. This is a particularly worthwhile task as Brexit and post-Brexit trade deals negotiations could go on for a decade (Elgot et al, 2016) and therefore are likely to be impacting professional and personal lives both within and outside the UK for a very long time. This also gives CMS time and opportunity to contribute to policy development moving forward.

Confronting Brexit would, however, require confronting CMS itself in some rather fundamental ways. As Tatli (2012) writes, CMS specializes in spotting and challenging exclusion and privilege in management and organising at large, but is often blind to the pervasive inequality, homogeneity and exclusion within its own ranks. This, in turn, sabotages its critical potential, for 'how can a community which is characterized by the

numerical and hierarchical domination of the privileged segments of society provide alternatives for the disadvantaged and oppressed?' (Tatli, 2012: 26). Tatli's argument is now particularly poignant in the context in which the disadvantaged and oppressed have apparently had enough of (academic) experts who are likely to be seen as part of the oppressing and uncaring elite. To demonstrate its relevance in the context of Brexit and rising heritage populism, it is therefore vital that CMS learns to apply the same critical scrutiny to ourselves as we do to others, and to act on such critical reflection to instill diversity and inclusion within our own community. This links to the broader need for CMS to become more thorough and inventive about bridging the distance between itself and the disenfranchised whose interests it purports to support.

It is not just the elitism and exclusivity of CMS that are problematic in light of this need. The political, intellectual and practical focus of CMS requires re-examining and refining too. Back in 2008, in a Speaking Out issue of this journal on the future of CMS, Stookey wrote about the tension between the elitism inherent in CMS (and which 'reserves authority for those individuals and groups with special attributes, for that which is specifically not common') and the CMS scholars' populist affinities – i.e. the privileging within CMS of 'the characteristics, interests, ideas and leadership of the majority'. Stookey called on CMS-ers to denounce elitism whilst openly acknowledging its inevitable role in the CMS' populist project, arguing that no meaningful change was possible 'unless guided by the common experience of the majority' (Stookey, 2008). Ten years on, the darker aspects of Brexit have cast the entanglement between CMS, populism and elitism in a new dour light. The surge of hatred and xenophobia are a poignant reminder of populism's ugly side, that 'meaningful change guided by common experience' does not necessarily mean change for the better, and that privileging the interests and ideals of the majority (even if this were feasible in the case of Brexit, where 'majority' and its motivations are so loosely defined and demographically complex) comes with the long historical shadow of too high a price too often paid by the minorities whose interests and ideas are thereby excluded.

In this new light, CMS needs to question and reexamine its populist affinities. This would involve asking whether it is indeed the majority interests that we wish to support and further through our work, or whether there are better ways of focusing the energies. We come back to this point later on in the paper. The relationship between CMS and populism needs to be reexamined especially as, in bringing to the surface the mistrust and questioning of the elites, neoliberalism, market fundamentalism and globalization, Brexit has both, in a way, embodied aspects of CMS critique and sabotaged it. It has done the latter not least through the questioning of the relevance of the academic elite and expertise on which CMS draws for legitimacy. It is therefore also the time to revisit and reassess the question of the relevance of CMS and its impact on the broader populace it aspires to serve.

CMS communities should be well prepared for such self-examination due to their long-standing claims to reflexivity and debates over their relevance to practitioners. Since

the turn of the millennium, such debates have been framed mostly in terms of different key positions in relation to the notion of performativity – including, specifically, anti-performativity (Fournier and Grey, 2000), critical or progressive performativity (Spicer et al, 2009; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Spicer et al, 2016; Wickert and Schaefer, 2015), and political performativity (Cabantous et al, 2016). More recently, they have also been framed as calls for a more public CMS (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016; Delbridge, 2014), engaged scholarship (Cunliffe and Scaratti, 2017) and intellectual/academic activism (Contu, 2017; Pritchard and Benschop, 2017; Rhoades et al, 2017). Below, we therefore take these positions as a starting point for thinking about the potential relevance of CMS in Brexit and post-Brexit contexts. We reflect on the potential and the challenges associated with each position, and argue that there is a need for a new public CMS, which would 1) be guided by the premise that we have no greater and no lesser right than anyone else to shape the world, 2) entail as much critical reflexivity in relation to our unintended performativities as our intended ones, and 3) be underpinned by marginalism as a critical political project.

