Research Paper No. 1850

Organizational Culture: Beyond Struggles for Intellectual Dominance

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March 2004
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Beyond Struggles for Intellectual Dominance*

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March, 2004

To appear in S. Clegg, C. Hardy, W. Nord, and T. Lawrence, (Eds.), Handbook of

*We wish to express our thanks to Cynthia Hardy, Mats Alvesson, and Linda Putnam. All
three gave us the kind of constructive, appreciative critique that could serve as the norm
for discourse in a war-free intellectual environment.
When scholars review an area of literature, particularly in a handbook, we generally begin with an appreciative history of the work of those who opened up this area of inquiry and then offer a detailed review of the last few decades of research on the topic. Such a review has a linear, precise chronological structure, with attention to "who was first?" The tone is apparently objective and decisively authoritative: "this study demonstrated that..." The goal is to present the objective truth about what we've learned during these years of effort. The result is an enlightenment tale of cumulative progress, as one "original" contribution after another builds a deeper and broader understanding than was available before.

In a review, intellectual differences of opinion are usually handled with indirection and tact that can help scholars co-exist in a close-knit field while continuing to have cordial intellectual exchanges. The most frequently used strategy is silence, whereby a paper or book focuses predominantly on one point of view, relegating competing perspectives to the margins (for example, in a parenthetical aside, a separate chapter in a book, or a footnote) or simply not citing them at all. This popular strategy permits the full exploration and delineation of the favored point of view, while not creating a need to criticize, or even draw attention to, other perspectives. A variant on this approach is the review that briefly mentions a wider range of perspectives, but focuses primarily on the perspective the author personally prefers. Whether silence, marginalization, or tactful understatement is used, these commonly utilized strategies mask intellectual disagreements. The reader is forced to attend to silences and “read between the lines” of what is published in order to decipher what fundamental issues are causing discord.
In the last few decades, the assumptions underlying this kind of literature review have been profoundly challenged. A brief review of these critiques will explain the unusual structure of this review and provide an introduction to some controversies that have affected the cultural literature. Some of these critiques have argued that purportedly objective knowledge is deeply limited by the historical context in which the research was produced (e.g., Reed, 1985). Calas (1987), for example, described how Mintzberg's (1973) study of managerial work reflected an ivory tower isolation from the political turmoil that characterized that era. Other scholars have argued that knowledge "development" takes a cyclical rather than linear form. Barley and Kunda (1992) described an alternation between rational and normative discourses of control in organizational studies, while Perrow (1979) framed a "short and glorious" history of the field as a struggle between the forces of light (human relations) and darkness. Some postmodernists (e.g., Derrida, 1976) have argued that "original" contributions to knowledge are impossible because any text is unavoidably an unwitting assemblage of ideas and quotations, often uncited, from other texts; the same themes reappear, clothed as new insights (Jeffcutt, Grafton-Small, and Linstead, 1995; Calas and Smircich, 1990). Of particular relevance to this chapter, Kuhn (1970) portrays the history of science as a political struggle for the dominance of one intellectual view over another.

Furthermore, a subjective point of view structures an author's apparently "accurate" account (e.g., Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988; Czarniawska, 1999). Even the most ostensibly "scientific" writing contains rhetorical strategies that enhance authorial authority by making the author's subjective judgments invisible (as in the use of passive voice or avoidance of the pronouns "I" or "we"). Any review chapter requires a constant stream of value judgments about which studies were most important, which contributions were derivative or minor, and why one point of view gained ascendancy while another was ignored. Chronologies are disturbed by publication lags, and it is often not clear who deserves credit for a given idea. Any shared consensus that emerges is a value judgment; the objective truth about what has been learned and who was the first to learn it, is to some extent a judgment call. Many organizational scholars have become increasingly worried about the uncertainties inherent in the social scientific
enterprise and the inevitable exigencies of writing social scientific prose. In writing this chapter, we wanted to find a way to take these difficulties into account. We therefore decided to experiment with the conventional structure and tone of a review paper, to see if we could find another way to depict the accumulation of research on the topic of organizational culture.

The culture literature is unusual in that norms of silencing, marginalizing, and minimizing intellectual disagreements have sometimes been broken, usefully. Fundamental disagreements about epistemology, methodology, political ideology, and theory that might have handled only in "subterranean" outlets such as blind reviews, have sometimes been openly argued in the cultural literature. For example, a number of publications argue openly for one point of view in preference to other, explicitly elaborated alternatives. We have a textual record of overt conflict, therefore, that can challenge taken-for-granted certainties and inspire new ideas. Because cultural research is characterized by deep disagreements about fundamental issues, however, there is little sense of a cumulative building of what would be generally recognized as advances in knowledge in this topic area. The seriousness of these intellectual differences makes it difficult to review the results of cultural research in a conventional manner. Whether one welcomes or disdains overt conflicts about fundamental issues, it is clear that any full review of organizational culture research must respond to the existence of these disagreements.

Rather than telling a conventional, chronological tale of linear progress toward greater knowledge, we have decided to experiment with an alternative structure for this review. In first part of this chapter, we portray research in this domain as a struggle for intellectual dominance among the proponents of various theories, methodological preferences, epistemologies, and political orientations (see also Hirsch and Lounsbury's (1997) review of the "family quarrel" among institutional sociologists). We use military metaphors to structure our description of this struggle for dominance: the organizational culture "war games" or, more specifically, a game of "king of the mountain."
Organizational Culture

The childhood war game of King of the Mountain is preferably played on a sandy beach so no one will get hurt. One king's temporary triumph at the top of a sand pile is rapidly superseded by the reign of another would-be monarch (boy or girl), until the succession of short-lived victories and the plethora of defeats leaves the pile flattened. Sometimes the tide washes away the traces of the struggle and sometimes children (usually a fresh army) rebuild the pile and start the game anew.

The game of king of the mountain has several attributes that make it a useful metaphor for our purposes. First, some players choose not to play the game, preferring to build their own castles in the sand. In king of the mountain games, coalitions usually evolve spontaneously, without much conscious coordination. The goal is to depose the current king. When that is accomplished, the coalition often dissolves, only to reconstitute itself in a somewhat different form when a new king or queen takes over. "Attacks" often take the form of a solo climbing to the top of the sand pile, rather than someone deliberately and aggressively pulling rivals down. Finally, it is important to say that we, as authors of this review, do not see ourselves as innocent, distant, or dispassionate adult observers of this game. We have, for better or worse, been fully involved players in the game, sometimes consciously, sometimes not. Using this metaphor, we "trace out the rise of the partisan camps, battles fought, and the damage done in the back alleys of the editorial and tenure processes," aiming to offer a "painfully accurate overview of the games academics play" (Zammuto, 1998, p. 731).

Any metaphor brings some issues into focus while obscuring others (Pinder and Bourgeois, 1982; Morgan, 1983a). The war games metaphor de-emphasizes isolationist and collaborative intellectual strategies. It can leave the impression of intentional coordination when coincidence or independent simultaneity would be more accurate descriptions. What was intended to be a non-aggressive description of an intellectual position can be interpreted as an aggressive attack. Times have changed since the first edition of this handbook, and many cultural researchers are no longer so open about competitiveness. The authors of this chapter believe that conflict and the struggle for
intellectual dominance have not disappeared. They have simply gone underground. Some cultural researchers deliberately prefer to explore intellectual differences through collaborative, conversational forms of speaking and writing. Personally, we are concerned about the deleterious effects of a struggle for dominance, and further worry that the use of military metaphors may help to perpetuate conflict rather than encourage understanding. For this reason, we critique the use of these military metaphors in the conclusion of this chapter, and offer an alternative metaphor, the idea of an infinite game. This approach highlights aspects of cultural theory and research that are obscured or ignored when military metaphors are used and when issues that generate conflict are the main focus of attention.

The Revolutionary Vanguard

Our focus here is on organizational culture research, and until the end of this chapter, we restrict our attention to studies that explicitly focus on this topic. We regret we cannot include the extensive socio-cultural work done by discipline-based sociologists and anthropologists, as that would require more space, more expertise, and a broader societal scope than we can manage. Although we make a concerted attempt to integrate North American, Australian, and European work on this topic, our language limitations prohibit a broader intellectual base. We begin the telling of this story in the 1970’s and 1980’s, as if organizational culture research began then, without history.¹ We cite some intellectual predecessors of particular points of view, less as contributors of the history of an idea than as totems invoked to legitimate certain points of view, drawing attention to the exclusion of other viewpoints with equally venerable intellectual lineage. We choose to constrain the historical depth of this review because of space limitations and because extensive treatments of the history of the organizational culture research already exist (e.g., Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Jeffeutt et al., 1995; Ouchi and Wilkins, 1985; Smircich and Calas, 1987; Turner, 1990). We allude to this historical shortsightedness by noting that organizational studies experienced a renaissance of interest in culture in the late 1970’s.
Most accounts cite the successes of Japanese management and the perceived failures of traditional organizational analysis as catalysts for a re-awakening interest in corporate culture among practitioners (e.g., Turner, 1990, pp. 85-6; Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. 4-5). In the late 1970’s, many academics were highly critical of mainstream organizational research, which, at that time, emphasized quantitative, neo-positivist science in both the U.S. (where it has long been the tradition) and, to a lesser extent, in the U.K. Some academics and many practitioners felt that this mainstream approach was arid and fruitless because it was overly reliant on a rational model of human behavior, a structural approach to questions of corporate strategy, and a love of numerical analysis. Business education based on such research, these critics argued, would create generations of managers who knew more about spreadsheets and models than people.

