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PAST POSTMODERNISM? REFLECTIONS AND TENTATIVE DIRECTIONS

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In this article we first reflect on the significant and positive impact of postmodernism for organizational theorizing during the past decade. Through several examples we point to contributions that poststructuralist perspectives have brought to the field. Finally, we consider four contemporary theoretical tendencies—feminist poststructuralist theorizing, postcolonial analyses, actor-network theory, and narrative approaches to knowledge—as heirs (apparent) of the postmodern turn for organizational theorizing past postmodernism.

Since the late 1970s, the social sciences, including organization studies, have been influenced by diverse theoretical perspectives calling for reflexivity toward the constitution of "theory" and the institutional, social, and political aspects of such constitution. "Postmodern" has been used to identify many of these perspectives, for they appear to share some features, including a concern for language and representation and a reconsideration of subjectivity and power.

More recently, the "postmodern turn" has come under increasing scrutiny, even by some of its advocates and supporters (e.g., Butler & Scott, 1992; Leitch, 1996). Insofar as postmodern perspectives allow for questioning conventional approaches to theory development, the argument goes, they provide incisive analyses showing the inner workings and assumptive basis of those theories. At the same time, however, the elusiveness of theory under postmodern premises prevents those who articulate postmodern perspectives from theorizing other, alternative views, because they do not have any "solid ground" from which to speak.

A typical response to an encounter with a poststructuralist analysis or a deconstructive reading in our field is "Yes, but. . . ." That is, "Yes, I see how the language in the text repeats what it seeks to suppress and excludes a devalued other" (upon reading Martin Kilduff's, 1993, "Deconstructing *Organizations*"; Joanne Martin's, 1990, "Deconstructing Organizational Taboos"; or Dennis Mumby and Linda Putnam's, 1992, deconstructive readings of Simon's concept of bounded rationality), or "Yes, I see how power/knowledge works in the unfolding of human resource management (HRM) practices and strategic management frameworks" (upon reading Barbara Townley's, 1993, or David Knights', 1992, Foucauldian takes on HRM or strategic management, respectively). And then, "*But,* once you've deconstructed, then what? How can we reconstruct, or get anything positive from this?"

We are sympathetic to this reaction, coming as it typically does from a desire to make a difference with our scholarship. Yet, we would not share the sense of "nothing positive from this." Instead, we would emphasize the importance of the postmodern turn for transforming contemporary theorizing in the social sciences in general and organization studies in particular. That is, we wish to mark the importance for contemporary theorizing of having *gone through* these intellectual currents.

Thus, in this article we discuss the impact of postmodernism as a significant and positive contribution to organizational theorizing during the last 10 years or so. Its significance, we argue, resides in the opportunities it has offered for reflecting upon the production of theory as a genre and as an institutional and cultural activity. By calling attention to the textuality of organizational theories, postmodernism has opened a space for a different form of criticism (e.g., Fondas, 1997; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993; Van Maanen, 1988, 1995a,b). Viewing theory as a representational form places decisions regard-

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ing "for what" and "for whom" we are going to speak in the core of our scholarship (e.g., Deetz, 1996; Ferguson, 1994; Hatch, 1996; Putnam, 1996; Van Maanen, 1996; Wicks & Freeman, 1998). Questions such as "Who is the subject of organizational theories?" and "What is represented and what is not represented in organizational theorizing?" can now be asked as issues to be resolved in the textual configurations themselves (Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Nkomo, 1992). Perhaps more important, these questions have given way to different forms of writing theory and have allowed different theoretical "voices" to emerge. The postmodern turn has opened "the margins" of organization studies to be "written" by and for others whose theoretical voices have seldom been represented in our scholarship (Calás & Smircich, 1991; Shallenberger, 1994).

We expand the above reflections as follows. First, we locate the entrance of postmodern perspectives into organization studies during the late 1970s and early 1980s, connected to writings about the multiparadigmatic status of the field. Second, we review key preoccupations of postmodern theorizing and observe the ways in which they are evident in organization studies. By referring to several examples, we point to the contributions that postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives have brought to organization studies as the field stands today. Finally, we consider four contemporary approaches to organizational theorizing and their current and potential contributions to organization studies in light of the issues raised above: (1) feminist poststructuralist theorizing, (2) postcolonial analyses, (3) actor-network theory, and (4) narrative approaches to knowledge. These, we claim, may be considered as heirs (apparent) of the postmodern turn, each offering specific contributions to organizational theorizing after postmodernism and each not yet sufficiently materialized.

Before we proceed, we must acknowledge that we are writing from a North American and business school location. This placement no doubt influences how we understand some issues in organization studies. As well, as we write these lines and the rest of the article, we are struggling with the same problems of representation and form we discuss below as postmodern topics. At the most immediate level, writing this article as a commentary and a chronicle of some recent past and current issues in the field is writing in a modernist form that betrays our assumed location as postmodern intellectuals. As commentators, we are taking the authorial position as narrators of this "knowledge." At the same time, the act of writing for this particular journal, under the premises of this special issue, already defines some limits of our writing. We can also anticipate for our readers that we have not found a "way out" of these multiple contradictions, but, as postmodernists, we were certainly not expecting that we would.

Our modest hope is that, through this article, we will be able to sustain a conversation through a different kind of engagement that does not require arguing for the superiority of our views in relation to those of others. In Barbara Townley's words, following Foucault, some of what this entails is for authors to specify the aspects of the world with which they are trying to engage and why; to situate knowledge and so de-reify it; to speak in a way that takes ownership of their arguments; and to be accountable for the choices made. "It posits a different basis of engagement, one which is reciprocal not hierarchical. It is a call for writing in friendship" (Townley, 1994b: 28).

POSTMODERNISM AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Much has been written about postmodernism and poststructuralism in the social sciences (Bauman, 1992; Featherstone, 1988; Rose, 1991; Rosenau, 1992), and we cannot review it all here. Our aim, instead, is to highlight those arguments and issues, such as *the incredulity toward metanarratives, the undecidability* of *meaning, the crisis of representation, and the problematization* of *the subject and the author,* that were particularly influential in organizational theorizing as it turned into more reflective knowledge making.

A central concern of those who started to experiment with the postmodern turn in organization studies is what Lyotard identifies as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (1979, quoted here from English edition, 1984: xxiv). For Lyotard, the modernist view about the universality of the true, the good, and the beautiful is no longer tenable. Other competing views have appeared that question not only the veracity of the Enlightenment philosophies but also their

"grand theory" style of theorizing that promotes a unitary vision of science and society.

Lyotard, following Wittgenstein, positions current conditions of knowledge as "language games." As long as these games are played with the intention of annihilation or cooptation, they force an agreement toward a dominant view where there can be none. Rather, Lyotard proposes, legitimate knowledge under postmodern conditions can only reside in "petit récits." Knowledge can only be produced in "small stories" or "modest narratives," mindful of their locality in space and time and capable of adapting or disappearing as needed. If recognized as the creation of small stories, *theorizing* thus becomes a temporary language game that assumes responsibility for its rules and its effects as power.

Lyotard's "story" has an uncanny resemblance to how conditions of knowledge in organization studies were changing at the time. At about the time of his writing, early arguments appeared about the existence of multiple ontological and epistemological paradigms in organizational analysis (e.g., Astley & Van de Ven, 1983; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Evered & Louis, 1981; Ritzer, 1975, 1981), and strong interest surfaced in organizational culture and symbolism, as well as qualitative research (e.g., *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 1979, 1983; Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984; Carter & Jackson, 1987; Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1985; Gray, Bougon, & Donellon, 1985; *Journal of Management,* 1985; Pondy, Frost, Morgan, & Dandridge, 1983; Turner, 1986). The dominant paradigm—positivism, functionalism—was challenged by other language games: interpretive and critical perspectives.

