

On Being Postmodern in the Academy

An Interview With Stewart Clegg

DAVID M. BOJE
Loyola Marymount University

Evidence of the postmodern turn abounds. In 1992, there were at least five special issues devoted to postmodern management agendas.¹ This year's National and Western Academy of Management meetings each had several postmodern sessions as did the Organization Behavior Teaching Conference in Calgary, Canada. Yet, despite our activity, it must be emphasized that our management discipline does trail the many disciplines that have already grappled with the postmodern agenda (e.g., philosophy, law, sociology, political science, anthropology, feminism, linguistics, urban studies, speech communication, education, and psychology). And the American Academy of Management trails its European counterpart (e.g., Burrell, 1988; Cooper & Burrell, 1988; and other contributors to *Organizational Studies*). Why have we delayed our postmodern adventure? What will be our pitfalls? Are we in search of one more fad?

I interviewed Stewart Clegg because he has faced and survived the postmodern turn, beginning with his dissertation at University of Bradford in 1974 and his pioneering assault on strategic contingencies theory in his book *Power, Rule and Domination* (1975). In subsequent books and articles centered on power and international capitalism, Clegg has challenged the modernist project. Modernists are accused of replacing small batch, craft production with a de-skilled, highly centralized, and bureaucratic mass production model. Postmodernists question the progress myth. Maybe

the move to mass production was not that great an idea. His two most recent books (1989, 1990) provide, I believe, the best studies of postmodern management and organization available because they put the issues in an international context with case examples that, among other things, challenge such sacred cows as the preeminence of the multidivisional form.

For these achievements, Bob Gephart and I invited Stewart Clegg to participate in our postmodern showcase session at last summer's Academy of Management meetings.² He also taught in Loyola Marymount's visiting scholar series. I trailed Stewart from Westchester to Las Vegas with my trusty tape recorder and challenged him to talk about the American Academy's resistance to the postmodern agenda. We covered a wide array of topics from theory-building to teaching postmodern courses to changes in the practice of management. I thought Stewart might be stuffy and formal, but to my surprise and amazement, he was game for a ride on my Harley Davidson, digs rock and roll music and actually knows the words to "Born to Be Wild."

I want to give some introduction to the themes that came through in our conversation:

1. There is no agreement on when postmodern or even modernist projects began (Toulmin, 1990). Did modernism begin when philosophy took a more positivist turn with Descartes or did modernism commence with the industrial revolution (Drucker, 1957)?

2. American approaches to postmodern are considered more affirmative and optimistic than the skeptical European points of view (Rosenau, 1992). Affirmatives assume that exploitation (i.e., racism, sexism, colonialism, hierarchy) associated with modernism can be countered by more enlightened and empowered management practices. Skeptics, on the other hand, argue that any formula for fairness and justice can be exploited to become yet another modernist command and control manipulation (Boje & Dennehy, 1993, p. xvi).
3. Postmodernists hold out the opportunity of constructing or resurrecting the stories and voices of those excluded and marginalized in the modernist project.
4. Postmodern management is related to administrative and manufacturing "flexibility" (Clegg, 1990; Harvey, 1989), but this flexibility does not necessarily mean more individual empowerment and self-control. Surveillance, for example, did not die because organizations got flatter and flexible; rather, surveillance with computers, videos, and electronic sensors made many layers of middle management unnecessary in this post-modern world.

Thus, inherent in all postmodern thought is the belief that the signs of the times make different sense according to different ways of reading the historical narrative.

D: Why do you think people resist postmodern theory?

S: To the extent that they do, I think it is because of the novelty and strangeness. First, postmodern theory is difficult if your assurance derives from certainties of the past. Postmodernism challenges certainties, inherited interpretations, and premises for paradigms. It does not respect the canons of correct method through which one routinely serves an apprentice in the quotidian rites of the North American graduate school.

Second, from the U.S. perspective, it also may appear to be largely a foreign affair. I first learnt of debate around the terms of postmodernism whilst working in the Faculty of Humanities at Griffith University, Australia, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Some colleagues in the cultural studies and comparative literature areas involved themselves in these debates. Through them, I became aware of social science contributions from writers that I was already familiar with, such as Habermas (1984). Within literature and cultural studies, there were several distinguished North American contributors, but the more specific social science debates largely occurred around European contributors, particularly French intellectuals (such as Baudrillard, 1983), in the pages of European journals such as

Theory, Culture and Society. Typically, these journals were not the natural habitat for most researchers in organization and management studies.

