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POSTMODERNISM AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH

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Drawing selectively from the often countervailing currents of postmodernism, we argue for an epistemology that combines a skepticism toward metanarrative with a commitment to rigorous standards of enquiry in pursuit of radical challenges to accepted knowledge. We discuss five problematics concerned with normal science, truth, representation, style, and generalizability, and we provide examples of postmodern approaches to classic data sets, local knowledge, eclectic sources, and the counterintuitive. In this article we seek to provoke an ongoing conversation concerning the potential of postmodernism for revolutionizing organizational research.

> Multiculturalism and deconstruction are the new rage on college campuses—and they are destroying a student's ability to think and to value. (Excerpt from a leaflet distributed to faculty advertising a public lecture on postmodernism, April 4, 1996, at a major Eastern university.)

Organizational researchers have tended to neglect or reject the critiques of academic enquiry offered by those who write from one of the many postmodernist perspectives. This may be because the import of postmodernist approaches for organizational studies is unclear. Indeed, the term *postmodern* is itself vaguely understood: it is often equated with deconstruction (e.g., Linstead, 1993) and is generally viewed as a nihilistic enterprise (as the lecture example above indicates) that offers nothing beyond a cynical skepticism (cf. Codrescu, 1986: 203). Nor are the works of authors, such as Derrida, Foucault, and Baudrillard, who are often associated with the postmodern turn, accessible to the majority of those practicing organization research. Postmodern writings are derided for their unintelligibility (Thompson, 1993: 198) and dismissed for reducing research to textual analysis (Giddens, 1987).

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Within the social sciences in general, the specter of postmodernism has aroused widespread anxiety. Postmodernism has been viewed as an enterprise that calls for the death of all scientific inquiry; the end of all new knowledge; the dissolution of any standards that may be used to judge one theory against another; a banishment into utter relativism wherein a clamor of fragmented and contentious voices reigns (see Pauline Rosenau's 1992 balanced review of these concerns and Stanley Fish's [1996] recent discussion of misunderstandings of postmodernism).

Our intent in this article is to rescue the term *postmodernism* from this chorus of negativity, and to use the insights of postmodern epistemology to alarm researchers in organizational studies into pursuing provocative research. We challenge the conventional wisdom that postmodernism is incompatible with research about the world, and argue against the premature dismissal of postmodern contributions. In presenting the case for the relevance of postmodernism for organizational research, we discuss two approaches to postmodernism (the skeptical and the affirmative), outline a postmodern epistemology that draws from both these approaches, discuss some of the major problematics that derive from this postmodern epistemology, and comment on a range of research that responds to these postmodern problematics.[1]

UNDERSTANDING POSTMODERNISM

Although relatively new to organizational studies, postmodernism has exercised a growing influence in the social sciences, from sociology and psychology to women's studies and history (Rosenau, 1992: 85), and is considered by some to be one of the 20th century's greatest challenges to established knowledge (Wisdom, 1987: 5). Even within the so-called hard sciences such as physics, postmodernist dilemmas are increasingly debated (Farney, 1994). One reason for postmodernism's growing popularity across such a wide range of disciplines is a disillusionment with what some critics view as the oversimplified, narrow, and disappointingly irrelevant work associated with modern social science (Rosenau, 1992: 137). Gergen (1992), for example, critiqued a wide range of organizational research because of its underlying adherence to a crude mechanical model of human behavior. Similarly, Kilduff (1993) offered a detailed critique of the Taylorist assumptions underlying March and Simon's (1958) modernist manifesto, and Carter and Jackson (1993) criticized research based on

[1] A cautionary footnote is in order to warn readers to expect a radical departure from what passes as conventional thinking among self-declared organizational postmodernists. As one reviewer has pointed out, we make no attempt to conform to existing postmodern critiques within organizational studies (see Alvesson & Deetz, 1996, for a review of previous work). Rather, we offer our own interpretation of the relevance of postmodernism, an interpretation that makes no claims to being more authentic than any other, but one that does try to match the excitement of ideas with the possibilities of research.

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expectancy theory for neglecting the importance of subjective understanding in favor of a narrow focus on measurement issues.

In what ways do these critiques derive from a shared understanding of postmodernism? Inevitably, any precise definition of postmodernism is likely to be disputed because the postmodernist label includes many diverse intellectual trends. As Best and Kellner (1991: 2) pointed out, "There is no unified postmodern theory, or even a coherent set of positions." Featherstone (1988: 207) suggested that there may be as many postmodernisms as there are postmodernists. Indeed, this very diversity is one of postmodernism's distinguishing characteristics. A typical comment from a postmodern perspective is "Diversity encourages creativity, while repetition anesthetizes it" (Kroll, 1987: 29).

Going Beyond the Skeptical Versus Affirmative Dichotomy

In discussions of the many varieties of postmodernism available, two distinct styles or ideal types are often contrasted: the skeptical and the affirmative (Rosenau, 1992). Skeptical postmodernism offers "a pessimistic, negative, gloomy assessment" of the possibilities of social science (Rosenau, 1992: 15). From the skeptical perspective, all interpretations of phenomena are equally valid, and the world is so complicated that concepts such as prediction and causality are irrelevant. Everything is related to everything else so the search for causes or origins must be discontinued. Skeptical postmodernists deny the possibility of an empirical social science and engage largely in critiquing existing work rather than undertaking new empirical approaches. According to Rosenau (1991: 15), skeptical postmodernists "emphasize the negative and lack confidence or hope in anything" (Rosenau, 1992: 183).

Affirmative postmodernism retains the possibility of making discriminations among competing interpretations. For example, Fish (1980) argued that interpretive communities of scholars guide readers' interpretations of texts. Thus, not all texts are considered equally valid or valuable.[2] Indeed, from this perspective, within the interpretive context, "it should be possible to invoke rules of competence, criteria of discussion and of consensus, good faith, lucidity, rigor, criticism, and pedagogy" (Derrida, 1988: 146). The deconstructive scholar who wishes, for example, to examine the work of the 18th century French philosopher Rousseau, "must under-

[2] Note that Fish's vision of an interpretive community does not entail the necessity of research teams attacking common problems, only the existence of loosely affiliated individual scholars. From our postmodern perspective, fragmentation is a virtue, not a weakness. We are in accord with Weick (1983), who questioned the benefits to scholarship of cohesive research teams, invoking instead a vision of individual researchers for whom heterogeneity is strength, originality a virtue, team research an enemy, and creativity valued over synthesis and replication. Given the increase in the number of specialty forums (i.e., journals, conferences, e-mail listservers) serving the needs of dispersed scholars, it may well be possible for the Academy to sustain many more fragmented scholarly communities than it has in the past.

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stand and write, even translate French as well as possible, know the corpus of Rousseau as well as possible, including all the contexts that determine it (the literary, philosophical, rhetorical traditions, the history of the French language, society, history, which is to say, so many other things as well). Otherwise, one could indeed say just anything at all . . ." (Derrida, 1988: 144). For Derrida, deconstruction is an exploration within strict boundaries of the indeterminacies to be found in texts, indeterminacies that open up radical reinterpretations of such texts.

