

Pierre-André Hudon
Christian Rouillard

Critical Management Studies and public administration: Reinterpreting democratic governance using critical theory and poststructuralism

Abstract: In this article we present the schools of thought comprising Critical Management Studies (CMS), explore their implications for public administration, and provide an alternate definition of democratic governance. We synthesize and describe the “modern stream,” inspired by the Frankfurt School, and the “postmodern stream,” associated with poststructuralist authors. Despite significant epistemological and ontological differences, these perspectives complement each other and cast new light on democratic governance. We present the respective theories of Foucault and Habermas, explore their implications for public administration, reconcile their views on power as a basis for a normative definition for so-called good governance, and redefine the concept of “democratic governance.”

Sommaire : Dans cet article, nous présentons les courants d'idées qui constituent les Études critiques en management (ECM), nous examinons leurs implications pour l'administration publique, et nous présentons une définition alternative de la gouvernance démocratique. Nous résumons et décrivons le « courant moderne » inspiré de l'École de Francfort et le « courant post-moderne » associé aux auteurs poststructuralistes. Malgré d'importantes différences ontologiques et épistémologiques, ces perspectives sont complémentaires et présentent un nouvel éclairage sur la gouvernance démocratique. Nous présentons les théories respectives de Foucault et Habermas, étudions leurs implications pour l'administration publique, rapprochons leurs points de vue sur le pouvoir comme base d'une définition normative pour la soi-disant bonne gouvernance, et redéfinissons le concept de « gouvernance démocratique ».

Introduction

Public administration theory's recent insistence on the concept of governance has brought forward the issue of pluralism in the coordination of State action (Osborne 2006, 2010). At the policy-making level, new tools such as deliberative democracy, quasi-judicial and quasi-legislative processes, collaborative policy-making or e-government have been developed

Pierre-André Hudon is Postdoctoral Researcher, École nationale d'administration publique (ENAP), Montreal. Christian Rouillard is Professor, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa.

to address the specific challenges of pluralist governance (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary 2005; Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, and Tinkler 2006). At the managerial level, recent governmental reforms have brought a plethora of new tools and practices that, arguably, have contributed to a "technicization" of management practices and to the dominance of a neoliberal managerial discourse (Parker 2002). While these novel approaches have been met with enthusiasm from those who saw them as making government "lighter on its feet" and more responsive and efficient, they have also attracted their fair share of criticism. Pluralism, network-based coordination and digital-era managerial tools indeed constitute a fertile ground for power struggles, instrumentalization of discourse and exclusion.

Critical Management Studies (CMS) have long been concerned with these issues in the field of business management, but have made few inroads in public policy and public management research. Nevertheless, CMS can provide a coherent framework for observing public administration critically. The aim of this paper is therefore to present a synthesis of the various schools of thought within CMS and to use these tools to provide an alternate definition of democratic governance.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we present CMS and their implications for public administration. We present the "modern stream," inspired by the works of the Frankfurt School, as well as the "postmodern stream," with concerns close to those of poststructuralist authors. We then argue that, despite significant epistemological and ontological differences, these two perspectives on power can complement each other and cast new light on the issue of democratic governance. We present the theories of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas, explore their implications for public administration, and reconcile them into a normative definition for so-called good governance. Finally, we propose a redefinition of the concept of "democratic governance" based on our understanding of CMS and of the Foucault-Habermas debate. We present a critical summary of the existing definitions, propose a new and improved definition for governance and analyze the normative requirements for so-called good governance.

CMS and public management

The origins of CMS can be traced back to a conference held in 1989 that led to a collective book directed by Alvesson and Willmott (1992). The book used critical epistemologies from various disciplines such as political science, sociology and anthropology and applied them to the study of management. For Fournier and Grey (2000), the rise in popularity of CMS in the late 80s and early 90s can be attributed to 3 factors:

1. *The resistance against managerialism and the rise of the New Right during the 80s.* The British authors identify Margaret Thatcher's fight against labour unions, sweeping privatization efforts and the imposition of managerialism as the symptoms of neoliberalism. In this perspective, CMS can be interpreted as an extension of the political fight against the New Right.
2. *The "existential" crisis of Western management.* Western (that is, American) management, seen as comparatively weaker than its Japanese and German counterparts, begins to question itself. Stuck between the rejection of classical bureaucratic techniques and a mystification of the manager's role within the firm, a reflexive re-evaluation of the discipline begins.
3. *The loss of influence of positivism and functionalism in social sciences.* Constructivist, critical, and poststructuralist perspectives in social science are becoming increasingly popular in the managerial discipline. The idea that an epistemological position based on pure science is not necessarily well adapted to the study of organisations and administrative system begins to surface.

Through the lens of CMS, public administration discourse and practice becomes a sociopolitical project that transcends instrumental goals-means rationality and which, like any sociopolitical project, shows a particular view of power relationships, the influence of hierarchy and authority, the relationship between individuals and groups and, moreover, opportunities for individual autonomy and collective empowerment.

