



Fucking Management: Queer, Theory and Reflexivity¹

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abstract

In this paper I attempt to make connections between 'queer' theory and contemporary thinking about managing and organising. It is structured around a re-presentation of queer, particularly the work of Butler and Sedgwick, and a discussion of the potential consequences of queering for managers, managerial practices and the science of management. Throughout, I am primarily concerned with authority claims - both personal and institutional - as well as the relation between (critical) theory and (critical) practice. I conclude with some reflections on what 'queer', and 'theory' might mean for 'me'.

My Usual Problems

There are only a few variables, after all; earth, air, fire, water, birth, death; above all, desire. Their combinations are infinite, but still, I've always tried to keep each element clear and discrete in my mind (mundane, Martin would say, ordinary) because when they run together they make something incomprehensible, uncontrollable, something - something opulent. (Dale Peck, *Fucking Martin*, 1994: 189)

The first is Management. Management, as the plural noun for 'managers', are an occupational group who have supposedly engaged in a very successful strategy of collective social mobility over the last century. From a disparate collection of occupational nouns - owner, supervisor, administrator, overman, foreman, clerk - a term has emerged that appears to represent anyone engaged in the co-ordination of people and things. There is an unusual reversal at work here. The historical effects of the division of labour have usually been to subdivide tasks, and their attached labels, whilst this move is an attempt to undivide, to create an umbrella which covers many labours. Through this undivision, this

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merging, a new class is created. Perhaps not a class in the Marxist sense, though that might not be too wide of the mark, but certainly a class in the sense of concepts.

The second is also management. That is to say, with the spread of certain kinds of practice, or descriptions of practice, claimed sometimes to be related to what Managers do. Thus there is increasing talk of the management of everything - from supply chains and customers, to careers, relationships and lives. The division performed here is between managing something, which is good, and not-managing, which is bad. The not-managing usually gets less attention but seems to include both bad management (mis-management) and no management, in other words both doing things badly and leaving things alone altogether.

The third is also Management. The name of University Departments that indicates another kind of practice - reading, writing and talking about what Managers do (often) and what management is (sometimes). This is certainly not a practice that can be isolated from the other two, simply because much of the output of this 'discipline' is shaped by, and in turn shapes, contemporary practices in both of the other areas. (Though perhaps not nearly as much as some of its practitioners would like to think.)

So, those are my three problems. Three forms of identity - managers, management and management (science). Take the title and see what you get. 'Fucking Management' - a curse against what 'they' do, an authoritarian instruction on how to manage your fucking, and the announcement of my hostile intention towards the discipline I seem to have this particular occupational fascination with. Now most of the time I seem to be 'against' these things, indeed that kind of stance seems to be one of the conditions of possibility of 'critical management' itself. Management, in its various guises, is simply a 'bad thing'. The masochistically heroic energy and identity I get from these simplicities is seductive. I know who I am, and what we (us critical management academics) are fighting for. Or at least I think I do sometimes.

Queering

For some time now I have also been worrying about the 'postmodern', specifically about the connections between 'epistemology' and 'ethics' (Parker, 1992; 1995; 1998). I suppose what disturbed me initially was the idea that if everything was just a story, then political and ethical commitment was somehow weakened. This is the slippery slope argument which leads from not knowing about things to not knowing what to do. In that sense it was easy for me to argue that postmodernism was inherently dangerous for any form of principled action. However, more recently I've begun to feel that this is a very 'English' stance to take - one that treats the postmodern as if it were an analytic category which could be placed into firm relations with other static categories - like ethics, politics, theory, epistemology and so on. It seems to me that, in some recent writing, versions of the post have been articulated as terms which are now settled. Hence to label oneself as a postmodernist, poststructuralist, critical modernist or whatever involves placing a mark which indicates (for author and reader) where 'I' claim to stand. Now in certain circumstances that might be a tactically helpful thing to do because it quickly constructs

somewhere to speak from, but it also runs the risk of applying a misplaced concreteness to subject positions and knowledges, and of causing your own thought to congeal.

In a sense this is a noun/verb issue. The concreteness of 'postwhatever' can congeal the radicality of permanent suspicion. So, this is why I want to explore queer. First, because it holds the possibility of setting a different body of writings and questions in motion which might begin to invigorate my rather stale thinking. Second, because in its activist and sloganeering moments, queer seems to be provoking questions about the language, knowledge claims and ethics/politics of the academy itself. Queer is currently a turbulent and unsettling term, one with no clear referent and a variety of lineages and expressions. It is both a claim to difference and to community, to radical alterity and to political tactics, at one and the same time. The paper begins by introducing and reviewing certain elements of queer for an audience primarily interested in management and organisation. However, at the same time I will be using these ideas to interrogate the notion of 'theory' itself in order to destabilise some common assumptions about what it is and does. Against some romantic versions of the post, I want to insist that queering theory is not a position - a standpoint - but an attitude of unceasing disruptiveness. Whatever is known must be doubted, whatever seems full must be emptied, whatever is obvious must be secreted away. Making theory queer is a challenge for thinking, and it is not a challenge that will ever start or stop with a new word (postmodern, or queer), however fashionable it might be in certain quarters at the present moment.