Members of the cultural revolutionary vanguard, whether or not they advocated the use of qualitative methods, shared a conviction that a cultural framework would permit them to broaden organizational research and theory. Many of us were originally drawn to culture as an emancipatory way of approaching organizational phenomena, and as a metaphor for revitalizing organizational theory. Culture seemed to allow us to move away from the constricting “boxes” of our theories and methods at a time when this change seemed to be needed, helpful, empowering, and energizing. In these first stages of the cultural revolution, hope was in the air, new insights seemed likely, and the possibility of an organizational theory that was at once broader and more useful was a heady tonic for many.

Value Engineering and the Integration Perspective

At this point, the game of king of the mountain had not yet begun. It was as if children drifted to the beach and began to play in the sand, at first without much interaction or coordination. Although publication dates can be misleading, and (as will be the case throughout this chapter) it is difficult to choose which of many exemplars to cite, many of the first widely influential culture publications were managerially oriented and written primarily for executive and M.B.A. audiences (e.g., Deal and Kennedy, 1982;
Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Critics later labeled this cultural approach “value engineering.” These authors argued that effective top managers could build a strongly unified culture by articulating a set of "corporate" values, perhaps in a vision or mission statement. If those values were reinforced consistently through formal policies, informal norms, stories, rituals, and jargon, in time almost all employees would allegedly share those values. This would supposedly set up a domino effect: higher commitment, greater productivity, and ultimately, more profits. These seductive promises were popularized in the media, complete with advice about how to create a “strong” (meaning unitary) culture. Not surprisingly, culture quickly became the hottest product on the consulting market.

The value engineers touched a responsive chord in many managerially oriented academic researchers who shared the perception that organizational research had become dead-ended, boring, and/or too distant from the practical concerns of business. A flurry of culture research appeared (e.g., Enz, 1988; Ott, 1989; Ouchi and Jaeger, 1978; Pennings and Gresov, 1986; Pondy, Frost, Morgan, and Dandridge, 1983; Schein, 1985). These studies showed that culture has many manifestations: espoused values (sometimes called content themes when enacted values are inferred from behavior); formal practices (written policies that govern organizational structures and rules); informal practices (such as norms about appropriate behavior or proper decision making procedures), and symbolic manifestations, such as organizational stories, rituals, specialized jargon, decor, dress norms, interior design, and architecture. Some define culture as the patterns of interpretation underlying these manifestations.

The pattern of interpretation described in Integration studies is characterized by consistency of interpretation across manifestations, organization-wide consensus, and clarity (Martin, 1992). In Integration studies, culture is "an area of meaning carved out of a vast mass of meaninglessness, a small clearing of lucidity in a formless, dark, always ominous jungle" (Berger, 1967, p. 23 quoted in Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergesen, and Kurzweil, 1984, p. 26). Within the domain that is considered the culture, there is virtually no ambiguity reported; Schein (1991) even argues that that which is ambiguous is not part
of culture. Reviews which include a description of some of the historical roots of the Integration literature are: Ott, 1989; Ouchi and Wilkins, 1985; Schultz, 1994.

The Integration perspective conceptualizes cultural change as an organization-wide cultural transformation, whereby an old unity is hopefully replaced by a new one; conflict and ambiguity may occur in the interim, but these are interpreted as evidence of the deterioration of a "strong" (meaning Integrated) culture before a new unity with different content is established (e.g., Clark, 1972; Greenwood and Hinings, 1988; Jonsson and Lundin, 1977). When dissent appears or ambiguities emerge, these anomalies are explained as evidence of individual deviance, insufficiently homogeneous employee selection procedures, poor socialization of new employees, a weak culture, a temporary period of confusion during a time of cultural realignment, or a domain of organizational life that is not part of the culture. In these Integration studies of cultural change, the bottom line is that homogeneity, harmony, and a unified culture are desirable and achievable, even though regrettable deviations from this idea may temporarily occur.

Examples of Integration studies include both qualitative (e.g., McDonald, 1991; Schein, 1985) and quantitative studies. For example, O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991) created a Q-sort measure based on content analysis of managerially oriented qualitative literature, consisting of 54 values said to characterize "strong," that is Integrated corporate cultures. Managerial and professional employees of large accounting firms were asked which of these values characterized their companies; values not chosen by a majority were excluded as not descriptive of the firm's culture. O'Reilly et al. found that when new professional and managerial employees endorsed the same subset of values that were endorsed by current professional and managerial employees of a company, the job satisfaction of those new employees was higher and intent to quit (turnover) was lower, in comparison with new employees with dissenting opinions. Denison (1990) used questionnaire items (originally developed to measure organizational climate) to measure culture. Respondent samples consisting mostly of managerial and professional respondents used Likert scales to describe the behavioral norms of their companies. Behavioral norms endorsed by a majority of respondents were used to define
their firm's culture. Items that did not generate wide consensus were excluded, as not
descriptive of the organization’s culture. These results were positively correlated with
various measures of firm financial performance.

Many, but not all, Integration studies have value engineering overtones, claiming
that culture can be managed or that "strong" cultures can lead to improved productivity
and performance (e.g., Collins and Porras, 2002; Kotter, 1992). This may explain why the
Integration perspective continues to generate large numbers of cultural studies, at least in
the U.S. (e.g., Brown, 1990; Schrodt, 2002). In contrast to such functionalist research,
other Integration studies take a more symbolic approach (Schultz and Hatch, 1996). For
example, Barley (1983) describes how funeral directors use a series of practices and
rituals (e.g., changing the sheets on a death bed, washing and putting make-up on a
corpse, closing the corpse's eyes) to create the illusion that death is life-like.

Many Integration studies, particularly those utilizing qualitative methods like the
Barley study described immediately above, are generalist studies, in that they examine a
variety of cultural manifestations. For example, Pettigrew (1979) described how
headmasters used rituals, stories, and jargon to generate commitment to their schools.
McDonald (1991) explains how uniforms, slogans, posters, a charismatic leader, well-
defined rituals, and a strong work ethic combined to create a sense of excitement and a
commitment to excellence among volunteers and employees of a temporary organization,
the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee. Quantitative Integration studies can
also be generalist (e.g., Siehl and Martin, 1988).

In contrast, O'Reilly et al. (1991) and Denison (1990) are specialist Integration
studies, in that they focus on only one (or at most two) cultural manifestation(s). Other
specialist Integration studies focus on a single kind of symbolic manifestation, such as
ceremonies (e.g., Dandridge, 1986), organizational stories (e.g., Brown, 1990; Feldman,
1990), and rituals (e.g., Knuf, 1993). When specialist Integration studies assume that the
manifestations of a culture are consistent with each other, they sometimes, without
adequate evidence, argue that a single manifestation can be used to represent the culture
as a whole. The problem with this is that meanings associated with a small sample of manifestations may not be consistent with meanings associated with a full range of cultural manifestations.

In addition, most Integration studies rely primarily on the views of managerial and professional employees. This presents a problem because it cannot be assumed that all or even most employees share the views of this minority of powerful individuals, particularly given the likelihood of differences of opinion across levels of a hierarchy (e.g., Alvesson, 1993). Thus, Integration studies often study a limited subset of manifestations and/or a small and unrepresentative sample of employees, and generalize from these limited data to the culture of the organization as a whole. This part-whole error characterizes much Integration research (Martin, 2002). Part-whole errors create a kind of tautology whereby culture is defined and then measured in Integration terms; evidence that is not congruent with this approach is ignored or dismissed as not part of the culture (such as any evidence of ambiguity or any quantitative measure that does not generate organization-wide consensus). As we shall see, this kind of tautology is not unique to Integration theories. However, because of the part-whole error, and because so many other variables (such as a company’s product mix, economic conditions, competitors’ choices) affect firm performance, the oft-repeated claims of a link between a “strong” Integrated culture and organizational performance must be regarded as, at best, unproven (e.g., Siehl and Martin, 1990). In spite of these difficulties, it is important to keep sight of the evidence presented in Integration studies, suggesting that there are some issues and interpretations that most organizational members apparently share.

**The Opposition Gathers: The Differentiation Perspective**

Roughly at the same time as the flood of Integration research began to appear, another group of scholars, mostly working independently, were drawn to some of the ideas expressed by the cultural revolutionary vanguard. They too thought that mainstream organizational theory and research needed revitalization. They too thought that a renaissance of interest in organizational culture would bring an interdisciplinary creativity
into the field, expanding the types of issues being studied and the kinds of methods considered valid. Like many of the advocates of the Integration viewpoint, some of this second group of scholars included qualitative researchers, who were excited because now, ("at last" in the U.S.), ethnographic research would have a home in organizational studies. They hoped that, rather than being dismissed as "a nice story about an N of one," qualitative case studies would be appreciated for their richly detailed, context-specific insights. Some scholars in this second group were also hopeful that cultural work would generate alternatives to the managerial orientation that had been dominant for so long, particularly in the U.S.; now the opinions and interests of lower level employees would be more fully represented.