An affirmative postmodernism, then, as articulated in the writings of Derrida, continues to bind researchers to rigorous standards of enquiry as they pursue radical interpretations. According to Rosenau (1992: 169), an affirmative postmodernism "would underscore novelty and reflexivity as it looks to the richness of difference and concentrates on the unusual, the singular, and the original." Rosenau argued that "any attempt to outline a postmodern social science will, on balance, depend more on the affirmatives than on the skeptics" (Rosenau, 1992: 169).

In identifying the implications of postmodernism for organizational research, we draw upon contributions from both the skeptical and affirmative styles and try to avoid demonizing either. We find much of the writing from a skeptical position useful in countering the new age naiveté of an affirmative postmodernism that celebrates "wonder and amazement" and pursues voyages into the "unforseen" (Rosenau, 1992: 169). Also, following Derrida (1988: 146), we reject the nihilist position in favor of an affirmative and activist social science that "embraces and does not exclude the world, reality, history" (Derrida, 1988: 137). Thus, in this article, we selectively borrow from the often countervailing currents of postmodernism, rather than granting absolute authority to one particular approach.

Incredulity Toward Metanarrative: Learning from Architecture

Lyotard (1984), in a widely influential text, suggested that postmodernism can be understood as incredulity toward metanarratives[3] (such as Marxism and structuralism) in contrast to modernism, which makes an appeal to just such narratives. Postmodernism, then, tends to "delegitimate all mastercodes" (Rosenau, 1992: 6). David Harvey (1989: 10) suggested that postmodernism involved a rejection of overarching propositions, an acceptance of pluralism and fragmentation, an emphasis on difference and heterogeneity, and an ironic admission of the ephemerality of things.

The emphasis of postmodernism, then, as Harvey (1989) and others make clear, is not all negative. In abandoning metanarrative, postmodernists allow for renewed attention to the traditional and to the particular (Rosenau, 1992: 6). Postmodernist architects, for example, have abandoned the myth of endless progress in favor of an eclecticism that, at its best,

[3] A metanarrative is a global world view that assumes the validity of its own truth claim (Rosenau, 1992: xi).

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creates designs exhibiting a striking synthesis of different traditions. Thus, the architect Charles Jencks (1989: 7) defined the postmodern style as "an eclectic mixture of any tradition with that of its immediate past," or more generally, "the combination of modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority (usually other architects)" (1989: 14).[4]

There are several aspects of this architectural postmodernism that we think are helpful in redefining organizational postmodernism. First, according to this perspective, postmodernism, compared to modernism, aims to communicate both to the concerned minority of technical experts in the field and to the wider population of those affected by the practice of science. We argue for a postmodern organizational science that exhibits both a mastery of traditional social science techniques and a relevance to the contemporary situation of organizational members. As Derrida (1976: 158), for example, makes abundantly clear, any interpretation of a text "requires all the instruments of traditional criticism," for "without this recognition and this respect, critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything." That careful and rigorous interpretation is compatible with radical postmodern re-readings is evidenced by research such as Joan Cassell's (1996) investigation of how the embodiment of difference affects the careers of women surgeons.

Postmodernism Versus Antimodernism

We emphasize a postmodernism that is, above all, eclectic rather than exclusive. Thus, our postmodernist perspective seeks to include and use techniques, insights, methods, and approaches from a variety of traditions, reaching backwards, forwards, and sideways with little regard for academic boundaries or the myth of progress that condemns some texts as old fashioned while proclaiming others state of the art. From this postmodernist perspective, all styles are simultaneously available. This postmodernism does not limit itself, then, to semiotic and deconstructive techniques, even though these approaches have been singled out as especially useful "postmodern research methods" (Dickens & Fontana, 1994). We agree with the feminist researcher Charlene Depner, who argued against the exclusion of methods typically associated with positivism: "[F]eminist psychology must implement every tool at its disposal—and create new ones—rather than reject any out of hand" (quoted in Reinharz, 1992: 93). Shulamit Reinharz (1992), in her book on feminist research methods, dis-

[4] Although we draw ideas from architecture in making sense of postmodernism, we intend neither to downplay the importance of postmodernist ideas in other areas, such as art and literature, nor to impose a false consensus on the field of architecture concerning postmodernism. Postmodern architects often disagree concerning aspects of postmodernism. Thus, Frampton (1983: 19), for example, criticizes some of Jencks' views on postmodern architecture as promoting "gratuitous images" for a media society.

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cusses experimental and survey methods as well as ethnographic, interview, and oral history methods. From her perspective, it is how the method is used that defines whether the research exemplifies feminism.

In postmodern research the goals are to challenge the content and form of dominant models of knowledge and also to produce new forms of knowledge through breaking down disciplinary boundaries and giving voice to those not represented in the dominant discourses (Giroux, 1992: 56). We argue that postmodern researchers, in pursuit of revolutionary challenges to conventional wisdom, can mix and match various perspectives or research styles for aesthetic effect or in order to contrast with tradition. This freedom to combine styles of discourse follows from the belief that no method grants privileged access to truth and that all research approaches are embodied in cultural practice that postmodernists seek to make explicit (Smircich & Calás, 1987). The mixing and matching of diverse styles helps surface the cultural practice within which each style is embedded.

Those postmodernists who declare an absolute opposition to modernity, including an opposition to the achievements of modern science and its methods, risk justifying the dismissal of postmodernism as "just another anti-modern intellectual current" (Rosenau, 1992: 169). Rather than conceiving of postmodernism as antimodernism, Jencks (1989: 10), among others, has championed a postmodernism that involves "the continuation of modernism and its transcendence." This sentiment is embodied in the postmodern rebuilding of the Palmer Museum of Art. When commissioned to replace an existing modernist art museum on the Penn State campus, postmodern architect Charles Moore decided to retain and revise, rather than hide or destroy, the old structure. He extended the modernist cube horizontally with a sweeping Romanesque portico that reflected and commented on the visible ornamentation of surrounding buildings.

Postmodern buildings employ double coding in that they make use of tradition and the latest scientific knowledge and techniques without committing to any dogmatic revival. Kenneth Frampton (1983: 23) discussed, for example, the Bagsvaerd church that employs reinforced concrete (a typically modern technique) to create an ambiguous vault that precludes "an exclusively Occidental or Oriental reading of the code by which the public and sacred space is constituted." We argue for a postmodernism that is similarly informed by, and yet ambivalent toward, classic statements and techniques of the field in question. The intent is not to venerate the work of predecessors or privilege the techniques of science; rather it is to situate research issues in creative tension with historical and scientific contexts. We join feminists such as Carolyn Sherif in taking issue with Kurt Lewin's call for concerning onself with history only as its forces are "revealed in the immediate situation at the time of study" (Sherif, 1979: 100). In order both to evoke a tradition and transcend it requires a detailed familiarity with the classic statements of that tradition. It is this detailed familiarity that allows the postmodernist to evoke the tradition

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in an often ironic or ambivalent way that contrasts with other elements of the design or project. Postmodernism, then, is, among other things, a call for renewed attention to the history of the field, and an affirmation of the relevance of important work regardless of its placement in some mythical modernist progression. Thus, postmodernists both celebrate tradition and deny the myth of progress.

