Introduction

Debates concerning epistemological and methodological orientations and their suitability for doing history and historiography have been vibrant in the discipline of history over the past three decades (Jenkins, 1991, 1995, 1997, 2003; Gunn, 2006; Ermarth, 1992; White, 1973; Munslow, 2010, 2012; Jenkins & Munslow, 2004). Jenkins’ (1997) *Postmodern History Reader*, for example, features the debate between modern and postmodern historians concerning ‘how’ best to represent the past. The debate contrasts, on the one hand, the modernist position underpinned by realism where relativism is viewed as a much feared danger with, on the other, a postmodern position, where pluralist notions of history are celebrated and where it is argued that relativism is the only hope for stimulating the emancipatory potential of the past as history (Jenkins, 1997, 1999; Brown, 2005).

To a large extent, the modern–postmodern debate in the discipline of history has also shaped the contours of the recent call for more history in management and organization studies (henceforth, M&OS). This is apparent in the oft-quoted and highly influential three positions for doing history developed by Üsdiken and Kieser. These “may be labeled as supplementarist, integrationist and reorientationist” (Üsdiken & Kieser, 2004: 322). Though the authors caution that the three positions are not fixed, preferring instead to highlight each as subject to variation, the supplementarist (and perhaps even the integrationist) position(s) are arguably still informed by modernist assumptions of realism offering promise of objective knowledge. The reorientationalist position, however, is dedicated to inherently challenging the “social scientistic framing of organisation studies” (Üsdiken & Kieser, 2004: 324; Zald, 1993) and shares many similarities with a postmodern orientation to history.

The perennial pitting of modernism versus postmodernism has arguably also influenced the arguments featured on the agenda calling for, and simultaneously offering direction for, doing more history in M&OS (Booth & Rowlinson, 2006; Jacques, 2006). This influence is most evident in the illustration of the relevance for M&OS of “philosophers of history such as Michel Foucault and Hayden White” (Booth & Rowlinson, 2006: 5). Foucault and White have not only weighed in on but have also shaped the modern versus postmodern debate by contributing to the development of postmodern historiography. Calls for more history in M&OS have also
suggested the need for theorizing and problematizing foundational concepts such as our understanding of the ‘past’ and ‘history’ (Weatherbee et al., 2012). The latter is seen as one way to benefit what has until now been only the nascent potential of what a historical perspective can bring.

The call for more history in M&OS might come as a surprise to those immersed in the historiography literature. In a 2009 book titled *At the Limits of History*, Jenkins called for an end of the academic discipline of history. This book and its arguments surfaced only two decades after the publication of his influential book *Re-Thinking History*. The latter was said to have shaped the discipline of history by rendering accessible what had previously been impenetrable conceptual arguments of postmodern history and historiography (Munslow, 2009). Jenkins’ decree is less astonishing if we consider other positions of this nature. An appeal for the end of history for example, was also evident in Foucault’s ‘anti-historical’ position of nearly three decades earlier in his own notion of archaeology (White, 1985: 234; Burrell, 1988).

Is the academic disciple whose focus of study is the past dead? In this chapter I argue that historical analysis has much potential, though to achieve this the past and history might be in need of some re-assembling. In light of the contrasting calls for the ‘end of history’ by postmodern historians (Jenkins, 1999, 2009) and the ‘call for more history’ by M&OS (Zald, 1993, Booth & Rowlinson, 2006), this chapter explores an alternative conceptual space for thinking historically. This conceptual space is outlined by first reviewing both modern and postmodern approaches to the past and history. It is my hope that the latter will serve as a sufficient context in which to thoroughly consider the need for what I will call an amodern approach to doing histories. I offer the following discussion while simultaneously remaining fully cognizant of the danger of imposing rigid categories and categorizations such as the three I provide. But I do so in the hope that these allow for the emergence of points of comparison whereby the differences, absences, and deficiencies between positions are more easily exposed. Thus, the amodern manifesto discussed in this chapter has three parts. I begin by discussing modern followed by postmodern histories. In the third section, I attempt a conceptualization of amodern histories.