This means that my use of queer does not map neatly on to a generalised deconstructive project - largely because of this suspicion of 'theory' which sometimes follows from poststructural arguments but is rarely explicitly articulated. It seems to me that 'theory' is a terribly overused and misunderstood word within the social sciences but, most importantly, it is a word which necessarily suggests that something called practice lies somewhere else. Importantly, theory is often seen as prior to practical action, or (for academics) as a form of knowing that represents the crowning glory of academic practice. Theory, far more than empirical research, travels around the global academic circuit as a highly prized public symbolic commodity. Now this is an attitude that I think needs queering, and the more activist 'practitioners' of queer do a considerable amount to blur the boundaries between theory and practice. Borrowing an older feminist line - the personal is the political. Everyday practice is therefore a form of theory too, and theory is a kind of practice (however hard it might pretend to be something else).

Now it follows from this that I can not (or perhaps, should not) treat these ideas as if they were bits of a jig saw puzzle that only people like me ('intellectuals', 'academics') can solve. The point of this investigation is to try and work out whether collapsing the hierarchical logic of theory might help me to think about a different kind of engagement. Not simply a reversal, where practice becomes the determinate term, but a folding of both terms together. I do hope it might do some of these things for my readers too, but that can not be for me to determine. I will also need to acknowledge some more obviously reflexive themes. There is a great risk of indulgence here, particularly for a white man from a stiff upper lip culture, but it is very important for the argument in this paper that I do not treat queer as if it were something that only inhabited the realm of the pure idea. Dethroning the (masculine?) fantasy of the pure intellectual by pointing to the material conditions of his reproduction is crucial. In that sense I will try not to write as if there is one Martin Parker

who cooks, cares for four children, has sex and so on; and then that there is another creature of the same name who inhabits the University of Keele and merely thinks and writes. I want, in this paper, to try and fold these two together, to queer the presupposition that the production and consumption of theory is a public, political matter - whilst fucking happens elsewhere.

What I am Not Doing

Before I begin, I want to start deflecting some of the criticisms I can imagine being aimed at me. The fact that I want to do this at this stage in the paper certainly indicates a substantial degree of sensitivity, of defensiveness and nervousness on my part. Make of that what you will, because you will anyway.

First, I want to be clear that I am not claiming a particular license to play with queer theory. As constituted over the last ten years or so, this is a body of work which grows from other people's academic, personal and political problems and fascinations. I have not been, and am not, involved in these matters to any meaningful degree. In some sense then I am simply appropriating the results of a series of interventions which have very little to do with me. Because this is a form of intellectual piracy, I have no wish to glorify my position as merchant of queer. However, though some others (authors, activists or whoever) might wish to claim more 'ownership' than me, they presumably set these ideas afloat in order that people might be tempted to do something with them too. I assume that this - together with the epistemological and political positioning of queer - means that I need no official license, perhaps just a degree of reflexivity about the differential location of ideas.

Second, I assume it is quite possible that some readers might begin to attribute various 'depth' or 'development' psycho-social explanations for my puerile title, inconsistent style and prurient interests. Sexual repression, exhibitionism and various forms of guilt (for my sex, gender, sexuality, class position, ethnicity and so on) seem the most likely candidates here. I am not going to worry very much about this because it doesn't interest me very much, but also because these kinds of assertions are so reversible - such is their logic. However, there is a danger that by concentrating on constructing explanations for *why* I wrote this piece my anticipated critics might be in danger of neglecting *what* I write.

Third, and this is for me the most important point, I am not intending to 'colonise', to 'appropriate', to 'domesticate' queer. I am not trying to make it into a new area for management research or practice. Management has often been rather effective at incorporating various ideas and themes, but just as often has turned them into slogans which present little challenge to the future of management as either occupation, practice or discipline. I have no intention of suggesting a clear future direction, research programme, or political manifesto here. The paper is concerned with exploring a particular kind of engagement, an intervention into both queer and management, but I am not at all sure that this will be 'useful' for managerialists, or anyone else. In fact, I think I would be rather pleased if it wasn't. Nonetheless, I have to begin by trying to capture queer, as gently as I am able, in order that I can present it pinned out for your critical gaze.

Re-presenting Queer

queer adj., n., & v.

adj.

1 strange; odd; eccentric.

2 shady; suspect; of questionable character.

3 Brit. **a** slightly ill; giddy; faint. **b** slang drunk.

4 slang offens. (esp. of a man) homosexual.

n. slang offens. a (esp. male) homosexual.

v.tr. slang spoil; put out of order.

in Queer Street Brit. slang in a difficulty, in debt or trouble or disrepute.

queer a person's pitch Brit. spoil a person's chances, esp. secretly or maliciously.

queerish adj.

queerly adv.

queerness n.

[perhaps from German quer 'oblique' (as thwart)]

Dictionaries are always useful places to begin spinning words, because they remind you that (even as they define and refine meanings with their curious precise shorthand) the meanings never end in the entry of entries. The final definition is never available in the dictionary. Nonetheless, I'm going to evidence my capturing of queer with two books published in 1990 that hardly mention the word at all, but that have both (within that brief period of time) become core texts on the queer syllabus. I will then explore some of the writings within which queer begins to be articulated more explicitly, before turning back to my three problems with management, and my own position in this text, in the following sections.

Before that though, a few words on some political practices. In some sense the word queer seems to have begun being used in a distinctively modern way on the West coast of the USA in the late 1980s. It indexed a kind of hostility to assimilationalist versions of gay politics and liberation, was given some impetus in the wake of the AIDS crisis, was certainly related to generational differences and was (semi) institutionalised in the ACT UP, Queer Nation and Pink Panther groups, and San Francisco's 'Year of the Queer' in 1993. "We're here, we're queer, get used to it." This was no attempt to demonstrate similarities of concern, no attempt to be involved in the formal political process, or to be tolerated behind closed doors. Rather it was a loud and proud assertion of difference, based on a politics of absolute recognition. This was a politics of T-shirts, alternative magazines, street marches, graffiti and posters. Though, as Gamson (1996) elegantly shows, there was (and still seems to be) little agreement within any putative 'gay', 'lesbian', 'bisexual' or 'transgender' 'community' over the meanings or usefulness of the word it has nonetheless been amplified in some rather odd and fantastic ways. Indeed, within a very few years, it has been taken to index both a set of political practices and various forms of academic theory - particularly within cultural studies - which brings me to my first academic text.

