

## **What Happened on the way to Postmodern?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

On the way to postmodern theory the revolution to reform modern capitalism fragmented into rhetoric-strands, while practice became ineffective. This article reviews three trends that contributed to this result while pointing possibilities for new qualitative research project in the fields of postmodern consumption, management and organization. The trends reviewed are postmodern fragmentation, late modern appropriations of postmodern moves, and emergent awareness of the dark-side of postmodern. The article concludes with possibilities for participatory research in ways that enact more postmodern forms of capitalist praxis. It is suggested that qualitative studies of postmodern praxis can be conducted; such as postmodern organizations that enact the dark-side of Biotechnology; consumer organizations, such as Blackspot and No Sweat that contract to non-sweatshop factories; and autoethnographic examples of how building a Harley-Davidson chopper is post-production and post-consumption.

### **Introduction**

**What is the postmodern approach to organizations?** There is no one approach (see Table 1). Postmodern approaches fragmented into naïve postmodern (calling late modern postindustrialism or complex/adaptive organizations postmodern); more radical approaches (Baudrillard & Lyotard's era-breaks with modernity & some of Foucault); more critical theory approaches (Jameson, Debord, & Best & Kellner, etc combine critical theory with postmodern theory). Then there are approaches I would call post-postmodern: Hybridity (Latour's thesis that we have never been modern, instead there is hybridity of discourses, mostly modern with some postmodern); dark side of postmodern (global reterritorialization, postmodern warfare, & Biotech Century).

**Table 1: Postmodern and Post-Postmodern Approaches to Organizations**

<b>Post-moderns</b>	Naïve	Bell; Bergquist	Confuses late modern postindustrialism & complex/adaptive organization with postmodern
	Radical	Baudrillard	Hyperreality; simulacra of culture
		Lyotard	End of grand narratives
		Foucault	Archaeology of knowledge; discipline & punish panoptic surveillance; then reverted to modern
	Critical	Jameson	Cultural logic of late capitalism
		Debord	Situationist International; accumulation of spectacle
		Best & Kellner	Postmodern Turn, & Adventure
		Boje	Unrepentant critical postmodernist
<b>Post-Post-Moderns</b>	Hybridity	Latour	Hyper-incommensurability of postmoderns
	Language Heteroglossia	Bakhtin	Polyphonic dialogism; stylistic dialogism; chronotopic dialogism; architectonic dialogism
	Dark Side	Hardt & Negri	WTO, IMF, G8, NAFTA, etc are postmodern networking control of global reterritorialization
		Bush & Neocons	Evangelical capitalism; Bush's Postmodern War II (Bush Sr. led 1 <sup>st</sup> one).
		Rifkin	Biotechnology Century

The naïve late modern appropriations of postmodern (add the confusion of postmodern with poststructuralism, i.e. Derrida is not postmodern), the more radical (era shifts) and theoretic critical-postmodern and post-postmodern (hybridity, language-heteroglossia, & the dark side), the result is polyphonic-fragmentation, bordering on cacophony.

**The postmodern (post-postmodern) dream became a nightmare in three ways!**

First, postmodern, after a spurting start in the fine arts jumped into the social sciences with excess expectation (Rosenau, 1992; Best & Kellner, 1991, 1997, 2001). Many thought that the postmodern era had arrived, and it was an ending to the predatory, exploitative, and unsustainable practices of the (late) modern era (Boje & Dennehy, 1993). The jump into various social sciences resulted in the fragmentation (or continued fragmenting) of postmodern theory into competing, an perhaps incommensurate factions: a celebratory postmodern that could not acknowledge the dark side of postmodern technology (Bergquist, 1993), an aesthetic one rooted in surrealism (Carr & Hancock, 2003), a postmodern science (Boje, 2001b), a naïve epoch-shift postmodernism that made predictions about an end to modernity that proved unsound (Clegg, 1990); a postmodern

theory that eschewed epoch-succession (Cooper & Burrell, 1988; Best & Kellner, 1993; Boje, Gephart & Thatchenkery, 1996), and a critical postmodern theory (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996; Best & Kellner, 1997; Boje, 2001b) that rejected epoch-shift, celebratory, and naïve postmodern in favor of a hybrid interrelationship with critical theory.

Second, late modern forms of capitalism kept appropriating ostensibly postmodern moves. For example, managerialists began to use the language of postmodernists (& poststructuralists) to generate models of managing and organizing that were called “postmodern” but offered less than democratic and ecologically unsustainable approaches. Nike ads would deconstruct its own hyper-consumerism, McDonald’s began selling salads while advertising its fast food as nutritious; even Wal-Mart wrapped itself in patriotism, and Americana, while intensifying its surplus value sweating of labor in its stores and subcontract sweatshops. Knowledge management, learning organization, and dialogue consulting offered up “knowledge workers,” “empowerment,” and “complexity” models that were purported to be postmodern, but were upon closed examination, a late modern manifestation of post-bureaucratic, post-Fordist, and post-Taylorist forms of surplus value extortion (Marx, 1867). Dialogue consulting is not the same as Bakhtin’s dialogic. Dialogue consulting is getting people together in one space and time to facilitate a consensus. Consensus is the death of dialogic plurality, as the many contending views (or ideologies) are herded into one. Nor does dialogic have to be in one space/time; in answerability, there is intertextual answering of past or anticipated speech acts.