D: Is the resistance political? What is the nature of the resistance?

S: Yes, I suspect that it is a kind of politics. But it is a politics of at least two kinds. First, I think that there is a political resistance that is genuinely conservative. For good reason, people want to conserve what they are familiar with, what their familiarity allows them to have, to understand, and to work with. Second, it is also a conservatism of intellectual capital. Each of us in our careers invests considerable effort, energy, and work in building up a store of intellectual capital from which we hope to get good returns. These are the forms of investment that we make as scholars, and as investors we like to see these investments earn a good return. Such investments, as *intellectual* capital, cannot easily be liquidated and reinvested as new market opportunities emerge. One doesn't easily liquidate intellectual investments. It amounts to a form of self-destruction. One destroys the basis of one's identity if one renounces the cumulative investments of the past for what must, in contrast, seem a speculative guess on the uncertain future. *Postmodernism*, because it follows modernism, may seem likely to undercut, supersede, and disconnect with modernism. Such revaluation poses a severe threat of deflation of an existing intellectual currency that still earns a reasonable rate of return in the market.

Another part of the conservatism is that post-modernism is difficult, and there is no getting away from that. The theory of postmodernism, defined by preeminent theorists such as Baudrillard (1983) and Lyotard (1984), makes different challenges upon the intellect to those required by articles in the standard vein of normal science in the management and organization journals. Postmodernism is not part of the paradigm of normalcy. It is a different way of thinking. It is a different way of approaching things. Reading someone like Derrida (1981) can be a frustrating experience, one that might make one angry with the wordplay, the jokes and puns, which often don't translate very well. In this sense, resistance is justified, particularly if you believe that there is a stand-alone paradigmatically secure field called "management" or "organizations."

D: Some people dismiss postmodernism because it's complex. But I also find that they dismiss post-

modernism on the grounds that we've done this before. There's an assumption that I've come across that there's a straighter line to get to the end. Implicitly, we know *already* what the end is. Why don't you just define for me what you think postmodernism is simply?

S: I think, simply, there are at least two ways of approaching it. It is interesting to look at the cleavage that is beginning to emerge in the literature. On the one hand, there are writers like Zygmunt Bauman (1988) in sociology, David Harvey (1989) in geography, or my work in organizations (Clegg, 1990) who deal with postmodernism very much in terms of what is identified as an "era" concept. Here the interest is in the way in which some empirical aspects of the world that we now inhabit are changing. For Bauman, the focus is very much on consumption and changes in its style, content, and meaning. For Harvey, the focus is on changes in manufacturing and the built environment in the urban sphere. For me, the interest is in both the theory of organizations as it runs up against possible limiting cases of the modernist paradigm and the possible transformations to organizational forms that these cases might represent.

What is common across these writers is some sense of there being a discontinuity with a modern past. Not only is there important substantive empirical change, but also these changes seem resistant to the undergirding of the modernist understanding that developed in the modernist era. That modernism might be unraveling is the leitmotiv in both theory and practice, but the sense in which this unraveling might be occurring remains fundamentally modernist when it is compared with *the terms of postmodernist theory*. Thus one distinction between modernism and postmodernism stresses the possible empirical discontinuity between eras: the modern and the emergence of the possibly postmodern. But the terms in which any such distinction between eras can be made are themselves thoroughly modernist, where rationalizing and definitive judgments about the nature of an empirical world get proffered as a possible hypothesis. The terms are already those of a pre-postmodernist theory, if you like.

It is the notion that there are some distinct *terms of postmodernist theory* that brings us to the second simple distinction. Here, the concern is less with the notion of an era and more a concern with how we

might go about constructing and appropriating knowledge about any era or phenomena. The emphasis is now on being *postmodernism*. Modernism was a regime of knowledge, a regime of truth, with specific forms of protocol, canons of inquiry, ways of posing questions, assessing evidence, and arriving at answers. To be postmodern means one can take a critical, deconstructionist stance towards both the objects of modernism and the understandings inscribed both in them and in their interpretation. It means being outside modernism. One cannot be knowingly outside without awareness. Hence, to be so must only be *postmodern*. Postmodernism means "after modernism." To be after modernism, one knows where modernism was and one has chosen not to be there but to be somewhere defined by not being where, when, and what modernism is.