Nonetheless, the appearance of competing paradigms, per se, does not change the conditions of knowledge from modern to postmodern. Insofar as each paradigm remains as a competing view in the search for foundational knowledge, it grounds a whole edifice of universal understanding that transcends culture and history (e.g., Bernstein, 1983; Chia, 1996). Multiparadigmatic awareness simply facilitates a still very modern, metatheoretical discussion around these issues: What philosophy of knowledge is behind "truthful knowledge"? Each paradigm is a *foundational claim* (a metatheory) about the possibility of true knowledge. Each offers a way toward a more complete understanding or explanation of the world in which we live. Each claims to be the best view of the world "out there." None accounts for the language game in which they all may be embedded.

Edging Toward Reflexivity

Yet, these shifting conditions in organizational knowledge anticipated the appearance of postmodern theorizing as several scholars in the field turned their gaze inward. Conversations about which paradigm was the most truthful or most legitimate transformed into a more reflective concern. What was the significance of having multiple paradigms in organization studies? As we see it, the importance of this turn is that it encouraged reflexivity regarding the "knowledge-making" enterprise itself (e.g., Whitley, 1984).

First, self-reflective awareness of *the researcher/theoretician's complicity in the constitution of their objects of study* started to appear. Kuhn's (1962) focus on scientific communities and changes in scientific paradigms became particularly influential. More important, organizational culture and symbolism research, with its phenomenological orientation, needed to account for the researched/researcher relationship, given its social constructionist ontological positioning (Mirvis & Louis, 1985; Peshkin, 1985; Van Maanen, 1988). Possibly, it was this scholarship that pointed most clearly at the constitutive character of the research activities in relation to the phenomena they were purported to study. Studies in the sociology of science also played an important role in this regard (e.g., Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Woolgar, 1988).

Second, arguments about the interested nature of knowledge making also surfaced (Connell & Nord, 1996; Rao & Pasmore, 1989; Stablein & Nord, 1985). The so-called paradigm wars is a good indication of these, for what is at stake is not simply the adequacy of particular theories but how the truthfulness behind those theories gets constituted by the different "contenders" (Donaldson, 1996; Hinings et al., 1988; Martin & Frost, 1996; *Organization,* 1998). Further, the pragmatics behind reducing the number of "acceptable" paradigms has been debated. Notice, for instance, that recent writings by Pfeffer (1993, 1995), Van Maanen (1995a,b), and McKinley and Mone (1998), among others, are not so much about which paradigm is right. Rather, they are

about why it is good for organization studies to limit—or not—their proliferation and how to do such a thing. All of these actions, and the writings that exemplify them, represent a reflexive understanding of *theorizing in organization studies as a political process rather than merely as a neutral, truth-seeking operation* (e.g., Cannella & Paetzold, 1994; Kaghan & Phillips, 1998; Martin & Frost, 1996; Scherer, 1998; Spender, 1998).

Another reflexive concern appeared as well. How does the specific constitution of our writings—their textuality—define the nature of our knowledge? *What are "the poetics" of knowledge making* (e.g., Astley, 1985; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997; Hatch, 1997; Jermier, 1985; Martin, 1992; Martin & Frost, 1996; Mauws & Phillips, 1995; Van Maanen, 1988)? In our view, this latter concern completed the required cycle of reflection, but it was the emergence of all these reflections, *taken together,* that marked a radical departure in knowledge making within the field. An ontological/epistemological *leap* had happened which opened the space for postmodern "theorizing." Anyone interested in this leap could observe, for example, differences between the special forum on theory building in the *Academy of Management Review* of 1989 and the same journal's special issue on new intellectual currents in 1992. Organization studies was, indeed, experiencing "the postmodern condition."

From this perspective, postmodernism offered an important contribution from the humanities to contemporary social sciences and organization studies (pace Zald, 1996). *The contribution was that of an occasion for reflexivity that allows for a critical examination of the way modern (paradigmatic or foundational) knowledge has been constituted, without needing to provide for an alternative knowledge.*

Poststructuralism: "No Solid Grounds" for Knowledge?

Nonetheless, reflexivity alone may not change much, especially if the reflections are expressed unreflectively. That is, at the very moment the complicity of language in the constitution of knowledge becomes part of the "conversation," the "tone" of the conversation has to change. The issue becomes how to articulate the operations of modern knowledge without being caught in unreflective representational webs that hint of modernity. Poststructuralism provided approaches for such articulations. It is through the tenets of poststructuralism that organization studies, like many other social sciences, anthropology (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), sociology (Rosenau, 1992), psychology (Shotter & Gergen, 1989), political science (Connelly, 1993), and even economics (McCloskey, 1986) have been able to fully engage in the postmodern conversation.

Relationships between poststructuralism and postmodernism have been expressed in several different ways (see, for instance, Bauman, 1992, and Foster, 1983). For our purpose we prefer Huyssen's understanding of poststructuralism as a theory of modernism at the stage of its exhaustion:

> But if poststructuralism can be seen as the *revenant* of modernism in the guise of theory, then that would also be precisely what makes it postmodern. It is a postmodernism that . . . in some cases, is fully aware of modernism's limitations and failed political ambitions (1986: 209).

However, we would like to further specify the importance of the "post" in poststructuralism. Huyssen's reference to poststructuralism as a theory that highlights modernist exhaustion refers to expectations in French humanities and social theory that a new paradigm derived from structural linguistics—that is, structuralism—would provide the strong "scientific status" that the human sciences had lacked. This hope arose from the view of language offered by Saussurean linguistics (Saussure, 1916; Gadet, 1989).

Semiology, as Saussure's *science of signs* became known, displaced linguistic approaches that focused on substance or meaning to focus on language as *a structural system of relations and differences. Independence of structure from meaning* while still accounting for their *relationship* became a general structuralist insight that transferred from linguistics to several other disciplines during the 1950s and 1960s. From anthropology (Levi-Strauss) to literature (Barthes) to philosophy (Althusser), structuralism offered a very specific response to the excessive subjectivism and intentionality of phenomenology and existentialism, as well as to the excessive social and economic determinism of conventional Marxism. However, the expectations of scientific legitimation to be achieved by structuralism in the human sciences were never

fully realized. Scientific interest soon gave way to another understanding of structuralism, known as poststructuralism.

Poststructuralist analyses demonstrate how signification occurs through *a constant deferral of meaning* from one linguistic symbol to another. At its most basic, poststructuralist approaches suggest that there is no stable or original core of signification and, thus, no foundation, no grounding, and *no stable structure on which meaning can rest*. This insight affects, in particular, meanings that claim to be universal or that claim to be progressively moving toward universality, such as the Enlightenment conceptions of knowledge and science.

For example, consider searching for meaning in a dictionary that always refers you to another word, in a neverending movement from word to word and with no final meaning to be found to stop this process. From this example it is possible to rethink the common-sense understanding of a world of objects or notions existing independently of the linguistic symbols—*signifiers*—through which we address them. Rather, objects and notions—what we pay attention to—are always already mediated through signifiers and their capability to differentiate. There is no essence on which to ground meaning; there are only differences between meanings.

Quite profoundly, these ideas subvert all possibility of constituting legitimate knowledge in the modern (paradigmatic) sense. Modern knowledge (or theory) is presumed to represent some form of stable phenomena existing outside their representation. For instance, as we read a journal article, we assume that it represents phenomena that exist elsewhere, whether empirically observed or speculated upon. Yet, poststructuralist arguments contend that all we have as knowledge is the representation itself, such as the materiality of the text in which "knowledge" is written. Further, textual representations have no fixed meanings. The text is constituted in signifiers whose referents could always slide to other referents. Words could always be reinterpreted through other words.