Third, the dark side of decidedly postmodern turns or conditions has only recently become the subject of inquiry. For example, postmodern science while oriented to a wider considerations of ethics, ferments technologies such as biotechnology, genetic reengineering, cloning, etc. that have potentially dangerous consequences to human and non-human species survival (Rifkin, 1998; Boje, 1999; Best & Kellner, 2001). The kinds of virtual communities offered as an escape from the panoptic kinds of management and organizational surveillance have arguably led to more surveillance, and a deterioration of face-to-face relationship. The (virtual) screen has become a ubiquitous part of our existence; we are less able to unplug from computers, cell phones, or personal data organizers to have any direct relationship to other humans or to Nature. These new

technologies have been appropriated into forms of managerial surveillance; their liberatory potential from the drudgery of work is unrealized; distance education is being pursued as on par with face-to-face education.

This article expands upon these three trends, while pointing out possibilities for qualitative research into postmodern management and organizational praxis. This is followed by an exploration of possibilities to use participant observation and autoethnography to provoke more liberatory and critical postmodern praxis in late modern capitalism.

## **I. POSTMODERN FRAGMENTS**

I confess! I participated in celebratory and naïve postmodern movements. We wanted to end U.S. corporate exploitation of humanity and Nature we saw in systemic forms of modernity (TQM, Taylorism, post-Fordism), and bring about postmodern revolution (Boje, & Dennehy, 1993; Boje & Winsor, 1993). We assumed that the panopticon of modern corporate bureaucracy and the state could be succeeded by a postmodern management and organization.

As Parker (1997: 490-4) observed, we were “McPostmodern.” We did not give enough reflection or ironic play to the ways in which modern corporate power would appropriate every single postmodern move in order to expand the surplus value machine; We did not stare into Nietzsche’s abyss and appreciate the cyclic ways in which power sees to its own perpetuation by co-opting liberatory moves, emasculating them, rendering them attractions to enslave more workers, consumers or gamblers in McDonaldization, Wal-Martization, Disneyfication, or Las Vegasization. We did not see how our calls for deconstruction, delayering, and polyphonic (multi-voiced) participation in corporate governance could be subverted. We thought that storytelling research could be used to gain insight into the hybridity of pre-modern (surviving & mangled), systemic modern, and emergent postmodern discourses. We did not see how late modern multinational capitalism would continue to write the story we unwittingly participate in; We thought postmodern era was in sight; it was not.

Naïve postmodern approaches, especially in the field of organization complexity, envisioned a full retreat of modernity in the face of postmodern management and flexible

forms of postmodern organization (Bergquist, 1993). As stated above, this includes episodic-shift models (Clegg, 1990) and my own polyphonic, bottom-up, democratic, post-bureaucratic, and post-Fordist approaches (Boje & Dennehy, 1993).

On the way to postmodern, consultants and managers mimicked the language of postmodern, Gurus such as Drucker (1957) called for “postmodern management” but confused post-Cartesian with liberatory democratic governance; Peters (1993) professed deconstruction in ways that centered control at the top. Both were suspicious of systemic modernism (Fordism & Taylorism) but did not appreciate the nuances of postmodern (or poststructuralist theory).

In short, there was a managerialist appropriation of postmodern moves, transforming them into superficial ways of promising workers ‘empowerment’ while not allowing worker-power to grow (Boje & Rosile, 2001).

Qualitative research into storytelling was in high demand by in managerial and naïve schools of postmodern, in order to capture the Holy Grail: move worker’s tacit knowledge (registered in story circles) into the management information systems; this is a direct fulfillment of Taylor’s dream: to make workers’ knowledge the property of the system and its reengineers. Complexity and postmodern theory have been strange bed fellows. For example Bergquist (1993) developed a postmodern theory of complexity devoid of any substantive review of postmodern philosophy, and without mention of power or hegemony of complexity managing and organizing. On the other hand, Cilliers (1998) uses poststructuralist and more radical postmodern positions of Derrida and Lyotard in the service of complexity science of organizations, ignoring critical postmodern theory. Cilliers is insightful and accomplishes extensions to Lyotard by theorizing a network of discursing agents to bound ethic with localized dialogic answerability. Bergquist’s (1993), by contrast, uses metaphoric complexity terms, relabeling them as postmodern, ignoring their philosophically or historical grounding.

A more naïve postmodern consulting does not seem possible. Yet, the dialogue consulting, the efforts to move dialogues among stakeholders into managerially-controlled consensus did just that. In naïve, guru, and complexity variants of postmodern, the concepts were truncated and reduced to a post-bureaucratic, neo-liberal, free market agenda of reducing the intrusion of unions, government, and community

accountability on the increasingly managerialist agenda. The rhetoric was postmodern, but the result was an illusion of participation and accountability. Supposedly liberatory technologies of virtual employment, for example, became pretexts for cyber-slavery. Cyber media became one more way to pull virtual wool over our eyes. Purportedly postmodern approaches, in sum, did not consider power, hegemony, irony, or how managing and organizing are embedded in the struggles of neo-liberal political economy; rosy Pollyanna promises did not materialize changes to predatory capitalism; debates over posturing replaced practice; posers ruled.