This collection of scholars soon generated an impressive body of work, labeled here and elsewhere (e.g., Martin and Meyerson, 1988) as the Differentiation perspective. Differentiation studies find: (1) interpretations of manifestations are inconsistent; (2) consensus occurs only within subcultural boundaries; and (3) clarity exists only within subcultures, although ambiguities appear in the interstices between subcultures. In this way, subcultures are like islands of clarity in a sea of ambiguity. Differentiation studies developed these three, empirically based commonalities without much intentional coordination (although meetings, such as the 1984 Vancouver conference on organizational culture and the annual gatherings of the Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism, did provide some opportunities for contact and interchange among a wide range of cultural researchers). In the terms of the king of the mountain game, it was as if some of the children playing independently on the beach began to notice each other, eventually moving together to play in a parallel fashion.

A good Differentiation study has to have depth, to "penetrate the front" presented to strangers (e.g., Schein, 1985), thus attempting to overcome impression management and social desirability biases. Such an approach should reveal aspects of organizational life that do not conform to managerial ideals. Many Differentiation scholars stress the importance of including more than just cognitive and symbolic aspects of culture. Studies should also include the material aspects of working life such as pay inequalities, the dirt
and noise of an assembly line, etc. This emphasis on depth of understanding produced
Differentiation studies that were sensitive to inconsistencies between stated attitudes and
actual behavior, between formal practices and informal norms, between one story and
another, and -- most important -- between the interpretations of one group and another
(e.g., Van Maanen and Barley, 1984; Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989). Some
Differentiation studies simply describe horizontal subcultural differences (Rosen, 1985),
for example between different functions, occupations, or jobs (e.g., Helmer, 1993; Trice
and Beyer, 1993). Others take a more critical view, drawing attention to vertical
differences between conflicting subcultures, which often represent conflicts of interest
between groups of high and low status employees (e.g., Alvesson, 1993; Jaques, 1951;
Rosen, 1985).

Examples highlight the texture of this kind of cultural work. Bartunek and Moch
(1991) show how five subcultures in a food production firm reacted differently to
management’s imposition of a Quality of Working Life intervention. Top management
was primarily concerned with control. In-house consulting staff members were
cooperative. The management of the local plants where the program was implemented
was paternalistic, using imagery of employees as “children” in relation to managerial
“parents.” Line employees exhibited a conformist reaction, following management’s
preferences. Machinists, historically an active, independent, and comparatively well-paid
group, actively resisted the intervention. Thus, to the extent that consensus exists in
Differentiation studies, it exists within subcultural boundaries.

A hierarchical, or vertical, alignment of subcultures is evident in Van Maanen’s
(1991) study of ride operators at Disneyland. At the bottom of the status ranking were
food vendors ("pancake ladies" and "coke blokes"), while the male operators of yellow
submarines and jungle boats held high status positions. Tension among ride operators,
customers, and supervisors was evident, as ride operators arranged for obnoxious
customers to be soaked with water when submarine hatches opened. Supervisors were
consistently foiled in their attempts to catch operators breaking rules. In Young’s (1989)
study of “bag ladies” in a British manufacturing plant, tensions between management and
labor were evident, and the younger and older workers fissioned into different subcultures. As these examples indicate, subcultures often appear along lines of functional, occupational, and hierarchical Differentiation, often coalescing into overlapping, nested groups that coexist in harmony, conflict, or independence from each other (Bastien, 1992; Louis, 1985). Also evident in these studies is a subtext: many of these subcultural differences also reflect demographic differences (e.g., class, race, ethnicity, age, and gender), creating working environments that are racially segregated (Bell, 1990; Cox, 1993) and/or deeply gendered (e.g., Aaltio and Mills, 2002; Gherardi, 1995; Kanter, 1977; Mills, 1992).

Inconsistency across cultural manifestations is also evident in Differentiation studies. For example, in the food production firm studied by Bartunek and Moch, top management said one thing to employees and did something different. At Disneyland, ride operators appeared to conform to management’s rules, while in fact doing whatever they pleased. In a particularly detailed examination of the effects of such inconsistencies on individuals, Kunda (1992) studied engineers’ reactions as they conformed to a company ritual designed to exhibit commitment to supposedly shared company values. During moments of ease while “off stage,” the engineers used humor and sarcastic side remarks to express their disapproval, skepticism, or ambivalence. As these examples indicate, espoused values, behavior mandated by formal policies, and informal norms are often observed to be inconsistent (see also Cooper and Meidlinger's (2000) study of tensions in a Catholic parish and Trujillo's (1992) analysis of multiple interpretations of major league baseball ballpark culture).

What these studies have in common is a willingness to acknowledge inconsistencies (i.e., attitudes versus behavior, formal policies versus actual practices, etc.). They see consensus as occurring only within subcultural boundaries. These studies describe whatever inconsistencies and subcultural differences they find in clear terms; there is little ambiguity here, except in the interstices between subcultures. As was the case in Integration research, there is a kind of conceptual and methodological tautology in this approach. No evidence of organization-wide consensus is sought and ambiguity is
acknowledged only when it occurs outside subcultural borders (Martin and Meyerson, 1988; Martin, 1992). Differentiation studies define culture in terms of inconsistency, subcultural consensus, and clarity -- only within subcultures, and that is what they find.

In contrast to the self-contained approach of Integration studies, Differentiation research tends to be more sensitive to environmental influences on cultures in organizations. Differentiation research has shown that the subcultures within an organization can reflect, and be partially determined by, cultural groupings in the larger society. For example, functional subcultures within a firm can reflect occupational subcultures that span firm boundaries, as when accountants or programmers appear to create the same kinds of subcultures, no matter where they work (e.g., Gregory, 1983). From the Differentiation perspective, cultural change is localized within one or more subcultures, alterations tend to be incremental, and innovations are triggered primarily by pressures from an organization's environment (e.g., Meyerson and Martin, 1987). The environment is likely to be segmented, so different subcultures within the same organization experience different kinds and rates of change. Thus, from a Differentiation viewpoint, an organizational culture is not unitary; it is a nexus where environmental influences intersect, creating a nested, overlapping set of subcultures within a permeable organizational boundary (Martin, 1992, p. 111-114). (This nexus approach can be used to conceptualize overlap and nesting among national cultures as well, see Sackmann, 1997).

In these examples, Differentiation studies offer a bold, empirically well-supported challenge to the Integration assumption that organizational culture can be a unitary monolith composed of clear values and interpretations that are perceived, enacted, and shared by all or most employees, in the same ways (e.g., Alvesson, 2002; Turner, 1986). The battle lines between Differentiation and Integration perspectives were now clearly drawn, and it was time to begin the first major offensive in the culture wars.

Let the Games Begin: The Attack of the Differentiation Advocates
Hundreds of Integration studies have been published in the decades since the cultural renaissance began. Most of the studies published in U.S. organizational journals were clearly Integrationist and shared a managerial emphasis (Barley, Meyer, and Gash, 1988; Jeffcutt, 1995). "Strong," (that is, Integrated) cultures continued to be pitched as the answer to managers' desires for greater control over their employees and greater profitability for their firms. In the 1980's, Differentiation scholarship had been outflanked by value engineering approaches, and the Integration view had become king of the mountain. Needless to say, advocates of the Differentiation viewpoint were not pleased by these developments and so they regrouped and then counter-attacked on several different fronts in the next decade. Some observed with contempt that Integration studies had "sold out" to the managerial perspective that dominated mainstream organizational research, (e.g., Turner, 1986; Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989, p. 92): Calas and Smircich (1987), noting the overwhelming numbers of Integration studies being published, declared that the cultural revolution was in danger of becoming "Dominant, but dead." This fear was premature. Critiques of the Integration view are still being voiced (e.g., Alvesson, 2002; Martin, 2002). Integration theories of culture have some of the qualities of Lazarus; just when one thinks they are dead, they pop up, full of life, perhaps because of purported ties between "strong" Integrated cultures and organizational performance or organizational change programs. Conflicts between the Integration and Differentiation perspectives continue to proliferate, creating openings for other parties to enter the battlefield.

A New Contender: The Fragmentation Perspective

A new contender, labeled the Fragmentation perspective (Meyerson and Martin, 1987; Martin, 1992), entered the fray and tried to redraw the battle lines. This perspective is logically positioned on the same three dimensions that are the focus of the Integration versus Differentiation struggle (degree of consistency, consensus, and clarity). According to advocates of the Fragmentation view, the relationship among the manifestations of a culture are neither clearly consistent nor clearly inconsistent; instead, the relationship is complex, containing elements of contradiction and confusion. Similarly, consensus is not
organization-wide nor is it specific to a given subculture. Instead, consensus among individuals is transient and issue-specific, producing short-lived affinities that are quickly replaced by a different pattern of affinities, as a different issue draws the attention of a different subset of cultural members (e.g., Feldman, 1989; Kreiner and Schultz, 1993). In such an ephemeral environment, culture is no longer a clearing in a jungle of meaninglessness. Now, culture is the jungle itself. According to the Fragmentation point of view, the essence of any culture is pervasive ambiguity (e.g., Feldman, 1991; Meyerson, 1991a). Clarity, then, is a dogma of meaningfulness and order propagated by management and researchers of a particular persuasion to create an illusion of clarity where there is none (e.g., Levitt and Nass, 1989).