Modern knowledge also presupposes that even if disputes over interpretations occur, one always has recourse to the authority of the writer. One could always ask, "What were the author's intentions; what did he or she mean?" From a poststructuralist perspective, however, the notion of authorship is suspect as a repository of stable meanings. Authorship is suspect first on the matter of intention. Skepticism toward the author's intention derives from a postmodern critique of modern philosophy's notion of subjectivity. Modernist philosophy assumes that human beings are autonomous subjects, whose interests and desires are transparent to themselves and independent from the interests and desires of others. If one denies the autonomy of the "self," one may question whose intentions are represented in the author's text.

In poststructuralism "the author" is understood as embedded in a social context and in relation to others (e.g., a community of scholars). He or she is an "author-function" (Foucault, 1977), whose name merely operates to authorize another version of the tradition within that community. Thus, invoking "intention" mostly activates a chain of signifiers, which are the several authors and writings that stand behind that tradition. These signifiers, already interpreted and reinterpreted, may not have much to do with the actual body or possible intentions of the "the author" that stands now as the end of the chain. Rather, these multiple interpretations have already constituted the author. To underscore this point, consider, for example, the function of citations in the constitution of theory and the multiple interpretations that have been imputed to the works of often-cited authors.

For poststructuralism, the position of the author is also in question in relationship to meaning. Insofar as the author is creating his or her work for others, the minute the work leaves the author's hands it becomes a public document whose status as work stands only in relationship to the possibility that it will be read. The document is meaningful only because it can be read by others, and once this happens, the author becomes just one interpreter among other readers. Even if the author were to converse with readers in order to clarify what he or she meant, that in itself would constitute another text—also subject to more interpretation. Think of the multiple texts that are produced by commentaries about any author's work, including the author's responses to those commentaries. Rather than putting an end to interpretation about the meaning of the original text, recourse to the author produces more and newer meanings.

Despite all these speculations, one may contend, we are surrounded by meaningful texts of knowledge, whose authors gain accolades for

their ideas—ideas that may be put into practice in the "real world." How is this possible, if all that constitutes such knowledge is unstable language, illusory representations, and author-functions? This question brings us back to another issue regarding the operations by which signification is attained. As discussed above, the basic linguistic insight that gave way to structuralism, and later to poststructuralism, was that language is a system of differences. If we observe *how* we say what we say, we are always making choices between the words we write or speak and those we do not write or say but that are "the other" (i.e., the difference) of what we are saying. For instance, right now as we write these marks on the page, we are trying to construct something meaningful for a particular community of readers. We do this by leaving behind—by leaving unwritten—a series of other possible marks that may not (yet) belong to this community.

It is interesting to observe which marks become expressed and which do not. The unexpressed ones also constitute our text by their absence, since they make it possible to put a limit—to contain—what we are saying. In this way it is possible to consider how *fixing signification* occurs. Fixing signification—the operation that permits asserting the truthfulness of our expert texts and authors—occurs as what is said conceals its other—that is, what is not said. In other words, as we (any of us) write, we engage in a linguistic play that eventually constitutes a hierarchical arrangement: that which is visible (and that appears in the text as self-sustaining) and that which the visible makes invisible (but without which the visible cannot appear).

And so, as we make choices to render this text readable for a particular community, we are also not saying several other things that may make it unreadable for that community. As we suppress these words and use others, we contribute to the perpetuation of this cycle: we are closing the possible vocabulary of the field, and we are excluding other meanings. Thus, at the most basic and immediate, it is possible to see how the stabilization of meaning is constituted within *a system of power relations—a system of inclusion and exclusion—which defines as acceptable or not the marks that will appear on the page as knowledge*. We all, as we try to signify, participate in the activation of these power relations. Who we are, how we know ourselves, what we say to others, and so on—it is all the production and effects of power/knowledge.

In the paragraphs of the past few pages, we have been paraphrasing several themes that have become well known in the parlance of postmodernism and poststructuralism: *the end of metanarratives, the undecidability of meaning, the crisis of representation, the problematization of the subject and the author*. Each of them and their relationships to one another point to the operations of legitimating knowledge and theory, which are constituted through an unstable system of signification. Our "common sense" of knowledge production is no common sense at all, but a lot of hard work for controlling signification.

Equally important, and perhaps less frequently admitted, is that these issues are also linked with the institutional politics of knowledge making. As noted by Lyotard, the question of language in the constitution of knowledge is not only a question of aesthetics or epistemology. It is also a question of the relations between the institutions that define what knowledge is and the language through which knowledge gets made. The reflexivity over the constitution of knowledge that permeates the postmodern condition has helped to articulate these relationships. Poststructuralism has contributed to showing, however, that these relationships are neither determined by some structural imperative nor defined by some higher order of power or authority. Rather, they occur as we all continue to signify and resignify our social milieux—over and over again.

Poststructuralist writings bring forward these issues, not through commentary in "plain language," as we are doing (or trying to do) here, but, rather, by violating the norms and destabilizing how and what is possible to say. In Lyotard's words,

> The text [the postmodern writer] writes, the work he [sic] produces, are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged . . . by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. . . . Hence, the fact that work and text have the characters of an *event* (1984: 81).

Postmodern Organization Theorizing

Postmodernism and poststructuralism are now well represented in organization studies. In

several books, articles, and book chapters scholars *describe* these intellectual tendencies and *discuss* how they might perform and what might be the implications of their performance (e.g., Baack & Prasch, 1997; Boje, Gephart, & Thatchenkery, 1996; Burrell, 1988; Calás & Smircich, 1997a; Cooper, 1989; Cooper & Burrell, 1988; Hassard, 1993; Hassard & Parker, 1993; Jackson & Carter, 1992; Jeffcutt, 1993; Kilduff & Mehra, 1997; Kreiner, 1992; Letiche, 1992; Linstead, 1993; Schultz, 1992). As important as these are for familiarizing our scholarly community with the primary ideas behind the postmodern, we are particularly indebted to poststructuralist *analyses*—works and texts with the character of an *event*—for challenging the field to think and do differently. By way of illustration, we have selected articles that represent *genealogical analyses,* following Foucault's work (1979, 1980), and *deconstructions,* inspired by Derrida's work (1974, 1982), for these are the approaches that appear more often in organization studies. We will highlight how these examples perform as poststructuralist analytics within these two different approaches.

We are aware that we are walking a very thin line here. Singling out these "exemplar works" is also an exclusion of others that perform equally well. At the same time, we would be further "fixing signification" if our commentaries were to be read as making the case that these are examples to follow, rather than as encouragement for others to write outside the margins. Perhaps more dangerous, some may expect that we would articulate a "method": how to do genealogies or deconstructions. However, although there are certain aspects of these analyses that could be called methodological, the issue of method as a guarantee of getting the right data to prove a point is, precisely, part of the modernist logic that poststructuralism addresses. To clarify, the issue is not that in these analyses "anything goes," because they are indeed very carefully crafted textual arguments; rather, the issue is that these analyses are crafted in relation to the specific critique they want to raise, and, as such, they are exercises of the theoretical imagination. Common denominators, such as theory and method, conceptual or empirical, are not applicable to these kinds of writings. Thus, readers beware that we might not tell you what you might expect.

Genealogical analyses. Foucault's genealogies are a "history of the present," which traces connections among the arbitrary rather than the intentional, the accidental rather than the planned, in the historical constitution of contemporary practices. These connections denaturalize everyday activities and institutions that we take for granted. At the same time, the connections are not presented as determined by, say, the dominant over the dominated, as a critical theory analysis would do. Rather, they are presented as webs of practices, discourses, and institutions that have been adopted, imitated, and transformed to the point that they become knowledge and common sense and are repeated by many without recollection of their original purpose—thus, the notion of power/knowledge.