A more “critical postmodern theory” began to emerge. Critical postmodern combines neo-Marxist ‘critical theory’ with ‘postmodern theory’ (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996; Best & Kellner, 1997; Boje, 2001b; Mills & Simmons, 1995). While such a combination seems incommensurate, it turns out to have much synergy. It is also my current passion.

I see it as a way to move out of the pitfalls of celebratory and naïve postmodernism, and get to a way of deconstructing managerialism as well as predatory forms of capitalism, while holding on to the dream of a more liberatory capitalism, a more ethical capitalism. Here I mean ethics in a Kantian sense of factions seeking to make their ethics (or maxims) universal, and never succeeding. Exemplars include Jameson (1991), Best and Kellner (1997, 2001), and Firat and Dholakia (2004) who are critical of modern and postmodern approaches from a “critical postmodern” theory perspective, and seek to liberate an alternative ethics. Best and Kellner, for example, do not dismiss all grand narratives. Critical postmodern shies away from the more radical positions of Baudrillard (1983), all is simulacra or hyperreal, or Lyotard’s (1984), incredulity for *all* grand narratives; some grand narratives such as sustainability and liberation are necessary. Instead, of a complete postmodern era, there is a preference for looking at postmodern turns, of emergences of postmodern situations in the cracks of modernity.

Latour (1993) for example, in saying “we have never been modern” points to ways in which modern did not realize its enlightenment aims, and ways in which modern and postmodern have formed hybrid relationships. My own work with colleagues looks at ways to invoke more dialogical, rather than dialectic approaches (Boje, 2005a, b; Boje

& Rhodes, 2005a, b; Boje, Driver, & Cai, 2005; Boje, Enriquez, González & Macias, 2005). The value of a dialogical approach to qualitative research is to study the interpenetration of pre-modern, modern, late modern, postmodern, and post-postmodern discourses. A dialogical approach to qualitative research attempts to preserve a polyphony (multiple voices in the field, including the ethnographer's voice), looks at multiple stylistics (verbal, written, gestural, décor, etc. ways of telling), at the relativity of time/space (the multiplicity of ways people spatialize & temporalize), at the architectonics (interanimation of cognitive, aesthetic, & ethic discourses between individual, organization, & societal).

Critical postmodern theory distances itself from celebratory, managerial, and/or naïve postmodern versions of knowledge management, dialog consulting, and complexity system theory. We hold out for a liberatory agenda that combines critical theory critiques of political economy with postmodern theory moves to de-essentialize, poly-vocalize, and reinscribe democratic-governance and sustainable ecological practices into management and organization.

Critical postmodern inquiry challenges managerialist, free market, neo-liberal globalization, and the entire discourse of Empire for marginalizing the logics and lifestyles of the so-called "less developed nations."

Next, we turn to the confusing of postmodern with late modern appropriations and imitations, as well as mis-sightings of postmodern moves and conditions.

## **II. NAÏVE CONFUSION OF LATE MODERN WITH POSTMODERN**

Much of what philosophers consider to be postmodern moves since Nietzsche has been confused with pronouncements of late modern in management and organization studies. I admit my own gullibility here.

In the previous section we looked at how Post-bureaucratic, post-Fordist, and post-Taylorist, and other late modern moves have been confused with postmodern. Flexible production, so-called "empowerment," efforts to transform bureaucracy, etc. have appropriated the postmodern label, yet not deviated from late modern forms of production and consumption.

A second trend has been the proliferation of pomophobic articles and books that skewer various postmodern and poststructuralist writers. Pomophobia is the paranoiac reaction by religious fundamentalist and to modern philosophers who see dire relativism and fascist conspiracy attached to all things postmodern, and anyone who professes them. Weiss (2000), for example, accuses myself and other organization postmodern writers of being collaborators with known Nazi postmodernists, allegedly Nietzsche (a silly charge since he was dead before Nazi Germany), Derrida (1989) for defending DeMan, and Foucault, for escaping military service.

A second pomophobic tactic is reductionism. All the varieties of postmodern theory are reduced to reactive polemics against Lyotard's (1984) call for incredulity to *all* grand narratives and Baudrillard's (1983) extreme position that *all* is hyperreality or simulacra. Reductionism ignores varieties of less radical postmodern positions that posit the value of particular grand narratives that promote environmental sustainability and global human rights (Best & Kellner, 1993, 2001) or more critical postmodern positions that do not assume everything postmodern is ephemeral or hyperreal.

A third pomophobic tactic is accomplished by the religious right. It is claimed that postmodernism is anti-spiritual, and an extreme form of situational ethics. Cilliers (1999) work is an example of a postmodern attempt to accomplish a less radical reading of Lyotard (1984), one that recognizes postmodern ethics. We might add, that Lyotard's earlier scholarship is influenced by Kant's (1781/1900) universal ethics (categorical imperative); Kant (1785/1993) argues that many people attempt to universalize their particular imperative in the kingdom of ends.