Lack of consistency, lack of consensus, and ambiguity are the hallmarks of a Fragmentation view of culture. Ambiguity is defined to include irony, paradox, and irreconcilable contradictions, as well as multiple meanings. In a Fragmentation account, power is diffused broadly at all levels of the hierarchy and throughout the organization's environment. Change is a constant flux, rather than an intermittent interruption in an otherwise stable state. Because they portray change as largely triggered by the environment or other forces beyond an individual's control, Fragmentation studies of change offer few guidelines for those who would normatively control the change process. Organizational precursors of the Fragmentation view include, for example, Brunsson's (1985) observations about organizational irrationality and hypocrisy, March and his colleagues studies of ambiguity in decision making (Cohen and March, 1974; March and Olsen, 1976), and Weick's observations about sense making (1995).

In an early example of Fragmentation research, Feldman (1989) studied policy analysts in a large government bureaucracy. They spent their days writing policy reports that might never be read and, in any case, were unlikely to influence the formation of a policy. In such a context, ambiguities prevented a clear analysis of the meaning(lessness) of the analysts' work. In Meyerson's (1991b) studies of social workers, ambiguity pervaded an occupation where the objectives were unclear, the means to those goals were not specified, and where sometimes it wasn't even clear when an intervention had been
successful or even what success in this context might have meant. Meyerson concluded that to study this occupational subculture -- while excluding ambiguity from the realm of what is defined as cultural -- would have been dramatically incomplete, even misleading. Weick (1991) offered a Fragmentation view of a foggy airport in Tenerife, as pilots, controllers, and cockpit crews struggled to make themselves understood across barriers of status, language, and task assignment. In this context, pervasive ambiguity was not benign; hundreds of lives were lost as two jumbo jets collided in the fog. Robertson and Swan (2003) studied highly educated consultants working within a knowledge-intensive firm where project work was inherently fluid, complex, and uncertain.

These studies illustrate the main point of Fragmentation research: that an understanding of ambiguities must be a central component of any cultural study that claims to capture the important aspects of people's working lives. The methodological choices made in Fragmentation research enable these kinds of conclusions to be drawn. For example, Fragmentation studies often tend to focus on occupations (i.e., social worker, policy analyst) and contexts (i.e., cross-national communication, literally in the fog) where ambiguity is easily seen. As noted regarding research conducted from the other two perspectives, Fragmentation studies exhibit a kind of methodological tautology: these studies define culture in a particular way, and then find what they are looking for (Martin, 2002). Introducing ambiguity into the conceptualization and study of culture raises the possibility that, when asked to describe their culture, members might say initially, "There is no recognizable culture here." On further reflection, they might report that this is a place where "...nothing is as it seems, there are no apparent connections between what people do and what happens in the end." This view of what is believed to be going on is an aspect of culture that is missed from the Integration and Differentiation perspectives because their strong focus on a consensus that makes things clear and repeatable. Thus, a contribution of the Fragmentation perspective is to alert and to challenge organizations and scholars to be wary of the assumption that culture is necessarily about strongly shared values and a coherent, predictable set of norms and behaviors. If researchers miss this point they can overlook important aspects of culture.
and introduce more certainty and predictability into the depiction of organizational culture than is warranted.

Cultural studies consistent with one of the three theoretical perspectives continue, to this day, to be published. Some Fragmentation and Differentiation studies continue to find data that challenges the Integration view directly, while others simply ignore cultural research not consistent with their view. Other studies, evidently weary of this dispute among the three approaches to studying culture, turned their attention to two sets of issues that had, so far, affected cultural writing primarily in the back alleys of academia, in closed faculty meetings and blind journal article reviews. These two issues are political interests (whether or not a given cultural study facilitated or was critical of a managerial point of view) and methodological preferences (regarding the superiority of quantitative or qualitative methods). The surfacing of these disputes had the ultimate effect of partially cross-cutting the Integration versus Differentiation versus Fragmentation disputes, bringing different issues to the battle front.

The Critical Theorists Take on the Managerialists, while the "Objective Scientists" Try to Stay Neutral

This battle began as a skirmish within the Differentiation perspective. Alvesson (2002) has argued strongly that there are two kinds of Differentiation studies. The first kind simply describes subcultural differences, often representing them as based on functional or occupational assignments, co-existing in a complementary, harmonious, or orthogonally independent fashion. For example, at OZCO (a pseudonym for a high tech company) members of the Marketing division often felt that Engineering "threw products over the wall" dividing the two subcultures of the company, expecting the marketing professionals to find ways to sell an unfamiliar product that might not even have a market (Martin, 1992). Although this subcultural difference produced friction, the differentiation between these groups was horizontal (Rosen, 1991), and both were clearly essential to the functioning of the company. This kind of subcultural differentiation is congruent with a managerial point of view (see also Trice and Beyer, 1993, on occupational subcultures).
In contrast, a second kind of Differentiation study focuses on vertical differentiation between advantaged and disadvantaged subcultures, drawing attention to the organizational life of non-managerial employees. This focus on labor versus management conflicts of interest (as well as other subcultural differences associated with demographic markers such as sex or race), is easily congruent with critical theory. Critical theorists point to the biases of studies that tacitly or overtly serve the needs of management at the expense of other employees (i.e., Knights and Willmott, 1987; Mumby, 1988; Reed, 1985). Stablein and Nord (1985) reviewed organizational culture research, classifying studies according to the extent to which they represent a critical point of view, and Alvesson (2002) has done so for more recent work.

Clues to where Differentiation studies stand on the managerial versus critical dimension can be most easily found in theoretical introductions, rather than in the content of descriptions of particular subcultures. Studies that take a more critical approach tend to cite some common intellectual predecessors to legitimate their theoretical orientation and anti-management tone. These include organizational scholars open to the insights of Marxist/critical theory, occupational research in the tradition of the Chicago school of sociology, and some early qualitative studies of organizations that included a focus on lower level employees (e.g., Crozier, 1964; Jaques, 1951; Selznick, 1949). These intellectual predecessors share a concern with the everyday working lives of lower status people. This focus challenges the top management's views and delineates the negative consequences of the status quo on those who are relatively disadvantaged. In this context, it is surprising to note how few Differentiation studies, even those written from a critical theory viewpoint, go beyond the delineation of subcultural differences to examine processes of organizational change that might benefit those who are at the bottom of an organizational hierarchy, for example in a grass roots collective action. Although several literatures are relevant to these questions of change (for example, research on social movements, unions, and sabotage), these issues have received relatively little attention to date from cultural researchers.
Thus, the Differentiation perspective includes at least two kinds of studies. One kind documents subcultural differentiation in a non-critical manner that tacitly or overtly reinforces a managerial perspective (i.e., Martin and Siehl, 1983). The other adds a critical, anti-management reading of the data (empirical examples include Rosen, 1985; Van Maanen, 1991; Young, 1989). Although not as diametrically opposed as the first two kinds, a third category of Differentiation studies aims to transcend political interests by tacitly or explicitly claiming to offer an objective and accurate picture of a subcultural context (e.g., Barley's 1986 ethnography of CT scanners). Ostensibly objective, neutral accounts describe cultures without examining in depth the effects of power differences or the issue of managerial control of employees' behavior. Needless to say, many critics would challenge the ability of any study to be free of the interests, biases, and ideological predilections of its authors.

Having come this far, critical theorists then expanded their attention to studies conducted from the other two theoretical perspectives. While some Integration studies clearly adopted a managerial point of view (e.g., Schein, 1985; Kotter, 1992), others described a strongly unified culture in critical terms, as an oppressive hegemony that successful controlled employees, in some cases even giving them a false consciousness that approved of their own oppression (Jermier, 1992). A classic example is Foucault's (1976) Integrationist description of the Panopticon, where the architecture of the prison permits hegemonic control of the behavior of prisoners who can be observed 24 hours a day. Other critical Integration studies have offered hegemonic descriptions of large corporations (e.g., O'Reilly, 1989; Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989) and the shop floors of manufacturing firms (Sewall and Wilkinson, 1992, 1998). Integration studies that adopted an ostensibly neutral and objective perspective include Barley's (1983) study of funeral directors and Martin, Feldman, Hatch, and Sitkin's (1983) study of claims of cultural uniqueness in organizational stories.