POSTMODERN EPISTEMOLOGY

This article focuses on postmodernism as an intellectual movement rather than on the possibility of postmodernity as a stage in the historical development of capitalist societies (see Hassard, 1994, and Jameson, 1984, for useful discussions). Among writers on postmodernism there is considerable skepticism (e.g., Parker, 1993) concerning the claims by some (e.g., Clegg, 1990; Vattimo, 1992) that a postmodernity label is helpful in understanding societal and organizational developments, such as flexibility, multiskilling, decentralization, and mass media. That organizations and societies are making radical changes in response to competition both local and global can hardly be denied, but such changes are characteristic of capitalist society (Marx, 1867/1976; Schumpeter, 1947).

More persuasive, perhaps, is the possibility that the significance of certain aspects of the contemporary world can be reevaluated from a postmodern perspective. Whether or not the world we live in can be represented as differing dramatically from the recent past, postmodernism highlights neglected aspects of contemporary everyday life (as well as neglected aspects of historical life; see Readings & Schaber, 1993). For example, Baudrillard (1983) drew attention to the extent to which people inhabit simulated worlds where the distinction between real and unreal is blurred. Models replace the real and "the boundary between hyperreality and everyday life is erased" (Best & Kellner, 1991: 120). From this skeptical perspective, writing and research consists of systems of self-signification with no relevance to anything outside the text. Whether we agree with Baudrillard's nihilistic vision or not, his work is valuable in alerting us to how much of our experience is structured by representations that in many cases have no originals. This suggests a research agenda focused on the process by which signs and images are produced and their effects on producers and consumers. Thus, semiotics gains importance as a research method (Gottdiener, 1994).

Postmodernism as an intellectual movement also calls attention to the margins and away from a preoccupation with some mythical center. This attention to the margins can be as literal as an attention to apparently unimportant but revealing textual marginalia such as acknowledgments (e.g., Ben-Ari, 1995; Derrida, 1988). But postmodernism also opens space for voices, texts, and viewpoints previously neglected or ignored. As Rosenau (1992: 168) wrote, postmodernism "focuses on what is nonobvious, left out, and generally forgotten in a text and examines what is unsaid, overlooked,

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understated, and never overtly recognized." The standard modernist gesture is to focus only on the center and to ignore the margins. Thus, Searle (1970: 55–56; quoted in Derrida, 1988: 68), in describing his speech-act theory, wrote, "In the present case, our analysis will be directed at the center of the concept of promising. I am ignoring marginal, fringe, and partially defective promises." This is akin to the common statistical practice of dropping outliers from the data in order to concentrate on typical cases. But this practice of eliminating the perceived margins from discussion may have helped promote and maintain an overly homogenous social science. The postmodern turn coincides with renewed attention to third world, feminist, and minority voices in the Academy (e.g., Nkomo, 1992). Postmodernism, by bringing hitherto marginalized voices within the scope of enquiry, amplifies viewpoints that have struggled to be heard.

In attending to the margins and to suppressed voices, postmodernists inevitably struggle against powerful entrenched interests. For example, Derrida's critiques of philosophy so profoundly challenged the privileged position of philosophers that the President of the Association for Symbolic Logic (and ex-Chair of the American Philosophical Association), Ruth Marcus, wrote to the French government to try to prevent Derrida's election to the position of Director of the International College of Philosophy. In her letter she wrote, "To establish an 'International College of Philosophy' under Derrida's charge is something of a joke or, more seriously, raises the question as to whether the Ministère d'Etat is the victim of an intellectual fraud." The letter repeats a newspaper accusation that Derrida was an "intellectual terrorist" (for further details see Derrida, 1988, footnote 12, 158–159). At Boston University, President Silber declared his "resistance" to a curious list of approaches that includes critical legal studies, structuralism, radical feminism, deconstruction, The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, and dance therapy (Flint, 1993). These attempts to stifle academic enquiries reflect the perceived threat postmodernist and other critical approaches pose to the status quo.

In organizational research, work that challenges the taken-for-granted distribution of power in organizations has begun to appear. For example, Robin Ely (1995) showed how sex roles are more stereotypical and problematic in firms with relatively low proportions of senior women. Her work exhibits postmodern characteristics not just in its focus, but also in its methods. She adds a set of vivid stories told in the voices of the women themselves to the positivist edifice of hypotheses and statistics. These women jump from the page with brutally candid assessments concerning power games in organizations. Ely's qualitative data are not just summarized and sealed within classification borders. They spill forward within the context of the standard journal article to transgress propriety, to challenge convention, and to articulate the voices of previously silenced women.

We emphasize, therefore, the importance of postmodernism as an epistemology that redirects attention to phenomena in the world. Our

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focus is on how postmodern epistemology can inform, enrich, and direct research enquiries concerning organizational phenomena. We follow in the tradition of American pragmatism (e.g., Peirce, 1931) in asserting that there is a real world that can be systematically investigated. We recognize that this apparently innocuous assumption is rejected by skeptical postmodernists such as Baudrillard (1983), but, as Gottdiener (1994: 170) pointed out, "[M]any of us . . . are convinced of the materiality of existence here and of the fact that social spaces are staging areas of social interaction." Following Derrida (1988: 150–151) we argue that, from a pragmatic perspective, contexts can be considered relatively stable and this relative stability allows for coherent interpretation. At the same time, there is always "a margin of play, of difference" that opens the possibility of new interpretations within the limits of the context (Derrida, 1988: 152). We resist, therefore, the skeptics' reduction of all social enquiry to a concern with the shifting play of signifiers. The material world imposes constraints on the multiplicity of meanings that can be attributed to signifiers, and postmodern inquiries that we believe can address social contexts, sign systems, and the interrelationships between them (Gottdiener, 1994).

Postmodernism, as Jencks (1989: 50) and others have pointed out, is characterized by "an increasing plurality of beliefs." Some modernists have decried what they see as the decline of the Academy into a babble of cacophony, and there have been calls for organizational studies to embrace a consensus typical of more paradigmatically well-developed fields so that we may garner greater prestige and influence (see Pfeffer, 1993, for an eloquent summary of these concerns, and Merton, 1975, for an emphatic rejection of earlier calls for paradigm consensus in sociology). From a postmodern perspective, "consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value" (Lyotard, 1984: 66; see also McKeon, 1985, for a pragmatic perspective on the impossibility of even a temporary paradigm consensus in philosophy). From a postmodern perspective, calls for devotion to paradigmatic unity are perilous, because they tend to remove social science from the concerns of practitioners, including workers and managers, and because the devotion to paradigmatic unity reduces the ability to critically combine diverse approaches. The modernist devotion to a grand narrative of progress is understandable as nostalgia for a hypothesis-testing logico-deductive past in which the direction of scientific research was controlled by an elite. But such a past has never, in fact, existed in the social sciences. The postmodernist emphasis on paradox, irony, eclecticism, and pluralism is fully evident in the work of such (post)-modern masters as Leon Festinger in psychology and Erving Goffman in sociology. Festinger brought the principle of counterintuitive experimentalism to its brilliant apogee, and Goffman deconstructed even the most mundane social situations into affairs of drama and desperation. From a postmodernist perspective, there is no reason to limit enquiry to a few paths marked out by any one particular

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elite, and it is undesirable for researchers to pursue the obvious at the expense of the unusual.