For these reasons, government cannot be reduced to a neutral and inevitable technical function, supposedly necessary for the proper functioning of complex organizations: it is neither a science nor an art, but a social construction that must be criticized and re-conceptualized in the light of a pronounced concern for the collective emancipation. The CMS approach rejects the notion of generic management with claims of universality, timelessness and transferability to focus on the particularities of the organizational context, particularly with regard to the constraints and specific resources that managers and non-managers alike must work with. The privileged status of efficiency as a *modus operandi* of public management is not upheld: efficiency is no longer synonymous with rationality, but rather a value, a polysemic addition, among several other possible values. Efficiency is also considered more than a simple input/output/outcome technical ratio and more than the neutral and ultimate aim of public administration. Rather, it is even the expression of the implicit and undeclared hierarchical structuring of values preferred by political and administrative decision-makers throughout its assessment.

CMS consider the managerial discourse and practice as an interaction/communication, rather than merely the cognitive activity of decision-making. The limits of rationality are no longer implicitly assumed to be static, but instead become dynamic: thus, we do not only discuss, debate

and exchange ideas, concepts and perspectives. We also build, through the power relationships we weave with others, organizational identity which in turn influences the nature and dissemination of the discourse itself.

The CMS approach therefore gives special attention to meta-narratives (politico-administrative documents with symbolic orientation and identity construction), such as management frameworks and the resulting supporting documents. The challenge is to identify the implicit control elements and managerial domination that pose so many obstacles to the proposed collective emancipation and, furthermore, which are themselves in a discursive participation context, sources of organizational confusion, and even disillusionment.

The two intellectual traditions of CMS

CMS can be broadly divided into two intellectual traditions: Critical Theory (CT) and postmodernism (Alvesson and Deetz 2000). Despite not having much in common from an ontological perspective, these two traditions share a concern for emancipation and a desire to uncover domination patterns (Casey 2002), particularly those ones related to a managerialist view of public governance (Grey and Willmott 2005). CT's influence on CMS is epistemologically modern and rational and is based on the work of the Frankfurt school. The postmodern influence on CMS is much more post-structuralist (that is, discourse-based) in its essence and analyzes the subtle effects of discourse and of power structures.

The modern stream

The first stream is "modern," in keeping with the Enlightenment traditions: emphasis on reason and free will, presence of an explanatory metanarrative and pretensions of universality. The modern stream is greatly influenced by the Frankfurt School, which denounced the consequences of massive industrialization, totalitarianism, capitalism and instrumental rationality, while proposing alternatives and questioning dogmas (Alvesson and Willmott 1996):

The Enlightenment promised an autonomous subject progressively emancipated by knowledge acquired through scientific method. It noted the rise of reason over authority and traditional values. Its science, as developed over time, proclaimed a transparent language (freed from baggage of traditional ideology) and representational truth. . . . The Enlightenment's enemies were darkness, tradition, ideology, irrationality, ignorance, and positional authority. Each of these themes of the Enlightenment are deeply embedded in modernist management theory and research (Alvesson and Deetz 2000: 13).

Scherer's (2009) analysis further shows the influence that critical theory has had on CMS. Indeed, critical theory goes further than traditional approaches in suggesting an active (if not activist) vision of scientific

research. Taking position politically is therefore an important part of critical research, as it is based on a normative desire for emancipation:

CT's basic concern is to analyze social conditions, to criticize the unjustified use of power, and to change established social traditions and institutions so that human beings are freed from dependency, subordination, and suppression. Unlike traditional approaches to social theory, which merely aim to explain and understand the societal status quo, CT is oriented toward the development of a more humane, rational, and just society (Scherer 2009: 30).

The CT tradition in CMS concentrates on research concerning the over-rationalization of bureaucratic processes, worker conditions, the socio-economic consequences of consumerism, and the quest for efficiency in public administration. Alvesson and Willmott's (1996) analysis identifies four critical themes that have had a direct influence on critical management research. They are summarized in Table 1.

For public administration research, the implications are numerous. First, the promise of the Enlightenment to do away with knowledge systems based on myth, superstitions and tradition indeed favoured emancipation. However, its scientific approach also had the inverse effect of creating new domination patterns by "naturalizing" social sciences and by removing them from their context. Identifying the failures of a narrow vision of modernity, stuck in universalizing ideas, constitutes one attack of the Frankfurt School against instrumental rationality and technocracy. This, in turn, highlights the democratic danger of the over-rationalizing and depoliticizing the decision-making processes.

Second, the critique of technocracy partly rejects instrumental reason as a dominant knowledge system. The omnipresence of technocracy and instrumental reasoning – the system in which legitimacy is held by "experts" making supposedly rational and value-neutral decisions – can be seen as an encroachment into the political sphere, which is supposed to be served by public management. Instrumental reason becomes particularly problematic if it hides other democratic concerns such as pluralism, inclusiveness, accountability or transparency. To be acceptable, instrumental reason needs to remain subordinated to a more complex and normative rationality, that Habermas calls "communicative rationality."