When is postmodern? Nineteen sixty-eight in France marks a watershed. After 1968, French intellectual life sees the emergence of a "new philosophy." Actually, it is not very new except that it is much closer to Nietzsche (1973) than to Marx (1976), thus forming an elective affinity with aspects of the work of Foucault (1977), who increasingly, sometimes surprisingly, becomes seen as allied with these postmodernist thinkers. Methodologically, it is Foucault's historical relativizing of regimes of truth, with his critique of representation as the basis for a radical politics, which seemed postmodern. Other writers who blazed in the post-1968 firmament, such as Baudrillard (1981), began to propose that the constitutive elements of our ways of seeing the modern world in which we live have become inadequate, are erroneous and are occluding. Different ways of thinking and seeing emerge, ways that dispense with, overthrow, overcome, and go beyond modern elements. This is postmodern theory.

These two simple distinctions describe the arena of postmodernism. The two elements are not always combined. Some writers on postmodernism as an era write with their feet firmly planted within the narrative codes and grammar of modernist theorizing. They have not changed their grammatology; even as they imagine they gaze at the signs of a postmodern elsewhere, they remain fixed within the modernist means of gazing. This would be the judgment on Bauman, on Harvey, on Clegg, from the dedicated theorist of postmodernism in the sec-

ond of the two senses distinguished above. An appropriation of some aspects of the terms introduced by postmodernism is simply a last gasp reflex of a modernism trying to stave off its own intellectual exhaustion in this judgment. Of course, this is not the view from those committed to and within the first school distinguished; they would sense a sea change in ways we live, work, consume, and organize. Thus this work offers linkages to the systematics of empirical phenomena. With a few exceptions, such as Baudrillard's (1986) *L'Amérique*, the textual pleasures of the purer postmodernist theoretical project rarely connect in this way.

To distinguish these schools, we might want to term the first one *empirical postmodernism* and the second *stylistic postmodernism*. The first has an empirical concern with emergent form of rationality; the second is concerned with interpretations that constantly undermine *any* senses of rationality vested in existing certainties of interpretation, irrespective of the empirical status of the phenomenon under question. The latter has a heightened reflexivity, a concern with the production of whatever sense-making apparatus is in use, irrespective of the phenomenon under discussion. This type of discourse first emerged in the analysis of cultural products, such as architectural style, art, and aesthetics.

D: Does the postmodern connect to what came before the modern, the premodern? Was the modern as a project a move away from another period of thought, some previous paradigm? Do you see a connection? Does the postmodern return us to the time before modernity or is it taking us somewhere beyond?

S: There are resonances and affinities. I first became intrigued by the issues while reading Zygmunt Bauman's (1987) book on *Legislators and Interpreters*. It was the key that unlocked something that had puzzled me about the analysis of power, a personal interest for a considerable time. One could describe and understand the logical evolution of a concept of power premised on a conceptualization that saw it as analogous to causality. Such a conception seemed to stretch relatively seamlessly from the foundational modern thought of Hobbes to contemporary theorists like Dahl and Simon (see the discussion in Clegg, 1989, for fuller reference and discussion). Even the furthest extensions of the causal concept, in more recent debates about the dimensions of power concerned with its concealed

and unseen aspects, do not transform the causal framework.

While at Griffith University, some colleagues that I worked with taught courses in which Foucault's (1977) *Discipline and Punish* was a text. Through them, I learnt of a very different contemporary approach to the analysis of power than the dominant causal tradition. The dominant view stressed the causal analysis of relationships between agents, where the point of the analysis was to establish which one was the "sovereign" or initiating subject. Foucault wanted to "execute" this sovereign concept of power. He argued that too much attention has been focused on power in connection with sovereignty, whether in the shape of a ruling class, state, or sovereign initiating subject. Neglected in consequence were forms of disciplinary power, that capillary power that did not flow from a sovereign center to a periphery and lacked sovereign architecture. Rather it flowed ceaselessly through the social body sustaining its everyday forms and was not merely prohibiting aspects of countersovereignty. Power existed in the rules, the quotidian routines, the minutiae of daily governance and surveillance in myriads of separate sites of social action. While the Hobbesian analysis seemed characteristically modernist in its focus on power as an architectonic principle of order, the Foucauldian analysis seemed almost postmodernist in its refusal to regard power as such an orderly device. Power lacked a necessary center.