Judith Butler's hugely impressive *Gender Trouble* (1990) has rapidly assumed canonical status as a book which sets out to 'trouble' fixed categories - most particularly those of sex and gender. Butler argues that, in conceptual and political terms, the category of 'woman' is one that should be treated as historically variable, as relational and not foundational. In a move which directly confronts more conventional feminisms - though with an admirable sympathy - she suggests that "the category of woman as a stable subject [*is*] an unwitting

regulation and reification of gender relations” (1990: 5). Butler wishes to corrode a certain kind of metaphysics, an attitude which assumes that ‘masculine’ and ‘male’ stand in opposition to ‘feminine’ and ‘female’ - the ‘heterosexual matrix’. The unthinking assumption that gender, sex and sexuality somehow line up in these binary ways is one that is common both to ‘patriarchy’, and to much of feminism itself. Yet placing these terms, and this dualism, in actual and theoretical ‘scare quotes’ is to insist on their historical contingency and to refuse their naturalness, their seductive symmetry. Butler, through a series of careful but critical engagements with de Beauvoir, Irigaray, Kristeva, Wittig, Levi-Strauss, Freud, Lacan and Foucault, attempts (successfully in my view) to dethrone the idea that there is any ‘abiding substance’ hiding behind all the actual manifestations of sex, gender and sexuality.

This is a radical form of constructionism, one in which social and psychoanalytic accounts, and even the body itself, are demonstrated to be accomplishments, mediations, performances.

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results. (1990: 25)

In suggesting that there is no time, no place, no essence where the heterosexual matrix can be finally located, Butler is avoiding the search for origins. Hers is a project which is intended to describe how origins come to be identified, how a ‘natural’, ‘real’, ‘authentic’ place before or after ‘the law’, ‘the social’, ‘power’, ‘culture’ seems to be needed in so many of the arguments and assertions about sex, gender and sexuality. Utopian matriarchal pasts that ‘we’ might return to, prediscursive libidinal multiplicities that ‘we’ might release, and utopian destinations that ‘we’ might reach. And here we get to her most powerful metaphor: if we dispense with origins, all these manifestations and configurations are better considered as forms of ‘drag’, as masquerade, as parody. This metaphor both denaturalises everyday practices, and also suggests that the relationship of sex and gender is not origin(al) and copy, but copy and copy. There is nothing behind the mask, no depth beneath the surface, nothing waiting for us “on the far side of language” (1990: 114). All these performances are simulacra, but at least ‘drag’ can be a repetition that has a subversive intent and effect. Precisely by celebrating its constructedness, drag foregrounds the becoming of gender. It helps to prevent the congealing, the reification, that origin stories must rely upon. ‘Queens’, ‘dykes’, ‘femmes’, ‘fags’, ‘leather men’ - and, of course, ‘queers’ - are dramatic expressions of our own performances, of the bodily acts, disciplines, ornamentations and relations that constitute the practices of sex/gender/sexuality.

Now this is both a theoretical stance which relies on a form of Foucaudian genealogy, but also an argument about the politics of representation and identity. If feminism is not speaking for an unified category of woman, then who is it speaking for, and why? Butler’s answer is that a feminist genealogy is an effective way of exposing the fragility of categories, and thus of ensuring that feminists take the problem of representation more seriously. Emptying the category ‘woman’ becomes a precondition for a new kind of politics, a politics which interrogates the question of the construction of origins. But this does not mean that some form of representationalist politics can be simply refused, or evaded. As she puts it:

The juridical structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power; hence, there is no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices. (1990: 5)

The point then is to refuse the single or abiding ground which is constructed by a feminist identity politics, whether positively in celebrating 'woman', or negatively by identifying 'man' as the problem, as the enemy. Indeed, if this 'heterosexual matrix' can be destabilised, perhaps the sheer variability of identities (and hence of identity politics) can be fully recognised. Ironically, it is precisely through feminism's claims to be representing 'woman', that the multiplicity of cultural, political and economic intersections that produce 'women' have been practically effaced. This is the "tragic mistake" (1990: 128) that any exclusionary politics, whether 'heterosexual', 'gay', 'lesbian' and so on continues to make. Gender (taking that word to stand for all the others), is not a thing, not an essence, but a "*stylised repetition of acts*" (1990: 140, emphasis in original). So too, Butler implies, are all the 'other' categories of 'same' and 'Other' – "color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness" - that require the "exasperated 'etc'" (1990: 143) to attempt to cover their diversity. Adding all these 'essences' does not get us any closer to totality, or transparency, and this is simply because the 'etc' is really endless, it is the supplement of meaning and will hence always exasperate all our attempts to capture it. For Butler, the 'critical task' should never pretend to be outside construction and representation, but instead should:

...locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them. (1990: 147)

My second 'ur-text' for Queer, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), is largely a work of deconstructive literary criticism. Like Said's *Orientalism* (1978), an important text for post-colonial studies, its method is post-structural and its texts are largely parts of the literary canon. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is concerned to show that binarisms are unhelpful and she demonstrates this through the central metaphor of the "relations of the closet - the relations of the known and unknown" (1990: 3). In a typically deconstructive move, she wishes to read texts in order to show that what is 'out' in the text relies on something else being 'closeted'. It is not enough to assume the "redemptive potential of simply upping the cognitive wattage" (1990: 7), but also to explore how ignorance is actively constructed.