Third, Habermas's theory of communicative action lays the normative foundations of the democratic process. Communicative action strives to define the conditions for communicative rationality: the production of a normative discourse and common values grounded in an open, honest, non-partisan and unconstrained communication process. While this definition can seem incompatible with the strategic games and the partisan environment of modern politics, it can nevertheless define the necessary conditions for democratic decision-making.

The modern stream, though very critical of the consequences of reason, never manages to repudiate modernity altogether. Its critics systematically

Table 1. *Modern Themes in CMS*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Main arguments</i>
The dialectic of Enlightenment	The classical book by Adorno and Horkheimer (1974) explores the paradox of modernity: while the original project of modernity was to fight myths and superstitions, modern thinking generated knowledge and practices whose consequences were equally dire to human emancipation.
Consumerism	In the <i>One-Dimensional Man</i> , Marcuse (1968) shows that mass consumption, contrarily to the dominant discourse, does not constitute a way to fulfill needs, but rather becomes an end in itself.
The critique of technocracy	The critique of technocracy constitutes the next logical step after the analysis of the dialectic of reason. It is, in fact, a critique of instrumental rationality (of which technocracy is the administrative transposition) that highlights the limits of an unbounded search of efficiency.
Communicative action	<i>The Theory of Communicative Action</i> (Habermas 1984, 1985) is Habermas's main work, in which he presents his critical theory. In these books, he tries to define the conditions necessary to communicative rationality.

Source: Adapted from Alvesson and Willmott (1996).

invoke the need for a readjustment or a reconfiguration, without questioning the very foundations of the modern discourse, such as the existence of universal rules and the ability to understand these rules so clearly that designing perfectly adapted institutions becomes feasible. Habermas, for example, believes in the modern ideal and tries to improve it through communicative action. For critical research in public administration, the theories of the Frankfurt School constitute a relevant, but incomplete, first step towards more democratic governance.

The postmodern stream

We define, perhaps in a slightly misleading way, the second CMS stream as postmodern. Greatly inspired by the works of Foucault and Derrida, this stream's ontological and epistemological position should be classified more precisely as poststructuralist. However, its origins need to be understood through the classic work of Lyotard (1979) on postmodernism:

In its most simple expression, we call "postmodern" the weariness towards metanarratives. . . . The narrative function loses its functions, the great hero, the great peril, the great journeys and the great goal (Lyotard 1979: 7–8, our translation).

This lack of confidence in metanarratives – that is, universalizing justifications relying on a structured and systemic logic – stems from the questioning of scientific knowledge and method and of the discourse that legitimizes it. From that point of view, the discourse itself becomes a form of power, as it serves to legitimate knowledge.

The failures of modernity are embodied by the excesses of “scientificism” and require an alternative response to the one proposed, for example, by Habermas. By remaining sceptical of the strict distinction between knowledge and discourse, poststructuralists are amongst the fiercest critics of the Frankfurt School scholars (Alvesson and Willmott 1996), whom they accuse of incoherence, as their search for universals constitutes yet another form of discourse – and therefore of power – incompatible with emancipation-based rationality.

By building upon discourse and language as instruments of power, post-structuralism becomes an important topic in CMS (Jones 2009). For Alvesson and Deetz (2005), four postmodern themes contribute to the epistemological foundations of CMS: the centrality of discourse, the fragmentation of identities, the critique of the philosophy of presence and the loss of foundations and meta-narratives. They are summarized in Table 2.

For public administration research, these themes have two main implications. First, the centrality of discourse can be related to redefining our conception of power. Indeed, for poststructuralist authors (especially for Foucault), discourse, knowledge and power are intrinsically linked. It is through the practice of discourse that knowledge becomes dominant, generates power relationships and structures administrative reality. Second, the fragmentation of identities goes hand in hand with the loss of relevance of meta-narratives and highlights an increasingly fragmented practice of power. While any analysis grounded in a universal meta-narrative invariably leads to clear prescriptions regarding the way government affairs should be conducted and managed, acknowledging fragmentation, ambiguity or even incoherence yields a different understanding of governance. Stakeholder relationships must now be seen as fragile and temporary collaborations in order to meet objectives that may or may not be coherent with common good. Even if the modern and postmodern perspectives on CMS hardly seem commensurable from an epistemological and ontological standpoint, they can be used jointly to cast a new critical light on public governance.

The Foucault-Habermas debate as tension between modernism and poststructuralism

The public administration works of Foucault and Habermas are often said to be impossible to reconcile. While Habermas advocates a fairly optimistic

Table 2. *Postmodern Themes in CMS*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Main arguments</i>
The centrality of discourse	Discourse serves two purposes. 1) It is linked to power as it constitutes the dominant thought system that feeds praxis. 2) As mentioned by Foucault, it (re)produces a certain interpretation of a phenomenon.
The fragmentation of identities	Postmodernists reject the idea of "Man" as described since the Enlightenment era: rational, possessing free will and predictable preferences. Rather, they either propose that the idea of a coherent self-image was constructed to favour a normative representation of identity, or that it is incompatible with modern, pluralist societies.
A critique of the philosophy of presence	Postmodernists challenge the "natural" state of objects. Indeed, they consider that objects are constructed and that their very existence constitutes a creation of language. Sense-making through language is therefore temporary and poorly defined.
Loss of foundation and meta-narratives	The modern scientific method always referred to universalist theories or, more precisely, to meta-narratives explanatory of the current social order: the invisible hand, class struggle, and quest for power. For postmodernists, these milestones are, at best, outdated or, at worst, false.