**Modernist management and organizational history**

Modern and postmodern historiographies are positionings inspired by entirely different intellectual movements. Furthermore, each is associated with distinctive temporal periods. There is much convergence on the opinion that the emergence of postmodernism was inspired by a thorough critique of modernism (Prasad, 2005; Jenkins, 1995). Perhaps because postmodern historiography, too, was motivated by a reaction to modernism, a reading of these respective literatures allows for the surfacing of facets or points around which to organize their comparison. For the purpose of ordering the discussion in this chapter, comparisons will include: a discussion on their respective contributors and traditions, their ontological and epistemological orientations, their assumptions concerning the relationship of past with/and history, thoughts on the nature of representations of the past-as-history, a summary of the treatment of context, and lastly, a discussion on the assumed role of the historian. I have summarized the positions of each tradition with regard to these facets in Table 12.1.1

**Modernist contributors and traditions**

I follow Jenkins (1995) who uses the socio-temporal condition of modernism as a label to describe a type of historiographical work. As a cultural condition, modernism celebrates “rationality, individualism and progress” (Prasad, 2005: 219). Jenkins (2003: 15) offers that most professional historians today are “stubbornly ‘modernist’” and are united in their commitment to
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Modern</th>
<th>Postmodern</th>
<th>Amodern</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ontology</strong></td>
<td><strong>Realism</strong></td>
<td><strong>Emphasis on epistemology</strong></td>
<td><strong>Emphasis on ontology</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Phenomena and the past exist outside of our mental appreciation of them and await our discovery.</td>
<td>Our view of the world (or the past) is mediated entirely through our knowledge of it (history). Ontology is collapsed into epistemology. The past is an absent present, it does not exist in an ontological real(ist) form. Objects or events of the past are constructed in the minds(s) of the subject-knower. All we have is knowledge of the past which is plural due to the various epistemological choices of representation available to the historian. Postmodernism understands history as knowledge of the past, which is an outcome of the community and mind of the historian.</td>
<td>The social past is performed as history in practices today; these performances constitute reality (today). Practices are enactive of the socio-past, history is what actors perform (in practice) as they talk about or do the past. Performances or enactments of the socio-past as history occur at the site of the relations of actors. Performances or enactments of the socio-past as history take different shapes in different sets of relations. Knowledge situated in practices is enactive. It creates our view of the object of study, thus the object(s) of study (past as history) are performed in practice(s).</td>
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<td><strong>Epistemology</strong></td>
<td><strong>Positivism</strong></td>
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<td>It is possible and desirable to accurately represent the past as it happened as history.</td>
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### Table 12.1 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The nature of representations of the Past as History</th>
<th>Modern</th>
<th>Postmodern</th>
<th>Amodern</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Singular</strong></td>
<td>The objective is to move toward one complete and uncontested version of the past or history by continually seeking to uncover history through verifying it against the past and its traces.</td>
<td>Referred to by Mol (1999, 2002) as perspectivalism. Historians, by virtue of their epistemological or ideological situatedness create different versions, knowledge or provide different perspectives on the past. It is the responsibility of the historian to be reflexive and transparent as to how their ideological grounding influences the tale told. Historians with varying ideological or epistemological positionings will ‘gather’ around a phenomena or event and create knowledge of the past of that event from their standpoint. The focus is on that phenomena and creating knowledge of that phenomena.</td>
<td>Multiple The focus is on practice and the different enactments that one phenomenon may take in varyingly situated practices as well as different sets of relations.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Relationship of Past and History</th>
<th>Real</th>
<th>Relative</th>
<th>Relational</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History is an accurate portrayal of the past.</td>
<td>We have one past but plural (representations of the past as) histories. There are many somewhat unrelated narratives of the past that coexist or compete and there is little emphasis on evaluating the relationship between them. Representations of the past as history are not grounded in their constitutive practices.</td>
<td>Enactments of the past as history occur in the relations of actors (in between actors) at the site of oscillation. The site of oscillation is the place between heterogeneous actors where there is potential for translation, or transformation.</td>
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### Treatment of Context

**Remove from context to study it**

Typically, phenomena of interest are isolated from the practices in which they occur to allow for studying the past free from bias or confounding factors.