For instance, one may ask, "What do a prison observation tower and total quality management (TQM) practices have to do with one another?" (e.g., Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992). Or, one may ask, "What does a population census have to do with HRM practices?" (e.g., Townley, 1993). In both cases one may answer that the prison's tower and the census have contributed to the appearance of a particular kind of *contemporary subjectivity.* It is only because we, in our society, take for granted such understanding of "self" that it is conceivable to us that there is anything normal about HRM or TQM.

Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) retell the story of just-in-time (JIT) management and total quality control (TQC) management not as advanced development of more efficient production practices but in relation to the surveillance logic of Bentham's 1700s panopticon. Foucault (1979) describes the panopticon as a tower in the center of a prison, with cells built around it. From this tower the guard could always observe without being observed. Key here is that the cells would always be backlighted in relation to the tower so that prisoners would behave because they could not tell whether the guard was there or not. As Foucault notes, the panopticon was only a very concrete case among many others following the logic of surveillance, which encouraged people to exercise self-discipline, whether the disciplinarian was observing them or not.

Tracing this logic to contemporary organization practices that are claimed to give workers more control over their work, Sewell and Wilkinson argue that JIT and TQC make the workers more visible to the control of the organization,

while making the mechanics of control more invisible. The more open architecture of the plant, the team work that creates a certain kind of peer pressure, the apparent decentralization that is at the same time displaced to more detailed instructions and computerized monitoring—all these have substituted for the hierarchy, the supervisor's gaze, and any buffering (e.g., inventories or down time) from or through which workers were once able to "hide." Throughout these changes, power also has become more dispersed and invisible.

But, aside from the panopticon, prisoners were also made docile through a more immediate disciplinary practice: a codification of knowledge that, like a census, permitted their distribution into classes, making them more governable by others and by themselves. Thus, a prisoner classified as more dangerous was likely to be subjected to more frequent observation and made more self-aware that such might be the case. In Foucault's words, "Disciplines characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale, along a norm, hierarchize [sic] individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate" (1979: 223; also quoted in Townley, 1993: 530).

Townley (1993) analyzes HRM from this perspective. Her work takes the reader on a tour of the common sense behind HRM (see also Townley, 1994a), emphasizing the connection between Foucault's investigations and HRM as an academic discipline and as a practice of power relations in the workplace. In very minute detail she provides a genealogy of the emergence and development of personnel practices as devices that, like the census, had no clear logic behind them, other than a belief in the *classificatory and normalizing power* of modern science.

Townley defamiliarizes HRM so that it can be observed as a very strange set of practices that simply accumulated over time, while becoming more *believable* as they became more specific regarding their ability to transform individuals—their minds and bodies—into "subjects of (the) discipline." Like the census, HRM makes us believe that we can be told apart, as well as believe in the possibility of being distributed to where each of us belongs. Because of these beliefs, we are willing to behave in certain ways and not others, and we hope that those behaviors will take us where we aspire to go. Like the prisoners, we are watching over "our selves" to ensure we are on our best behavior.

This very short excursion into Foucauldian genealogies, via two organizational studies articles, also illustrates genealogy's relationship to poststructuralism, as discussed above. Genealogies destabilize meaning; they give us another way to think about our common sense without pretending that the genealogical story is the best story. As distinct from "history"—a narrative of origin, cause, and effect with fairly clear directional arrows—genealogies show that history is possible only because we do not tell ourselves other stories that would make the logic of origin, cause, and effect suspect. Genealogies also decenter "the subject" that we believe "we are" in relation to our institutions. Rather than being the origin, our subjectivity is embedded as producer and effect of a complicated network of narratives and practices, sometimes more visible than others and always more unstable than we may think.

Other excellent examples of analyses inspired by Foucault's genealogies include Du Gay and Salaman (1992), on consumer culture; Sakolsky (1992), on labor processes; Pye (1988), Knights (1992), Willmott (1992), Jacques (1996), and Jacobson and Jacques (1997), on management knowledge and managerial practices; Fox (1989), on management learning; and Hollway (1991), on organizational behavior.

Deconstruction. Jacques Derrida's writings partake of poststructuralist sensibilities regarding meaning, representation, and authorship, as discussed before. However, his approach is quite different from Foucault's. The historiography that characterizes much of Foucault's work is not present in *deconstructions*. Rather, deconstructions are philosophical meditations delineated in very close readings of particular texts. These readings attend to the language in the text and to those areas where language betrays itself. For example, deconstruction often pays attention to what authors put "on the margin," such as footnotes that are set aside as not integral to the central point of the text. Yet, it is usual to find the main text contradicting its central points exactly on these marginal spaces. And, thus, in characteristic reversal, the margin becomes the center (of attention) in Derrida's analyses. At the same time, the style of deconstruction is not conventional criticism, since that would imply that the critic "knows better" (that

he or she has foundational knowledge) than the writer whom the critic is criticizing. Rather, deconstruction disassembles textuality to show how, despite careful control of textual representations, language always exceeds the writer's control.

Deconstructive analyses follow certain general "rules." They identify areas of the text where a particular word or phrase is privileged as central to the meaning of the text. The analyst looks for "another term"—an opposite—the privileged term may have concealed, and brings that term to view. This operation decenters the supposedly self-sustaining central term. Eventually, the analyst makes both terms undecidable so that other meanings could be constituted over the text. For instance, we wrote in the first sentence of this section the word "partake." As we look for synonyms in our computer's thesaurus, we find that it means both share and divide. As we contemplate these two meanings, what is it that we are saying? That deconstruction comes together with others into the fold of poststructuralism to share with that intellectual community? Or that deconstruction disjoins the intellectual tendencies known as poststructuralism such that there are no common grounds to form a community? Or is it both?

Martin Kilduff's (1993) "Deconstructing *Organizations*" is an excellent and very sophisticated illustration of this approach in organization studies. His rereading of this famous book shows how the text works to position itself as filling a void in the literature. In this particular instance, the text registers complaints about Taylor's scientific management and claims to substitute the mindless mechanical worker with a rational decision maker. Yet, Kilduff soon focuses on the play of *presence and absence* identified by Derrida as a necessary operation in the composition of a credible text (whether literary, scientific, or any other genre). Kilduff shows how March and Simon exclude previous writing, such as the Hawthorne Studies, that offers other conceptions of working people. In Kilduff's words,

> *Organizations* makes no mention of Roethlisberger and Dickson's (1939) definitive account of 12 years of experimental work. To acknowledge the existence of this text would be tantamount to admitting that the gap MS claim that they are hoping to fill has already been plugged (1993: 16).

Kilduff emphasizes how *Organizations* always returns to what it denies. The textual production of the rational decision maker is positioned as the opposite of Taylor's employee as machine. Yet, the deconstruction shows how the text both denounces and celebrates the machine model to finally reinscribe the hierarchical model of the organization. *Organizations'* move has been to simply substitute one mechanical notion of work with another, through the language of "programs," such that the worker continues to be represented as incapable of handling anything but simplification.

Although not as popular as the analyses based on Foucault's work, deconstructions have appeared in texts of accounting (Arrington & Francis, 1989; Cooper & Puxty, 1994; Nelson, 1993), information management (Beath & Orlikowski, 1994), marketing (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Fischer & Bristor, 1994), and organization theory, more generally (Boje, 1995; Calás, 1993; Calás & Smircich, 1991; Cooper, 1986, 1989; Gergen, 1992; Martin, 1990; Martin & Knopoff, 1997; Mumby & Putnam, 1992).