How did one connect the analysis of capillary and disciplinary power in Foucault (1977) with that of sovereign power in the dominant tradition from Hobbes (1662) to the present day? That was the question which vexed me. How did Foucault's way of thinking about power connect with the predominant Anglo-American traditions? In contemporary terms, it was difficult to answer this question. In the present day, there seem no points of contact. The literatures and styles of analysis were distinct, although the concept seemed the same one—that of power.

The answer to the puzzle, as I began to work it out, was that while the Hobbesian impulse was very much what Bauman (1987) termed a "legislative approach," that of Foucault (1977) was an interpretive approach. While legislators sought to rule on the real nature of concepts and their application, interpreters sought merely to understand the world. Yet there were premodern precursors to the

interpretive approach that Foucault embraced. On one occasion, he even made it explicit in his work: the inspiration was Machiavelli (1958). Machiavelli, writing a hundred years before Hobbes (1962), sought not to design a concept and rationale for modern kinds of sovereignty but instead sought only to interpret, with a strategic intent, the very complex, contingent, and ambiguous politics of the Medici court. In this respect, Machiavelli, before modernism, was almost already a postmodernist thinker and researcher in terms of the distinctions that we might use today. Foucault (1979) was his natural and conscious heir. So, in the analysis of power, at least, postmodern analysis in its difference with and from modernist analysis was in fact closer to premodern forms. There are some backward linkages then, in answer to your question. As elsewhere, there are no virgin births or immaculate conceptions.

D: What should one read to become oriented to postmodernism? How should one get started?

S: Well, it depends where you want to go in postmodernism, because it is such a big and diverse field. If your interest is in the theoretical aesthetics of postmodernism, then some debates around the excellent journal *Theory, Culture and Society* are probably in order. This journal has been instrumental in critically addressing the work of recent French writers like Baudrillard (1981), Lyotard (1984), and of course, Foucault (1977)—who always denied that he was a postmodernist or that he even knew what it meant, of course! Nonetheless, postmodern or not, Foucault represents an important point of cleavage.

The best, and easiest place to start is Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and the many interviews that he gave (for example, Foucault, 1980). In these, frequently, he was more explicit than was the case in some book-length studies. From there, one might want to move on to the special issue of *Theory, Culture and Society* published on postmodernism in 1988. In this, one will find Bauman's (1988) seminal piece on the question of the difference between postmodernism and postmodernity. Later, this was to be collected as part of his recent book, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (Bauman, 1992), another essential resource. Of course, most of what Bauman has written, particularly since his watershed *Memories of Class* (Bauman, 1982), is important. Also, one would

need to look at David Harvey's (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

D: What should someone starting to work in this area look for?

S: Let's think of some mistakes that someone should try to avoid. One mistake would be to assume that postmodernism means that anything goes, that there are no standards or criteria; it's all relativism. Some enthusiasts of postmodernism might espouse it this way, but it ain't necessarily so. Without doubt, there are hegemonic forms of discourse and practice that get to be constituted as the correct, the proper, the normal, the legitimate. But what postmodernism can show us is the way in which such judgments have no necessity outside power/knowledge practices that constitutes the regimes within which their necessity resides. The important thing about postmodernism is that it enables us to see that no necessity attaches to the ways in which these categories, these conduits, get constituted. Such determinations are always historically contingent phenomena. Postmodernism at its best should be capable of historically situating, constructing, and deconstructing specific sorts of discourse.

D: What about the perspective of a manager? Can managers get into this literature?

S: That is a good question. We've touched mostly upon one aspect of postmodernism, the aesthetic, cultural, and theoretical aspects of the debates. However, also it can be conceived in terms of the empirical aspects of the era, in a way opposed to postmodern analysis. In the latter conception there is much that some manager's might find of value.

From the point of view of somebody who is a manager, we can say that postmodernity, in the era concept, represents a set of opportunities and a set of challenges, a set of possibilities. The narrative categories and devices through which we have organized our consciousness of Western modernity have been overwhelmingly modernist. One consequence of this has been that we have overprojected a dominant variant of the modernist experience, that of the United States of America, onto this history. Consequently, not only is it difficult to come to terms with exceptions to this experience as they present postmodern possibilities to us, but it also proves difficult to comprehend that even in the midst of modernity there were experiences and phenomena that resisted modernist impulses.