Fragmentation studies can also be classified as managerial, critical, or ostensibly neutral. For example, managerially oriented Fragmentation studies describe ambiguity as a tool that management can use to usefully glide over differences in the interpretation of
organizational events or "corporate values" (see Kreiner and Schultz' 1993 study of cross-organizational organizing, Cohen and March's 1974 description of ambiguity in decision making, and Eisenberg, 1984, or McCaskey, 1988, on executive's deliberate use of ambiguity). Some critically oriented Fragmentation studies show how executives deny the existence of ambiguity and offer a false claim of clarity in a complex arena, as in Perrow's (1984) study of the Three Mile Island disaster and Sabrosky, Thompson, and McPherson's (1982) examination of ambiguity in the U.S. military command structure (see also Grafton-Small and Linstead, 1995; van Marrewijk, 1996; van Reine, 1996). Finally, some Fragmentation studies tacitly claim to offer an objective empirical portrait of a culture (e.g., Levitt and Nass's 1989 study of decision making in the publishing industry).

Thus, the skirmish between managerial and critical Differentiation viewpoints spread, highlighting differences in orientation towards power and control in organizational cultures studied from all three theoretical perspectives. This skirmish became a larger battle, one that cross cut the lines drawn between the Integration, Differentiation, and Fragmentation camps. On the horizon, another conflict was brewing, one that would cross cut prior battle lines in yet another way.

The Methodology Battle

The methodology battle was particularly fierce because researchers' firmly held epistemological beliefs often provide the foundation for their method preferences (e.g., Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Although some skirmishes in this battle took place out in the open, most were more like guerrilla warfare, taking place in a series of out-of-sight maneuvers. The methods battle affected, for example, an editor's choice of journal reviewers for a culture article, a "blind" reviewer's verdict about the merits of a particular manuscript, assumptions about how doctoral students should be trained, and even the content of letters from external reviewers in tenure cases. Such out-of-sight maneuvers left few published traces that can be quoted here without breaking norms of confidentiality and blind review. Nevertheless, we personally can testify that these non-
public fights are fiercely contested, particularly in the U.S. where field is dominated by managerial interests, integrationist theoretical preconceptions, and quantitative methods. Let us begin with an examination of quantitative cultural research.

Most quantitative researchers measure culture using questionnaires, drawing primarily on techniques used in organizational climate research (Schneider, 1990). Such questionnaires are generally “specialist” in that they focus on only one kind of cultural manifestation -- usually a measure of agreement with a series of espoused (rather than enacted) values or a self-report of group behavioral norms (e.g., “People in my work group are generally more cooperative than competitive). Although such measures generally use Likert scales (Denison, 1990), other studies have used more innovative techniques, such as adjective sorting tasks (e.g., O’Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell, 1991).

There are several problems with these kinds of quantitative measure of culture. Here the distinction between specialist (one or at most two manifestations of culture) and generalist (multiple manifestations) becomes relevant again. Specialist studies tacitly assume that one kind of manifestation is consistent with or representative of the culture as a whole, disregarding the numerous Differentiation studies that show evidence of inconsistency across manifestations. Additionally, there are problems of bias. Fearing that researchers’ promises of anonymity will not be kept, respondents may give misleading answers that are reflective of top management’s expressed preferences, rather than their own actual beliefs or behaviors. In this way, respondents create a false impression, usually one of organizational consensus. Additional bias occurs when respondents give answers that seem socially desirable or that reflect their current levels of job satisfaction (high or low), rather than answers that reveal a more enduring quality of their experience. Another source of bias stems from the tautology problems discussed above. Responses that contradict the assumptions of the researcher’s theoretical perspective, and respondents who are likely to dissent from the researcher’s assumptions, may be excluded from discussion and analysis -- as not part of the culture. A few questionnaire-based specialist studies have used broader, random samples of respondents, across status levels, and have found evidence of subcultural differentiation (pockets of ignorance of and
resistance to managerial values), rather than organization-wide consensus (Kilmann, 1985; Rousseau, 1990).

These kinds of quantitative measures may give a misleading representation of a culture because the researcher has generated the alternatives that the respondents are evaluating. Several innovative quantitative measures of culture avoid this problem. For example, Kilduff and Corley (2000) have developed network measures of the three theoretical perspectives, and Kolb and Shepherd (1997) created a novel measure of concept mapping, Siehl and Martin (1984) measured cultural socialization with a company-specific jargon vocabulary test and a "tacit knowledge test" (randomly selected words in a memo from the organization's president were blacked out and employees were asked to "fill in the blanks").

Even these relatively innovative quantitative methods have been criticized by qualitative researchers, primarily due to concerns about depth and breadth of cultural understanding. Advocates of ethnographic methods generally produce broad, generalist studies that offer richly detailed descriptions of a wide range of cultural manifestations (e.g., Kunda, 1992; Schein, 1987; Smircich, 1983; Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Van Maanen, Dabbs, and Faulkner, 1982), especially if longitudinal data have been collected (e.g., Pettigrew, 1985a, 1985b). Many ethnographers also disapprove when specialist studies focus on espoused values or self-reported behavioral norms because such a "superficial" focus cannot "penetrate the front" of people's desires to present themselves in a favorable light. For all these reasons, ethnographers often consider quantitative studies far inferior to the depth of understanding made possible by long-term participant-observation. This concern is particularly relevant in organizational contexts, where behavior is often constrained by managerial preferences or employees' career ambitions and thus cannot be assumed to reflect an employee's true attitudes. Therefore, the long-term involvement of the researcher (as a participant-observer or observer, not a directive interviewer) can hopefully come to make the researcher's presence be less disruptive of normal interaction, permitting the collection of less biased data.
Qualitative culture researchers disagree among themselves about the importance of in-depth understanding. Some ethnographers criticize short-term and/or interview-based qualitative studies as being “smash and grab” ethnographies. A researcher would have to spend months or even years as a participant before he or she could truly “penetrate the front” of cultural members and see things from an insider’s “emic” perspective. Anything less was worthy of being classified as exploratory pilot testing -- in short, probably not worth mentioning, in print (see Sutton, 1994, for a frank discussion of these issues). Recently, innovative qualitative methods have been introduced. For example, Witmer (1997) applied Gidden's theory of structuration to the analysis of ethnographic data, using an interpretive, interactionist methodology. Wilson (2000) combined a "repertory grid method" of repeated interviewing, supplemented by group discussions, analysis of company documents, and observation and reflection by the author.

Many ethnographers had thought that the cultural movement would provide respect, particularly in the U.S. where qualitative methods had been so disparaged. They were disappointed therefore when the cultural domain of organizational research, like all the others, was in danger of being taken over by the number crunchers. This reaction was expressed in public forums by the usual strategies of silence and marginalization. In more private arenas, such as “blind reviews,” the negative reaction to qualitative methods was more pronounced and many researchers felt it was difficult to get their work published due to methods preferences of reviewers and editors. When asked to evaluate research utilizing non-preferred methods, some reviewers were openly dismissive (see discussions of the reviewing process in cultural research by Martin, 2002; Rousseau, 1994). Others responded to resistance to qualitative methods by citing texts justifying their methods choices and outlining the fundamentals of good qualitative research methodology (some helpful texts include Agar, 1986; Blau, 1965; Glazer and Strauss, 1967; Schein, 1987; Nord and Connell, 1998). In a promising recent development, some major journal editors have acted as peacekeepers, opening their pages to qualitative work thereby providing opportunities for publication and evidence of what is being produced using these methods, thereby adding some balance to the debate.
The result was, at first, an open and informative debate over the merits of qualitative and quantitative methods for studying culture. In recent years, this battle has quietened, and gone underground, but the issues remain unresolved in many quarters (see the edited volumes by Hassard and Pym, 1990 and Tsoukas and Knudsen, 2003). There are fewer openly combative exchanges in public, and more studies use both qualitative and quantitative methods (e.g., Denison, 1990). Nevertheless, the more private and less visible forms of battle continue as doctoral students are advised to avoid one method or another, and "blind" reviews continue to be touched by these concerns. Given the deep differences of epistemology and the training investments that underlie these disputes, agreement is unlikely. Although it can convincingly be argued that cultural research has, as some hoped, opened new doors to qualitative methods, it is not clear what studies or arguments could convincingly resolve these differences of opinion.

An Attempt to Redraw the Battle Lines: A Meta-Theoretical Move

What had been a struggle among the Integration, Differentiation, and Fragmentation perspectives was now a conflict between the critical theorists and their more managerial colleagues and between the advocates of qualitative versus quantitative methods. The game of king of the mountain was being played in earnest; all of these contenders were competing for supremacy, although each was arguing for the use of different playing rules. Rather than going for a minor victory (a fourth perspective), one obvious next move in the king of the mountain game was to create a meta-theory that encompassed conflicting views by proposing a higher level theoretical abstraction to bridge some of these theoretical, political, or methodological differences.

Martin (1992) observed that Integration, Differentiation, and Fragmentation researchers defined culture in a particular way, then designed studies that made it more likely to find what they were looking for. This problem of tautology explained, to a large extent, why evidence congruent with each perspective had been found. (Indeed, some have argued that similar tautological problems characterize all of organizational research;
see Morgan, 1983b). Martin (1992; 2002) argues that any organizational culture contains elements congruent with all three perspectives. If any organization is studied in enough depth, some issues, values, and objectives will be seen to generate organization-wide consensus, consistency, and clarity (an Integration view). At the same time, other aspects of an organization's culture will coalesce into subcultures that hold conflicting opinions about what is important, what should happen, and why (a Differentiation view). Finally, some problems and issues will be ambiguous, in a state of constant flux, generating multiple, plausible interpretations (a Fragmentation view).