Now, what is the value of all this to organization studies? We argue that the problematization of foundational theorizing posed by poststructuralist analyses offers pause and a good space for reflecting over the constitution of knowledge in any disciplinary field. In particular, poststructuralist analytics permits us to think "the unthinkable," to move, as it were, "outside the limits," and to consider taken-for-granted knowledge-making operations under very different premises. At their most startling, these analyses promote a temporary state of "disbelief," which can make us conceive of knowledge and knowledge making as a very different enterprise altogether—"the end of innocence" in Flax's (1992: 445) words. Genealogical analyses, offering very detailed historical documentation of what otherwise may have become naturalized, offer important ways to rethink current issues in the organizational literature. Genealogies will not result in better theories if judged under instrumental premises. What genealogies do best is to reposition conventional wisdom and to show how what passes as knowledge is an entanglement of power relations, in which many are implicated. From this perspective there is no way out of power/knowledge. That is, as we are all "effects" of the power of discourse, we all move from one dis-

cursive network to another, always producing power relations. Genealogies, nonetheless, do offer possibilities for *resisting* theories (i.e., not recognizing "our selves" in certain discourses of knowledge) and, thus, for reconceiving a theory or a research area in unexpected ways, bringing different insights into the field.

Similarly, deconstructions, as close readings for understanding the constitution of textual knowledge, work on the blind spots that we all—readers and writers—are *unable to control* as we write theory. We may be surprised or irritated to read academic papers that, for example, analyze marketing's notion of exchange relationships as pervaded by power relations and patriarchy (Fischer & Bristor, 1994); that demonstrate how charismatic leadership in organization studies is a surrogate for bureaucracy (Calás, 1993); that reveal how a systems development text ostensibly advocating user friendliness reinscribes relationships of control and dependency (Beath & Orlikowski, 1994); or that demonstrate the "great books" of the field of management to be complicit in exclusionary knowledge practices (e.g., Calás & Smircich, 1991; Martin & Knopoff, 1997). We might think these authors are excessive in their interpretations. Yet, deconstructive readings attend to language so carefully, it is hard not to read differently, or listen differently, after one's usual way of interpreting/reading has been so unsettled. The effectiveness of much of this work comes from *the effects* it has on us as we experience familiar language as unnatural. At a minimum, we would say, deconstructive writings provide an approach for learning and teaching the inner workings—the mode of existence—of conventional theorizing—historically, rhetorically, and politically—and for showing how we are all existing "inside" these.

In general, postmodern analyses help us to understand the exclusions on which writers need to rely in order to represent "positive knowledge." More important, they make us all more aware of those exclusions and of the possible consequences of apparently innocent textualizations. By decentering "true knowledge," these analyses can help us accept the possibility of "other knowledges," which otherwise may be ignored or deemed illegitimate—that is "marginal." Further, a particularly important contribution of theorizing done in this fashion is that it provides a different language with which to address conventional issues (e.g., Gergen, 1992). As such, it makes it possible to "see" conventional theories in a different light and, further, to write knowledge in a different form.

On a more "practical" note, perhaps the most significant for us academics in the business of knowledge making, poststructuralist analyses can work directly on the taken for granted of the institutions in which we labor—that is, "the house of knowledge." Both historically and rhetorically, the arguments that we hear today about "the way it is" in the university (e.g., D'Aveni, 1996) require close analyses to show that "the way it is" is not necessarily so (e.g., Bensimon, 1994); "it" can be interpreted otherwise. We all, as organizational scholars, are in an excellent position to genealogize and deconstruct the "logics" of our institutions, for the construction of institutions is the primary object of our theories. In the process of doing so, all of us would be learning how to teach others to do the same for their own organizations: an immediate integration of theory and practice, if ever there was one.

In our view there is still much work to be done in organization studies through postmodern analytics, but perhaps it is now too late. Some commentators consider that postmodernism has become at least partially exhausted (e.g., Eco, 1992; Kaplan, 1988; Leitch, 1996; Parker, 1993). Thus, organizational studies may have gone past the "post," with very few achievements. Not too many writings in organization studies have actually engaged in the *serious play* intended by these analyses, especially when it comes to extending the consequences of the reflexivity so achieved. We even wonder up to what point the "post" has become a career maker for traditional knowledge-making bodies, and up to what point it has become a way to reclaim the field for marginal voices to speak. Still, the possibility of asking and trying to answer these questions could be an important legacy of the "post" for organization studies, as it seems to be for other fields. Further, it is conceivable that the major contribution of postmodernism is, precisely, that it has become partially exhausted, for this exhaustion has opened space for other theoretical approaches to appear.

RECLAIMING GROUND: AFTER THE "POST" IN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORIZING

Despite concerns about unstable grounds for theory, or perhaps because of them, the postmodern turn has provoked new theoretical approaches in the social sciences and the humanities, such as feminist poststructuralist theorizing, postcolonial analyses, actor-network theory, and narrative approaches to knowledge. Some of these approaches are responses to limitations in postmodernism. Others, bearing a family resemblance and benefiting from the insights of poststructuralism, are reclaiming some "ground" on which to build their projects. Yet, most of these approaches are specific in their critiques of postmodern analyses for their lack of strong political engagement and for their remoteness from "the real world."

Be they in support of or distinct from postmodern analytics, these theoretical tendencies share the following concerns. First, they all emphasize the relationship between "power" and "knowledge" at the inception of "theory." That is, each of these approaches articulates relationships between those who do knowledge and the knowledge that gets made; each points at the subjectivities that get constituted through theory; and each takes seriously the politics of knowledge making and incorporates into their writings those reflective concerns. Second, they all share a preoccupation and an ambivalence about the way "other's knowledge/other knowledges" can be represented, while emphasizing the need to do so. The problems of representation and form—the poetics of knowledge making—become the focus of textual experiments.

Insofar as these are also concerns of poststructuralist writings, there may be not much difference between the "heirs" and their "parentage." However, here the family resemblance ends. These approaches also share ambivalence about the antiessentialist tenets of poststructuralism and the implications of these tenets for creating theories that could engage with the world "outside the text." Finally, each considers it necessary to adopt an ethical posture as part of the knowledge-making enterprise—as part of *writing* theory. At a minimum, they all ask, "Whose interests does theory serve? For whom is it good?" Such a posture would be difficult to sustain on more "shaky" poststructuralist grounds.

More generally, these theoretical tendencies create bridges between "the text" and "the world." However, the world they re-present may be very different from the one encountered by organization theory before postmodernism. Some of these writings may be classified as conceptual and others as empirical; however, these traditional definitions are difficult to maintain. Note that we continue to emphasize the term *analysis* since that is the focus of all these approaches. Their "evidence" may come from the words in another text, from a literature review, from ethnographic accounts, from questionnaires, from laboratory experiments, or from all of the above, and still others. Yet, they all use the evidence to produce interpretations and critical commentaries that denaturalize more conventional views and that may even bring about social activism. That is their theoretical posture. Below, we briefly review these approaches, emphasizing their current intersections with organizational theorizing.

Feminist Organizational Theorizing and Postmodernism

Ironically, feminist theorizing in organization studies may have gained momentum in the 1990s owing to the popularity, more generally, of poststructuralism (e.g., Calás & Smircich, 1992, 1997b; Calvert & Ramsey, 1992; Fondas, 1997; Hearn & Parkin, 1993; Martin & Knopoff, 1997; see also a new journal, entitled *Gender, Work and Organization*). Feminist theories are always political theories, regardless of the philosophies on which they stake their claims. Whether liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist, psychoanalytic, or so on, feminist theories have been mostly about how and why the exclusion or oppression of women happens and how to provide remedies for this situation (for recent reviews of this literature, see Alvesson & Billing, 1997, and Calás & Smircich, 1996). Several of these theories have been around for more than three decades without receiving much attention by organizational scholars. Specifically, despite the emphasis on gender in the women-in-management literature, most of this literature has skirted the issue of gender-specific theory development, and scholars have carried on their research agenda sustained by traditional organizational theories (Calás & Jacques, 1988).