One advantage that history offers is that it provides a more ‘holistic’ view.

**Place in context**

Place events and phenomena into the context in which it has occurred to explain and understand it.

Doing history is a vehicle for placing organizations and their practices in context.

**Any practice creates its own context**

It is not possible to put things into context or their container to understand their functioning, as the context is what is created through our efforts to define it. The context is what actors produce when they perform the socio-past as history.

Any practice creates its own context. It is what is created through various sets of relations and performances of actors.

We cannot start off by assuming as given (context exists) what we wish for our analysis to show (actors efforts or practices that build context, or social past as history).

### Role of the historian, i.e. who does history?

The historian assumes the responsibility for writing the history in an objective manner, but in doing so removes him/herself from the product of history and the reader.

The historian assumes a privileged position as historian and mostly so because s/he is removed from view.

The historian includes him/herself in the narrative, talks about history as an outcome of him/herself.

The historian assumes responsibility for writing the history.

The historian de-privileges him/herself as an authoritative voice by situating the history as an outcome of his/her situated efforts. In doing so, s/he emphasizes that it could have always been otherwise.

The historian (which does not assume her/his status as such based on his/her institutionalized academic category) is part of the performance.

History is performed in multiple sets of practices.
ontological realism (White, 1985). Histories they produce can be described as empiricist, factualist, objectivist and documentarist where the study of the past is undertaken for its own sake, thus purportedly uninhibited by present centered motivations.

Leopold von Ranke is often credited with instituting the study of the modern historical method (Geyl, 1962; Gunn, 2006; Hobsbawm, 1997). His colorless and detached approach to historiography is often assumed as the discipline’s common sense, especially so in Anglo-American circles (Gunn, 2006). Though Ranke is credited with the origin of modern historiographical practice, many historians have since shared in the pursuit of similar ideals. British empiricist Geoffrey Elton, for example, pursued a scientistic historiographical approach underpinned by a belief in the possibility of objectively and impartially reconstructing the truth of the past reality as it happened (Elton, 1967; Perry, 2002; Jenkins, 1995; Green & Troup, 1999). Whilst some of these hallmarks are celebrated to varying degrees by positivist, scientific, and business historians (Collingwood, 1956; Chandler, 1962; Phillips, 1935), these modernists are united in their commitment to realism (White, 1973; Jenkins, 1997).

**Modernist ontological orientation: realist**

Historical realism is the belief that (a) the past (and history) exists outside and unencumbered by our mental interpretation and appreciation of it, and (b) that the past is knowable upon its discovery (White, 1973). Realist apprehensions assume the task of the historical enterprise as one of representing the past reality as it happened (Gunn, 2006; White, 1973). The past reality is assumed as a ‘fait accompli’ and thus has an unchanging form. The goal is providing a singular, all-encompassing, truthful representation of the past by “providing a precise and accurate reconstruction of the events reported in the documents” (White, 1985: 52). The historical enterprise is dedicated to discovering the traces, evidence, or sources of the past, as behind these lie hidden the historical reality (Ankersmit, 1997). By establishing causal linkages between pieces of evidence, the historian recovers the past and provides neutral explanations rather than interpretation (White, 1985; LaCapra, 2007; Brown, 2005). That historians ‘find’ or ‘uncover’ stories is what differentiates them from fiction writers who merely ‘invent’ theirs (White, 1973). Indeed, the work of modernist history is an assumed “culturally neutral task” (Ermarth, 2007: 52).