Source: Adapted from Alvesson and Deetz (2005).

view of the normative requirements for productive and rational deliberation, Foucault chooses to analyze government practices, be they beneficial or detrimental to democratic governance. It is precisely this tension between the search for normative ideals and the loss of faith in universal explanations that constitutes what Flyvbjerg (1998) calls an "essential tension in modernity":

Foucault and Habermas agree that rationalization and the misuse of power are among the most important problems of our time. They disagree as to how one can best understand and act in relation to these problems. Habermas's approach is oriented toward universals, context-independence and control via constitution-writing and institutional development. Foucault focuses his efforts on the local and context-dependent and toward analysis of strategies and tactics as basis for power struggle (Flyvbjerg 1998: 227).

However, despite studying very different objects, Foucault and Habermas's theories of power are sufficiently close to be contrasted with one another.

Foucault's governmentality

Although his analysis covers many topics and disciplines, the common thread in Foucault's work is the study of the micro-practices of power. While his early work dealt with sexual practices, psychiatry or the penal system, Foucault soon began to study public administration as a locus of power. For Foucault, power is no more a top-down hierarchical phenomenon, but rather exists in capillary form, through the micro-practices and instruments of government. Furthermore, these practices are no longer motivated by the desire of an all-powerful monarch to remain in power, but rather by a more subtle and ill-defined governmental rationality – governmentality:

The aim is not to conquer and possess, but rather to produce, give rise to and organize a population in order to enable it to develop its properties. Thus, the reference to political economy gives rise to a major change in the understanding of power. . . . From now on, it will be based on promoting wealth creation through activities structured by the political authority (Lascombes 2005: 346, our translation).

Foucault defines governmentality as the "ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures analyses . . . which has, as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security" (Foucault 1991: 102). By acknowledging political economy and security's preeminent place in governance, Foucault agrees with what the Frankfurt School tries to accomplish: a critique of reason and of its consequences. Governmentality emphasizes organized and structured practices (attitudes, rationalities and techniques) by which individuals and groups are governed, as well as the distinction between the three levels of power, namely strategic games, techniques of government and states of domination (power technologies). As such, Foucault's greatest contribution to the field public administration was that government action should be looked at from the angle of its practices, rather than from an institutional or juridical perspective (Lascombes 2005).

Although initially developed to study the transformation of society, Foucauldian governmentality allows for a different view of administrative reforms. It starts with traces, signs and disparate instruments, without acknowledging the implicit managerial meta-narrative on which the coherence of management frameworks is based. Governmentality focuses on the makeshift repairs and other inconsistent reconfigurations that invariably accompany a specific reform. The challenge, then, is not so much to demonstrate the distance between the original objectives and concrete achievements, nor to compare the actual situation to an ideal situation. Rather the challenge is to explain how and why administrative reforms persist, multiply or follow one another at an increasing rate, even though the failures seem to add up everywhere, or at the very least, that the perverse effects and unintended consequences appear to be increasing in number and

intensity. A heuristic hypothesis argues that governmentality illustrates the transition from the Justice State to the Administrative State, where the government is to govern society *and* administration (Bezes 2005). The power of the state is no longer based only on the control of society, but also on controlling the bureaucracy. In other words:

the theorization and practice of “state reform” have become a device at the heart of the exercise of contemporary power and constitute a new political rationality, a new way of exercising power and continuing to govern men [sic] but by demonstrating the desire to govern itself, i.e., to govern the state (Bezes 2005: 377, our translation).

Governmentality rejects universal concepts (State, public administration, etc.) and does not assume the primacy of traditional institutional actors (departments, organizations, central agencies, etc.). The objective is rather to dissect the concept of State, in order to show what it encompasses, how it was/is constructed, as well as to identify the type of knowledge it relies on. Thus, the notion of governmentality highlights the need to understand government action as decentralized, fragmented, and dynamic, taking into account its specific context, but always as a locus of power. From a Foucauldian perspective, the key point is that power relations are constructed, deconstructed, reconstructed, and disseminated, in multiple directions, through extensive social networks, at different locations and scales. Power is therefore mediated in complex and dynamic ways through the state apparatus, requiring us to go beyond traditional understandings of rights, justice, and indeed knowledge itself.

Paradoxically, it is the emphasis on the mechanics of power that may constitute Foucault’s greatest weakness: political action, which he sees as being void of any guiding principle, remains an uncontrollable headless monster. In his own words:

I believe that we find ourselves here in a kind of blind alley: it is not through recourse to sovereignty against discipline that the effects of disciplinary power can be limited, because sovereignty and disciplinary mechanisms are two absolutely integral components of the general mechanism of power in our society (Foucault and Gordon 1980: 108).