FIVE POSTMODERN PROBLEMATICS

A quick glance at the leading journals in the organizational sciences confirms that explicitly postmodern research has begun to appear (e.g., Boje, 1995; Kilduff, 1993; Martin, 1990), but there is relatively little overt discussion of why and how such research is different from other articles appearing in the same journals. Those pursuing postmodern enquiry struggle with a number of problematics that are either ignored or suppressed in much of the empirical work in our field. We see evidence of empiricists in organizational studies turning their backs on these problematics in pursuit of conformity to "normal science" (e.g., Donaldson, 1996), even as researchers in other fields, including accounting (e.g., Arrington & Francis, 1989) and economics (e.g., Covaleski, Dirsmith, & Samuel, in press), borrow from postmodernism to transform enquiry. In the following section, the intent is to delineate those epistemological crises that seem to us to be particularly relevant to the research engagement with events and practices in the world. We follow this rather abstract discussion of problematics with specific examples of research that illustrate and expand on our postmodern perspective.

Problematizing Normal Science: The Revolutionary Stance

We have already mentioned that postmodernists reject metanarratives, and this translates into a distrust of grand theories of all kinds. The move away from grand theorizing was signaled in sociology by Merton (1957: 9), who pointed to the relative poverty of work derived from any "master conceptual scheme" and called for the development of theories of the middle range—that is, theories "applicable to limited ranges of data." But this commitment to programs of research derived from either grand or middle-range theories is questioned by postmodernists who dispute the importance that Kuhn (1962) granted to what he called "normal science."

Kuhn claimed that the vast majority of scientists mostly worked on puzzle solving within accepted and unchallenged theoretical frames. This was not just a descriptive account: as Kuhn (1970) himself made clear, the scientist's commitment to puzzle solving rather than innovative thinking is a normative stance. This is what Kuhn believed scientists should be doing (cf. Feyerabend, 1970).

But Kuhn's view is disputed by many philosophers of science, including Popper (1970: 53), for whom puzzle-solving science is dangerous both to science and to civilization because it involves the abandonment of critical thinking. According to Popper (1970: 55), scientists are revolutionaries not puzzle solvers. Problems continually provoke scientists to critically reappraise existing theoretical approaches. The work of scientists involves not routine puzzle solving but "bold conjectures, controlled by criticism"

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(Popper, 1970: 55). Further, Popper dismisses as "dangerous dogma" the view that scientists are unable to shift between competing paradigms (cf. Stablein, 1996; Weaver & Gioia, 1994).[5]

Although Popper's views can hardly be described as postmodern, his emphasis on the revolutionary stance of the scientist toward existing paradigms and his argument that scientists can move (albeit with difficulty) between paradigms, depending on the demands of the problem under investigation, are consistent with our postmodern epistemology. Contrary to Kuhn's insistence that science should subject itself to long periods of routine puzzle solving within the framework of a dominant theory, postmodernists champion the simultaneous availability of many different theoretical positions, and the importance of an ever-present critical discussion of underlying assumptions. As Drews (1987: 36) made clear, this postmodern vigilance with respect to philosophical frames of reference is provoked and aided by investigations of phenomena by scientists. Thus, postmodernists refuse to privilege middle-range narratives over grand narratives because they reject the hegemony of any particular narrative irrespective of its range.

Problematizing Truth: The Importance of Fiction

Nietzsche observed that "truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions" (1873/1995: 92). From this perspective, the pursuit of truth becomes deeply problematic as a goal of social science because what counts as truth is not fixed, but derives in part from social conventions that can differ among contexts and language games. Certainty is only possible within the boundaries of a particular language game (Wittgenstein, 1958: 224), and postmodernists habitually break down such boundaries. Truth is not something that inheres in nature; it is rooted in conventions fabricated by humans (Nietzsche, 1873/1995). Each linguistic community, and even each individual, can potentially perceive the truth about the world differently.

What may be most important, therefore, in understanding human behavior may be the perceptions and judgments that shape the world through self-fulfilling prophecies and enactment processes (cf. Weick, 1995: 55–61). To understand the created world—that is, the world that humans have

[5] Note that much of the existing work in organizational postmodernism assumes that postmodernism is incommensurable with modernism. In particular, the series of explanatory articles by Cooper and Burrell (Burrell, 1988, 1994; Cooper, 1988; Cooper & Burrell, 1988) take the view that modernism and postmodernism are "two radically different systems of thought and logic" that "may be fundamentally irreconcilable" (Cooper & Burrell, 1988: 110). This incommensurability perspective would appear to rule out the possibility of a creative postmodern engagement with research that we outline in this paper, leaving room only for what Cooper and Burrell refer to as "organizational analysis," an ongoing critique of the assumptions, implications, and dangers of bureaucracy (see Burrell, 1996, for further elaboration).

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created and to which they respond—scientists may have to strive to understand the fictions that people perceive and enact. To accept that there is a world to which people respond is not the same as saying that we all agree on how this world should be represented, or that there is, in fact, any universally agreed on representation.

Indeed, the postmodern emphasis on the importance of individual perceptions in the creation of shared social worlds suggests increased research attention to how individuals make sense of experience and construct and maintain social worlds, and how social constructions take on the appearance of certainty. Within the organizational studies community, many researchers are now pursuing topics in the area of sense making (see Weick, 1995, for a review). Some of this work appears strikingly postmodern in its attention to the detail of a specific case, in its creative use of unusual evidence, in its emphasis on the importance of narrative and text, and in its contribution of new concepts based on informed speculation (see Weick, 1993, for one example, and Van Maanen, 1995, for an insightful commentary).

Problematizing Representation: The Object Is Subjective

The question of accurate representation of the world has become a major issue within postmodern discourse, particularly within anthropology (see, e.g., Clifford & Marcus, 1986). The postmodern position goes beyond the claim that ethnography is a form of writing and is, therefore, subject to literary interpretation. Rather, postmodernists seek to undermine all claims to methodological purity: for postmodernists, there is no methodology capable of achieving an unmediated, objective representation of the facts. Instead of trying to erase all personal traces of the researcher from the work so as to provide the reader with an illusion of unmediated access to the subject, postmodernists seek to demystify the technology of mediation by explicitly detailing the involvement of the researcher.When a writer invokes a methodology with its panoply of assumptions, value judgments, and exceptions, this invocation is in part a rhetorical attempt to persuade the reader of the scientific authenticity of the document (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). The danger is that a concern for method can overwhelm a concern for relevance, surprise, challenge, and discovery. The appearance of objectivity in scientific texts is then misleading, because science does not hold a mirror up to nature (cf. Rorty, 1979). Rather, scientific work takes place in contexts of interpretation involving rhetorical conventions and taken-for-granted assumptions.