All three pomophobic charges are without substance. First, various postmodern writers (Jameson, Best & Kellner, Deleuze & Guattari, & Baumann) as well as poststructuralist writers accused of being postmodern (Foucault, Derrida, Bakhtin, & Kristeva) do not subscribe to relativism (or not to the forms of relativism pomophobic writers attribute). Rather, the call is for qualitative research into how ethical and moral values compete in the public square, and how various ethical positions of late modern and postmodern writers attempt to gain universal allegiance.

There is nothing to prevent a postmodern ethics (Baumann, 1993), or even a postmodern spirituality (Wilber, 1996: 58); Rosenau (1992) posited *New Age Affirmative*

*Postmodern* as a counterforce to *Skeptical/Critical Postmodern*. Further, what pomophobic contend are universal ethics, are, in business practices, oftentimes reduced to Kant's (1781/1900) second category, practical reasoning (Jones, Parker, & Ten Bos, 2005). Lying, stealing, bribing, coveting, etc. in global multinational corporate practice, and in business ethics pedagogy are far from categorical imperatives. This does not mean that Norris (1989), Ellis (1989), Epstein (1999) is incorrect in saying *some* (but not all) postmodern positions are relativistic. It means that the research opportunity is to study relativism as it is situated in business (& organizational) practices, as well as counterforces to install universalistic ethics (be they greed or liberation).

Finally, critical postmodern theory holds out the possibility for a liberatory, non-predatory version of capitalism, if you will, a liberatory-grand narrative. This postmodern grand narrative professes democratic governance, transparency in monitoring corporate ethics, and a revision to the surplus value equation of maximizing exploitation that favors worker rights, community sovereignty over corporations, and eco-sustainability. The father of capitalism, Adam Smith, was concerned that workers receive a living wage; corporations not become too huge so they circumvent local control, and in his moral sentiment writing, posited an ethical transaction, such that if a child was the buyer, the seller would tender the same deal as if it was a knowledgeable adult. Korten's (1995) writing on the de-charter movement fits here; communities in which corporations are deemed to be destructive can have their charters revoked. There are opportunities to study the de-charter movement, such as the recent attempts in California to de-charter an oil company due to its predatory human rights record, or a lawsuit won against Nike for lying about its sweatshop and worker rights conditions, or a recent lawsuit against Wal-Mart by workers of six nations claiming worker rights violations.

Next, we look at qualitative research opportunities in the dark side of postmodern.

### **III. DARK SIDE OF POSTMODERN**

On the way to postmodern, the celebratory, appreciative, naïve, late modern pretender/posers of postmodern, as well as (post) postmodern emergent social experiments have tripped into a shocking discovery: the *dark side of postmodern*. I am not referring to the pomophobic charges of relativism, Nazism, and anti-ethics.

**What is this dark side?** Every change from (late) modern hegemony is not necessarily positive, not an exit from exploitation, vampirism-capitalism or unsustainability! Vampirism is a term Godfrey, Jack and Jones (2004) give to Marx's (1867: 302) writings on ways exploitative capitalism is vampire-like, sucking the blood of labor: "the vampire will not lose its hold on him 'so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited.'"

Is there a difference between the dark side of (post) postmodern and the (late) modern appropriation of postmodernism? Whatever (post) postmodern innovates in its expressivity, theory, and method, gets appropriated, and turned into something instrumental to modernism. I think it has been shown that we have not moved into a post or post-postmodern era; at best there is a hybridity of discourses, contending, reappropriating, rehistoricizing one another. What is held out as a postmodern way to counter some modern oppression, turns into the dark side. The good news is these processes can be studied.

We can use qualitative research to explore the *dark side* of (a) late modern/postmodern hybrids (Latour, 1993), (b) postmodern turns (Best & Kellner, 1997), (c) postmodern conditions (Harvey, 1989), (d) postmodern fragments (Baumann, 1989), or (e) rhizomatics (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The reason why I think it will take qualitative research, is that immersion in the rivalry of discourse, the multi-storying, the more dialogic and intertextual ways of expressing the moderns and postmoderns necessitates something deeper than counting. Further, when one is critical of the dominant ideology, self-reflective about one's own ideologies, and how these construct and reshape identity, it means telling one's story, qualitatively relating one's living story, to ways our story is controlled by corporations and the state; it is something that requires textual, ethnographic, historical inquiry.

*Dark postmodern* evolves from strains of late modern vampirism, imitations of postmodern conditions, turns, etc. that exhibit twisted and unforeseen dire consequences of even postmodern liberation moves; each positive move has its dark side that can be studied using qualitative research in three areas: (a) post-technology, (b) post-aesthetics, and (c) post-science.

**Postmodern Technologies** My own view is there is a dark side to postmodern technology, be it late modern imitations of postmodern, or hybrid modern/postmodern interpenetrations. In the rush to virtualize human interaction in cyberspace, redesign nature with biotechnology, and to become post-consumers with self-designed individualistic postmodern life styles, there are techno-consequences as horrifying as those found in modern predatory management and organization.