If ignorance is not - as it evidently is not - a single Manichaeian, aboriginal maw of darkness from which the heroics of human cognition can occasionally wrestle facts, insights, freedoms, progress, perhaps there exists instead a plethora of *ignorances*, and we may begin to ask questions about the labor, erotics and economics of their human production and distribution. (1990: 8)

So ignorance, like secrecy, is something that is made. An enquiry into its making should not privilege either the dominant or the subordinated term in a particular relation - homo and hetero for most of her book - but a host of others too:

...secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine/feminine, majority/minority, innocence/initiation, natural/artificial, new/old, discipline/terrorism, canonic/noncanonic, wholeness/decadence, urbane/provincial, domestic/foreign, health/illness, same/different, active/passive, in/out, cognition/paranoia, art/kitsch, utopia/apocalypse, sincerity/sentimentality, and voluntariness/addiction. (1990: 11)

So, after establishing her biographical (and necessary) indebtedness to feminism and her anti-homophobic motivations, in a delicious parody of classical philosophy Sedgwick sets forward a series of 'axioms' that guide her enquiry. In a sense, all the axioms are establishing the principle of pure difference - not symmetry, or listing (Butler's 'exasperated "etc"'), but sheer difference. Probably the most foundational, in an ironic sense, is 'People are different from each other.' That is to say, that sex, gender and sexuality mean different things to different people at different times. That their sexual investments vary in intensity, importance and in (human or non-human) object choice. That the relations between their chromosomal sex, their gender and their sexuality should not be assumed. Further axioms explore this difference in more disciplinary terms, by refusing to assume that antihomophobic enquiry, feminism, lesbian and gay studies and literary criticism will all line up neatly either. This is a hostility to what she later called the "Christmas Effect" - when sexuality, children, consumption, work, the state, the family all line up in lockstep, speaking with one voice (Sedgwick, 1994: 5). There is no neat and tidy clearing up and sorting out of knowledges and practices here, but an engagement with difference by a woman who, as Sedgwick puts it, has investments as a woman, a fat woman, a nonprocreative adult, a sexual pervert and a Jew (1990: 63).

This book is then, though less explicitly than Butler's, another example of Foucaudian genealogy. It is an extended argument about the relationality of the named and that which does not dare utter its name. As Sedgwick shows, it is also an engagement with the politics of naming, between the assertion of a special and particular difference (the 'minoritizing' view) and the assertion of a generalised sameness (the 'universalizing' view). For both forms of representation the same/different divide functions in some rather predictable ways - either the Other is reified, treated as both special and external, or the Other is included, treated as another example of the same. If the secret is to be worth anything, it can not be held within a glass closet, it can not be an open secret, an empty secret (1990: 164). There is no way beyond this, there will always be secrets, but it is possible to use deconstructive methods:

... towards an examination of the resulting definitional incoherence: its functional potential and realization, its power effects, the affordances for its mobilization within a particular discursive context... (1990: 92)

For Sedgwick, it seems that a play with secrecy - 'I know that you know' - is similar to Butler's use of drag. This is a secrecy that she both discusses and enacts in the text via her suggestive (but rarely explicit) re-readings of, and collisions between, various texts. Secrecy is a condition of language and politics, and there is no light bright enough to make it go away.

So both these books make theoretical and ethical/political gestures simultaneously. Like much, though not all, of feminism the knowing becomes a practice which is inseparable from the practice of being the knower. And this is perhaps what gives subsequent queer writers their distinctive flavour, not so much that they are concerned with gaylesbianbisexualtransgender issues, but that they collapse 'theory' and 'politics' in their texts. To put it another way, the texts intend (though whether they succeed is another matter) to explicitly perform the ethical/political in their writing. As Sedgwick put it a few years later, by which time she was using the word 'queer', the project is one of 'across' formulations.

The *queer* of these essays is transitive - multiply transitive. The immemorial current that *queer* represents is antiseparatist as it is antiassimilationist. Keenly, it is relational, and strange. (1994: xii)

And this necessarily means that “there are important senses in which ‘queer’ can signify only *when attached to the first person*” (1990: 9, emphasis in original). There is, in other words, a big problem with suggesting that queer theory has its own metaphysics of presence, an identity independent of its tactical use in a location.

Yet, despite the admonitions of both Butler and Sedgwick, queer has become canonical. Such is the way with words once academics get hold of them. ‘It’ is increasingly generating its own stars, publication outlets and dialect. And, it seems to me, some of ‘it’ is also demonstrating its own versions of minoritarian and majoritarian politics. On the one hand it is fair to say that a lot of what has been written beneath the label of queer has been about transgenderlesbiangaybisexual identified people. There is here a re-recovery of a hidden history, of secreted stories. Much of this writing is celebratory, in the sense that it attempts to reverse the terms of the subaltern discourse, to embrace the stigma and make connections with and for other people with related identities. Like the ‘herstories’ of feminism, the critique of the ‘malestream’ within organisation studies or the people’s histories written from below, this is a project which attempts to legitimate a particular set of minority knowledges. So we have writings about music, literature, advertising, comic strips, the academy, work, AIDS and so on which make connections to/with bisexualtransgenderlesbiangay individuals and communities in other spaces and times, and with other cross-cutting identifications too - most notably race and ethnicity. This is, if you like, the side of queer which exemplifies its collapsing of theory and practice through (usually highly engaged) writings about particular practices, what Joshua Gamson calls an “ethnic/essentialist politic” (1996: 396).