Problematizing Writing: Style Matters

If science is partly a rhetorical production overwhelmingly expressed in writing in which textual elements such as the title, acknowledgements, tables, figures, headings, and references work together to structure and enliven the body of the text, then style becomes important. Postmodernists refuse to exempt any text from rhetorical examination, no matter how

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objective sounding, no matter how matter-of-fact the text may appear to be. All texts represent a series of choices concerning how arguments should be presented, and these choices are embodied in the text.

From a postmodern perspective, scientific texts are not immune from aesthetic considerations. Persuasive texts also are artistic constructions (Van Maanen, 1995). This has long been accepted in the hard sciences where equations and results are judged on criteria that include elegance and parsimony. In the social sciences, similarly, researchers who produce aesthetically pleasing texts gain influence because their insights compel attention. A surprising example from the modernist literature is the original work introducing organizational ecology to the social science community, achieving high levels of artful crafting in terms of narrative construction, thematic unity, and compelling intuitions (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1984). The style of expression (where by style we refer to the rhetorical command of syntax, logic, example, and structure) helped ensure the sudden dissemination to organizational scholars of ideas from population biology (e.g., Levins, 1968) and community ecology (Hawley, 1950). Their expression in this particular style made available "an entire battery of new concepts and language for describing organizations and their environments" (Davis & Powell, 1992: 343). Cronbach (1986: 97) made a similar point concerning Murray's list of psychological needs and presses: "Murray offered, not a set of propositions intended to displace all competitors, but an alternative vocabulary for talking about persons, incentives, and gratifications." What is important to note is the impact such aesthetically compelling work achieves irrespective of the value of the empirical work it inspires. Thus, the work of Karl Weick compels attention not because it offers testable hypotheses for teams of graduate students, but because of its distinctive and persuasive style (Van Maanen, 1995).

Problematizing Generalizability: The Advance of Ignorance

From a postmodern perspective, the aim of social science is not generalizability. Postmodernists agree with Giddens (1984: xix) that "the uncovering of generalizations is not the be-all and the end-all of social theory," and with Cronbach (1982: 70–71) that "general, lasting definite 'laws' are in principle beyond the reach of social science . . . . sheer empirical generalization is doomed as a research strategy." There are many reasons for the crisis of generalizability in the social sciences, such as (a) the impossibility of isolating all the possible contingencies that can affect outcomes, (b) the historically situated nature of social science research, and (c) the ease with which research results are translated into policy recommendations or disseminated to the potential subjects of research (thus radically altering the possibilities of replication). If social science is not in the business of producing laws of behavior, then what is its purpose?

Some postmodernists might be tempted to answer in terms of the pleasure of the text: social science is valuable to the extent that it provokes interest and excitement among practitioners and readers. But an activist

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postmodernism requires more than this. Giroux (1992: 15) wrote of teachers as transformative intellectuals skilled in strategies for putting ideas into practice. This is very different from the modernist ideal of the ivory tower intellectual uninterested in the practical implications of research. Postmodernists accept the double hermeneutic by which the human sciences affect the very phenomena (humans and their worlds) that are the foci of study. The quest, then, is not to impose a series of laws on these infinitely changeable phenomena, but to strive to shape public policies (as Derrida has done, for example, in campaigning to preserve the teaching of philosophy in French high schools) and, above all, to pose new questions. As Cronbach (1986: 91) stated, "Social science is cumulative, not in possessing ever-more refined answers about fixed questions, but in possessing an ever-richer repertoire of questions." From this perspective, one of the most interesting paradoxes of science is that progress is deeply problematic, because, as Kuhn pointed out, the expansion of knowledge is accompanied by the expansion of ignorance:

> Though the bulk of scientific knowledge clearly increases with time, what are we to say about ignorance? The problems solved during the last thirty years did not exist as open questions a century ago. In any age, the scientific knowledge already at hand virtually exhausts what there is to know, leaving visible puzzles only at the horizon of existing knowledge. Is it not possible, or perhaps even likely, that contemporary scientists know less of what there is to know about their world than the scientists of the 18th century knew of theirs? (1970: 20)

The idea of progress in science is a myth, therefore, in the sense that the more we know, the more we realize we don't know. We progress toward ever greater knowledge of our own ignorance.

SUGGESTIONS FOR AND EXAMPLES OF POSTMODERNIST RESEARCH

Awareness of postmodern problematics may result in research that takes account of some or all of the issues we have raised. Those who take a postmodern stance may strive for the revolutionary overthrow of existing taken-for-granted assumptions rather than working to methodically fill in the blanks in existing research programs. An activist postmodern stance challenges conventional wisdom and transgresses established boundaries with bold conjectures and innovative methods. Researchers working from a postmodern perspective may limit themselves to the detailed examination of one or a few cases rather than trying to generalize over hundreds of cases. The postmodern preference is for detailed understanding of the particular, for local knowledge and local times, as opposed to statistical trends. In presenting evidence to support conclusions, those working from a postmodern position tend to provide as much vivid immediate detail to the reader as possible. Standard statistics are not enough to provide authenticity to the research report. The researcher may share not just

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summaries of evidence but the actual evidence itself, such as letters, photos, detailed conversations, and a discussion of the researcher's own intuitions. Researchers adopting postmodernism tend to pay great attention to the writing process itself. This means striving to involve the reader in the text, eschewing passive objectivity for an active authorial voice, and carefully crafting an aesthetically pleasing narrative.

We also assert that postmodernist research does not have to reject the modernist legacy; rather, this legacy is available for selective use. Postmodernists in the social sciences have tended to pick on positivism as somehow representative of modernism and, therefore, as the straw man against which their own work can be judged (e.g., Agger, 1991). But attacks on positivism are at least a century old. John Stuart Mill (1865/1965) complained in 1865 that "though the mode of thought expressed by the terms *positive* and *positivism* is widely spread, the words themselves are, as usual, better known through the enemies of that mode of thinking than through its friends" (quoted in Roscoe, 1995: 492). From our postmodern perspective, the hypothetico-deductive method and the preference for quantitative analysis characteristic of positivist research are elements available to the researcher, to be combined, possibly, with other elements such as ethnography, biography, textual deconstruction, and semiotic interpretation. The placement of hypotheses in a text, for example, does not necessarily signal the researchers' commitment to a priori predictions. Hypotheses are rhetorical devices that can be used as helpful summaries of theory and as guide posts for the reader.