Virtual technology is often called “postmodern”, though cell phones, Internet hyperspace, computer chat rooms, virtual team meeting in distance education and globalized corporate work are all the result of late modern capitalism. Be that as it may, what purveyors and observers call “postmodern technology: has some dark consequences: education, family, and work life that is less grounded in time/space; it is no longer a here-and-now time, nor is it local place for face-to-face encounters; rather, what substitutes for humans wedding themselves to cybertech is a rather shallow, artificial, tenuous, and fragmented existence. The cell phone, text messaging, video game, chat room generation with its robotic pets instead of ‘real’ pets, virtual sex instead of flesh-and-blood sex, and postmodern war fought with the same screen-based image production as a Nintendo game is a deterioration of the human condition brought about by so-called “postmodern technology.” Education, work, and family relationships are more disembodied.

Beneath this amalgam of late modern/postmodern technology, all the virtual hybrids of human to computer, war to simulation, relationships to cybertech, etc. is the global sweatshop industry making the cell phones, computers, smart bombs, etc. that is the basis of postmodern life style consumption, as well as, postmodern war. On the one hand, postmodern technology delivers liberatory potential for some of its consumers, but factory workers, students in cyber classes, soldiers, civilians, and animals in postmodern wars pick up the tab for the dark side.

In education, qualitative research can begin to look at how far postmodern technologies have driven a wedge into pedagogy. With the ever-present screen of the overhead projector, computer, personal data organizer, etc. postmodern technology mediates the relationship between teacher and students, as well as between student and student, and administrator and cyber-university personnel. Just as the work organization

is being deskilled by transferring worker-knowledge into computer-system-knowledge in workplaces, there is a deskilling of the teacher and the student in postmodern education. Teachers are becoming technology-users of pre-fabricated PowerPoint templates, pre-done test banks, and pre-arranged instructional guides that the publishing industry. The result is the professor no longer professes their own scholarship; they are professors who play carefully-pre-scripted roles; teaching is now idiot-proof; the curriculum is safe from professors who no longer are required to teach; they just select from the kits of test banks, PowerPoint slides, experiential exercises, video clips, and homework provided by the manufacturer.

**Postmodern Aesthetics** Secondly, the dark side of postmodern can be studied using qualitative methods; there is an on going change in aesthetics. Postmodern aesthetics, would look at competing aesthetics, not at “beauty” but at ways ideas are expressed artistically. From cyber sex to cyber work and cyber education, a postmodern aesthetic is something researchable. However, choices of aesthetic theory vary: Larsen (1990: xxvii), for example, argues that instead of modern’s totalitarian aesthetic, we can research local “discursive practice” in the aesthetic of everyday life. Another approach gives “prominence” to the “aesthetic dimension” that is uniquely postmodern (Linstead & Hopfl, 2000: 3). And others, such as Carr and Hancock (2003) contend that postmodern aesthetic is derivative, traceable to the critical attitude of the surrealist artist. It will take qualitative inquiry to sort out such positions because one must enter into and interpret a multiplicity of aesthetic ways of being expressive; such analysis is well beyond positivism or post-positivism ways of knowing.

My suggestion for a starting point is to look at a dialogical approach. Bakhtin (1990), for example, developed “architectonic dialogism” which can be defined as the interanimation of aesthetic discourse with ethical and cognitive discourses. Aesthetic, for Bakhtin, is not about socially-defined “beauty”; it is the consummation process, who consummates what, and who is answerable for what is consummated (Boje, 2005b). The result is a more dramaturgic approach to aesthetics, asking who are the authors, beholders, characters, and directors in the architectonic dialogism. Bakhtin’s concepts of heteroglossia, polyphony, and architectonic dialogism anticipate postmodern theory, and offers a way of studying aesthetics in relation to cognitive and ethical discourse.

**Postmodern Science** Thirdly, postmodern science become possible because scientists began to break ranks with practices of late modern science. Postmodern science, like technology and aesthetics has its dark side, yet some factions hold out the possibility of ethical science. Biotechnology, genetic reengineering, cloning, of plant animal, and human species, terminator seeds and designer ecosystems are part of the dark side of postmodern science. The term, postmodern science, can be found in the hard sciences, beginning in the early 1960s with Matson (1964); Ferre (1976) expanded the concept as did Toulmin (1982a,b) and Prigogine and Stengers (1984), followed by Griffith (1988a,b), Sheldrake (1990), Oelschlaeger (1991), and Sassower (1995). Best and Kellner (1997) have an excellent review (see Boje, 1999 for review).

If science is carried out with an amoral attitude, the world will ultimately respond to science in a destructive way. Postmodern science must therefore overcome the separation between truth and virtue, value and fact, ethics and practical necessity (Bohm, 1988: 67-68).