Poststructuralism, however, opened the space for considering gender theoretically, independent from particular sexed bodies. The linguistic turn moved the concerns of feminist theory from the body of women to the body of the text, and the effects of this change were felt in organization studies. For example, one could now ask, "How is gender written in organization theory?" (e.g., Calás & Smircich, 1992) and pay (deconstructive) attention to how the language of our theories would construct understandings of the world that represented the interests and concerns of certain populations and not others, despite organization theories' mantle of neutrality (e.g., Martin, 1990; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). Equally important, it became possible to theorize "gender relations," to observe how both men and women, together, constituted "gendered conditions" that produced very entangled webs of power/knowledge.

Organization studies scholars may have been more welcoming of feminist poststructuralist analyses than of other feminist theory tendencies, but many feminist scholars outside of organization studies were not so accepting of the conjunctions of feminism with poststructuralism. The separation of "sex"—a biological marker—from "gender"—a social, discursive, and institutional construction—became suspected of weakening any political agenda written on behalf of women. The gendering of theories could result in an interesting and sophisticated academic exercise, but how would this contribute to fighting the oppression of "real people"? Was this not another elitist posture more typical of "the patriarchs"? Some, even more defiant, questioned why poststructuralist approaches were gaining ascendancy at the same time more critical feminist theories were, at last, taken seriously in the academic milieux.

In summary, the relationship between feminist theories and postmodernism has been, at best, uneasy. Poststructuralist feminists accept the merits of deconstruction and genealogies because they make explicit the devaluation of the feminine in "universal" theories and in discursive practices (e.g., Flax, 1987). In particular, they appreciate the ways in which the margins interrogate "the center" through these analytical approaches. The critics, however, point at the depoliticizing effects of these antiessentialist approaches when it comes to claiming agency and empowering representation. The problematics of the subject and the undecidability of meaning stand in the way of positive political alliances (e.g., Alvesson & Deetz, 1996; Nicholson, 1990).

These issues have not escaped the notice of organizational scholars interested in feminism and postmodernism. In a very powerful argument that deconstructs "organizational taboos," Joanne Martin (1992) embraces the "linguistic turn" and produces an incisive analysis of the traps in the speech of a CEO who claims to be sensitive to female employees. At the same time, she notices the limitations of deconstruction, and even of her own "reconstructions," if she were to stay simply at the level of the text. Thus, she reconnects concrete organizational and social issues with the deconstructed text. She notices how task segregation and gender pay inequalities become reified rather than alleviated by small organizational reforms, and she calls for "a fundamental realignment of government policies concerning both the family and the marketplace" (1992: 356). Also, she notices the complicity of her analysis in silencing other voices in her text, for she privileges the story of a high-ranking female employee. Deconstruction alone is not sufficient for analyzing "the intersections of gender and class with race and ethnicity" (1992: 354).

Concerns of this kind, of which Martin's reflections are a good example, are now possible to address. Several processual approaches to feminist theorizing have emerged from the encounters of socialist feminist theories, black feminism, and poststructuralism. These approaches share the critique of subjectivity in poststructuralism but concede to a less dispersed, socially constituted "subject position," enacted through historical and cultural locations, as well as through power relations. In these approaches scholars have reconsidered the separation of sex from gender in theorizing, concluding that the antiessentialist posture also permits inclusion of other forms of social oppressions in the analyses.

The intersections of gender, ethnicity, race, class, and sexuality figure prominently (e.g., Hurtado, 1989). The emphasis here is not simply on the bodies that constitute these intersections but on the subjectivities that get formed and transformed within these social markers. Further gender in these analyses is not about women anymore. One can now talk about "mas-

culinities" or about "queer theory" as productive analytical approaches for understanding specific conditions of different people in the world (Butler, 1990; Graham, 1996). This also applies to the conditions we help create in the world with our scholarship. The more general questions these texts address are as follows. How would the analyses help us think differently about those with whom we relate? How would writing about these intersections contribute to better understanding and changing oppressive relationships? But asking these questions is not intended to provide permanent and universal answers. Instead, the answers are little narratives, intended as interventions for changing specific oppressive conditions that may be experienced by some at the present.

Organization studies have already been inspired by some of these theoretical intersections (e.g., Bell, Denton, & Nkomo, 1993, on race and gender; Calás & Smircich, 1993, on gender, race, class, and globalization; Calvert & Ramsey, 1995, on whiteness, privilege, and gender; Collinson and Hearn, 1994, on working-class men and masculinities; Nkomo, 1992, on the racialization of theory; Shallenberger, 1994, on professionalism and sexuality; see also *Organization*, 1996). Thus, as one may assess, feminist theories more generally, and feminist critiques of postmodernism in particular, have contributed strong interdisciplinary theories that lend multiple theoretical lenses and methodological approaches to the study of organizations.

Postcolonial Analyses

These theoretical tendencies, now represented both in the humanities and in the social sciences, emerged directly from Third World scholars extending the insights of poststructuralism to its logical consequences (e.g., Bhabha, 1988; Radhakrishnan, 1996; Said, 1989; Spivak, 1988). If Western modern knowledges (i.e., the Enlightenment notion of knowledge and science) have silenced the voices of "the marginal"—"the others"—what would happen if those others were to speak back as "knowledgeable"? More directly, poststructuralism is, in general, a critique of Western epistemology as a system of exclusions. But poststructuralist analyses are also critiques of modernity *in* the West *by* the West and, of necessity, themselves exclusionary of other forms of knowledge.

At their most immediate, postcolonial (or, according to some, neocolonial) analyses share with feminist poststructuralist theorizing objections about the decentering of subjectivity and the problems of representation. But, in response, they pay attention first to the ways in which Western scholarship creates categories of analysis that, even at their most critical, are blind to their own ethnocentrism (e.g., Chambers & Curti, 1996). For example, even critical categories, such as gender, race, and class, may assume an unproblematic universalism—often associated with the idea of "a core humanity." What if categories such as class have no counterpart in other societies? What if race as a social marker is irrelevant? What if gender stands for a universalized "woman" who only exists, conceptually, as the body of certain women from the West?

Postcolonial critiques also extend to narratives of "origins" in Western theories. They may retell the story of "the other," who was already there from "the beginning," and who might have been excluded or devalued in the Western version of the theoretical "tale" through such markers as "traditional," "primitive," or "less developed." At the same time, these are not nostalgic narratives of a return to a better primordial world. Rather, these are closer to Foucault's genealogies, which give us a different "history of the present" (and its configuration in power/knowledge), as particular relationships between "the West" and "the Rest."

Further, in postcolonial studies scholars analyze the intersections of Western theories and Western institutions as a politics of knowledge. Concepts such as, for instance, modernization processes conceal other social formations and issues of value for the populations that these concepts claim to represent. Postcolonial studies counter these conceptualizations by offering analytical categories and representational approaches for the others to represent themselves in "their own terms." For example, conceptual notions such as hybridity and hybridization (García-Canclini, 1990; Pieterse, 1994) make both comprehensible and unique what "Western eyes" (Mohanty, 1991) often describe as "uneven development" or the "paradoxical modernization" of several Third World countries. "The border" and "borderlands," both as geography and as metaphor, have become productive spaces, rather than dividing lines, for theorizing compli-

cated subjectivities and social relations in response to dominant ideologies (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987; Saldívar, 1997). And "diaspora" and "displacement" have become articulations of the experiences of immigrants from "the rest to the West" and of the politics of ethnicity that evolve around issues of cultural and national identity (e.g., Gilroy, 1993).