We refuse, therefore, to rule out any method or approach from the postmodernist's repertoire. We intend to go beyond dualities such as modernist/antimodernist, or positivist/antipositivist. We champion the simultaneous availability of apparently incongruous research methods including laboratory experiments, deconstruction, ethnography, and sophisticated statistical analyses. As an indication of the range of research that we think exhibits elements of postmodernism, we decided to comment on some examples of research. Our intent is not to privilege some work as canonical, but to give the reader confidence to pursue research from a variety of styles. We included work that responds creatively to postmodern problematics irrespective of whether the authors identified themselves as postmodernists (cf. Manning, 1995). The intent is to widen rather than narrow the possibilities available from a postmodern perspective. Discussing actual examples of research also allows us to comment on many features of postmodern writing that develop from engagement with epistemological questions. If postmodernism is impossible to summarize, because its manifestations are so multifarious, one way to convey the excitement of this approach is to point to specific examples.

In making sense of postmodernism's relevance, we continue to draw inspiration from postmodern architects who combine postmodernist theory and practice. Architects have not only engaged in critical debates concerning postmodernism (Frampton, 1983; Jencks, 1987; Kroll, 1987; Portoghesi,

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1982), they have also constructed buildings where people live, work, and play. Indeed, many university campuses in the United States now incorporate examples of postmodernist architecture (examples include Kresge College, at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and the Palmer Museum at Penn State). We look to the field of architecture, then, for clues as to what an applied postmodernism of organizations might look like. Architects not only theorize about postmodernism, they also practice it. We argue that organizational researchers can also put postmodernism into research practice.

Decorate the Space: Reviving the Classics

From our postmodern perspective, the tasks of problematizing normal science and undermining metanarratives are aided by detailed knowledge of the classics of the field. In many cases, postmodernists made their most audacious statements in the context of the reigning classic statements that are customarily taken for granted by the scholarly community. Thus, in the field of architecture, the addition of glass pyramids to the Louvre in Paris draws attention to architectural detail that otherwise might pass unnoticed, and sets up a clash of styles that awakens attention to contrasting traditions. Similarly, Jacques Derrida established his reputation through a series of careful deconstructions of classic works. For example, he critiqued Saussure's (1966) assumptions concerning the correspondence between signifiers and signifieds, thus radically undermining the whole structuralist enterprise, which, at the time, was dominant across the social sciences (Derrida, 1976).

In the organizational studies literature, such deconstructions of established canonical works are rare but in demand (Van Maanen, 1988). Nevertheless, work that exhibits the postmodernist qualities of communicative relevance, evocation and transmutation of tradition, state-of-the-art methodological finesse, and an explicit invitation to the reader to participate in the research adventure are to be found. One example is taken from sociology, where interest in postmodernist enquiry is growing (e.g., Fuchs & Ward, 1994).

Burt's (1987) reanalysis of the classic Coleman, Katz, and Menzel (1966) account of the diffusion of the antibiotic tetracycline among Midwestern physicians is one example of research that exhibits some postmodern characteristics without any explicit claim to a postmodernist label. Burt's work is, in many ways, a recussitation of the original. He literally rescued the data from destruction by recovering the ancient water-damaged data cards from a moldy warehouse, and he made these data available to everyone interested in investigating the stories presented by the original authors and himself. Thus, the project is left *unfinished* in a typically postmodernist gesture of inclusion of the audience. Burt, in reconstructing the original data, and in offering (in a footnote to his article) to provide the data on disk to the reader of his radical reanalysis, brought the reader into the project of science rather than insisting on a rigid demarcation between scientist and audience.

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Burt both invoked the original work, praising it for the high quality of the data, and undermined the work by showing that the original explanation for diffusion could not be sustained. The original work suggested that physicians relied on conversations with colleagues in deciding whether or not to adopt a new drug. According to Burt's analysis, physicians relied, not on collegial conversations, but on their perceptions of the actions proper to occupants of their positions in the social structure of colleagues.

Physicians, according to this view, adopted the innovative drug in order to gain advantage over rivals. Competition among structural equivalents—that is, among rivals who could substitute for each other in the social system—helps explain the diffusion of innovations. In presenting his own explanation for diffusion, premised on structural equivalence rather than on cohesion among discussion partners, Burt used the tools of the typically modernist structural approach. Far from having to ritually reject modernist advances in technology, postmodernists can use such advances for their own ends.

In the case of Burt's article, the structural analysis programs were used to advance an agenda that was clearly important to Burt. There is no pretense in the article that the analysis has been performed simply in the service of science. As a passionate statement of advocacy for a particular perspective, Burt's work succeeds in communicating the excitement of personal discovery rather than the dullness of objective analysis.

At the same time, readers are invited to analyze the work from their own perspectives; thus, the piece serves to ignite discourse rather than to complete the search for truth. Note that Burt did more than take a classic data set and reanalyze it as a methodological or conceptual exercise (as he does elsewhere; see, for example, Burt, 1976). Rather, he radically challenged not only the accepted interpretation of one of the classics in the field, he also overturned our faith in what had come to be the accepted explanation for social influence. Thus, the data reanalysis is powerfully tied to a revolutionary undermining of assumptions that go far beyond the particular data set in question. By choosing a canonical data set to deconstruct, and by offering everyone the opportunity to confirm his critique, Burt succeeded, like Derrida, in challenging the accepted practice of enquiry.

Celebrate the Local

One of the major reasons for postmodernist architects' disenchantment with the modernist style of Le Corbusier, Mies Van der Rohe, and their associates was the perceived failure of the "machine-for-living" ethos. The giant housing projects, for example, that disfigure the cities of the world appear, from a postmodernist perspective, to lack any connection to classical ideals of harmony with surroundings. Brutalist architecture often violates the colloquial grammar of surrounding buildings and landscape.

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Kenneth Frampton (1983: 17) wrote of modernization's optimum use of earth-moving equipment to create flat sites that are the prerequisites for "the victory of universal civilization over locally inflected culture." Postmodernist architecture, by contrast, seeks to both comment upon, and integrate within, such features of the environment that promote a sense of continuity with the local past. For example, the postmodern development of Franklin Court, Philadelphia, features Benjamin Franklin's house "ghosted" in stainless steel above his preserved memorabilia and sayings on plaques (Jencks, 1989: 14). This outdoor museum and public space allows people to move through the area while gaining an immediate understanding of the historical significance of the space. The architecture serves to promote a connection to surrounding buildings and the local past. Other postmodern buildings take advantage of local topography to create idiosyncratic cross-cultural challenges to accepted conventions using modernistic techniques (Frampton, 1983: 22–23).

In the social sciences, the call for increased attention to local knowledge has been sounded most clearly in anthropology (see Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1983). The modernist aspiration to "draw pure structure from its culture-specific accretions" (Barkun, 1968: 33) has been decried by Geertz (1983: 182) "as a proposal for a perverse sort of alchemy to turn gold into lead." Within organizational studies, the movement away from mass survey research on dozens of empirically derived variables (a movement signaled, for example, by Starbuck's [1981] devastating critique of the Aston studies) has been fiercely resisted by those who define social science as consisting of only this kind of work (see, e.g., Donaldson, 1995). Nevertheless, detailed ethnographic work within conflicted and localized organizational settings has begun to appear.