The case of "French Bread," in my *Modern Organizations* (Clegg, 1990), is a case in point. Here was an industry that, according to some North American variants of modernist organization theory, had no right to be organized as it was. Subject to the same contingencies, it should be subject to the same organizational forms. It is not. The reason, I argue, depends on the institutional embeddedness of cultural values. These are resistant to the rationalities of organizationally determinant contingencies.

Elsewhere, when we begin to grasp the specificity of Japanese and other East Asian organizations, we again find that the forms do not correspond to the various "universal" rationalities abstracted from the U.S. experience. Some aspects are recognizably modernist; others, such as the widespread use of subcontracting on long-term contractual relations and the tendencies towards internal dedifferentiation are not. They appear as a different trajectory, one that does not follow modernity. In some respects they are "post" modern in their implications. Also, they are "post" modern as well in terms of the temporal location of our knowledge of their specificity.

Managers, one would anticipate, might be interested in this aspect of postmodernism. Surely, there are lessons to be gained from the specificities of this institutional embeddedness for practice in one's own organization. This is not to suggest that there is some essential cultural or national dimension of postmodernism. In Japan, for instance, it is obvious that there are distinct variants from organization to organization: Nissan is not just like Toyota, for instance. There are institutionally cultural dimensions to these expressions that should neither be overlooked nor reduced to some type of cultural determinism. They may not be capable of punctilious replication elsewhere, but there may be other institutional forms available that may enable the achievement of similar effects.

One may not want to see the institutional supports of some of these organizational forms replicated. Take gender relations, for instance. If the highly developed gender segmentation of Japanese organizations were shown to be a core institutional element of their success, would one necessarily want to replicate it? Would one really want to abstract some gendered examples of Japanese organizational form and behavior as norms of good practice for U.S. organizations? If one were a female manager in the U.S., one has a far better chance of

a successful organizational career and contribution than would be the case in Japan. Does one really want to hold up the labor time practices of Japan as emblems of good practice, when formal hours number a statistical average of about 2,300 hours participation a year, compared to about 1,600 hours in Germany or Sweden? If this were to be seized upon as part of the postmodern package, would one want it? Might we not be better off looking at the more social democratic postmodernist options that have been developed under institutionally cultural conditions elsewhere, such as Sweden and Germany? I think so.

In particular, elements of the best developed European social democratic tradition in Sweden seem to offer an alternative to the differentiated modernist universe of assumptions with which we are familiar. Again caveats apply: Can one take institutional innovations and forms of practice that have been fertilized by long, deep traditions of social democratic parties, policies, and rule and expect to see them replicated in different soil? No, I don't think so. Again, there is an important lesson here. What goes on in the organization is not an autonomous self-contained sphere but surrounded by and embedded in the institutional values of specific times and places. So much is dependent upon extraorganizational variables, institutional factors and political contingencies—not just the organizational contingencies distilled for their relevance from a dominant tradition of interpretation. Because often we tend to focus on what can be changed at the organization level by management, we sometimes miss the institutional supports and barriers to change at this level.

- D: Certainly, from looking at your books you are not arguing in favor of contingency theory? You are not saying there are postmodern contingencies or do I misunderstand you?
- S: If contingency theory means that there are only some ways of organizing based upon the organization technology, size, etcetera, I don't argue that. Such factors are not unimportant, but they do not seem to me, analytically, to lead to theory capable of sustaining a defense against charges of a narrow methodological empiricism. The question of the relative weight of their importance, whether it is one correlation coefficient or another, does not overly concern me. I don't find such questions useful or interesting to address.

What interests me is what people do in organizations, not so much that some effects of their doing can be correlated with others. My view is that management in organizations is always more complex than it appears to be. Management is done in concert, in contradiction, in conflict and consensus by and through various agencies who fight, resist, squabble, and sabotage as much as they communicate, coordinate, and control. The resources that they use to do this are very simple. They are the powers, knowledges, and translations of the powers and knowledges of others that they are able to construct, as these others similarly seek to construct. The consequences of this simplicity can be very complex. Not only are the interpretive dynamics of power, knowledge, and translation rapidly likely to reach Byzantine layers of interpretation and sedimentation of culture, value, and history they are also likely to be accomplished by socially skilled actors in ways that invariably have surplus meaning attached to them. There will be more than meets the eye, as both David Silverman's (Silverman & Jones, 1976) and Deirdre Boden's (in press) ethnomethodologically influenced research programs demonstrate.