A wide range of organizational contexts have been examined using a three-perspective framework. These include studies of a temporary educational organization for unemployed women in England, a newly privatized bank in Turkey, truants from an urban high school in the U.S., changing organizational culture in the Peace Corps/Africa, a university provost search, and professional subcultures in an Australian home care service (Baburoglu and Gocer, 1994; Bloor and Dawson, 1994; Eisenberg, Murphy, and Andrews, 1998; Enomoto, 1993; Meyerson and Martin, 1987). Implicit in the three-perspective framework is the assumption that these social scientific viewpoints are subjectively imposed on the process of collecting and interpreting cultural data. Often one perspective, labeled the "home" viewpoint, is easy for cultural members and researchers to acknowledge, while the other two perspectives can be more difficult to access. It is therefore a misunderstanding to conclude that a particular organization has a culture that is best characterized by one of the three perspectives. Rather, any culture at any point in time will have some aspects congruent with all three perspectives.

The three-perspective framework is a meta-theory. It claims that, when a cultural context is viewed from all three perspectives, a deeper understanding will emerge. This is a meta-theoretical move because the theory encompasses all three perspectives, moving to a higher level of abstraction to do so. Such a metatheoretical move can be interpreted critically, as an attempt to dominate other approaches to understanding cultures in organizations. This is a classic attempt to redraw the lines of battle and so become "king of the mountain." Postmodern critiques of such meta-theories (e.g., Gagliardi, 1991;
Lyotard, 1984) are especially disdainful, labeling meta-theories as "narratives of transcendence" because each claims to be better than its predecessors -- more abstract and yet also closer to 'the' empirical 'truth.' Such meta-theories have been viewed as totalitarian attempts, by those who are or wish to become dominant, to provide all-encompassing world views that silence diversity of opinion. Postmodern scholars argue that attempts to create meta-theories are futile because multiplicity will always find a way to flourish.

The three-perspective meta-theory is based on a series of undeconstructed categories that position the three perspectives in opposition to one another. It ignores aspects of theories and studies that straddle boundaries among the perspectives (see especially, rich ethnographies such as Kunda, 1992, and Pettigrew et al., 1985b), omits unclassifiable research or relegates it to marginalized places in the text, and only addresses issues that transcend these categories in places (such as footnotes and parenthetical remarks) separated from the main bodies of texts. Most importantly, use of these tripartite categories to classify studies reifies the perspectives and pigeonholes individual studies into boxes, thereby diminishing the uniqueness of their contributions (cf., Schultz and Hatch, 1996). While such a use of categories is not unique to this particular attempt to build a meta-theory, it does have harmful effects on knowledge creation and the ways scholarly work is and is not evaluated (e.g., Gagliardi, 1990; Turner, 1989).

And so it goes; cultural researchers do not agree about theory, method, epistemology, or the conclusions to be drawn from the empirical record to date. In spite of (or perhaps because of) this lack of consensus, the last decade of cultural research has produced a variety of insightful, innovative studies that might not have been conducted within the narrower orthodoxies of theory and method that have constrained other kinds of organizational inquiry. Cultural studies have brought epistemological and methodological variety to the field and introduced ideas from other disciplines. Qualitative generalist work has offered richly detailed, context-specific descriptions of organizational life, while quantitative culture studies and comparisons of qualitative case
studies (see Blau, 1965) have offered cross-organizational comparisons that would otherwise have been difficult to make. In spite of these accomplishments, soon cultural research had to face a new and formidable challenge: postmodernists entered the organizational culture wars. The postmodernists' bid to be king of the mountain had a very different tone than the modernist traditions of cultural research described so far. If the postmodernists are successful, cultural researchers will have to admit that it is impossible to know or represent the truth about a culture.

The End of Theory: A Postmodern Rout of All Armies from the Field of Battle?

Although it is beyond the mandate of this chapter to discuss postmodernism at length (readers should consult the chapter by Alvesson and Deetz), it is important to discuss its implications for and contributions to the work on organizational culture (see Calas and Smircich, 1988; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Jeffcutt et al., 1995; Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992). A mini-introduction may be helpful for those who have not yet tackled the admittedly esoteric, convoluted writings of postmodernists. There is not just one postmodernism. It is a discourse, rather than a unified theory, in part because it has attracted such a diverse group of advocates, including architects, philosophers, and literary critics. Some postmodernists have been accused of facism, while others are leftist refugees from the political activism of the 1960's. In all these varieties, postmodernism challenges ideas that constitute the foundation of modern science: rationality, order, clarity, realism, truth, and intellectual progress (e.g., Baudrillard, 1983; Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1976; Lyotard, 1984; Marcus and Fischer, 1999).

When contrasted to postmodern ideas, modern cultural studies attempt to provide coherent accounts and to order the disorder that is organizational life. Carrying this emphasis one step further, Integration studies offer a portrait of unity, harmony, and in many instances, the promise of cultural control. In contrast, postmodern accounts draw attention to disorder and offer a multiplicity of irreconcilable interpretations, making Integration studies particularly suspect from a postmodern viewpoint. Postmodernists argue that the relationship between the signifier and the signified, between an image and
the original experience it was once produced to represent, is attenuated, complex, and in part, arbitrary. This arbitrariness should not be confused with the more tepid, manageable ambiguities, irrationalities, and randomness that are the focus of Fragmentation research. The key difference is that while ambiguity implies a surplus of meaning attached to a particular object -- a somewhat unclear, fuzzy, vague, obscure or enigmatic relation -- arbitrariness implies a capricious or willful relationship that cannot be determined by any rule or principle. While an ambiguous relationship means that there is a way of understanding and capturing the way in which a signifier represents the signified, an arbitrary relationship makes no such assumptions. (Alvesson and Berg, 1992, p. 220)

Modern cultural scholarship, particularly ethnography, attempts to cut through superficial cultural manifestations and interpretations to uncover a deeper reality, revealing knowledge that is closer to the truth. Modern scholarship is careful to draw distinctions among the objective truth about reality, the subjectivity of a researcher-author, and a text. These distinctions, however, are not inviolable. For example, modernist studies sometimes explore the flaws of an imperfect relationship between reality and data (which presumably can be improved by more rigorous ethnographic or quantitative methods). Modern scholars also sometimes acknowledge a flawed relationship between presumably objective data and its imperfect representation in a text (which presumably can be improved by clearer, more "transparent" writing). More rarely, a modernist author may engage in self-reflexivity concerning the effects of his or her individualized subjectivity on a text (e.g., Kunda, 1992; Van Maanen, 1988). Such introspection is usually confined to the margins of a text (an introduction, an anecdote, or an appendix). Marginalization enables the modern author to maintain the impersonal, supposedly objective style and language that sustains scientific credibility by making the individualized subjectivity of the author invisible in the main body of the text (e.g., Clifford and Marcus, 1986).

In contrast, from a postmodern point of view, reality is a series of fictions and illusions (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Clifford and Marcus, 1986). A text is not a closed system; rather, it reflects the subjective views of its author, those who read it, and those
whose views are quoted, included, suppressed, or excluded (e.g., Hassard and Parker, 1993; Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992). This focus on representational issues, such as the ways impersonal language reinforces the authority of an author, undermines any claim that a text can represent the objective truth about a reality that is "out there" -- separable from the text (e.g., Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Jeffcutt et al., 1995; Smircich, 1995). Truth therefore becomes "a matter of credibility rather than an objective condition" (Alvesson and Berg, 1992, p. 223; Van Maanen, 1988).

Whereas modern scholars argue about what the truth is or what methods or modes of engagement would bring research closer to truth, postmodernists use analytic techniques such as deconstruction to reveal strategies used to establish the illusion of truth in a text. Deconstruction shows how: an author establishes his or her credibility; particular data are selected and interpreted (to the exclusion of other, equally valid data and interpretations); uncertainties are hidden; opposing meanings are suppressed or omitted; and unintended and suppressed viewpoints emerge in the margins of a text (such as footnotes, asides, metaphors, etc.) (For examples of deconstruction relevant to organizational culture, see Calas and Smircich, 1991; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Martin, 1990). Reading between the lines of a text in these ways makes silences become eloquent and exposes the false certainties inherent in language (such as the clarities of a dichotomy). Postmodernist cultural scholars use textual analysis to interrogate, disrupt, and overturn claims to truth or theoretical superiority (e.g., Gagliardi, 1991; Jeffcutt et al., 1995). Their goal is not to establish a better theory of culture (this would perpetuate the struggle for intellectual dominance of the field), but rather to show why the truth claims of modern cultural scholarship merit challenge and reinterpretation (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Smircich and Calas, 1987; Willmott, 1993).