### *Anti-performativity*

The anti-performative (or non-performative) stance, put forward by Fournier and Grey (2000) as one of the key features that unifies diverse CMS endeavors, is about questioning the managerialist subordination of knowledge, research and learning to the goals of economic efficiency. It is also about challenging the mainstream assumption that the purpose of management research and education is to contribute to the effectiveness of managerial practice. As ‘opposition to forms of knowledge exclusively serving economic efficiency’ (Cabantous et al, 2016: 200), anti-performativity is in some ways aligned with the spirit of heritage populism that openly disdains economic expertise and facts. This alignment arguably presents CMS with an opportunity to inform the efforts to denaturalize and deconstruct old institutions of inequality and repression in the process of Brexit. Anti-performativity can also be instrumental in making sense of how Brexit and its consequences came about, through analysis of the alienation and disenchantment of segments of the populace with the dehumanizing tyranny of neoliberal economic fundamentalism. Furthermore, with its inherent anti-managerialism, anti-performativity can act as a timely imperative ‘to free the notion of [CMS] engagement from the straightjacket within which it has become trapped by debates promoting or refusing dialogue with managers, and re-imagine engagement in terms of a broader organizational constituency’ (Fournier and Grey, 2000: 27). On the other hand, as populism rises to dominance, anti-performativity is in danger of becoming abused as a discursive weapon in the arsenal of the powerful. The notion of ‘anti-establishment’ (repurposed in relation to heritage populism) suddenly, ironically, threatens to become an establishment itself, and acquires darker and more menacing undertones. The CMS ‘anti-‘focus – the vector of its critique – on economic performativity, whilst valuable, potentially risks becoming too narrow to grapple with the organisational complexities in the wake of this political change.

### *Critical or Progressive Performativity*

The assertion that CMS should be profoundly performative, in the sense of having as its central task active and pragmatic intervention in specific debates about management and encouraging progressive forms of management (Spicer et al, 2009), arguably fits rather comfortably with the idea that CMS should be actively contributing to the efforts to re-organise and repair during and after Brexit. Moreover, as a rapidly evolving set of ‘unresolved issues, challenges, contentions or concerns that exist but are not clearly articulated’ (Spicer et al, 2016: 234), that are of utmost public importance and in urgent need of reflexive questioning, Brexit constitutes an ideal arena for putting the full capacity of critical performativity to the test. More specifically, where it ‘involves CMS becoming affirmative, caring, pragmatic, potential focused, and normative’ (Spicer et al, 2009: 537), critical performativity offers an opportunity to address and mitigate the impact of Brexit on organisations, and help to shape organisational reactions to Brexit and their consequences. This could involve working constructively with individuals and groups within both commercial and non-commercial organisations (such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development<sup>1</sup> and trade unions) to help dissipate Brexit-related tensions in the workplace, address emotions at work, and actively challenge racism, xenophobia, and homophobia (for example by questioning underlying assumptions about the role of immigrant labour or other minorities in organisations). Such engagement could emphasise a role not only for engaged scholarship but also for critical management education that extends beyond the classroom. In this, CMS-ers could make use of specific tactics associated with critical performativity – in particular, searching for potentialities in the present context (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012), engaging with non-academic groups using dialectical reasoning, scaling up insights through movement building, and propagating deliberation (Spicer et al, 2016) – in order to reclaim relevance at a time when detached academic expertise is increasingly undermined.