Histories of this nature are not estranged from the academic discipline of business and management. From early business histories, such as that which documents the past of Woolworth (Phillips, 1935), to those that speak to history as a useful ‘diagnostic tool’ to “motivate employees in the present” (Smith & Steadman 1981: 164), to those that describe history as a ‘leadership tool’ (Seaman & Smith, 2012), to using history to maintain a focus on a firm’s essential principles (Roowan, 2010), the notion of history is treated as some ‘thing’ or ‘object’ that exists outside our mental appreciation and awaits discovery. What is similar in each of these accounts of the past is the ontological realism that underpins them.

**Modernist epistemological orientation**

Similarities can be drawn between historians who share in their assumptions on the generation of knowledge of the past, or their epistemological orientation (White, 1985; Jenkins, 1995). Following Jenkins (1995), I label those who believe that it is both possible and desirable to represent the past as it actually happened as history as modernist. For these historians, the past is similar to a jigsaw puzzle whose many pieces must be unearthed, respectfully brought into the present, and assembled into its preconceived composition (Jenkins, 2003). The intent is on
creating singular, truthful or accurate apprehensions of reality, where different interpretations are understood as due to ideological distortions or inadequate factual data (White, 1985).

Positivist histories are an example of this (in M&OS, positivism is commonly assumed as an epistemological orientation in and of itself; see Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Influenced by Ranke, positivist histories share in the belief that historical processes are “subject to laws or generalizations akin to the natural sciences” (Gunn, 2006: 5; Green & Troup, 1999; Collingwood, 1956). Thus, the first step is to ascertain the facts, the second is to discover the laws, which are then relied upon to order the facts (Collingwood, 1956). Identifying the ‘laws of causation governing’ historical processes acts as the authority in solving historical disputes. As the methods and concepts of the natural sciences were increasingly used as a guide for ‘proper’ historical investigation (Hobsbawm, 1997), history began to lay claim to the revered “status of a science” (White, 1985: 54). Those management histories that adopt these facets of positivism are often described as “linear, progressive … and truth-centered” (Jacques, 1996: 14).

Modernist relationship of representations of the past as/to history

Unsurprisingly, modernist historians, characterized by their commitment to ontological realism and epistemological positivism, believe that the ideal relationship of the past as/to history is one where the latter (history) is an accurate, complete, and uncontested representation of the former (past). For modernists, rigorous history is that which is one and the same with the past (Jenkins, 1995; Elton, 1997). The emphasis then, is on discovering the truth of the past (Cousins, 1987; Jenkins, 1995). This is a task to which many historians contribute by adding to the existing stock of knowledge until it is deemed an adequate portrayal of the past. After all, what business historians “are really trying to find out is what was really going on, what really happened” (Kantrow, 1986: 87). Underpinning this quotation lies the assumption that past reality is discoverable and singular, as evidenced in Figure 12.1.

This type of historical enterprise leads to a history that is “ontologically single” (Law, 2008: 137) in that the past has only one form of existence as history (Cousins, 1987). In this scenario, “‘other’ histories are not really histories at all but fakes” (Jenkins, 1997: 16). Figure 12.1

Figure 12.1

Singular history

H
symbolically places these types of historians grouped in a circle, with their gaze and efforts focused on a singular, upper case ‘H’. Thus, there are many historians and (eventually) one agreed upon History. Jenkins (1991, 1995) calls this upper case history.

**Modernist treatment of context**

What is especially noteworthy about the desire for the emergence of a singular, agreed-upon history is the “nature of the process of convergence” through which historians derive the uniform story. The process occurs over a period of time, as many historians across different time periods add to the existing stock of knowledge to solve a particular “mystery”. Perhaps for this reason, historians, following Ranke, have sought to construct history free from the present context and thus “extinguish” themselves from their study of the past (Kalela, 2012: 14). This means that phenomena of interest are studied objectively from the present-centered practices in which historians live (and by which they are surrounded) in an effort to free the study of history from bias or confounding factors. Thus, modernist historians strive to construct histories without influence of present circumstances but nonetheless within the context of the past (Kalela, 2012). It follows then that the past is understood not to illuminate a present societal concern but instead is studied for its own sake and on its “own terms” (Green & Troup, 1999: 2). ‘Own sake-ism’ refers to “the attempt to understand an earlier human culture or society first and foremost in terms of its own self-conceptions and values rather than in order to serve an immediate practical or political interest of the present” (Zagorin, 2009: 72).