Rifkin (1998: 197), for example, argues that postmodern philosophy was seized upon as a way to legitimate those economic, technological, and scientific revolutions that redefined life in the new Biotech Century; instead of God or evolution, now science and a slew of corporations create and patent life. Corporations with names like Amgen, Organogenesis, Genzyme, Calgene, Mycogen, and Myriad, as well as more familiar ones like Du Pont, Upjohn, Monsanto, Eli Lilly, and Dow Chemical have not been subject of qualitative or other inquiry (Rifkin, 1998: 15). Yet, biotech-science (& technology) have spawned an industry, as well as management and organizations praxis that can be the topic of qualitative research.

There is an important role for qualitative research in studies of postmodern science and its scientists: “And much postmodern science continues to be oriented toward quantitative knowledge, experiment, prediction, and control” (Best & Kellner, 1997: 223). We can use qualitative research to study postmodern science, for its liberatory potential, and its dark-side consequences. This would entail a sort of ethnographic study of scientists, how they do their science, how they discourse about it, and the ways science is instrumental to the dark side of postmodern. Certainly in the Biotech Century and the age of Postmodern Warfare, an inquiry into the embedded aspects of science and

technology into corporations and state organizations is in order. How, for example, is Deplete Uranium science being used to recycle nuclear waste onto the battle fields; how is that science used to make the claim that DU damages tanks, but is ecological sustainable, safe for civilians and soldiers (these are widely disputed claims).

There is a role for qualitative research into the dialogic aspects of organizations. For example, if you forgive me for resurrecting Bakhtin, as a pre-postmodernist (someone who anticipated ‘critical postmodern’ analysis), then several projects are possible. For example, corporations such as McDonald’s and Wal-Mart use multi-stylistics (various types of verbal, written, gesture, architecture, etc.) to story themselves to customers and employees.

McDonald’s for example, polyphonically embeds photos of children and parent, with cartoons, and celebrities to endorse the construction of fast food being nutritious, and (in moderation, with exercise) a healthy diet. On the back of trayliners (those paper ads on the plastic trays), one finds another stylistic, scientific-seeming charts of fat and nutrition content, with endorsements by Bob Greene (Oprah’s fitness coach), and list of science-oriented agencies and associations. In short, there is stylistic plurality that is dialogic. Intertextually what McDonald’s stories polyphonically, and stylistically is opposed by counterstories from nutritionists, fitness experts, and culture jammers who do not buy the premise that junk food is healthy or sustainable. Architectonics is the interanimation of several types of discourses: cognitive, aesthetic, & ethic); it is how one type of discourse animates the other two. For example, McDonald’s is making ethical claims through aesthetic-photos and cartoons, and cognitive claims about the science of fast food nutrition animated though the other discourse types. Chronotopically, there is an admixture of ways time and space is co-constructed (e.g. in biographies of executives & the firm, in future strategies of the the firm, in the Rabelisian usurptation of Rogue-Clown-Fool in Hamburglar-Ronald-Grimace, their contemporalization in the whole netherworld of McDonaldland’s relation to human world, in global to local, etc.). Look at all the various dialogisms (polyphonic, stylistic, chronotopic, & architectonic), and there is a veritable dialogism of these dialogisms to be studied using text and intertext analysis.

I want to conclude with what I think postmodern possibilities are, and associated qualitative research projects.

#### IV. POSTMODERN POSSIBILITIES

This essay has argued that on the way to postmodern a gaggle of theorists and philosophers defined postmodern in lots of different ways. Many efforts cite Lyotard or Baudrillard, the most radical positions in order to shout them down for being too extreme. Others limit postmodern to aspects of architecture or to prototypical moves one reads in surrealist or cubist painting. As reviewed, the religious right wants to excommunicate postmodern writers for advocating what they deem to be anti-universalism, a relativism that leads to situational ethics instead of Kant's categorical imperative, or the Ten Commandments which are infected by contemporary practical reasons for their violation.

The result is a postmodern jungle of impenetrable concepts, texts that are about the esoteric disagreements and pomophobic tar and feathering rather than qualitative research into postmodern praxis. My proposal is to encourage qualitative methods to study postmodern praxis. This can be done in several ways.

First, we can continue to study hybridity, the interpenetration of late modern and postmodern practices in complex organizations. My own research on Disney, Nike, Enron (2004, 2005 with Rosile), McDonald's (2005 with Driver & Cai), and Wal-Mart (2005 with Guibert) emphasizes the hybridity of late modern and postmodern practices.

Second, at one time I was willing to concede that my colleagues were correct; *there are no postmodern organizations, merely late modern ones* (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997; Hassard, 1993; Hassard & Parker, 1993; Thompson, 1993). However, I now wish to modify that position. In addition to hybrids, and postmodern science (Biotech) firms, there are some postmodern consumer organizations that need to be studied.