To that extent, Foucault is perhaps too quick in distancing himself from the voluntarism generally associated to liberal democracies, without being able to provide any structured and coherent alternative for change.

Habermas’s political theories

Whereas Foucault focuses on the mechanics of power, Habermas adopts a more classical posture. As a social-democrat, he believes that political action necessarily involves the consensual adoption of rules and norms through deliberation (Habermas 1997). In the long run, when applied to an inquiry into the ideal normative nature of political organization, Habermas’s theory is based on the procedural search for rational

consensus. Within Habermas's considerable writings, two themes are of particular importance.

First, the theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984, 1985) is an inquiry into the basic conditions of consensus and of publicly-supported decision making. Habermas uses the metaphor of the "perfect conversation" (borrowed from Gadamer), where all communication efforts are deemed to be sincere, coherent with the social context and norms, and searching for exactness:

Habermas (1984) argues that, notwithstanding the hegemony of instrumental rationality in contemporary capitalist society, there exists potential for communicative rationality, characterised by social interaction which is free from domination (the coercive exercise of power), strategic behaviour by actors, deception and self-deception (the influence of ideology). It requires all actors to be equally and fully capable of making questioning arguments ('communicative competence') and capable of participating fully in discourse (Sanderson 1999: 330).

Habermas's empirical expectations are that, in a very liberal fashion, public participation should be opened to all stakeholders that interact in the public sphere through deliberative procedure and forums. He opens the door to a societal dialogue to which all stakeholders are invited, regardless of their relative capacities, resources, constraints and interests. This obviously raises the question of power or, rather, of the possible misuse of power, something for which Habermas has often been seen as being naive and idealist (Flyvbjerg 1998).

Procedural democracy is the second important theme in Habermas's analysis. Presented in *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas 1997), procedural democracy applies the idea of communicative rationality to a political model. Taking from both republicanism and liberalism, this model tries to link these two perspectives by relying on communication procedures and institutionalized deliberative processes as a common denominator:

With the republican model, [procedural democracy] rejects the vision of the political process as primarily a process of competition and aggregation of private preferences. However, more in keeping with the liberal model, it regards the republican vision of a citizenry united and actively motivated by a shared conception of the good life as inappropriate in modern, pluralist societies. Since political discourses involve bargaining and negotiation as well a moral argumentation, the republican or communitarian notion of a shared ethical-political dialogue also seems too limited (Baynes 2002: 17).

Although he takes from both the liberal and republican models, Habermas also rejects some of their key assumptions: liberalism's unwillingness to deal with ethics and values, and republicanism's requirement for a State that embodies the values of the political community (Finlayson 2005). Communication procedures (based on communicative rationality) therefore become the only way to reach consensus, as there is no shared ethos in Habermas's liberal democracies.

Deliberative communication processes also take place in two separate spheres: the formal track, which includes parliamentary bodies and formal

political institutions, and the informal track, where civil society and private-sector actors interact using the media and informal forums (Baynes 2002). In this model, Habermas's expectations are an informal sphere in which "radical democracy" is practiced, and a formal sphere whose constitutive laws are legitimized through the deliberative communicational rationality (Munnichs 2002). Dunleavy, Bastow, and Tinkler (2006) have already underlined the possibilities that digital era instruments could create, namely the ability to cut out the middle person (the civil service) in terms of government-citizen relations, or to "facilitate a genuinely citizen-based, services-based or needs based foundation of organization" (Dunleavy, Bastow, and Tinkler 2006: 483). We contend digital era tools could have even greater implications for radical democracy, enabling deliberation and exchanges that minimize the government's ability to control information, at least in the early policy stage.

We take, from Habermas's work, a great concern for finding the conditions under which political system as well as laws and norms remain legitimate. The two-track system, where civil societies' voice is being heard "radically," and where formal institutions are coherent with the consensus built through deliberation, highlights the need for a highly procedural form of democratic governance, staying away from expert-driven technocracy. The rejection of liberalism's reluctance to factor in value and ethics and of republicanism's tendency to impose the values of the dominant group underlines the need for a form of governance that is highly contextualized, yet respectful of the plurality of values, interests and concerns. Nevertheless, it is impossible not to acknowledge a certain naivety in Habermas's thinking, especially concerning the respect of communicative ethics and the voluntary subjugation of strategic behaviour.

A possible reconciliation?

The book edited by Kelly (1995) can be used to start reconciling Habermas and Foucault. If Foucault sees power everywhere, especially on the micro-practice of societal institutions, Habermas remains convinced that power is the unfortunate consequence of a miscommunication. Another stark difference highlighted in Kelly's book is the need for normativity. Foucault concentrates almost solely on acknowledging the real effects of politics and of the instruments of governments on power relations between actors, while Habermas strives to make governance more democratic by encouraging the definition and implementation of normative processes.