Many would not want to engage with postmodernism, asking, "What positive contribution does it make?" or dismissing it on grounds that it is esoteric, reactionary, a-political, too relativistic, or nihilistic (e.g., Reed, 1990). This reaction has been particularly strong among some empirical, relatively positivistic culture researchers, perhaps because postmodernism represents a deep challenge to basic tenets of the
scientific method. Rather than seeing only the threat that the burgeoning postmodern literature represents, we hope more organizational culture researchers could try to learn from and use some aspects of postmodern thinking, as their counterparts in anthropology have done. Postmodern analysis is useful to organizational culture researchers because it reveals false claims of certainty. It offers a textual approach to greater intellectual honesty, or at least humility, in research. It uncovers insights hidden from view by accepted theories and methods. A postmodern approach could most certainly offer insight into the representational strategies that make cultural accounts more like fiction than like science (e.g., Calas, 1987; Jermier, 1992; Van Maanen, 1988). Our cultural texts could become more self-reflexive and we could seek, as anthropologists are now doing, new ways of writing about culture that allow multiple voices to be heard and deconstructed, without transforming the researcher into a transcriber who has given informants total control of and responsibility for the text (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). It is important to acknowledge, however, that adoption of such insights would not represent a major change in modern cultural research strategies, nor would it fully acknowledge the depth of the challenge to the scientific method that would follow from a full acceptance of postmodern ideas (Alvesson and Berg, 1992).

We have tried to grapple with the implications of postmodernism in the structure of this review chapter. As explained in the introduction to this chapter, we used the metaphor of a war game to describe developments in this field as struggles for intellectual dominance, rather than as linear advancements in a progression toward greater knowledge. In the first sections of this chapter, we describe the various moves in the culture wars as if these modernist culture scholars were saying "My approach is deeper, more complex, or more inclusive than yours" (ethnography, a longitudinal approach, or the three-perspective framework) or "Look what you have been ignoring" (the Fragmentation perspective). Such claims of superiority have in common the implication that each view is, somehow, closer to the truth about a culture. All are attempts to impose order and meaning.
A postmodern critique would deconstruct these attempts to establish dominance in a hierarchical order. For example, such a critique would show how all these modern studies refrain from fully exploring the inherent and inescapable limitations of textual representation. Rather than perpetuating the king of the mountain game, where each new theory or meta-theory attempts to dominate other current contenders, postmodernism is an attempt to rout all contenders from the field of battle and change the terms of engagement in the culture wars. No longer are we discussing ways to "penetrate the front" of cultural members and get closer to some truth; now truth is impossible to represent. Ironically, this may be the ultimate meta-theoretical move.

An Alternative to War Games

A deeper response to the postmodern critique might return to the observation that any metaphor brings some issues into focus while obscuring others. The culture wars metaphor, like other military metaphors, reads aggression, intentionality, and coalition building into acts that may have not had any of these characteristics. For example, cultural researchers may not be trying to undermine or challenge each other's research; their goals may be more benign and intellectual. Military metaphors emphasize hierarchy, restrict flexibility because they dwell on constraints rather than opportunities, and force choices among a fixed set of solutions. In this way, military metaphors tacitly legitimate and may even encourage competitive behavior, thereby becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy (Weick, 1979). Even if back-stabbing, selfish, or nasty behavior has occurred on the academic playing fields (and we think it still does), we believe invoking such pain and destruction as a rhetorical device may be gratuitous and extreme.

In addition, many scholars have argued that military metaphors are gendered because such characteristics as aggression, war, and competition are more frequently associated with masculine rather than feminine stereotypes.
"War is a quintessentially masculine activity and an essential test of manhood. It is dangerous, bad, harsh, and unfriendly. Women's role in the institution of warfare has always been peripheral," Wilson (1992, p. 892)

"…military imagery probably…persists because it is tough, macho, and exciting." Weick (1979, p.50)

"[military metaphors] enshrine the notion of the chain of command and the necessity of organizing in hierarchies." Clancy (1999, p.75)

We are a team of co-authors with feminist convictions, and yet we have painted a portrait of cultural research that emphasizes power, competition, conflict, and domination, perhaps creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, or at least over-emphasizing these aspects of the research process.

Gherardi, Marshall, and Mills faced a similar difficulty when they were asked to contribute to an edited volume (Westwood and Clegg, 2003, p. 327) which was described as a “text constructed around dyads of point and counterpoint, thesis to antithesis, paradigm against paradigm.” This trio of authors objected, “Only men can be so excited by the idea of the war game. Either they do it with weapons or they do it with thought, but the pattern is always the same.” They soon regretted this gendered characterization, for reasons Gherardi described, “Immediately after, I realized how I was using gender stereotypes, casting all men as stupid warriors, forgetting how many women like the same game, and most of all I was thinking in terms of men and women as categories of people, assuming the game was gendered!” (p. 328). Nevertheless, the authors decided to reframe their task so they: “could move forward in a ‘journey of discovery,’ building on each others’ contributions rather than arguing competing positions” (p. 325).

Going through a similar evaluation, we decided to examine what other aspects of the cultural domain would be emphasized if we approached the field with a different metaphor, one not borrowed from stereotypically masculine discourses. Instead of emphasizing troops assembled for a zero-sum game of conflict, we sought a rhetorical strategy that would enable us to promote a long run, open-minded, constructive
conversation about cultural theories, political interests, and research methods. Instead of describing cultural research as a war game, we could invoke the idea of finite and infinite games, originally proposed by Carse (1986, p. 3), who explains, "A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play." According to Carse, time in a finite game is linear, marked in terms of a beginning, the present, and the future. Players must agree on spatial and numerical boundaries, so the game is played within a marked area, with specified players. Players in finite games must have an opponent. Rules of play restrict what the players can do and offer contractual terms by which players can agree who won. When a finite game is won, play comes to an end. Only one person can win, although the other players' performances can be rank ordered at the conclusion of the game.

An infinite game, in contrast, has no barriers to entry and no questions regarding who is eligible to play. Rules prevent anyone from winning an infinite game. As many people as possible can play. Infinite games are not bounded by time in a linear sense of a beginning or an end. Rather, time becomes an issue of duration. The main goal of the infinite game is to prevent it coming to an end. There are no spatial or numerical boundaries. "Finite players play within the boundaries; infinite players play with boundaries" (Carse, 1986, p. 10). Rather than fearing surprises because their consequences are unpredictable, surprise allows the infinite game to continue. Wins and losses are regarded as moments in continuing play. Infinite game players can enter the game with all the energy of finite players, but the game is playful rather than a deadly struggle for domination. In being playful, infinite game players allow for possibility.

If cultural research were portrayed as an infinite game, ideally no voices would dominate, and no players would try to dominate others. Because no powerful elite would gain precedence or control, a wider range of cultural studies would emerge. Boundaries would blur around what is and what is not culture, and around who is and is not a cultural researcher. Some new topics of cultural research would emerge, other levels of analysis (in addition to organizational) would be seen as relevant, and some areas of inquiry related to culture would be included under a cultural label. Such a broadened focus would
soon overlap with the domains of other chapters in this handbook, but a brief overview is illustrative of the ways cultural work has evolved recently.

A number of cultural theorists have noted that cultural boundaries are moveable, as when norm-loosening rituals are held off-site (e.g., Douglas, 1975; Van Maanen, 1986). Others have observed that cultural boundaries fluctuate, alternately expand and collapse inward, as if a person were breathing (e.g., Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Pettigrew, 1985b). Cultural boundaries are also seen as permeable, like the membranes of a cell that permit osmosis (e.g., Kreiner and Schultz, 1993; Marcus and Fischer, 1986/1999; Swidler, 1986). Finally, cultural boundaries are blurred, at times in a self-conscious negotiation, and other times in a thoughtless evolution (e.g., Clifford, 1997; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Anthropologists now critique earlier studies that portrayed cultures as if societies existed in a mosaic, each firmly bordered culture co-existing, but not overlapping with its neighbors (Keesing, 1981, p. 111-113). Sahlins (1985) uses a similar metaphor, decrying studies that described cultures as a-historical “islands of history.” These arguments for the longitudinal study of external cultural influences are extensions of the “nexus” approach to describing external cultural influences on subculturally Differentiated organizations. They are congruent with a call to reconceptualize cultural boundaries as moveable, fluctuating, permeable, and blurred (Batteau, 2001; Martin, 2002).

Once boundaries are redefined in these more complex ways, relationships among organizational, industry, national, and cross-national levels of cultural analysis become more difficult to conceptualize. Early research on industrial and national culture in organizational studies usually assumed a mosaic approach and described culture in Integration terms, each culture a clearly bounded unity. To date, many studies of national and industrial culture still rely on Likert measures of agreement with researcher-generated values or self-reports of behavioral norms, while ignoring within-culture differences across organizations, across age groups, classes, and ethnicities, and between urban and rural locations (e.g., Bryman, Gillingwater, and McGuinness, 1996; Hofstede, 1991). In contrast, other industry and national studies capture complexities of cultures riven by
these kinds of differences (see, for example, Weiss and Delbecq's (1987) examination of regional differences in the high technology industry; Kondo's (1990) study of the effects of age, gender, and family background in a small family owned business in Japan; and Yanagisako's (2000) history of North Italian, family owned businesses grappling with inheritance laws that enabled and sometimes required that businesses pass into the control of daughters as well as sons).