We have to start from the assumption that people do have some idea about what they are doing, do have an inkling of what games they are implicated in. Of course they could be wrong, and there is no reason to assume that they are more right than the social scientist. At the point of intersection between the situated action of the language games of everyday organizational life and those of the academy of sciences, the most interesting and parlous translations take place.

Where do institutional frameworks and practices come from? Within national institutional frameworks, important conventions surrounding phenomena such as accounting conventions, disciplinary conventions, tax rules, etcetera, vary culturally, nationally, specifically, and, of course, in terms of organizational contingencies. Such phenomena are enormously important to the ways in which management and organization gets to be done. For example, the state is one of the major organizational framers of organizational action, as it fixes so many parameters within which this action gets to be constituted.

Another aspect that is a corollary of this view of organizations sees them as arenas that various

agencies in and around the organization seek to configure according to their definitions of their (and other's) interests. Power is central to these practices, in both the sovereign and the disciplinary sense. In the sovereign sense, some have access to more resources, however defined, than do others. In disciplinary terms, it is through knowledges embedded in various disciplinary practices that attempts to bring off specifically interpretable courses of action. Hence we should no longer be overly concerned with the boundaries of organization action, with what is and what is not within an organization, with what an organization is. It is not important to determine these things a priori. It is an empirical matter. An organization is whatever it gets to be, defined in and through the practices that institutionalize it as such, in specific arenas and settings. These boundaries are sometimes in flux, somewhat ambiguous, varying with the kinds of power, conflicts, and contradictions going on in and around the organization.

D: What are the implications of this view for managers?

S: I think that management should look at how various kinds of routine get established, reproduced, and changed. I am thinking of the kinds of regulations; frameworks; accountability schemas; controls; configurations of space, time, knowledge, power, and resistance that characterize an organization. One should look to the very fiber of one's and others' normal ways of being organized and doing organization. One should look to these and say, "Let's look at some ways in which, whatever our criteria of effectiveness, the norms of what is good, what is bad and what is ugly are constituted."

One wouldn't necessarily agree with all criteria that many managers might use, but one would want to look at them. Whatever they are, let us try to analyze some institutional corollaries so that the institutional frames that produce these kinds of outcomes can be identified. We can then see to what extent it is practicable, feasible, ethical, or desirable to be able to replicate these in some way. One would hope that management and organization theorists might become a little more modest in respect to their claims to be able to intervene in organizational spheres and spaces. By using the approach sketched here, we may become alerted to the ways in which much of what goes on in and around organizations

is not necessarily subject to systematic manipulation and variation by the people who run organizations, or who think that they do.

Also, the kinds of national, specific institutional framing that may be functionally positive in one era and at one time may be dysfunctional at another time. Max Weber made this argument when he related the Protestant ethic to the spirit of capitalism at the dawn of the modern era. Simultaneously, he looked at the impact of other world religions upon the probability of capitalist economic success. He was skeptical about the possibility that these other world religions, such as Islam, Confucianism, or Hinduism, would provide the necessary linkage. Today, however, several writers, rightly or wrongly, are confident that in the present circumstances the evolution of Confucianism into a post-Confucian ethic has this necessary relationship. The argument is that this ethic fulfills a similar role to that which Weber scripted for the Protestant ethic nearly a hundred years ago. It alerts us to the possibility that something that once was an institutional handicap might, later, become an institutionally successful form of practice.