On the other hand, the majoritarian impulse is also evident in two ways. The most obvious is a generalised “deconstructionist politic” (Gamson, 1996) which seeks to undermine any and all claims to ethnic essentialism. I will have more to say about this in a moment, but there is also a form of queer which seeks to make similar kinds of claims but in less ‘French’ language. Steven Seidman is probably the most important writer in this area, and he has suggested (correctly I think) that queer is - in terms of its social ontology - a form of radical social constructionism (1998, see also many of the essays in Seidman, 1996). Yet, for Seidman, if queer is to develop some more influence, it needs to move away from its poststructural leanings and to become both more historicized and contextualised, and a form of general social theory. Queer must move from the edge and get closer to the middle, to demonstrate that “we are all in the closet” (1998). It is important to point out here that the closet is both productive and repressive at the same time - concealing a ‘real’ self just as it indexes an alienated an inauthentic self. Yet as Seidman acknowledges, this is not a new insight. The subaltern self has been re/cognised by feminist and post-colonialist thinkers as being an important site of resistance, of an identity positioned against domination. (To which it might be added Marx too, in terms of his distinction between a class ‘in itself’, and a class ‘for itself’.) But this is a general statement that tells us little about the actual relations between ‘closets’, ‘passing’, ‘heteronormativity’ and so on in societies nowadays. In other words, the politics and sociology of queer is rather “thin” (1998: 184). In this move Seidman is suggesting that, in terms of academic practice, queer needs to become more majoritarian, but also that it should research the “contextual, agentic

aspects of meaning making” (1998: 188). He is both asking for queer to become a norm (though a highly unstable one) and for it to re-invigorate a social constructionist sociology. Ironic in some ways, that French post-structuralism should once again be re-read through the lens of US pragmatism, both in terms of its democratic liberalism, and its hostility to structural generalisation.

There is a sense in which both these minoritarian and majoritarian versions of queer are implicitly or explicitly positioning the poststructuralism of Butler and Sedgwick as a kind of “textual idealism” (Epstein, 1996: 157). Indeed, it might be rather persuasively argued that (since both books are rather ‘difficult’) they are reproducing the theory/practice distinction in their form and content just as they attempt to disavow the reader of the validity of such a distinction. To be frank it is hard to imagine someone without a good grounding in (at least) the three F’s (Foucault, feminism, and Freud) being able to make much of what Butler and Sedgwick write. It would, however, be rather too easy to make too much of these internal differences, and this short review of queer is really intended to point to unities rather than divisions. After all, the hinge of both criticisms is a tactical one, not a foundational disagreement. The point is to debate the effectiveness of outsider and insider strategies for contesting what Cheryl Cole calls “mechanisms of containment” (1996: 298). These mechanisms are discursive, in the sense that they are both conceptual dyads (deviant/normal) and also practices of inclusion and exclusion (around HIV for example). It seems to me that, for queer in general, it is not a question of either texts or practice, but one read through the other (and through the Other).

So queer then, in the very broad terms in which I have reviewed it here, is an approach which seems to be centrally concerned to politicise the terms on which knowing is often conceptualised. Its key move is to question the boundary, not simply to demonise that which lies on one side and to celebrate that which lies on the other. Queer eschews simple finger pointing, it avoids resting on the simplicities that separate the innocent from the guilty, the victim from the oppressor, or experience from abstraction. There are no political or authorial positions that are not also complicit in that which they condemn. As Ki Namaste puts it, we can never move ‘outside’ current conceptions of sexuality (or anything else for that matter), but then we are never entirely ‘inside’ it either. The dominant discourse sets frames for thinking with, but at the same time it always leaves something outside the frame. This means that both repetition of hegemonic understandings, and of romantic resistance to such understandings, are not options.

What we can do, queer theory suggests, is negotiate these limits. We can think about the *how* of these boundaries - not merely the fact that they exist, but also how they are created, regulated, contested. (Namaste, 1996: 199, emphasis in original)

Or, as Gamson says, the point is to recognise that identities (whether separatist or collective) are “made-up yet necessary”, both contingent and inescapable at one and the same time (1996: 395).

So, that is my review of queer - and it is mine - with all the paradoxical claims to authority that involves. In a while I will return to the three versions of management in order to see what difference these understandings might make, but first, how distinctive is queer?

Necessary and Sufficient Explanations

It seems to me that the centre of management (as a discipline) is still profoundly conservative in political and conceptual terms. I state this as a truism which is simply banal. However, this centre has always had its periphery, an Other which functions to demarcate and identify that which is the same. How would 'Critical Management' know what it was if it weren't for the 'British Academy of Management'? In other words, the inside and the outside are made in the same movement. But the outside has been celebrated rather a lot recently. Indeed, there is something rather dull, rather tiresome, about the seemingly endless series of attempts to force management as a discipline to recognise its (self-consciously fashionable) other. More research is almost always needed, there are always gaps in the literature and careers are forged in the heat of disrupting, estranging and deconstructing this, that or the Other. In that sense:

...queer theory suggests this month's trendiness, just the latest progeny spawned by the Foucaudian revolution and adopted by over-eager literary critics and proponents of cultural studies. (Epstein, 1996: 145)

Or, as de Lauretis has put it, queer "has quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry" (in Spargo, 1999: 68). So my attempt to 'insert' queer inevitably needs to be contextualised as a move in an academic game, a game which (if my strategy works) will 'end' in an academic paper in a refereed journal with my name attached. But acknowledging that fact, that motivation, is part of what queer seems to press on me. In saying this, I am both ironising this paper and trying to claim some distinctiveness for this move to a particular way of thinking. But queer is also necessarily related to older currents of thought - on gender, post-structuralism, social constructionism - so in what sense is it 'new'?