To make the most of these possibilities, however, the limitations of critical performativity must be reflected on and confronted. For example, its goals of micro-emancipation and micro-engagement ‘to induce incremental, rather than radical, changes in managerial behaviour’ (Wickert and Schaefer, 2015: 107) – the goals that may work their slow effects well in times of relative stability, may prove hopelessly unresponsive and inadequate in the context of radical political events (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016). Furthermore, the emphasis of critical performativity on the process of ‘reflexive conscientization’ that aims to slowly raise the critical consciousness of practitioners (Wickert and Schaefer, 2015) may require reimagining or at least refining in a situation where the lack of critical consciousness is not necessarily the problem. Rather, on whatever side individual CMS-ers find themselves in the context that exacerbates and normalizes explicit political tensions, the question may now be at least as much about the means and the ethics of dealing with the critical consciousness of those we attempt to emancipate. The question is especially pressing when that critical consciousness is decidedly at odds and perhaps even openly hostile to our own, and

bent upon a course that we see as destruction of our own deeply held beliefs, such as those of equality, pluralism and openness. In this light, it needs to be acknowledged that even the term 'progressive' may now provoke additional hostility in more than one way due to its resonances with the political defeats of the progressive liberal side.

### *Political Performativity*

Political theory of performativity – aka political performativity – was developed to 'provide an alternative reading of performativity that better enables efforts to take on the issues' that critical performativity aims to address (Cabantous et al, 2016: 198). In the light (and darkness) of Brexit, the core strength of this position is its explicit emphasis on performativity as necessitating engagement with power and politics that are both embodied in and transcend organisations, as well as its engagement with subjectivities, identities, and socio-material arrangements that both constitute and are constituted within the broader networks of power (Cabantous et al, 2016). Political performativity thus offers CMS an opportunity to respond more fully to the context in which 'big P' Politics comes to radically disrupt and rearrange organizational practices and working lives. In this context, political performativity can be put to work to examine how new subjects and identities (e.g. 'Brexiteers', 'Brexiters', 'Remainers', 'Lexiteers') are constituted as part of Brexit, how subjects and identities are questioned and reworked (e.g. 'experts', 'intellectuals', 'academics'), how the othering of groups that come to be the objects of the hatred surge (e.g. 'immigrants') takes place. Political performativity has the potential to encourage CMS-ers to expand their focus to examine organisations and workplaces as parts of the wider socio-material networks constituting and being re-constituted by Brexit. This would involve paying attention not only to the impact of Brexit on organisations, but also to the role of organisations and organising in shaping Brexit and its consequences. More broadly, it would involve investigating the role of the wide range of organisations, institutions, social movements and individuals (e.g. media and social media, financial institutions, local, national and supranational governments, NGOs, political and business leaders (Grint, 2016), think tanks, universities, academics) in shaping and/or failing to shape popular and political opinion underpinning heritage populism and its alternatives. The stance of political performativity would foster the view of CMS and CMS scholars as actors among many in these wider networks of power, and thus as possessing no greater nor lesser a priori entitlement to influence and impact the socio-material arrangements of which they are part than anyone else.

### *New public CMS, unintended performativity, and marginalism*

The 'no greater nor lesser' qualifier is important. From the position of assumed elitism and expertise, the 'no greater' aspect may seem (to an academic) a degrading thought, but we would suggest that it is otherwise merely a sobering one – a reminder that CMS should claim no higher ground to address problems and shape society in post-Brexit context. Too much discussion of CMS performativity seems to assume a privileged

intellectual and moral right of critical scholars to intervene or at least critique managerial and organisational practice. Yet the recent events have demonstrated very clearly that the world is not waiting with baited breath to hear and act on academic utterances. Instead, it is up to us to earn and maintain the pragmatic and contingent right to change and impact – in the more meaningful sense of developing a ‘public CMS’ (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016) perhaps enabled by organic public sociology (Brook and Darlington, 2013) and new public social science (Delbridge, 2014) rather than its stripped-down, economic efficiency-driven version propagated by the managerialist Higher Education. Such right needs to be earned by not only having something worthwhile to say and do, but also by speaking and acting in ways that are convincing, interesting and engaging to audiences that are ‘not likely to come to the sermon, much less be a part of the choir’ (Perrow, 2008: 915). Although we would not advocate writing for *The Daily Mail*,<sup>ii</sup> we see an urgent need to rework CMS’ engagement with politics, policy and community, whilst continuing to develop and enact critical scholarship and education.