Studying phenomena in a manner free from presumably confounding contextual factors is done by (theoretically) isolating or bracketing it from that context. The tendency to isolate the study of the past from circumstances of the present has led Rankean, traditional empiricist, and positivist historians to caution against any form of interpretation (Geyl, 1962). Modernist historians argue that theory and interpretation are not only present-centered phenomena but, when imposed on historical facts, serve to distort them (Gunn, 2006; Perry, 2002; Jenkins, 1995).

Assumptions concerning the context of historical analysis which modernist historians share are evident, with their importance highlighted in many business histories. For example, Harvard Business School historian Alonzo McDonald emphasizes that what is significant “when looking at a major problem is to try to define the context or environment in which to place that problem. Only then does the problem really begin to take on meaning, make its true severity clear, or point the way toward management actions that might resolve it” (Kantrow, 1986: 81).

When speaking of developing his business history courses for the Harvard Business School, Tedlow notes that it was important to “set up a context within which historians can effectively examine business enterprise and ask questions of it” (Kantrow, 1986: 82). Similarly, Smith and Steadman (1981: 170) note that having a “strong knowledge of contexts” is important in “order to discriminate between good and bad historical data.” These studies underline a modernist assumption that the past context not only exists but that it is possible to discover it for the purpose of using it to understand a particular phenomenon.

**Role of the modern historian**

The discussion above has many consequences for what we assume as the role of the historian in the craft of history. Generally, modernist historians are those who undertake the task of writing history but in doing so, remove any trace of themselves from the text or narrative. In adopting an impartial third-person voice, the historian assumes a god-like view, creating and writing simultaneously from everywhere and nowhere at all (Law, 2008; Green & Troup, 1999).
The historian stands in as “an external, invisible, impersonal, and all-knowing teller of the story” (Zagorin, 2009: 72). In doing so, the historian creates “the illusion of omniscient, neutral narrator” (Zagorin, 2009: 72) and by abolishing himself from the text, the resulting groundless history is assumed to speak for the past, on its behalf, as its neutral transmitter of “what happened” (Jenkins, 1995). History, untouched and uncolored by the historian, becomes a direct representation of the past (Collingwood, 1956). Indeed an illusion is created where “the literary text is a direct record of reality” (Zagorin, 2009: 72).

**Postmodern management and organizational history**

*The condition of postmodernism and postmodern history*

The summary of modern historiography above, however brief, provides a fitting frame with which to discuss postmodern contributions to historiography. Postmodernism is often described as a socio-political condition with artistic and scholarly consequences, premised not only on a hard critique of modernism but also on the belief in its utter failure (Jenkins, 1995; Green and Troup, 1999). Central to postmodernism is an outright rejection of realism, the ontological position of modernism (Jenkins, 1997; Jenkins, Morgan & Munslow, 2007; Zagorin, 2009; Jenkins, 2009). What is understood to be particularly problematic is the tendency of modernist theory to produce reductionist, essentialist, and universal accounts.

As Jenkins, Morgan & Munslow (2007: 5) note, postmodernism presents a condition in which “our chosen ways of reading things lack solid, universal foundations.” The significance of postmodern thought is signaled by its focus on the conditions of knowledge production as an institutional and cultural activity that is always positioned (Calás and Smircich, 1999). In doing so, postmodern thought challenges the innocence of modernist ‘truthful’ knowledge claims and threatens the notion that knowledge can ever correspond to a single ‘reality.’ By virtue of this, knowledge is assumed as always positioned and thus, necessarily plural. Reality then, is pluralized and accessible only through text, language or interpretation. The spread of this idea over the past 30 years represents a central feature of what is commonly called the ‘linguistic’ or ‘textual’ turn in the social sciences and history.

