In the last decade, many scholars have sought to integrate the humanities and liberal arts with management learning and education (Colby et al., 2011; Steyaert et al., 2016; Gagliari and Czarniawska, 2006). This effort echoes a more general critique of management and organisation studies (MOS) for lacking humanity, and for purporting the idea of the human being as a rational, morally neutral and interest-maximising actor, engaged in management as a technical, quantifiable and quasi-scientific activity (Hendry, 2006; Marturano et al., 2013). The field of management learning has in this respect come to form one battleground in the so-called ‘science wars’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001), with approaches firmly rooted in the positive social sciences on one side and approaches inspired by the humanities and liberal arts on the other.

For some time now, however, the humanities have been facing a complex crisis involving not only their impact on and role within society, but also their promise to produce and promote advanced forms of knowledge (Martinelli, 2016). Some would even claim that the humanities have already “shipwrecked with all hands aboard” (Serres, 2006: 228) or exploded (Braidotti, 2013). This scepticism derives not only from the general collapse of the notion of an objective natural moral order, but also from the gradual dethroning of ‘Man’ as the subject at the centre of world history. At least since Michel Foucault’s famous proclamation of the ‘death of Man’ in The Order of Things (1970), the number of voices criticising the classical humanist ideal as ‘the measure of all things’ has steadily increased across a variety of disciplines, including management learning. For some, the best way to counter this crisis has been to turn back to focus on the formative elements of the humanities with roots in Antiquity, and to plead the case for reviving and cultivating their noble ideals in contemporary education and research (Nussbaum, 2010). Others, however, have argued that the unsettling of the humanities as a field with privileged access to studying the ‘especially human’ should instead give rise to an exploration of “what might be involved in the reinventions of notions of the human in today’s world and more especially in the critical practice of the humanities” (Braidotti and Gilroy, 2016: 1). In this special issue, we wish to explore what such a re-working of the notion of the human could come to mean for management learning.

One way of thinking constructively about this question may be to begin with the tension that lies at the heart of management learning as a field: between management learning as a formal process reflecting the acquisition of a fairly preordained body of knowledge within the context of business school education, and the continued emphasis on management learning as involving a variety of forms of knowledge created and disseminated by human beings in a wide range of organisational settings (Sims and McAulay, 1995; Bell and Bridgman, 2017). Over the years, Management Learning has contributed to the latter understanding, emphasising a “license to think freely” (Grey, 2009) that
embraces management learning outside conventional management education. Examples of such work includes forages into arts-based methods (Mack, 2013), theatre (Beirne and Knight, 2007), history (Gearty et al., 2015), literature (McAulay and Sims, 2009), philosophy (Zundel, 2013) and critical pedagogy (Śliwa and Cairns, 2009). Rather than just prescribing the value of the humanities to ameliorate the ills of management education, these approaches illustrate that the humanities also need to be enriched, nuanced, and critiqued through the lenses of the ideas and perspectives of organisational research. How, we wonder, might such forages provide for reciprocal integration, in ways that enrich organisational research with a more extensive conceptual vocabulary, while at the same time rethinking the humanities as a discipline?

Another way to approach the unsettled humanities might be to engage with what has been termed the “minor affective turn” in MOS (Beyes and De Cock, 2017). This turn to affect has worked to broaden the understanding of how power and domination operates in organisational life and to demonstrate affect as co-constitutive of organisation and human subjectivity (Fotaki et al., 2017). Conceptualisations of affect engage with notions of the human by critically bringing to light the constitution of the subject of the classical humanities, and often emphasise the transformative properties of the human (Sedgwick, 2003), for example by asking how an embodied ethics of organisational life might look (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015), with neglected aspects of gender (Kelan, 2012), and new approaches to the representation of organisations and learning (Michels and Steyaert, 2017). How might such transformations influence and reciprocally change our perception of the humanities and their role in management learning?

Further, this also connects to the exhortation to embrace “a freer, and at times iconoclastic, kind of writing” (Cunliffe and Sadler-Smith, 2010). While for example the contribution of literature and storytelling has proven fruitful for the understanding of management and organisation (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994), the meaning of the unsettling of the humanities to such a contribution has received limited attention. Consequently, what might it mean for the humanities in management learning to include literature and fiction, not as something easily identifiable as being legitimate by analogy, but as something that ultimately resists assimilation? Can literature be that which embraces the open-ended force of words and even brings forth the fragmentation of subjectivity and narrative as ruinous potential (De Cock and O’Doherty, 2016)? Opening up management learning to such perspectives may help to cut across the parallelism between philosophy, science and the arts (Braidotti, 2013) and work against the idea of the humanities as a harmonious whole preordained by rational thought. It could even afford us new understandings of what it might mean to speak of something like an “emancipatory humanism, that is a working humanism, a daily humanism, a changing humanism” (Karavanta and Morgan, 2008: 4) in management learning.

The question about how the unsettled humanities affect and spur new ideas within management learning may however also be explored in relation to the rich and fast-growing theoretical issues that emerge around the edges of the classical humanities and across disciplines. One example is ‘digital humanities’, a field emerging as a reciprocal integration of disciplines around the use or study of digital tools that call for concepts, methods and knowledge rooted in the humanities. Including early efforts to engage with the endeavours and problems intrinsic to digitisation and post-humanism (Parisí and Terranova, 2001), themes that have been variously repeated in the emerging field of the ‘environmental humanities’ (Rose et al., 2012; Sörlin, 2012). This field draws on a growing willingness to engage with the environment from within the humanities and to rethink the ontological exceptionality of the human. What have traditionally been termed ‘environmental issues’ have here been shown to be inextricably entangled with human ways of being in the world or adapting to the world, which in turn raises broader questions of political and social justice, and debates about the
death of political subjectivity (Chandler and Reid, 2016), also important to consider within management learning.

Consequently, what might it demand to take the humanities one step further in management learning? How might we articulate in this field a ‘thicker’ notion of humanity that challenges reductionist accounts of humans as self-contained, rational, decision-making subjects, while at the same time rejecting the role of the classical humanities as a kind of moral super-ego working to promote a predetermined set of social responsibility charters? In other words, how might new forms of humanism emerge in management and what idea of the human would be involved in its revised theories and practices? How is the post-human turn currently feeding our conceptualisations and empirical investigations, and what are the potential problems or gains? How can we mobilise different humanities in management and organisation to enrich organisational research? And how can we rethink the unsettled humanities and advance both the humanities and management learning?

Based on these themes, we welcome contributions that address some of the following questions:

- What does the current unsettling of the humanities mean for management education?
- How might the finitude, limits and transgressions of the ‘human being’ transform management practice?
- How do theories and practices dealing with the biohuman and posthuman, for example in neuro-enhancement, “cyborgs” and other technologies, influence management thinking and learning?
- What management pedagogies are relevant, appropriate or problematic in the Anthropocene Age?
- How might management education play a role in the unsettling of the human within the traditional humanistic and artistic disciplines of research, teaching and performance?

Submission guidance
To discuss your article prior to submission, please contact the special issue editors: Rasmus Johnsen, rj.mpp@cbs.dk Annika Skoglund, annika.skoglund@angstrom.uu.se Matt Statler mstatler@stern.nyu.edu William M. Sullivan, wmsphl@aol.com

This call is open and competitive; manuscripts will be double-blind reviewed and a limited number of papers will be selected by the guest editors for publication in the special issue. Submissions must fit with the aims and scope of Management Learning: [https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/journal/management-learning#description](https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/journal/management-learning#description) as well as with this special issue call. All submissions should be made online: [http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/management_learning](http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/management_learning) in accordance with the journal submission guidelines.

References