*Blackspot Sneakers* and *No Sweat* clothing are organized as postmodern organizations; they do not claim to be postmodern; I call them postmodern because they are a critical (table 1) break from the "dark side" of late modern global sweatshop capitalism. They began as consumer corporations, where we consumers pooled our orders for sneakers, until a factory could be seduced to break ranks with the global sweatshop hegemon. My colleague Jeff Ballinger helped both get off the ground. *Blackspot* is organized by the *Ad Busters Magazine* publishers; they settled on a factory in Portugal to produce sneakers, since it was a union shop, had a long tradition of skills in the shoe

industry, and employed old and young workers, males and females (a profile 180 degrees opposite the sweatshop industry). *No Sweat* settled on Indonesia, on a factory that has a weak union, pays livable wages, at least higher than those of the Nike and Reebok factories there. Both manufacturers aspire to be No Logo (Klein, 1999). More accurately, both have anti-logos: *Blackspot* has a splotch of white paint applied with a brush, while *No Sweat* uses its name as its logo. Qualitative research can examine the pulls on these postmodern consumer organizations to become hybrid, to incorporate modern management and organizational practices (hierarchy, deskilling, etc.).

A second example is autoethnography into postmodern experimentation. I just built my own motorcycle. My friend, Nik Dholakia, tells me I am being a “postmodern consumer.” I entered the space of late modern production, circumvented Harley-Davidson’s hegemon, and put together my own experience of production, and produced a unique motorcycle using mostly after-market products. I designed and build a *postmodern Harley Chopper* along with two of my neighbors: Michael Rigby and Pep Gonzales. Michael has built six choppers from the ground up, and scores of rebuilds (replacing motors, transmissions, and frames). Pep is a champion welder; he holds two national championship welding titles, and is a blacksmith.

I am one of thousands of post-consumers, people who build their own Harley Davidson Choppers, with a mix of Harley and after-market products. This kind of autoethnography offers several analysis options:

A Chopper is a veritable Frankenstein, parts from scores of different after-market manufacturers, juxtaposed with the ‘heart’ (a Harley-Davidson factory motor), and bones from the bone yard (salvage yard, pipe scraps I welded to extend the frame). I began by entering (& winning) 16 Ebay auctions for Harley as well as after-market parts. I ordered additional parts from a series of after-market catalogues (*Canyon Run, Jireh, Big Twins; J & P*). The Harley parts include the Evolution big Twin motor (1240 cc), the Dynaglide Front end (bought this from Pep), and ‘Swing Arm’ which secures the rear wheel to an after-market softtail frame (by Ultima). The rest of the chopper is all after-market, including the fenders, gas tank, seat, 6 speed chrome transmission, chrome shocks, and scores of other parts.

A Postmodern Harley Homebuilt Chopper is an example of postmodern production and postmodern consumption. I used Ebay, after-market catalogues, and my welder, chop saw, and grinder to do violence to the prototypical factory bike concept. I participate directly in the production. The reason this motorcycle is a chopper is because, I chopped the backbone of the frame with a chop saw, extending it 2 inches, raising it 4 inches, and tilting the neck from stock position of 30 degrees to 35 degrees. Pep did the more precise surgery, tacking the extended backbone into the after-market Ultima frame. It is also called a Chopper because the rear fender is bobbed. Bobbing means cutting the stock fender to give it a shape different than a factory bike; it is a practice that began after veterans returned from WWII. In short, the chopper is a radical parody of the Harley-Davidson factory bike.

Michael and Pep assure me that we have conspired to produce a motorcycle that is superior in performance, quality, and aesthetics than the factory floor bike model. There are several reasons for such a claim. This is because, once anyone purchases a basic stock bike, the thing barely runs; it needs a better carburetor (most choose S&S), stock pipes are less efficient, and the bead blast parts such as primary covers, cry out for upgrade.

First, the after-market parts we purchased are each higher in quality. For example, I bought the Dyna ignition system, which times with ease and has higher performance capabilities (in its settings) than the factory one. Michael and I installed a competition clutch that has a belt drive instead of a chain suspended in oil in the primary covers (which is why Harley cycles leak). Since we invested our own labor time for its use value and aesthetic value, we could shape the frame and swing arm with a grinder, weld in smoother lines, than the chunky-boxy style from the Harley-Davidson factory.

I think the reason is that Harley-Davidson is maximizing is what Mark (1867) calls surplus value (the difference between the use value of labor power, and the surplus value). Surplus value is maximizing by limiting labor time in production of a product. Factory laborers are not given the time to sculpt the bike as we were able to do. Labor is accumulated, congealed, and embodied into the Chopper. As Marx (1867: 51) states, labor creates value only in its “congealed state.” Chopper and a deal bike each possess use-value. The additional welding, grinding, cutting, torching and overall sculpting of the

bike add to its use-value and to its aesthetic value. Chopper labor is different than other forms of collective labor embodied in it, such as the labor of Harley-Davidson factory workers fashioning the Evolution motor, the Triple Tree front end, or the Swing Arm (the only genuine Harley parts), or the workers in the after-market factories. The factory workers are managed and organized in ways that minimize labor-time embodied in the parts and assembly. The sculpted bodily form of the Chopper accumulates labor-powers of my neighbors and I, and stands in parodic relation to the factory bike, with its congealed labor-power.

Postmodern capitalism, like its (late) modern counterpart, demands a “material ground-work or set of conditions of existence which in their turn are the spontaneous product of a long and painful process of development” (Marx, 1867: 80). What lies beneath the aesthetic form of the postmodern Chopper? Certainly, postmodern is interpenetrated by late modern global capitalism and all its exploitative practices.