- D: We've talked about managers, we've talked about scholars, let's talk about students. How do you teach them? How do you orient them to postmodern perspectives?
- S: I don't think that teaching an undergraduate audience about postmodernism is necessarily any more difficult than teaching them about more conventional, more modernist forms of organization analysis and theory. The basic problem is not postmodernism *per se*, but their lack of an experiential basis to relate to. Nonetheless, they have considerable experience that they can bring to bear. There is a stock of popular culture, of popular knowledge, that you can tap—current affairs in the news; the movies, a great but much neglected source for organization theorists; novels and other narrative forms; musical lyrics. These can be very important sources of data for students to try to illustrate points. For students growing up today, in the 1990s, postmodern culture saturates their whole mature life. I mean that they're already framed within a postmodern culture. They're more at home with the kind of fast-cutting, jumping, moving images of a rock video than they are with the sort of straightforward narrative structures of the text. You can get

people to see that these two pose a set of oppositions, a set of differences picked up intellectually by writers like Baudrillard (1986) and Lyotard (1984). Implications are evident in such reflections for the relation between modern and postmodernist theory.

Secondly, students today are fascinated by difference. They live in a world surrounded by difference. They experience difference through the simulacra of TV and the movies and the everyday news, which a child growing up in the 1950s is less likely to have experienced. Today young people live in a world saturated by signs, by symbols, by media, by signification of difference and otherness. By contrast, my generation grew up in a sort of monocultural zone isolated in space and time, rarely transgressed except through the ether of static surrounding the Voice of America Jazz Hour with Willis Conover, 208 Radio Luxembourg, and the odd irruption on the BBC Light Programme. (Although, on a personal note, growing up in the North of England, yet fascinated by American culture, the blues, jazz, rock, the movies, the beat poets, Kerouac, James Dean, Bird, Billie, Elvis, Dylan, Miles, Coltrane, one experienced an estranging kind of otherness, a bizarre difference that years of displacements never entirely resolved.) Today's students live in an unutterably richer postmodern world of simultaneity, clarity, and difference. They are post-McLuhan. The linearity of straight narrative is one option, but not the only one. I think that this makes a difference—a difference to what one can do and expect.

- D: Are you saying that modernist theory is out of touch with the postmodern world?
- S: Yes and no. I doubt social change is a process like changing gears on a car. You don't just change from first into second gear. There isn't a moment of transition from modernity into postmodernity, from premodernity to modernity. Change is much more subtle, much slower, much more complex, much more sedimented. I think what happens is that the changes that occur trickle down into all the layers of sediment already stratified; this allows some ancient things to remain, be, or become visible while other new things stay on the surface or slide under the accretion of previous displacements. So because there are some elements of postmodernism in theory, in thinking, in empirical reality occurring

doesn't immediately invalidate or neutralize the modernist past. I mean, how could it? We live in an era, in an age that has been shaped, framed, and constituted by the illusion that this is possible. People do make their history, sometimes, occasionally, but not under circumstances of their choosing as a post-Hegelian philosopher once said. So, given that that is the case, no, but yes also.

What is happening is that there are, I believe, some changes in the world of empirical phenomena that we study which are not easily or readily captured in the representations that typically constituted the modernist forms. I think that the important point is that, whereas the representations of modernist thought may have been adequate to the task of representing a modernist reality, to keep repeating them over and over as reality changes is analogous to making silent movies in black and white while the technology of color and sound has become pervasive. If we keep on seeing it through the same old ways we'll never see it as being any different. To do that is to risk the kind of marginalization that has occurred in the history of science when particular technologies and scientific research tracks become redundant and marginalized due to some technological breakthrough. One thinks of the transformation that occurred in astronomy based upon optical lenses, when confronted with radio astronomy. New ways of seeing, new forms of representation, render the old ways redundant. Something similar may be in process in organization analysis, although the field is unlikely ever to become wholly redundant because the nature of organizational worlds is never all of one piece, and is in part an effect of the forms of representation available.

Hey, let's go for a swim.

NOTES

1. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* put out two issues on postmodernism in 1992 (Vol. 5, No. 1 and No. 2) and featured articles with Stewart Clegg. In July 1992, the *Academy of Management Review* did a special issue devoted to postmodern agenda, edited by Linda Smircich, Marta C  las, and Gareth Morgan (Vol. 17, No. 3). Finally *International Studies of Management & Organization* published the first of two 1992 special issues on postmodern management in the summer of 1992, edited by Stephen Fox, Robert Cooper, and Llu  s Tarin Mart  nez (Vol. 22, No. 2).

2. Post Modern Management: Diversity and Change was a showcase symposium at the August 1992 National Academy of Management Meetings in Las Vegas. Stewart Clegg's paper was titled, *Postmodern Management*.

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