Based on a critique of modernism, postmodern historiography concerns the various ways that the past can be written and represented today. It is about destabilizing dominant narratives of the past. It is about the histories that are “not told, retold, untold” and those which have been “forgotten, hidden, invisible, considered unimportant, changed, eradicated” (Jenkins, 1995: 36). Power and emancipation are central to these histories where the weak and subordinate are given a voice to reclaim their past in an effort to deflate imposing meta-narratives (Brown, 2005).

The diversity of postmodern thought is explained in part by the various intellectual traditions from which it has emerged, including Marxism, the liberal center, and the conservative right (Jenkins, 1995; Prasad, 2005). Partially because of this, postmodernism does not represent a coherent and cohesive collective of scholars (Brown, 2005), although they do share a concern for language, representation, subjectivity, and power (Calás & Smircich, 1999). The various traditions and perspectives that are often subsumed within it include poststructuralism, post-Marxism, post-feminism, postcolonialism, and cultural theory (Jenkins, 2009; Gunn, 2006). Contributors who have informed postmodern historiography include Foucault (though he was reluctant to adopt the label), specifically his work on archaeology (1973), discourse (1973), and genealogy (Burrell, 1988). Other contributors include Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard (1993), Ankersmit (1997, 2007), Ermarth (1992), Munslow (2010, 2012), White (1973, 1985; Jenkins, 1995; Green & Troup, 1999), Rorty (Jenkins, 1995; Perry, 2002), and Jenkins (1991, 1995). Over the past...
25 years management historians working in this vein have included Jacques (1996, 2006), Cooke (2006), Mills (2006), and Booth and Rowlinson (2006), as well as others who have increasingly drawn on the work of the aforementioned postmodern theorists. I briefly summarize some of their points of intersection as a way of fleshing out postmodern historiography.

**Postmodern ontological and epistemological orientation**

Though far from a homogeneous group, postmodern historians are united in their ontological orientation of post- or anti-realism. The consequences of this for theorizing the notion of the past is that it is said to be an absent present; one that does not exist in an ontological realist form. As Collingwood (1956: 5) explains, the “past has vanished and our ideas about it can never be verified as we verify our scientific hypotheses.” This position does not deny that “what happened before now actually happened” (Jenkins, 2003: 35, 2009; Brown, 2005) but instead emphasizes that what happened before now cannot be understood as the one definitive past as would modernist history. Thus, while there is agreement that what ‘happened before now’ forms part of a past time, it can never stand in for the past or history in and of itself or in its entirety. The past and history then, become absent objects of inquiry, which are signified by remaining traces or artifacts (Jenkins, 1995; Munslow, 2009). Traces and artifacts do not stand in for the past but are what becomes ordered into narrative form in the minds of the knower (Ankersmit, 1997). And, as noted by White (1985: 39), the past as we construct it “enjoys no existence apart from our consciousness of it.” In effect, the “past is therefore a permanent dimension of the human consciousness” (Hobsbawm, 1997: 10). Because the past no longer exists, modernist criteria of truth or falsity are not relevant for assessing how the past is re-presented in historical representations (Braun, 1997; Brown, 2005).

Those who do history from a postmodern orientation are also united in their rejection of positivism. The notion that history is subject to general laws and that its discovery follows a natural science model of research is dismissed. History is not understood to follow a single logic or line of development, neither is it assumed to be universal and by virtue of this it is not to be considered singular (Gunn, 2006; Jenkins, 1995). As with the textual or linguistic turn (Lyotard, 1993; Jenkins, 1995; Gunn, 2006; Perry, 2002), the emphasis is on understanding reality of the past as mediated entirely through our knowledge of it, thus through text and language. Because the past is gone and history is understood as its textual representation, it becomes impossible to verify history. History, then, is understood as knowledge of the past (Jenkins, 1991; Munslow, 2010; Kalela, 2012). And history, as the representation of the past, has no referent in ‘the world out there’ to which we can compare it for accuracy (Jenkins, 2003; Ankersmit, 1997). Historical truth claims, objective history, fixed meanings, and certainty are substituted by a privileging of subjective meaning, fluid interpretations, undecidability, and reinterpretation. The latter has aroused criticism among modernist historians as it undercuts that there is a reality to which the history may correspond (Zagorin, 2009; Braun, 1997).