Some cross-national work (e.g., Dahler-Larsen, 1997; Koot, 1997; Sackmann, 1997) has taken the study of cultural complexity even further, both clearly echoing all three perspectives and going beyond the three perspective framework to wrestle with the difficulties of what a nexus is and how it requires that organizational and national culture be reconceptualized. This more complex theory is better suited to illuminate the cultural complexities of organizations, such as transnationals, collections of globally distributed subsidiaries, the amalgamated products of complex mergers, and well organized collections of cottage industries or franchises. It may even help us understand the cultures of global, wired organizations of individuals and teams who meet on line, rarely face to face (e.g., Barley and Kunda, forthcoming). For example, The Well was arguably the first strongly committed community of people that "lived" and worked together on the internet (e.g., Hafner, 1997), one that evolved an odd but deeply involving on-line culture. Garsten (1999) studied the transient and episodic imagined cultures of U.S. and Swedish temporary employees of flexible organizations. Consider the even greater difficulties of capturing the culture of an international cable company that consists of temporary teams of international workers, who speak different languages and gather only to perform a laborious task, like laying cable in Thailand or across the Indian ocean, and then disperse, only to reconfigure themselves in other teams in other places (Stephenson, 1996). Although this chapter cannot review cross-national research more fully, these examples show how it is increasingly difficult to separate the study of cultures across organizational, industrial, and national levels of analysis. The internet, air travel, and an international economy have indelibly blurred and in some case, erased these boundaries.
Other scholars use cultural language to describe what they do, but are involved in issues that transcend the concerns of the three perspective framework and break through boundaries of cultural research. For example, Strati (1992) and Gagliardi and his colleagues (1990) focus on the aesthetic aspects of cultures in organizations, especially on interpretations and effects of cultural manifestations that can been seen, felt, or heard, like furniture, noise, dirt, music, architecture. Mills (1995, 1997) focuses his attention on the gendered aspects of organizational cultures, for example studying airlines that have had strict occupational sex segregation between pilots and flight attendants. Other gendered culture studies focus on relatively applied issues, such as the ways ostensibly gender neutral "equal opportunity" initiatives recreate traditionally gendered practices (e.g., Rubin, 1997; Woodall, Edwards, and Welchman, 1997). Some of these studies offer an Integrationist view of gendered occupations, while others explore differences in gendered practices across organizational boundaries (e.g., Poggio, 2000). Some studies of gendered cultures seem to have more in common with Fragmentation research, for example, those that examine ambivalence among male and female secretaries (e.g., Pringle, 1989; Sotirin and Gottfired, 1999), the complexity of changing approaches to gender research in an organizational journal (Townsley, 2003), and the ambiguities inherent in gendered organizations (Hearn, 1998), such as a transnational academic feminist organization (Mendez and Wolf, 2001).

While the research above seems generally comfortable with the label of cultural research, that boundary also is disputable and permeable, as research domains that are the conceptual neighbors of cultural research overlap with cultural studies, sometimes without a cultural label. Perhaps the most explicit boundary negotiations have occurred between organizational climate and organizational culture researchers. They have devoted considerable energy to articulating how their respective approaches differ and overlap (e.g., Ashkanasy, Wilderom, and Peterson, 2000; Denison, 1996; Ostroff, Kinicki, and Tamkins, 2003; Schein, 2000). Because climate research is survey-based, quantitative studies of culture are sometimes almost indistinguishable from early climate research. One major difference between the two is that while quantitative studies of cultures measure self-reports of behavioral norms (e.g., O'Reilly et al., 1991), climate is a
measure of the psychological meaning of situations as perceived by individuals. For these reasons, the content, meaning, and validity of the climate construct is believed to be isomorphic at multiple levels of analysis (Ostroff et al., 2003).

Other areas of inquiry have evolved in a clear attempt to differentiate their area of inquiry from cultural studies. It is unclear, in some cases, whether this is cultural research under another label, or whether these are conceptually distinct areas of inquiry. For example, after cultural research began to explore issues of Differentiation and Fragmentation, Albert and Whetton (1985) introduced the topic of organizational identity, defining identity as that which is central, enduring, and distinctive to an organization, directly echoing the concerns of the Integration perspective of cultural research. Subsequent identity research has added Differentiation-like and Fragmentation-like complexities to the Integrationist view of identity and Hatch and Schultz (1997) convincingly distinguish the territory of culture from that of organizational identity, going on to define various aspects of perceived identity, distinguishing it from an organization’s external image. Subsequent work on identity and image has added complexities, some of which echo aspects of the three perspective framework (e.g., Parker, 2000) and others which do not (e.g., Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). Full exploration of any of these traditions of research is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the permeability and moveability of the boundaries around culture and related topics are evident here. Finally, discourse analysis is another related area of inquiry that has the capacity to deeply inform cultural studies, especially in so far as it draws attention to ideational influences from outside the highly permeable boundaries of any particular “culture” (e.g., Alvesson, 2004; Chia, 2000; Grant, Hardy, Oswick, and Putnam, 2004). These areas of inquiry permeate and move the boundaries of cultural research, in a manner congruent with the rules of an infinite game.

Then and Next

Like others, we originally came to the cultural arena excited about the ways it would open organizational studies to new kinds of thinking. It was astonishing to us,
however, to see how quickly this apparently open conceptual terrain became cluttered (in part, by ourselves) with competing theories, boxes, categorizations and so forth. Many of these became reified in the emerging cultural war games. During the last decade, many of the most playful, inquiring, irreverent and inventing voices have left the cultural field or played less frequently on it. Culture has become a part of the hegemony within organizational theory and practice. This Quixotic victory had the paradoxical effect of "deaden-ing" culture’s effect on open inquiry, a point made most eloquently by Smircich and Calas as long ago as 1987.

Perhaps this is the fate of all innovative endeavors. They either die out or, if success strikes, they become coopted and routinised so they can be used in organizations (Frost and Egri, 1991). Such developments are not all negative since we must have ways to preserve creative and useful ideas and practices. In the case of cultural research, however, these preserved insights become "truth ammunition" in the struggle for dominance. In contrast, we seek some mechanisms to foster "free-range" thinking that has the capacity to learn from and about the wars, but that can also be used to negotiate peace. We believe that efforts are needed to balance or even unbalance the culture wars mentality, thereby counteracting the tendency for theories and methods to become constraining boxes that impede “free range” inquiry.

Regarding organizational culture studies as an infinite game vastly expands the scope of ideas, cultural contexts, and bodies of data that become relevant. Both cultural and ostensibly non-cultural research becomes relevant. The types of organizations able to be examined as cultures grows to include even wired communities of people who meet only on line, but nevertheless may have a discernible cultural identity. Such an expanded view will encourage us to ask not just what a culture is, but also what an organization is. These developments may well prompt some to seek again to define that which is unique to cultural theory (e.g., Willmott, 2000), albeit from a more empirically sophisticated and epistemologically well informed position than was prevalent at the start of the cultural renaissance in organizational studies. Nevertheless, we believe it is at the edges of cultural theory where the most fundamental and interesting questions arise. The game of
King of the Mountain will always be a part of cultural studies, whether the struggle for intellectual dominance is played out in the open, in the more secretive back alleys of academic life, or, less consciously, being implicit in the ways cultural research is conducted, reported, and published. Wars don't typically end: they are settled for a time and then they flare up in new forms, perhaps with new armies, new "would-be kings." Other wars start up in different situations. We expect this to continue in the culture arena. We suspect, however, that regarding cultural studies as an infinite game will be far more generative and perhaps, more fun.

Thus, this review is, partially, a plea for more imaginative and courageous attempts to turn the culture field away from warlike endeavors. We do not believe that wars will vanish from the intellectual landscape and we know that not all changes resulting from wars are negative. They sometimes clear the air and fresh ideas emerge. We do think, however, that competition for dominance is costly in terms of lost ideas and silenced or disillusioned people. Whether conflict is overt or advocates of opposing views ignore each other, the "king of the mountain" approach is not the only way to structure cultural inquiry and it may not be the best. Undoubtedly, some readers will likely say: "There's a war (game) to be played; let's get on with it!" Others will say: "I choose not to play and will pursue my own path." We say: "Let's find ways to focus as much energy as we can to keep the study of culture free of destructive conflict, so we can collectively imbue it with characteristics that will invite us all to do our best work, to share that work with excitement and passion, and to keep the search for understanding and application rich and open."

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1 This story of the academic culture wars takes place in a broader societal context, where the phrase "culture wars" referred to a growing awareness of ethnic, religious, regional, national, racial, and gender differences.

2 We do not know the origins of this term, but it was first drawn to our attention as the title of the annual meeting theme of the Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism, held in Montreal, Canada, in 1986.

3 Although Schein (1985, 1987) is one of the best known advocates of an Integration approach to culture, his emphasis on the importance of depth of understanding has been echoed and utilized by a wide range of cultural researchers, particularly those who use ethnographic methods to study cultures from a Differentiation or Fragmentation viewpoint. Thus, whereas Schein, in the Integration tradition, finds evidence of deeply held assumptions that are shared on an organization-wide basis, the Differentiation researchers cited here use depth to reveal long-standing inter-group differences.
This felicitous phrase was, we believe, coined by Robert Sutton.
References