Several of these approaches have addressed the issue of representation in regard to the location of the researcher. Different from arguments about subject position in feminist theories—where the scholar claims no more than to be able to speak from her or his own positionality—in postcolonial analyses researchers may first consider the position of privilege already occupied by the Third World scholar and, thus, his or her responsibility to use that space on behalf of others. Yet, she or he must also remember that in giving voice, she or he is silencing many other voices. Thus, a second representational move is on the question of silence. What other voices are there that the scholarly voice, no matter of what persuasion, cannot represent (e.g., Spivak, 1987)? Some experimental texts break the linear style with images, prose, poetry, and so on, which produce "interstices of silence" in the text (e.g., Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1989) in order to represent *the absence* of other voices.

As these paragraphs illustrate, poststructuralist concerns about meaning, representation, and subjectivity still surround postcolonial theorizations. Nonetheless, much of this work has been able to recover poststructuralist deconstructions with affirmative conceptualizations. Perhaps one of the most creative is "strategic essentialism" (Spivak, 1987), which promotes reclaiming the essential identity of a group as a temporary strategic gesture in the interest of agency for struggle, no matter how dispersed the identities of the members. Also, Haraway's (1985) concept of affinity has been invoked to signify the possibility of alliances among peoples who may not share a common heritage, ethnicity, gender, or so on, but who find themselves in agreement on certain critical issues that should be voiced. Who speaks for whom in this case is not the issue; the issue is that somebody has to be able to speak up for all in some cases. Further, by paying attention to popular culture, social movements, and testimonial writings, postcolonial theorists represent what other scholarly voices may be silencing, for, some argue, it is in these sites that particular configurations of identity, agency, and organization appear and transform under contemporary globalization processes (e.g., Alvarez, Dagnino, & Escobar, 1998).

What is the relevance of these analyses and conceptualizations for organizational studies? In our view, globalization processes, at their most conventional, belong in the province of our disciplines. Concerns with ethnocentrism in our "international" management theories have already been voiced (e.g., Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991). However, up to what point is scholarship in organization studies ready to accept "the other's" *strange knowledges*? For example, up to what point is the assumption of worldwide convergence in management knowledge an assumption that pays attention only to a cosmopolitan elite who is not that different? What differences are not represented in these assumptions? How many people in the world are left out of our theories? With what consequences?

Further, what is the complicity of Western organizational and international management theories with transnational institutions whose policies and practices impact the material conditions of millions of people in the world, both "at home" and "abroad" (e.g., Appadurai, 1990; Dirlik, 1994; Hall, 1996)? There is an increasing awareness that Western understandings of globalization, development, and the market are closely aligned with the interests of global capital—the same global capital to which organization theories attend and for which they speak. Yet, even "global capitalists" and such institutions as the International Monetary Fund are now ambivalent about policies they supported in the past and question their long-term impact on the survival of a reasonable capitalist world (e.g., Soros, 1998). How, then, could we think differently about these issues?

The stories we have written in much organization theory, our concepts and representations, no matter how global (or precisely because of this), represent the ways of thinking of certain peoples and not others. These theoretical representations have been profoundly implicated in blinding us to current global circumstances. Thus, if we are to really engage in a global conversation, postcolonial theories are an excellent place for us to start learning how to write in *theoretical voices* that allow spaces for "the

other" to "speak back" (e.g., Alvarado, 1996; Calás, 1992; Mir, Calás, & Smircich, 1999; Radhakrishnan, 1994).

Actor-Network Theory and After

Better known now by its acronym, ANT, actor-network theory first appeared in the social studies of science and technology (e.g., Callon, 1980, 1986; Latour, 1987, 1988a, 1993; Law, 1994), yet it has been transformed over the years and continues today to be debated (e.g., Callon, 1997; Callon & Law, 1995; Latour, 1997). As discussed more recently by Law (1997a,b; see also Law & Hassard, 1999), ANT has become an assemblage of modest stories whose narratives have changed from great stories with a chronological ordering to many small stories that form a pattern with no possible chronology. However, in Law's view, such is precisely ANT's current theoretical value, for, despite much trying, actor-network "theory" has never been able to coalesce into a coherent theoretical perspective in the modernist sense.

ANT origins are mixed, including semiotics/structuralism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology, to name a few, but one may find now in ANT some similarities with Foucault's notion of power/knowledge as power relations are produced through "actants" who perform the available discourses and practices. Even the notion of author-function may be invoked, except that in this case the "authors" are both human and nonhuman (e.g., Latour, 1988b). Concurrently, such notions as rhizomes, deterritorialization, nomadism, and the like in Deleuze and Guattari (1988) can be associated with the idea of "network" as a very dispersed and decentered chain of ongoing and mutant activities (e.g., Lee & Brown, 1994). Thus, "network" is approached as topography and as performance, rather than as a final or original state.

Early ANT comprised ideas of network as analytical structures, where the structure was actually constructed by the analyst. These structuralist and constructivist networks were materially heterogeneous and included social, technical, and natural actors. All elements of the network were actors, since they were capable of acting upon one another. Also, authors of early actor-network studies had more interest in understanding how things got centered, how they were drawn together, and how they were ordered as a network. More recently, scholars are paying attention to how things get both centered and decentered (e.g., Singleton, 1996) and to the movements and oscillations that occur. The concept of ontological choreography captures this latter idea (e.g., Cussins, in press).

ANT highlights at least two issues. First, the actor and the network are not just things out there to be seen or apprehended by the researcher. Rather, actor-network is in itself the conceptual frame—a way of understanding social and technical processes. Second, *thinking* in networks requires conceiving of relationships among things in particular ways. Some actor-network studies are also explorations of ways to develop a vocabulary for conceptualizing those relationships (e.g., Akrich & Latour, 1992). The ANT scholar conceives of networks as constituted by scripts. For instance, machines have scripts prescribing *roles* that others in the network must play. Yet, the network is precarious, for it takes much effort to maintain the "enrolment." Thus, from this perspective, networks are processes or achievements, rather than stable relations or static structures. *Translation* represents the network's moves (Callon, 1980; Law, 1997a).

It is difficult to describe ANT as a theoretical tendency without also emphasizing its methodological aspects. ANT is reflexive, because it both constitutes and describes its object of interest. The studies may be conducted through ethnographic research in a laboratory, for instance, but both the way "things out there" are looked at and the way they are reported back contribute to the constitution of those same things "in here." There is irony behind this. Critics of positivism, many social constructionists, and all poststructuralists would say that such is exactly what any other empirical study does. Yet, ANT scholars do not hide that such is the case. Rather that is their point of departure, as well as their end. ANT, thus, provides a very good way of telling stories about "what happens out there" that defamiliarizes what we may otherwise take for granted. Latour's (1996) *Aramis,* in which he tells a heterogeneous story of a technological project that includes the technology's "voice," and Bowker and Star's (1996) analysis of classification and standardization as a political project of technoscience are good recent examples in this regard.

These approaches are not much seen (yet) in organizational journals in the United States. However, ANT's theoretical tendencies and methodological arguments have been represented in organizational sociology and organizational studies in Europe for several years (e.g., Brown, 1992; Kaghan & Phillips, 1998; Latour, 1986; Lee & Brown, 1994; Star, 1995; see also http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/ant.html#ear for an excellent annotated bibliography).

If nothing else, ANT, with its focus on irreductionism and relationality, rather than facts and essences, may become a very useful exercise to counter conventional "theoretical tales" in organization studies. More immediately, as organizational studies face contemporary technologies in a reconfiguration of the time/space of organizations, as "the Web" and "virtuality" become part of our everyday mode of existence, and as our interactions with machines incrementally define our life experiences, ANT provides ways to navigate and represent these (dis)locations while displacing more conventional "organizational" thinking. In Law's words,

> How to deal with and fend off the simplicities implicit in a world in which: "Have theory, will travel" makes for easy intellectual and political progress. How to resist the singularities so commonly performed in the acts of naming and knowing. How to defy the overwhelming pressures on academic production to render knowing simple, transparent, singular, formulaic. . . . Well, the "after" in "actor-network and after" holds out promise (1997b: 7).