There is already much we can draw on – both within CMS and in the wider social sciences – to develop this agenda. This would include, firstly, rediscovering and reasserting the power of education as activism (Contu, 2009; Delbridge, 2014) whilst becoming more inventive about how we take critical education to those who are unlikely to become managers (perhaps learning from 1950s-60s British Marxist historians and others, who taught adult education, enabled by trade unions and other institutional actors). It would also include developing a more extensive arsenal of engaged research methodologies aimed at producing socially useful knowledge, in which researchers act not as detached ‘experts’ but as dialogue facilitators between practitioners (Cunliffe and Scaratti, 2017). To engage with the rise and effects of heritage populism, we could learn from past research into similar phenomena – for example, 1980s sociological studies of Far Right communities, where researchers took the experiences and perspectives of those directly involved in such movements as a starting point for critical intervention into the Far Right norms and assumptions. More broadly, we can make use of the encouraging new work on intellectual/academic activism (Contu, 2017; Rhodes et al, 2017) and new spaces in which it can be made visible (including the Acting Up section of this journal (Pritchard and Benschop, 2017)). Whatever else we do, we would need to reclaim less masculinized versions of public intellectualism, with the aspiration to act not as prominent (or dominant) public thinkers/experts imposing views on others from a safe, elevated and distant position, but as (embedded and embodied) conduits of understanding (Latin *intellectus*) – interpreters, questioners – within and between communities.

The ‘no greater right’ element is a reminder that any importance and political advantage that we do have derives from our connection to others. In crafting such links we construct both our identities and influence, yet as critical scholars we should be mindful of the ‘strength in numbers’ adage and the seduction of power. We must choose our allies carefully. Whilst it may be tempting and even seem sensible to ‘work with the

enemy' in order to be critically performative (Delbridge, 2014; Spicer et al, 2009), we should be very careful of the ways in which our engagement with those in positions of power reproduces the very power structures and elites we wish to challenge and coopts our work into their service. This raises the issue of *unintended performativity*. If we acknowledge that CMS and CMS scholars are (inevitably) actors interacting with other actors within socio-material networks of power, then it follows that each action we take results in some sort of performativity or impact on others. Even if all we ever do is disseminate ideas, these ideas have an impact and a fate of their own in the hands of other people around us, often to the detriment rather than benefit of others (Dunne et al, 2008). Consequently, we need to be vigilant about and ready to combat our unintended performativity, especially where CMS work becomes misused and twisted. To put it differently, a new public CMS should be radically reflexive not only about the public good it aims to achieve but also about the public harm it needs to avoid achieving.

One case in point is of the notion that postmodernism has paved the way for post-truth politics, and that the liberal leftist academia should therefore acknowledge its 'shameful part' in spawning post-truth and its consequences (Calcutt, 2016). As a home for non-mainstream approaches, including postmodernism, CMS is clearly implicated in this argument. Yet this is arguably a case of postmodernist thought twisted in the service of heritage populism. For example, there is a vast difference between examining and questioning the power dynamics and assumptions sustaining (dominant) truth claims (something for which postmodernism is very useful) and the post-truth claims that (inconvenient) facts are irrelevant. There is therefore intellectual and political work cut out for CMS-ers here to draw out the differences and their moral consequences (perhaps even applying postmodernism to deconstruct post-truth as an emerging grand-narrative!).

Returning to the challenge of choosing our allies carefully and the issue of the entanglement of CMS scholars with populism and elitism, we suggest that *marginalism* might be a more promising direction as the CMS political project. Rather than pandering to the wishes of the majority, heedless of whatever its stampede might leave trampled underfoot, or bowing to the superiority of elites, however indifferent they may be to the fates of those seen as insignificant, marginalism would involve a responsibility towards the underdog, the excluded, the forgotten. It would involve picking up the pieces of what has been washed up, broken and pitiful, on the shore; and engaging with the voices too quietly dissonant amidst the confident choir of the majority. Here we could take inspiration from the organic public sociology and strive to 'extend and deepen our organic engagement *with* the organized, unorganized, marginalized and unwaged, whether they are in overt struggle or searching for their voices to be heard, as a first step in pursuing social change' (Brook and Darlington, 2013: 214). Marginalism would also mean that CMS takes up a permanently relative, semiotic position, always directing its critique against the dominant vectors of power, whichever way they may be pushing society. A change in the direction of such vectors – and in the shape of the margins they create – would imply a corresponding change in the vectors of critique, and a sensitive

search for the new marginalized. The underdogs of the pre-Brexit context may or may not be the same today, and this needs to be carefully explored.