There is always a dark side to postmodern consumption and production. Unfortunately this applies to my postmodern Chopper. Since the Frankenstein assembly of body, frame, heart (name given motor by Chopper builders), and other parts, a goodly number are made under labor conditions I have no way of knowing. The drag pipes (which perform better than factory model pipes) come from Bangladesh, the transmission (also a better product) is from Taiwan, and most of the remaining after-market parts come from factories in China. In short, it is highly probable that some or even all these parts are made in sweatshops that exploit workers with union-busting, poverty wages, forced overtime, age and gender discrimination, physical violence, unsafe factory conditions, etc. My efforts to produce a postmodern motorcycle outside the capitalism of Harley-Davidson, has plunged me into the hell of global after-market capitalism (which may well be worse). While I am engaged in the aesthetics of designing and experiencing my own production relation with Harley and the after-market workers, I am still not free of late modern capitalism. On the plus side, going outside the box of multinational corporate capitalism, combined with adequate qualitative research and inquiry into factory conditions, can help to elevate the conditions of workers who made the parts for the bike that my neighbors and I sculpted into a Chopper.

Besides qualitative study of congealed, collective labor and surplus value, there is a social value that can be researched. The social value of factory and Chopper bikes is different. Harley factory bikes and Choppers take on social value, and manifest mystical qualities. A Harley is more dazzling commodity than a Honda, BMW, Yamaha, etc. As Marx (1867: 71) puts it, commodities, with social value, achieve “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.” My Harley Chopper is “commodity fetishism,” a “mysterious thing” and a “fantastic form” (Marx, 1867: 72). It is this fetishism that invites qualitative inquiry. This includes stripping away the mystical veil of factory Harleys, as well as Choppers.

The postmodern Chopper is sacralized; esoteric cultist rites and rituals accompany its collective labor production by us, the post-consumers! I am just beginning this investigation, taping and transcribing interviews with after-market purveyors, and post-consumers, and doing my field notes.

There was on November 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7PM, the ritual of the bell. A bell must be given to the rider; it is a “Mystical Story” and a rite, said to ward off “Evil Road Spirits... Road Spirits can’t live in the presence of a bell”<sup>1</sup> A friend told me to “listen to the bike, and she will tell you her name.” My collaborative co-builder, friend and neighbor, Michael, gave me a “skull-cover” for the ignition that had been “good luck” on two of his choppers. Chopper spiritualism exists outside the normal experience of factory motorcyclists. This transcendent, mystical, supernatural, commodity fetishism, the hauntology of a ghost in the machine, invites rather different postmodern inquiry. Could such spirits speak, they would perhaps say: ‘we are more than use-value, or surplus-value, we are specters invited to inhabit machines.’”

Besides use-value, peeling back the veil on accumulated sweatshop labor, and secret practices of commodity-fetishism, qualitative inquiry can explore the eroticism of post-production and consumption.

Bataille (1986: 15) develops a typology of eroticism: physical, psychological, and religious. Building and riding a chopper is all these forms of eroticism. We have explored some of the religious eroticism. The chopper also has physical sensations: the chopper

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from “freedom Pewter-Bells” in a document that accompanies the bell purchased by friends for the postmodern Chopper.

has its smell, its vibrations to the touch, its lines are pleasing to the eye, its sound excites the enthusiast, and there is a taste to the bike. Finally, the chopper has its own aesthetic bestowed by builders and riders, plus a good deal of advertising by Harley-Davidson.

Bataille's eroticism theory helps explain what happened on the way to postmodern. Postmodern held out the possibility and the threat of turning the modern order "topsy-turvy" (Bataille, 1986: 13). What is most erotic, for me, about building a postmodern Chopper, is to transgress late modern capitalism, to violate its taboos. When I chop way, weld, bob, and torch the stock-frame-skeleton, cutting its backbone, raking its neck, and grinding smooth its square edges, this is an erotically aesthetic sculpting that I do. When I ride any motorcycle, much less a home-built one of Ebay and catalogue parts, with modified frame – I am aware of my impermanence; while not a death wish, it is a wish to ride along the line between life and death. In taking a postmodern Chopper adventure, I "yearn for our lost continuity: (Bataille, 1986: 15); beings are discontinuous (they are born and die); death is the only continuity!

On the way to postmodern, the appropriation of this aesthetic and its erotic dimensions by late modern capitalism has blurred the lines, making it more difficult to violate modernity taboos. Yet, as a post-laborer and post-consumer, I am able to transgress what a corporate image of a motorcycle is. I destroy the self-contained character of participation in modern capitalism; I escape its modern life style (Bataille, 1986: 17, para).

This is one example. There are also postmodern consumers who are changing their homes to be solar efficient, or using photovoltaic technology to get off the electric grid, going against the mainstream construction industry preference for unsustainable construction, struggling with a mortgage industry that privileges less sustainable modern production. There are postmodern scientists refusing university and corporate research positions. There are many more firms than those cited here with ape postmodern moves in order to appear ethical, while beneath the veneer of empowerment and transparent codes of conduct, this vampire and the werewolf continue their predatory capitalist practices.

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