Because the past is assumed as an absent present and history is knowledge or representation of the past, epistemological questions feature quite prominently in postmodern histories (Gunn, 2006; Jenkins, 1991, 1999). With the textual turn, attention is drawn to the textual conditions through which all knowledge of the past is produced and the possibilities and limits it offers for historical understanding (Jenkins, 1995). Postmodernism gives rise to the modernist fear concerning our knowledge of the past: history as fact or fiction debate. Not surprisingly, many postmodernists side with history as fiction (White, 1973; Jenkins, 1995, 2003). Thus all historical representations assume a fictive nature, “the contents of which are as much invented as found and
the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences” (White, 1985: 82).

In his notion of Metahistory, White (1985) offers that Western academic conventions, which have given shape to the academic enterprise of history, have come with modes of emplotment. Metahistory, in some senses, is a way of taking stock of the existing discourses or modes of emplotment that constitute history. In White’s text *Metahistory* (1973: 2) he questions “the epistemological status of historical explanations” or knowledge. He presents a typology of modes of emplotment referring to “the way a sequence of events is fashioned into a narrative that is gradually seen to be of particular kind” (Jenkins, 1995: 159). Emplotment offers advice on the ordering of traces, or the encodation through which the past is narrated or chronicled as history (White, 1985; Jenkins, 1995). Through the historian’s mode of emplotment, a “meaningful form” is imposed on a “meaningless past” (Jenkins, 1995: 137). Much to the dismay of modernist historians who profess ideological neutrality, White (1985) argues that all historians, modernists and postmodernists alike, adopt an ideologically positioned mode of emplotment that influences how the past figures as history. After all, to say that one is not ideologically positioned is to make a comment about one’s ideological position.

Thus the point is less that historians and novelists are similar because each invents traces or events but their resemblance lies in that each chooses a mode of emplotment, which gives the text meaning beyond the traces themselves. The past offers no inherent mode in which to organize the traces into historical form. Those modes of emplotment are given to us today, as an outcome of our disciplinary endeavors and plural ideological regimes. The fact that there are many ideological regimes, each reflecting particular political interests, leads to the construction of plural histories (Jenkins, 1991, 1995).

**Postmodern representations of the past-as-history: plural**

The idea of one past and many ways to represent it is what is intended by plural histories (Jenkins, Morgan & Munslow, 2007; Gunn, 2006). Embracing and celebrating this is a central tenet of postmodernism (Jenkins, 2003). To say that histories are plural is not only to comment on the fact that various ideological commitments and modes of emplotment give choices to historians in how to construct history. It is also to suggest that historical interpretations are no longer fixed. Through postmodernism, histories become “contingent, arbitrary and logically unstable” (Jenkins, 2003: 21). Instead of acting as the final authority on the past, histories now have no closure. They are continually at risk of being re-figured or re-interpreted by readers as soon as they are written. The question thus arises, how to deal with “variations on history” (Rigney, 2007: 152)? Whereas modernists solve discrepancies between historical accounts by consulting the traces or archival documents, postmodernists feel that variations on the past should be accepted as an inherent part of history (Jenkins, 1995, 2003).