Similarly, Flyvbjerg (1998) argues that while Habermas has a clear idea of what constitutes a true democratic process, he does not understand (or take into account) the mechanics of power and its influence of the public policy process. He also shows that Foucault's analysis, while highly contextualized and grounded in solid empirical examples, focuses too much on

micro-phenomena of power: it could blind to the institutional or structural causes of problems. Bierbricher (2007) proposed integrating Foucault's strategic analysis into Habermas's framework of deliberative democracy. He envisions a model that could take advantage of Foucault's concern for strategic action in a deliberative setting. Bierbricher provides the following hypothetical example of such an analysis:

Deliberative democrats have to decide whether their focus should be to further deliberations in the classic democratic institutions at the core of the political system ... or whether they should be more concerned about strengthening the institutional power of these at least rudimentarily deliberative settings vis-à-vis the executive branch, etc. This strategic decision, which has implications for the allocation and use of organizational and financial resources of deliberative democrats, is one that could and should receive instructive insights from a Foucaultian perspective (Bierbricher 2007: 232).

For democratic governance, these analyses have two main implications. First, they emphasize that the micro-practices of government and its formal institutions (Habermas's formal track) are extremely sensitive to power. This has been noted by Foucault (1998) and by many of his readers working in the field of public administration (Lascombes 2005; Lascombes and Le Galès 2004; McKinlay and Starkey 1998). Nevertheless, as Habermas would point out, the problem is not so much the power embedded in these instruments, but rather the misuse of power that comes from poorly designed and legitimated instruments. This highlights the need to acknowledge that government instruments do not represent merely a technical choice (through the use of instrumental reason) in policy implementation, but rather a political process that should undergo the same kind of democratic scrutiny as the actual policy it aims at implementing.

Second, the study of the relations between governance actors (governments, private sector, civil society, etc.) could benefit from a dual Foucauldian/Habermasian examination. As Bierbricher (2007) points out, Foucault's study of governmentality points to a movement of de-statization closely related to neoliberalism and calls for a renewed thinking of democratic institutions. Habermas provides a blueprint for what these institutions ought to be – and on what bases they will become legitimate. Deliberative (democratic) institutions might work best when they are free of domination, but their *raison d'être* and configuration still need to be understood in historical context in order to remain legitimate and effective. This forces us to acknowledge two parallel phenomena. On the one hand, it underscores in a typically Foucauldian way, that governance does not obey a top-down, hierarchical logic, but is rather influenced in a more subtle way by the State's need for security and economic performance. On the other hand, it reiterates Habermas's optimistic intuition that democratic institutions nevertheless can be reformed and that, in a social-

democracy, these can neither rely on the classical liberal or republican assumptions.

A good example of how deliberative democracy could benefit from strategic insights can be found in the way governments deal with social movements and protests. While radical, messy democracy is often the norm in social movements, the next logical democratic step would be the translation of these concerns into public policies through deliberation in formal institutions. However, the interface between social movements and formal institutions is where Foucauldian concerns come into play: security is often used as a justification for repressing social movements, though the ultimate aim is more likely a suppression of their very voices. A Habermasian reading would nevertheless suggest formal institutions that acknowledge (and even formally recognize through constitutional rights to strike, for example) the legitimacy of these concerns and the importance of a pluralist representation of opinions in the formal sphere.

Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary's 2005 discussion on New Governance processes also touches on those issues. By identifying the emergence of quasi-judicial and quasi-legislative processes (such as mediation programs, roundtable regulation or public audiences), the authors acknowledge the formal sphere is no longer the only place where policy-making can happen. However, the risk of instrumentalization of these quasi-formal processes remains high, as their relative novelty and their informality render them even more vulnerable to strategic behaviours and micro-practices of power. Paradoxically, the movement towards informality which favours representation and inclusivity also points to the need for a regression towards institutions formalized through communicative legitimization.

Foucauldian and Habermasian insights at the managerial level

At the managerial level, the modern/poststructuralist contrast of this paper also builds on four additional elements, namely: the appropriation of a bureaucratic legacy, the constructive dimension of power, the recognition of multiple individual identities, and the primacy of managerial Utopia.

The appropriation of a bureaucratic legacy. Bureaucracy, as an organizational form, is much more than its perverse effects and unintended consequences (du Gay 2000). The principles of standardization, specialization and hierarchy, to name just three, will endure and survive any change planned for organizational "debureaucratization." The idea of a legacy is that it is something that we accept, that we appropriate, and that we transform in the light of a particular organizational context in terms of constraints and resources.

The constructive dimension of power. Any collective action, including those that make up the practice of management, is an exercise of power, and therefore a shared exercise. We need to move beyond the mythology created by the current conception of the manager-leader. Therefore, power is not only domination (acknowledged or not), confrontation and conflict (open or latent). The practical exercise of power is as much an opportunity as it is a limit to organizational creativity: the managerial challenge is to transform *power limits* into *power opportunities* (Lascoumes 2005).

Recognition of the individual's multiple identities. This is conducive to establishing a meeting ground and dialogue. The idea is to allow – rather than force – everyone to go beyond the reductive state of their narrow institutional identity. This does not negate maintaining these institutional identities in a given context, but rejects their hegemonic nature and sensitivity to rediscovery of the human element and diversity in complex organizations.