NOT QUITE AT THE END (OF POSTMODERNISM)

Discussing these three theoretical tendencies—feminist poststructuralist theorizing, postcolonial analyses, and actor-network theory—returns us to the opening theme in our account of postmodernism—the incredulity toward meta or master narratives—and to a continuing question of how *to write* legitimate knowledge in postmodernity. For Lyotard, and for many of the scholars discussed in the above sections, legitimate knowledge can only be written in small stories or modest narratives (see also Haraway, 1997), mindful of their locality in space and time and capable of disappearing as needed. Legitimate knowledge would be in the form of temporary language games, recognized as such—games that "assume" responsibility for their rules and effects as power. This leads to perhaps the most radical notion in all of this article. Should we not all start writing our theories differently? Should we not all explicitly recognize the textuality of knowledge making and become reflective narrators in/of our theoretical stories?

Whereas we would not argue that every organizational researcher should stop what he or she is working on and begin to do poststructuralist feminist theorizing, postcolonial analysis, or actor-network theory, we *would* like each of us to follow the example of these theoretical tendencies and problematize the constitution of our theories at their most immediate: in the way we write and the language we use.

How would those writings look? They would surely look different. Whether we are involved in ethnography or statistics heavy research, whether we are writing about institutional theory, population ecology, organizational justice, corporate mergers—whatever, no matter what topic or area or what methods we use—we are all producing orderliness in our writings, sequences of relationships (plots/story lines/models/cause maps), putting pieces together, picking and choosing to pay attention and ignore. No matter who "we" might be—men or women, from the Third World or not, trained in the sciences or the humanities or neither—in our writing we are fixing signification; excluding, including, concealing, favoring some people, some topics, some questions, some forms of representation, some values. Can we do our writing in a way that is "self-conscious" of our "choices," and, at the same time, can we recognize that we do not even exist as independent autonomous selves—that we are only products of multiple and competing discourses, and pretty lucky if we ever get to be author-functions? *And why ever would we want to write in such a different way?*

To someone, a reader who wishes to remain anonymous, it suggests an infinite regress—*as I think about myself thinking about my thinking . . . I'll be paralyzed.* In response, we can refer here to Karl Weick's suggestion in his "drop your tools" allegory for organization studies (Weick, 1996). As the story goes, some firemen in peril failed to drop their heavy tools in order to run unburdened. They perished in sight of safety. The message "drop your tools" ran counter to their practice and identity.

For us academics, one of our most important tools is writing—the key to success and identity. *Dropping my (most favored way of) writing, the tools I spent so many years learning how to use . . . I might be rendered speechless. Maybe that wouldn't be so bad, take a time out. . . . Are you kidding, slow down my production? Now that's a truly dangerous suggestion. Gotta publish more not less, standards are tightening, tenure pressure's increasing, gotta make full professor some day, and now there's even post-tenure review!*

Linda Putnam sets out the challenge of writing differently very well:

> Organizational researchers need ways to open up text for multiple readings; to decenter authors as authority figures; and to involve participants, readers, and audiences in the production of research. One venue for achieving these goals is to seek alternative ways of presenting research reports—ones that challenge conventional modalities, ground research in historical processes, promote reflexivity, and open up our text to an infinitude of meanings (1996: 386).

In other words, can we write in a way that "fixes signification" tentatively, leaving room for others? *Would it still be called research?*

Writing while incorporating undecidability of meaning, the crisis of representation, and the problematization of subject and author locates the moral responsibility of the scholar, who cannot claim innocence from the representational force that she or he brings to the text (Czarniaswka, 1995, 1997, 1998). It also means revamping our notions of authors-ourselves as agents, attending to the ways in which our *theoretical narratives* are embedded in institutions that write us as much as we write them. Along with Czarniawska, there have been others writing about narrative approaches to knowledge in organizational studies (e.g., Barry & Elmes, 1997; Deetz, 1996; Hatch, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1987; Putnam, 1996; Richardson, 1994; Van Maanen, 1996).

We know of some experimental writings that blur the boundaries between theory and method (e.g., Burrell, 1997; Calás, 1987; Goodall, 1989; Jacques, 1992; Richardson, 1998; St. Pierre, 1997) and some that present illusions of multivocality (Linstead, 1993; Linstead & Grafton-Small, 1992). Many of these draw an explicit thread between the exclusion of ethics and power relations in the language of our theories and the conventions of "writing theory," for *it is behind these conventions that the ethics and values of our institutions hide. It is behind these conventions that the interests of a few are presented as the reality of many.* One of our favorite attempts to bring the ethical closer to home is Denny Gioia's (1992) story of his employment as a recall manager for Ford Motor Co., in the era of Pinto fires. Shall a Pinto fire be represented in a sequestered photograph, or in the calculations of a cost-benefit analysis? Can we, should we, use our cherished theories to explain our own (in)action?

If we start writing and talking differently—what difference? *If we start writing and talking differently—what else is there?*

At the beginning of this text, we promised to present four contemporary approaches to organizational theorizing, the last being narrative approaches to knowledge. But as the reader may have gathered, this last approach—in this more or less self-exemplifying part of our text—as well as all the others, contains the message we most wanted to convey in this article, the approach we felt most compelled to write. How are the issues of representation and form implicated in sustaining the power relations behind our theories and our institutions? As we see it, finding ways to answer this question represents important work that we all can do past postmodernism.

We hope our many pages, written in friendship, have presented an optimistic and productive face for moving past postmodernism in organization studies. We have discussed the contributions of the postmodern turn as bringing reflexivity to our knowledge-making enterprise, as well as the contributions of poststructuralism through the analytics of Foucault's genealogies and Derrida's deconstructions. We have briefly discussed, as well, some contemporary theoretical perspectives that, influenced by postmodernism but also critical of some of its arguments, offer other positive conceptualizations and representational forms for organization studies.

One more general point, however, is that postmodernist, postfoundationalist perspectives *have already* touched many of us in organization studies. Perhaps some of us have been tourists in the land of postmodernism and may not wish to settle there permanently, but "we" have been "effected"—changed—by the meeting. We cannot erase the unsettling that has occurred because of these encounters. They have left traces in how we consider theory and ourselves.

Connell and Nord (1996) say that what has happened is that practitioners of organization studies are now more ready to accept uncertainty and to recognize that interests or values have been and continue to be major factors in shaping what constitutes knowledge in the field. We hope they are right.

We are also aware that it is possible to write these words now, and in this location, because our institutions also have been changing. The "postmodern conversation" has affected our journals, the curricula of our programs, and even the way we think about ourselves as scholars and educators. Some colleagues may still debate how to preserve "the purity of our knowledge," but if they look around, they will notice that, in the university, the boundaries between disciplines are already fallen. We all are effects and producers of the postmodern, and it is showing (e.g., Aronowitz & Giroux, 1994; Readings, 1996).

In summary, our whole text concerns the questions "Can we do theory differently? How do we do that?" In that sense, our aim toward relevance has been focused on "doing theory" as the specific practice of our own community, without a direct interest in articulating the content of theories for some other constituency. However, given the type of argument on which we have been focusing, this exercise has also been our way to call attention to the absences of certain voices and issues in our theories. Ours has been an argument about the "power(s)" of theorizing. How do we address and deploy the powers of our community? Under whose ethics, and under whose values, will we continue the practices of our institutions? These are questions that, in our view, organizational theorists cannot avoid addressing any further. Thus, at the end, ours is not a theory (or a proposition) intended to be tested; *it is the telling of a very small story* that we hope resonates with others.

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