A book that provides a detailed ethnographic examination of the conflicted organizational production of the self is Kondo's (1990) account of identity transformation in Tokyo social settings. In this work Kondo convincingly authenticated the postmodern emphasis on the fluidity of identity. She showed how her own identity as a Japanese-American woman was reconfigured in a variety of contexts including the Japanese home and workplace (a small Tokyo candy manufacturer). Kondo's success (and consternation) in mastering the various gendered identities available to young women in Japan provoked an intense interest in how identity "is negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous, the result of culturally available meanings and the open-ended, power-laden enactments of those meanings in everyday situations" (Kondo, 1990: 24). Her work is postmodern in a very explicit way: she showed how texts and selves are crafted productions within very specific social contexts. Fiction, therefore, applies not just to the world outside the self, but also to the constitution of the self.

A recent example of how to achieve a degree of authentic local representation within the limits of a journal article is Cassell's (1996: 41) examination of how women surgeons embodied themselves in a career dominated by "aggressive, macho male peers." Cassell avoided the reduction

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of male/female differences to either biology or a social constructionist plasticity. She sought an explanation of the career patterns and experiences of female surgeons without limiting herself to the arguments that (a) humans are biologically divided into two sexes, and all else follows, or (b) gender differences are created by socialization processes. She drew on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus* to illuminate why some male surgeons reacted with visceral misogyny to the presence of female surgeons in operating rooms, why the female surgeons tended to have Catholic backgrounds, and why subordinate women nurses sometimes reacted viciously to female surgeons' challenges to the embodied social order.

Cassell placed a strong emphasis on understanding the personal, embodied experience of the 33 women she studied. She tried to balance representativeness and diversity. A comprehensive sampling at the first site was followed by the strategy of maximizing the diversity of the sample in the four remaining sites: "If I learned of a surgeon who was African-American or Orthodox Jewish, or one in a specialty I had not yet observed, or in a particularly interesting personal or professional situation, I tried to study her" (Cassell, 1996: 47). Cassell speculated about the possible importance for female surgeons of the Catholic *habitus* of the nun, who is "permitted to obtain higher education, to intimidate and discipline males, and to lead, in the service of humanity" (Cassell, 1996: 48). According to Cassell, no corresponding *habitus* is available for Jewish women dissenters, each of whom must "painfully define herself, on an individual level, as a rebel against an embodied set of structuring principles and common schemes of perception and conception" (Cassell, 1996: 49).

Cassell, as author, was quite frank about the possibility that she might be "projecting upon the surgeons my own personal reactions to the choices they must make and that my feeling of utter visceral certainty about this analysis says more about me than about the women surgeons" (Cassell, 1996: 51). Her work is postmodern in possessing personal certainty and conviction, but eschewing dogmatic claims to verity. Cassell's work also underplays the rhetorical importance of methodological rigor, seeks an explanation of difference beyond simple gender or biological dichotomies, gives voice to underrepresented narratives, and attempts an ambitious resolution to the problem of generalizing from her sample. She argued that the concept of *habitus* "allows for fine-grained discriminations without sacrificing the ability to generalize" (Cassell, 1996: 47). Bourdieu's (1977) concept is a sensitizing device that permits the elucidation of differences without the resort to either grand theory or reductionist dichotomies.

Cassell's work is part of the feminist challenge to the master narratives of modern man. Feminist postmodernism is political in its challenge to the status quo in patriarchical society, and at the same time offers an epistemological critique of existing practices of representation (Foster, 1983: xiii). As Owens (1983: 59) has pointed out, postmodernists seek not to transcend representation but "to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating

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others." Feminist postmodern researchers seek to represent women as subjects rather than objects and to give voice to the narratives of those who violate what Cassell (1996: 46) referred to as the "principles of the incarnate social order."

Mix and Match: The Eclectic Approach

Postmodern architecture achieves much of its stunning visual impact through an explicit eclecticism that carefully combines classical styles from a variety of different periods and traditions with a Pop-icon humor designed to appeal to and reflect on the contemporary scene. For example, the AT&T Headquarters building designed by Philip Johnson and Philip Burgee features a cathedral-like base that incorporates eclectic references to both the Italian Renaissance and Egyptian sacred buildings: 37 stories of pink granite and a 50-foot split pediment "with gently upturned ears, a characteristic eighteenth century gesture of refinement" (Jencks, 1987: 231). This most famous of postmodern buildings succeeds in opening up a discourse "with its neighbors, the past, and the grid of New York" (Jencks, 1987: 234). At the same time, the building retains a typical sense of post-modern humor: mechanical equipment hidden behind the split pediment blows out clouds of vapor "when the temperature is right" (Jencks, 1987: 231).

This particular combination of humor, historical scholarship, and eclectic borrowing is rare in the social sciences, but has been mastered by Robert Merton (1965) in tracing the source of the aphorism, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants," and in his more recent article (1995) examining the partial citation phenomenon. Merton had attributed the so-called Thomas theorem ("If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences") to W. I. Thomas in several previous publications despite the fact that the theorem appeared in the 1928 book written by both W. I. Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas. Merton had previously explained in footnotes that Dorothy Swaine Thomas herself had confirmed to him that this theorem was formulated by W. I. alone. Nevertheless, he found himself confronted by an accusation of institutionalized sexism in attributing the theorem solely to the male author of the book in which it appeared. His previous footnotes explaining the attribution had no discernible effect.

In what way is Merton's article clarifying the authorship of the Thomas theorem postmodern? First, the style of the article "departs from the tidy format that has come to be prescribed for the scientific paper" (Merton, 1995: 379). Merton referred to the article as "this discursive composite of archival documents," but this fails to capture the élan with which he weaves textual fragments, letters, and observations together in pursuit of the biography of a sociological idea.

The mystery as to whether W. I. actually was responsible for the theorem is solved early in the article in an extended footnote. But a powerful narrative tension drives the article forward, and this relates to the

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difficulty of establishing the truth. How can Merton convince us of what he believes? This is the dilemma faced by the social scientist from a postmodern perspective. It is not enough to merely assert that private correspondence exists that shows that Dorothy Swaine Thomas declared W. I. Thomas to be the sole progenitor of the theorem. Merton's attempted solution is to put all the evidence he has before the reader. This includes facsimiles of all letters bearing on this question between himself and Dorothy Swaine Thomas, letters that contain much other, apparently irrelevant information. This full inclusion of source materials in the body of the text enables the reader to discern not merely the strength of Dorothy Swaine Thomas's testimony, but the relationship between her and Merton, between her and W. I. Thomas, and between Merton and W. I. Thomas. Readers are enabled to judge for themselves the truth of the matter in a way that would be impossible were Merton content to summarize the evidence, rather than to present it in full, including not merely typescripts but actual photocopies. The apparently irrelevant details help with authenticating the correspondence, and contextualizing the dispute over origins. Further, these details establish the cultural background within which the collaboration between the Thomases was embedded, and contrasts earlier cultural practices with the somewhat different context of the contemporary academy.