Initially I suppose it might be possible to dissolve queer into a project which is concerned to think about sex, gender and sexuality. Accepting that, rather general, description then we find a large body of writings resting on various forms of feminism, equal opportunity liberalism, and studies of men and masculinity which have (over the last twenty years or so) been concerned to think about gender and organisations quite systematically. But, in this paper, I'm not particularly concerned to legitimate talking about 'sex' (of any classification) in management or organisation studies - though I don't object to it either. Take for example Greenberg and Bystry's paper on male homosexuality and bureaucracy (1996). They note that male self assertion and competitiveness, and the separation of home from work are historically recent phenomena, and moreover, that these developments are paralleled by the rise of the bureaucratic society. Indeed, Merton's 'bureaucratic personality' is the archetypal male personality too, one that separates hatreds and passions from the brute instrumentality of getting things done. It is also worth noting that, from the Spanish inquisition to the holocaust to the contemporary military, homosexuality has often been repressed by bureaucratic mechanisms. So, Greenberg and Bystry suggest, the more bureaucratisation we find in a given society, the more intolerance of homosexuality we also find. The more repression, the greater the sexual asceticism and fear of the Other. Though this is an interesting and persuasive argument, I am uncertain as to whether it needs queer theory to legitimate it. Indeed, presupposing as it does a particular economy of repression and freedom, it could be said to have little to do with a distinctively queer form of thinking. As David Bell (1995) has suggested for geographers, speaking of sex is one

thing, but queering implies a desire to fuck the discipline a little. Or as Michael Warner has put it rather pithily, the aim is “to make theory queer, not just to have a theory about queers” (1993: xxvi). Queer then, if it is to be an useful term, is not merely reducible to a concern with sex, gender or sexuality.

But then spinning queer in a different direction, towards poststructuralism, might allow us to make a rather parallel claim. If queer is a relational postdualist epistemology, one largely indebted to Foucault, then we also find a large body of writings concerned with French poststructuralism, postmodernism and radical social constructionism which make connections with organisation theory. So queer ‘theory’ becomes a branch of social ‘theory’ more generally, one that is concerned to legitimate the linguistic turn within studies of management and organisation. But this too seems to dilute any distinctive meaning that queer might have, it subsumes it to a primarily theoretical project, a form of writing engaged in by academics employed to produce knowledges for their particular clients. Take William Haver’s discussion of queer research for example (1997). Though Haver uses the word queer, and references Butler, his main concern seems to be engaging with Deleuze, Guattari, Blanchot, Lyotard, Nancy and so on. Not, I hasten to add, that there is anything wrong in doing so - my point is simply that the word queer seems rather superfluous here. It is a rhetorical gesture that does little, in Haver’s text, to dethrone the high priests of French theory. So, to reiterate Warner’s aphorism, the task is to make theory queer, not simply to invent a new branch of it. Queer, if it is to be an useful term, is not easily reducible to poststructuralist theory either.

Finally, is queer just another form of social constructionism? As I have noted above, much of queer relies on a social ontology which is indebted to a version of interactionism. In some sense Butler’s version of ‘drag’ is methodologically prefigured in 1960s’ US sociology as dramaturgy or ethnomethodology, much of which was framed as an organisational sociology. Take, for example, Harold Garfinkel’s essay on Agnes the transexual (1967). Garfinkel’s attempt to explicate the rules by which ordinary people deploy common sense knowledge to achieve sex status seems to exemplify the kind of approach that Butler is hinting at. Indeed, his list of “properties of natural, normally sexed persons” (1967: 122-133) and his use of the term ‘passing’ (and ‘management devices’) are far more rigorous than Butler’s. Yet his aim is not the same. Where Garfinkel wants to explore the mechanisms of accountability in order to explain them better, Butler’s aim is to problematise them for explicitly political reasons. For Garfinkel, demonstrating that the social world is indexical and contingent appears to be an end in itself. For Butler, the point is to de-naturalise in order that new forms of performance can be solicited. So, I would suggest, queer is not ‘only’ social constructionism either.

So what is different about queer? What do I want to claim for its distinctiveness? I have spent some time suggesting that it isn’t only about sex, or about poststructuralism, or about social constructionism. These are necessary to explain queer, but they are not sufficient to explain it (away). For me, queer seems to be a curious and unstable amalgam of all of these things, one that gains a voice through a ‘war of movement’ within the present. This is not to say that its fate may not end up being similar to that of postmodernism, and this paper is probably one of its gravediggers. But queer makes its sense now. It is fashionable, and there is no good reason why theories of management should not engage with the fashionable. “Queer today and gone tomorrow” (Spargo, 1999: 65) is not necessarily a

criticism, but could be an invitation to engage with the contemporary. In order to do this, let me return to my three versions of management - as occupational group, as everyday practice, and as discipline.