Managerial Utopia. The utopian role of administration is about creating, through management frameworks, symbolic guidance elements answering the question: where are we going? The reaching of these objectives (results) being less valued than their pursuit (process) creates systematically unfulfilled collective expectations.

All of these elements point towards standards for evaluating the quality of democratic governance. Foucault postulates that governmental rationality (governmentality) is grounded in the mechanisms of political economy and security and, although he does point to the negative consequences of this for human emancipation (or “radical liberty”), he never provides a clear alternative. Habermas, on the other hand, has a very clear normative understanding of the values on which democratic institutions need to be based, but does not question those (social-democratic) values concretely. He calls for institutions that are more respectful of the necessity for radical deliberation, but whose legitimacy comes from historical coherence.

Democratic governance: What is governance? And how do we make it democratic?

“Governance” has multiple, often conflicting, interpretations. For our study of democratic governance, this implies that we need to define what we mean by “democratic,” given the particular contextual constraints of governance in a specific jurisdiction. This section offers a critical look at its various interpretations.

Many scholars (Baron 2003; Hirst 2000; Paye 2005; etc.) show that “governance” can either refer to a greater inclusion of non-traditional

(civil society, private sector) actors in policy making, to a synonym for "government" or to a network-based model for policy-making. Hirst's (2000) very complete typological exercise identifies five ways in which the term is used: 1) "good governance" as a set of normative criteria (such as accountability, efficiency, transparency); 2) supranational governance as an attempt to structure international relations; 3) corporate governance as a principal-agent issue between a fragmented (stockholder) ownership and a professional and permanent board of directors; 4) governance as a new public administration model close to the tenets of managerialism (for example, New Public Management); and 5) governance as novel, network-based, loose model of interaction between the private sector, civil society and governments. These last two conceptions are the most interesting, as they concern the very heart of our public administration problem.

However, we also observe many problems with the existing definitions. First, the term "governance" is often assimilated to "good governance," without a discussion on the process of governance and the normative implications in making it good. Indeed, the highly normative concept of "good governance" can be found in more or less similar forms in documents emanating from governmental or international institutions. All these definitions (amongst others: Argyriades 2006; OECD n.d.) rely on a set of common characteristics such as predictability, performance, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, rule of law, which are often incompatible with one another. Arbitration between these values is often necessary at the policy and management level, and constitutes the main task of governments. Consequently, there needs to be a strict separation between the description of the process of governing, the conditions needed to govern well and the trade-offs that are often involved.

Second, the normative basis of governance assumes very specific – generally neoliberal – undertones, which seem to be taken for granted in most definitions. This can be seen notably through the emphasis on budgetary performance and managerial accountability. We contend, however, that a more reflexive (less normative) definition of governance is possible.

Third, despite a frequent concern for participation, very few definitions include a discussion of power discrepancies between stakeholders. However, any definition inspired by CMS should be concerned with power imbalances.

Fourth, the technical means and instruments of power are rarely, if ever, mentioned in the most common definitions of governance. However, in keeping with Foucault's interpretation of State rationalities, it is through the instruments of government (statistics, legal procedures, biopower, etc.) that power is exercised. Any CMS-inspired definition of governance should

therefore acknowledge the coercive role of policy instruments in the democratic process.

We therefore propose this definition, which takes into account the four criticisms we formulated:

Governance is . . . a multi-dimensional and dynamic process through which public-, private- and community-sector actors construct, deconstruct and reconstruct the basis of their interactions, including the fragile and temporary sharing of common goals, through the selection and implementation of government instruments. Capacity (constraints and resources) is asymmetrically fragmented between actors, whose relative autonomy varies according to the issues and challenges at stake, the technical means available or the activity sectors (Rouillard and Hudon 2007: 1, our translation).

But one important question remains: under what conditions does governance become democratic?

Making governance democratic

Democratic governance can generally be defined as the relative and dynamic control, by elected official and citizens, of public policy decisions and implementation. Democratic governance should therefore reflect this desire to move away from “technical” decision-making, made by experts in a bureaucratic organization or by market forces, and closer to a model where decisions are made by democratically accountable officials supported by technical means.

In Habermas’s terms, this could be described as a rejection of the dominance of instrumental reason as the legitimate basis for decision-making and an acceptance of a more complex communicative rationality. It also implies that governance will take place in institutions that acknowledge the need for communicative rationality. For the informal track, this could take the form of deliberative public sphere where all stakeholders can freely participate in a fruitful societal debate; for the formal track, this could mean formal institutions whose legislative and executive mandates are legitimized through a reflexive debate. Yet, power relations invariably come with any deliberative effort between stakeholders, be it within the informal sphere or in formal institutions. The relative capacity of the various stakeholders is rarely identical, if only in terms of having access to relevant information, and to being able to treat it properly. In liberal democracies, this would point to institutions that promote the participation of minorities that traditionally have less access to deliberative forums. Additionally, a key challenge for communicative action or rationality is to avoid the displacement of the deliberative ethos, namely to ensure that the act of deliberation is about the issues at stake, and not about the deliberative process and/or conditions themselves. In other words, the challenge is to avoid deliberating about deliberating, to the neglect of the actual issues

and challenges at hand. But power being a dynamic and non-transitive phenomenon, nothing precludes that this deliberative drift is avoided, at least part of the time. But to do so, capacity asymmetry between the various stakeholders should be fully recognized according to issues, and mitigated by the acceptance that the overall legitimacy of the deliberative action on any given issue is only as high as the relative capacity of its least capable stakeholder.