Thus, Merton succeeded, to some extent, in overcoming the problems of how to represent the evidence and how to assert the truth of a claim. He did this through a highly personalized text, presented as a story, with identifiable characters, and an array of epistolatory evidence. As Merton mentioned, he drew on the tradition of the epistolary novel and on the stream-of-consciousness techniques initiated by the 18th-century novelist Laurence Sterne (in *Tristram Shandy*). This case study seeks to establish the truth concerning one sentence in the history of sociology. Merton overwhelmed the reader with the sheer volume of evidence but managed to array this evidence in an aesthetically pleasing text that masquerades not as science but as finely wrought fiction. This work is one example of how careful scholarship, critical thinking, personal narrative, and highly charged humor can combine to produce work of lasting value in the best tradition of emerging postmodern eclecticism.

Searching for Paradox

The modernist ethos is summarized in Mies Van der Rohe's aphorism, "I don't want to be interesting, I want to be good" (Fleming, Honour, & Pevsner, 1972: 193). Echoes of this statement are often heard concerning organizational research (e.g., Donaldson, 1995: 232). By contrast, postmodernists prefer the interesting over the obvious and place a high value on paradox, contrast, counterintuition, and humor (see Fine & Martin, 1995, for a discussion of sarcasm, satire, and irony in the work of Erving Goffman). From a postmodernist research perspective, there is no point in establishing the obvious through laborious research. Such research not

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only brings social science into disrepute with its publics (thus violating the postmodernist emphasis on relevance), but it also wastes resources on research questions that simply confirm what everyone already knows.

Postmodernism, then, involves a search for the nonobvious, the counterintuitive, and the surprising. This does not mean an endless pursuit of the new. As we have already argued, postmodernist enquiry takes place in the context of the long tradition of modernism. Thus, the paradoxes discovered by postmodern enquiry are likely to be deeply embedded in and counterpoised to the classic themes of the field.

Reference has already been made to the postmodern characteristics of the experimental work of Leon Festinger, Stanley Schachter, and their associates (e.g., Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Schachter & Singer, 1962). One example will suffice to illustrate how far this work departs from the majority of the lab experiments that crowd the pages of the applied psychology journals in which most microorganizational behavior research is published.

Schachter and Singer's (1962) effort to uncover the determinants of emotional state exhibits many postmodernist features. First is an explicit appeal to classic references in the field. In the case of the emotions, the classic reference was William James's (1890) theory of a connection between bodily states and emotions. James is referenced and quoted in the first sentence of the research report, thus setting the report in the requisite classical tradition. Note that this reference to James is not gratuitous, nor accompanied by other grand-sounding names to buttress the article's claim to attention. On the contrary, the tradition is evoked as a means of communicating the continuity of the scholarly tradition, which is shown to span over 70 years. In a typical postmodern fashion, work from very different eras is treated as part of a continuum. There is no pretence of a drastic "break" with tradition. Not only is work from a very different era introduced as a classical frame for the contemporary, but research from a different culture is also presented as relevant and vital to the research continuum: the authors reference, quote extensively from, and comment on a 1924 paper published in a French journal, and offer, in a footnote, translated copies of this work to the reader, thus, in a characteristic postmodernist gesture, including the reader in the research endeavor.

All of these vital references establish an historical context for the contemporary research. The experiment itself is a masterpiece of double-coded, hilarious drama. Adrenalin-influenced subjects are either provided with the correct explanation for symptoms of arousal, an incorrect explanation, or no explanation. The authors go to considerable trouble to enact the dramatic props, setting, and dialogue necessary for the creation of the illusion that an experiment on vision is underway. The high point of this drama comes in the description of how the stooge created for the subject either a euphoric or an anger explanation of the puzzling adrenalin-induced arousal. In the euphoria condition, the stooge progresses

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from doodling to paper basketball to hula hoops. In the anger condition the stooge progresses from complaining about the questionnaire to angrily crossing out items to tearing up the questionnaire and hurling the pieces on the floor. The questionnaire in the anger condition, we are told, ends with "With how many men (other than your father) has your mother had extramarital relationships?" The available categories are "4 and under, 5–9, and 10 and over."

The results of the experiment include such humorous touches as the description of the subject in the euphoria condition, "who threw open the window and, laughing, hurled paper basketballs at passersby." The conclusions confirm the potentially revolutionary hypothesis: given precisely the same state of adrenalin-induced emotional arousal, "we have, by means of cognitive manipulations, been able to produce in our subjects the very disparate states of euphoria and anger."

This experiment is an example of how a postmodernist social science can employ stagecraft, tradition, humor, and the full panoply of modernist methodology to examine topics, such as the determinants of emotional state, that lie at the boundaries of several disciplines and thus escape attention from segregated academic departments. Postmodernism, in its eclecticism, stretches across disciplines in pursuit of the interesting at the expense of the obvious. Postmodernists, like Schachter, tend to have highly diverse careers. (Schachter, besides his collaborative work on social affiliation, emotional states, and cognitive dissonance, also collaborated on pioneering contributions to research on obesity, smoking cessation, and the random walks theory of stock market variation.) Organizational studies, lying at the crossroads of many disciplines, offers many opportunities for activist postmodern research. The postmodern agenda is to avoid paradigmatic narrowness, obvious hypotheses, and contextless empiricism while borrowing freely from the available repertoire of methods and research styles in rigorous challenges to conventional wisdom.

ANTI-CONCLUSION

We were at a meeting of quantitative social scientists recently and one of us happened to mention, in the course of a conversation between sessions, an interest in the work of Derrida. The result was astonishing: a senior social scientist staggered backward as if physically struck. That the invocation of Derrida's name should evoke such a visceral response is one indication of the polarization between empiricists and postmodernists. It is easy to forget the gulf between those empiricists distrustful of speculation in the absence of rigorously collected quantitative data and those postmodernists dismissive of all attempts to use data to represent the world. Across this gulf, the two sides eye each other suspiciously while fighting for journal space and academic advancement.

We are not sure what can be done about this undeclared war. We have emphasized a relatively inclusive version of postmodernism in this

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article, but, clearly, much of the hypothesis-testing empirical research that appears in our journals has few if any of the features that we have discussed as postmodern. Many researchers who seek to confirm conventional wisdom assume that data represent the truth about an objectively measured world. Such researchers rigorously exclude intuition or subjective experience from their research reports, and signally distrust humor, irony, and the paradoxical. Much research, in short, fails to raise any challenges to paradigms of enquiry or practice, and fails to benefit from the whirlwind of ideas associated with postmodernism.

Those caught up in the excitement of postmodernism, however, can easily lose sight of the revolutionary potential of postmodern ideas for the practice of so-called normal science. Part of our purpose in this article is to suggest how organizational studies might be reshaped by postmodernism in ways that enhance rather than detract from the research adventure. We have endorsed the inclusive elements in postmodernism and have outlined how postmodern commitments to breaking down disciplinary boundaries, challenging conventional wisdom, and giving voice to viewpoints and perspectives hitherto silenced can employ some aspects of approaches commonly identified with modernism. In drawing attention to epistemological problematics that postmodernists have surfaced, and in suggesting how some researchers have begun to deal with these problematics, we offer less a map of the territory than signposts on how to storm the Bastille of conventional thinking. The practice of research should never be a timid adventure.

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