Fucking Management

I'll begin with management as a group of workers. It seems to me that, again at the risk of being rather banal here, the most obvious point to make is that this generalised term can not be understood apart from its manifestation in local practices. Following a form of radical social constructionism, management would have to be understood as a form of performance. This is clearly a move which turns nouns into verbs, which makes the thing of management into a doing, or a becoming. To mistake the word for a thing is to be trapped by the metaphysics of presence, to reify the object of enquiry. And here perhaps Butler's metaphor of drag might be a useful way to re-invigorate an interactionist or dramaturgical view of how it is that managers manage to 'pass' as managers (see, for example, Mangham and Overington (1987)). Doing 'manager' is playing a role. Management means wearing the costume. It calls upon the bodily comportment, the props and scripts and gestures that signify 'manager' in the late twentieth century. The problem, or one of 'my' problems, is that the role has become hardened into a series of predictable scripts, an unreflective rehearsal of what the type 'manager' does. But treating management as 'drag' - not just dramaturgy - suggests both its provisionality and a possible playful form of resistance. As Butler puts it: "Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatise the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established?" (1990: viii). So perhaps what might be called 'camp' management would be a form of practice which would dramatically enact its provisionality, its fragility, without constructing a fictional outside to the discourses of management within organisations.

Now that kind of argument is both about academic treatments of management (viewing managers as if they were in drag) and also an argument about a subversive form of management (suggesting to managers that they should perform as if they were in drag). In other words, it folds academic 'theory' and management 'practice' into one another. This, it seems to me, is the kind of thinking that queer is rather good at. It recognises the complicity of academic representations in constituting the (in this case) organisational world. Gibson-Graham (1996), in a short think-piece, makes a similar suggestion about markets, economics and academics which rests its pitch on the metaphor of queering the 'public' domain. Why assume, for example, that all forms of exchange can be reduced to capitalist commodity production? For Gibson-Graham, academics might like to queer conventional representations of those matters that they take to be most obvious, partly because these representations become performative in themselves and partly to free management (as a discipline) from the hegemony of liberal economics. So once again, what academics claim the world is like, and what kind of world managers live in, are seen as inescapably linked. The point here is surely to dethrone singular assumptions, such as those held by being 'for' or 'against' management. Butler puts this point with characteristic clarity.

The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms. (Butler, 1990: 13)

So if we are suspicious of dualisms, of dyads, then the 'us' and 'them' which divides 'the critical' from 'the conventional', academics from practitioners, should also be the object of critical scrutiny. Not, to reiterate the point, because we can step outside them to somewhere on the far side of language, but because they can become objects of scrutiny in themselves. Now this brings me on to management as a practice, as a form of discipline which seems to be increasingly constitutive of the well tempered liberal subject. Managing our selves, our relationships, our sex, our children (if we have them) and so on. In a very related way, it seems to me that queer is a current of thought and practice that might regard the self-disciplines of the management of everyday life with considerable scepticism². Against the certainties of liberal governance, against bodily and intellectual habits which celebrate conformity and repetition we have a conception of subversion and transgression as a habit in itself. But this is not a romantic version of resistance as a return to something else in time or space, or as a modernising move to some time or place which is better than now. What interests me here is the possibility of a practice of queering which would avoid such interminable positioning as 'post' this or that, against something, for something else. Instead, adopting Sedgwick's metaphors, the movement would be an unceasing exposure of what was secreted away, and at the same time a closeting of some other term. This is a denaturalising process, a radicalisation of what is understood to be traditional and taken-for-granted. Against managing, in the sense of control, this is a continual, permanent, never ending movement of asking "who are 'we'"?

This point needs to be made more clearly, because it is all too easy to let it slip into being an essentialism of the outside. After all, I might be read here as setting up an opposition between the free play of queer against the constrained work of management, movement versus mobility, the dandy versus the organisation man, disorganisation versus organisation. The romance of this transgression, of this heroic struggle, hangs around some queer writing too (Namaste, 1996), as well as much of what is often called postmodernism. But the point of queer is surely not to choose one of these words, one of these positions, as if they are choices that can be made by a rational liberal subject who stands beyond the social. To play is to work, and free play is only possible when something else has already been fixed. Or, as Bob Cooper has demonstrated in many of his essays, organisation and disorganisation are made in the same moment (see, for example, 1990). Unification and division are parasitic on each other. Joshua Gamson, in a lovely essay on queer tactics, seeks in a similar way to show that both the 'ethnic/essentialist' and the 'deconstructionist' movements make sense. This is not an either/or. They reflect the fact that:

...two different political impulses, and two different forms of organising, can be seen facing off. The logic and political utility of deconstructing collective categories vies with that of shoring them up: each logic is true, and neither is fully tenable (1996: 396)

Management then, as an everyday practice, cannot simply be opposed by queering. In the terms I have been setting up here, both make each other. The point is not to believe that 'we' can do without management and become queer, but to continually recognise the disciplining characteristics of both of these moves.

2 Not that queer is the only site which encourages such scepticism. For a similar argument, from 'critical humanism', see Grey (1999).