Bierbricher's (2007) description of the de-statization movement linked to the rise of a neoliberal governmentality also has numerous normative implications for governance. Because this form of governance entails an implicit acknowledgement of the principles of managerialism and a heavy reliance on instruments that integrate market mechanisms and technical evaluation methods in the decision-making process, neoliberalism can also be seen as a crystallisation of instrumental reason in the political domain. However, Foucault's expectation of a fairly radical rejection of the mechanisms of power points not to new or redesigned institutional forms, but rather to specific behaviours that are expected of citizens: an active and critical outlook on public debate and a non-complacent assessment of elected officials. Yet, institutional setting will invariably affect the outcome because it will both support and inhibit public debate, as well as the assessment of public officials.

If the rationality of *instrumental thinking* is determined by whether or not the correct (efficient, effective) means are identified, the rationality of *interpretative reasoning* depends upon the achievement of a successful dialogue among decision-makers in which a mutual understanding of means and ends is achieved. Finally, the rationality of *critical reasoning* depends upon whether or not a chosen course of action leads to opportunities for growth and self-development. One can see how critical reasoning, by emphasizing both process and outcome, is conducive to openness and dialogue in a way that remains impossible for instrumental thinking, and even interpretative reasoning. To that extent, critical reasoning might even turn out to be a vector for individual and collective participation, inasmuch as it gives new sense and meaning to individual efforts towards communicative action and deliberation.

But this can only be done by moving from *consensual participation* to *critical participation*. Consensual participation is marred by a conservative bias insofar as it is based on current, recognized and ossified roles, functions, identities and expectations. Critical participation, on the other hand, includes the ability to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct identities and roles. Contrary to what is suggested by much of the public administration and management literatures, the consensual dynamic is one of marginalization and exclusion and must not be confused with unanimity. It is also liable to reproduce the asymmetry of existing power relationships through

the unspoken, though implied, rejection of individual and collective dissidence. But is this not contrary to the bureaucratic environment found in large scale public and private sector organizations? Nothing in this regard is an insurmountable obstacle when bureaucracy is not reduced to its rigidities, its blockages, its limits and its dysfunctions, which, one must stress, are not inherent characteristics of the bureaucratic model, but often-times the result of poor work relations, inappropriate distribution of resources and constraints, and/or of problematic organizational design. If bureaucracy as an organizational form remains as present as ever, despite repeated claims of its obsolescence, if not its imminent death, it is indeed because it is more than mere dysfunctions. Bureaucracy can and should also be understood as the organization of specialization, standardization, and hierarchy (Aucoin 1997). To that extent, one can understand that organizational complexity and scale are contributing factors of bureaucratization. In other words, one could easily imagine a facilitative bureaucracy without having to deny the existence of a coercive bureaucracy (Adler and Borys 1996).

Conclusion

In our opinion, this tentative redefinition of democratic governance constitutes a possible alternative way of thinking about democratic public administration, especially since advances in CMS have rarely been transposed to the field of public administration. Simply put, bureaucracy needs not to be reduced to its many perverse effects, including its technocratic drift, and the resulting technocracy. As an organizing principle, bureaucracy is also a vector of formal and informal practices which can in turn foster and sustain deliberative practices. Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary (2005) have shown that new quasi-legislative and quasi-judicial governance processes are becoming increasingly common and have concluded that "public administration needs to address these processes in teaching and research to help the public sector develop and use informed best practices" (p. 548). We hope that the discussion presented here will constitute a starting point for this endeavour. More precisely, we believe that the integration of the power variable into the analysis of deliberative institutions could foster more inclusive and representative governance.

Furthermore, considering that the Habermas-Foucault debate and its implications for democratic governance remain underused in the academic literature, we believe this paper contributes to a better understanding, through reframing and reinterpreting, of the modernist-poststructuralist debate for the study of governmental discourses, practices, and instruments. It hopefully reconciles the notion of democratic governance, overtly

present in the field of public management, with Foucault's notion of governmentality, largely ignored within the same field.

Though knowledge creation is always limited and circumscribed by research design, there is arguably an added value in combining both streams: to enable the researcher to avoid the critique of being politically naive regarding the ethos of communicative action, while fostering critical thinking on alternatives to processes and practices structured by mainstream (that is, neoliberal) democratic governance. In other words, because these streams build on different levels of analysis, they can enrich one another into a multilevel perspective. Whether or not this is respectful of Habermasian and Foucauldian orthodoxies is not the issue here. The interest of this dual analysis lies in its potential to reframe and recast democratic governance, in order to turn public management into an instrument of collective emancipation, instead of being a substitute for it, as can only come from its current emphasis on performance and accountability.

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