We suggest that marginalism would mean that our search for the underdogs should also guide our search for allies – in other words, our ‘natural’ allies should be those on the margins of every sphere, organization, location and walk of life. Perhaps we should start by looking for the oppressed, excluded and marginalized within our own ranks and ask how such ‘CMS underdogs’ could help us address the inequalities, marginalization and exclusion within our own practices, and whether, working collaboratively, they would be willing to act as connections to those whom we normally struggle to reach outside academia. In the broader context, we should also learn from and engage with emerging resistances – for instance, social movements and campaigning organisations like Avaaz, who are very effective at identifying social, political and economic problems around the world and mobilizing fast response action through a combination of digital, offline, local and global resources. Conversely, a greater challenge could be to dare go where resistance produces its own social injustice – where the oppressed oppress, and marginalised marginalize others (think racism, hatred and xenophobia attacks in the context of heritage populism), and also where power comes so close to domination (in Foucauldian sense) that resistance is all but absent. Whilst finding such blind spots and engaging with the silent voices they may conceal is likely to be difficult, CMS is relatively well-equipped to do so with its long-standing work on different forms of power and resistance, and approaches for focusing on the hidden dark side (e.g. postmodernist emphasis on the absent present). From the marginalist perspective, the really challenging aspect would be to ensure that our configuration of allies remains dynamic and contingent to reflect the changing power relations and to resist the temptation to settle permanently into familiar networks, drifting together towards more comfortable positions.

### **Concluding thoughts**

The ‘no lesser right’ element should act as an encouragement. We have no less pre-given right and no less a priori responsibility to speak and be heard, to critique, to care, to feel, to uproot, to repair, to defend and to change than anyone else. Our hope is that in taking up this right and responsibility at this time of great uncertainty and upheaval, and in putting to the test thoughts and ideas both established and new, CMS-ers of all kinds of walks and persuasions can contribute positively to shaping Brexit and post-Brexit worlds in academic as well as personal capacities. Given the global nature and complexity of Brexit and heritage populism as phenomena, doing so is likely to require working across disciplines and geographical locations, and diverse contributions – including new, inventive forms – from different kinds of academic, scholarly, political and practitioner activities, and from a broad range of approaches and methodologies. It is likely to need engaged, public critical education and scholarship enabled by broader intellectual activism (Contu, 2017) (with awareness of our intended and unintended performativities), including active, reflexive engagement with both traditional and

social media, and critical contribution to policy and political campaigns (Brook and Darlington, 2013; Fleming and Banerjee, 2016). It is also likely to need a critical re-evaluation of a number of long-standing debates, e.g. about post-industrial society, the profit imperative, ecological responsibility, patriarchy, feminism and masculinities, symbolic violence, migration and work, global value chains, intellectual pluralism, equality and human rights, and alternatives to populism and austerity. Additionally, it would also require an ongoing sponsorship of newly emerging debates such as the role of the journalistic field and social media in populist movements, the role of emotions and affect in research, and ongoing work on developing the role of researchers as activists.

Such effort may well begin to unfold new forms of public performativity. Brexit is a wake-up call – we hope it can act as an impetus for a positive transformative change within and beyond CMS.

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<sup>i</sup> The **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)** is a professional UK association for human resource management professionals that 'champions better work and working lives' ([www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)).

<sup>ii</sup> The Daily Mail is a daily middle market tabloid newspaper and is currently Britain's second largest selling newspaper. Its editor is Paul Dacre and its political alignment is conservative. During the EU referendum campaign it was staunchly pro-leave with an emphasis on anti-immigration stories (see Martinson 2016) and as such is said to have had an influential effect on the voting patterns of its readership.