Finally then, management as a discipline, as a place that I inhabit on an everyday basis. Whilst much of what I have suggested above has clear implications for 'intellectual' practices generally, I wish to focus here on some of the institutional issues. Above all, I would say, queer insists on a reflexivity about knowledge, about the places and spaces whereby certain forms of knowing are legitimated, about the subjects and objects of enquiry and the manners that pertain to its production and distribution. Now in one sense this obviously means disrupting certain assumptions about the place of queers within the academy. Most of Higher Education is still premised on largely heterosexist assumptions about 'being married to the job'. It trades on the increasingly hyperproductive and hypercompetitive preconditions for an academic 'career' which rely on instrumental reasoning and abstraction (Wiegman, 1997). This might be seen as a liberal problem of inclusion, and addressing it requires that queers are brought in from the cold - in terms of different living arrangements, pension schemes, anti-discrimination policies and so on (see, for example, Humphrey, 1999). But, more importantly for my argument, queer also disrupts some of the pretensions that the liberal academy has about itself. Queering the academy does not only mean making an academy of queers, but queering *the idea* of the academy. Like feminism, queer theory's foregrounding of desire and power can:

...profoundly disturb the idea that the forces of power are outside the academy and that therefore academic knowledge can offer a disinterested judgement of politics (Clough, 1994: 167)

The knowledges of management (as a discipline) have never been value neutral, but neither can they become politically engaged simply by trading on liberal guilt. They are always implicated in the production of discipline, both power over organisational subjects and power over appropriate knowledges. Wishing it otherwise can never make it so. But, and this is a typically Foucauldian point, power-over is always also power-to (Foucault, 1982). Disciplines are productive, and can not be wished away. Once again, the point is to recognise the both/and of knowing, the positivity and surplus of institutional knowledge. A university which dressed in drag, and recognised its own economy of secrecy and disclosure, its own sexual economy of repression and freedom might be an institution that worked against itself in some rather productive ways (see, for example, Burrell, 1993).

So, to wrap up this section, I want to make some general points about the distinctiveness of queer. I have suggested it is not reducible to queers, or to deconstruction, or to social construction though all of those ideas provide it with its necessary conditions of possibility. Though queer is clearly not one movement, and does not provide one politics, it seems to me to provide a conjunction between the hermeneutic of suspicion and passionate political engagement which is highly productive. In a sense, its lack of simplicity, of coherence, is precisely what marks it out at the present time. Gamson provides two 'axioms' which, like Sedgwick's, seem to express some of these central paradoxes rather nicely. First, "*secure boundaries and stabilised identities are necessary not in general, but in the specific*". In other words, 'we' cannot avoid using dualisms, dyads, us and them, but 'we' must always be aware that these are local claims (and perhaps accomplishments). 'We' can not manage without 'we', but 'we' is always a problem. Second, the "*destabilisation of collective identity is itself a goal and accomplishment of collective action*" (1996: 412, italics in both originals). That is to say that collectivities (of managers, of critical management, of academics) should try to be like self-destructing pieces of machinery. Part of the critical task is reflecting on the elevated authority claims of the critical position itself. Which is

another way of pointing to the practice of queering, not from without, or from within, but from across the boundaries that organise our lives.

Some Secrets

So, what is left in the closet of this paper? Much of my writing has undoubtedly been rather abstract. I have been concerned to do a 'proper' academic job on some (often rather dense) writers, and have made the connections and separations that seemed necessary for a paper of this sort. There is a lot of academic rigour here, a lot of logic. But, 'fucking management'? Hardly. More like masturbation in front of academics³. To complete this self-indulgence it would seem that I need to put myself into this paper at its end, in order that 'I' can be the stop on this endless questioning, this permanent and rather tiresome queering. There is an issue of disclosure here, of the release of repression that heralds true freedom, real emancipation. As Oscar Wilde's character Lord Henry suggests to Dorian Grey:

"You, Mr Gray, you yourself, with your rose-red youth and your rose-white boyhood, you have had passions that have made you afraid, thoughts that have filled you with terror, day-dreams and sleeping dreams whose mere memory might stain your cheek with shame" (in Sedgwick, 1990: 138)

Should I then, 'come out' as the author of this paper? Tell you that I typed some of it with a baby on my lap? Tell you some of my terrors and passions, secrets and lies? Tell you about my home, my work, my body and tastes? Swim for a while in the warm bath of reflexivity, of reflexivity about my reflexivity? Show you my standpoint, celebrate an epistemology of experience? Expose the 'real' me? Claim that 'here I stand, I can do no other'? (Parker, 1995; Willmott, 1997)

Of course not. I will (and have) told you as much as I need and want you to know (though - as I said - I cannot, in advance, predict what the effects of that might be). Queer is not about 'my' reflexivity, though I am (in this paper) its condition of possibility. Of course at the same time I can not ignore the 'I' - what Sedgwick calls a grammatical form 'that marks the site of such dense accessible effects of knowledge, history, revulsion, authority, and pleasure.' And this is my final point, that queer is not reducible to reflexivity either. When I claim to be the author of this paper, this is also a necessary and impossible move (Foucault, 1984). Just as the 'we' of collectivities is a political problem for liberal politics, so is the 'I' for authority claims.

Not a simple, settled congratulatory "I", on the one hand, nor on the other a fragmented postmodernist postindividual (Sedgwick, 1994: xiv)

3 One colleague, on reading this, wrote – "You've turned sour and self-conscious here. Like you had being playing some Chopin and, getting near the end, turned grinning to the audience and stuck in some ragtime for no particular reason." He was right, and I am.

Queering the authentic self, and the non-self, are part of the deconstructionist/essentialist matrix too and 'I/we' can not choose one without also simultaneously (but often involuntarily) choosing the other. I want to capture this paper (and my current understanding of queer too) like this. I use the word, as Epstein says "nervously" (1996: 153). I am not certain what queer means to other people, and what it says about me. The word worries me. But my understanding of queering is that a certain 'nervousness' about words, and about practices, and about the relationship between them, is sometimes rather useful for fucking things up, for making fluid what was seen as foundational. A nervousness about categories makes, as my epigraph suggested, 'something incomprehensible, uncontrollable, something - something opulent'. And that sounds like rather an interesting thing to be doing.

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