Plurality is also a result of the postmodern treatment of traces, evidence and facts. Whereas modernist historians assume their facts or traces are ‘given’ or ‘found’, postmodernists believe they are created through the kinds of questions historians pose (White, 1985). The subject of the historical investigation causes certain traces to assume relevance over others. What counts as relevant, of course, is the choice of the historian. The historian plays a role in what is read into the trace, as well as the meaning it will contribute to the narrative (Jenkins, 1995, 2003). Instead of assuming that the facts speak for themselves (Kellner, 1997) or that they act as a “magnifying glass” through which we view the past (Ankersmit, 1997: 287), postmodernists emphasize the choice of certain facts over others, the variety of combinations they may take, and the many meanings that can be derived from them as they are fashioned into history (Brown, 2005).
histories serve to liberate history from the past, and open the conditions of possibility for the
many ways the past can feature as history. Indeed, the emancipatory potential of history lies in its
plurality (Jenkins, Morgan & Munslow, 2007; Jenkins, 1995).

While postmoderns have celebrated pluralism, others have instead critiqued it. Modernists
for example, have feared plural histories due to the lack of moral ground it offers for the judg-
ment of past events (Brown, 2005). This is a significant point concerning relativism that I take
up below. Others, including Mol (1999, 2002), have suggested that in creating plural accounts
of the past, postmoderns and moderns actually reveal their similarities. Mol’s reasoning is
that to construct plural narratives, historians gather around a particular phenomenon or event
and thus create knowledge from each their own individuated standpoints. The result then, is
many historians, each engaged in their own crafting of history, each acknowledging that due
to their own perspective on the object under study, an independent and different history is
likely to emerge, thus a different object (see Figure 12.2). It is, as Jenkins (2009: 5) notes, a
condition where “historians can make the past ‘historical’ any way they like, that is to say, in
their own image.” Each “perspective remains ‘absolutely singular’ because the subject’s gaze
is always constitutively in the object gazed at” (Jenkins, 2009: 12). In effect, each historian
constructs her own spatially based ‘singular’ history. Each resulting story is assessed for validity
on its own terms, as it is evaluated according to internal criteria and the bounds of its own
perspective. Thus, despite the benefits of the textual turn for history, such as acknowledging
all history as text as well as the notion of plural histories, some have criticized postmodern
history for resembling modernist histories in the construction of their own version of a his-
torical ‘singularity’ (Mol, 1999).

Before proceeding, three noteworthy points are highlighted in anticipation of the discus-
sion on amodernism that follows. First, not only do postmoderns describe a process where it is
‘knowledge’ of the object that is being constructed, but, and this is the second point, that know-
ledge making occurs in the mind of the observer’s ‘cognition.’ Thus, history making is a ‘cogni-
tive’ and embrained act (Law, 2008). Finally, in focusing their gaze on the object (in this case the
past), it is the ‘latter and resulting knowledge of it’ that assumes a privileged position.

Postmodern relationship of past to history: relative

As noted, plurality in history has been criticized for its potential in leading to moral, political,
and epistemological relativism (Brown, 2005). Relativism here refers to a type of knowledge
whose value can only be assessed when understood in accordance with the perspective from which it has emerged. The issue, as previously noted, is that because the multitudes of perspectives give rise to many somewhat unrelated narratives, these are assumed to coexist (Jenkins, 2009). When it is the very notion of coexistence that is celebrated, there is no way to judge the good from the bad and claims to historical objectivity are undermined (Green & Troup, 1999). All representations of the past are thus assumed as “equally representative of reality and therefore equally fictitious” (Green & Troup, 1999: 300). Little emphasis is placed on evaluating either their relationship to one another or their legitimacy according to any universally accepted and neutral criteria. This view undercuts any possibility for absolute truth where one history is assumed as unconditionally valid.

Modernists have long feared “the troubling specter of relativism” (Zagorin, 2009: 64) for providing “anything goes” histories where historians “say whatever” they like (Elton, 1997: 179) and there are “no ground(s) even in principle for acknowledging a contradiction between an assertion and a denial” (Lang, 1997: 426). On the other hand, postmoderns have offered that it is the absence of relativism that should be feared (Brown, 2005; Jenkins, 1999; Munslow, 2009). Its absence “allows hegemonies of illiberal culture to blossom, and encourages the training in a History discipline that permits the principle of incontestable Historical certainty” (Brown, 2005: 175). Postmoderns offer that relativism “is not merely unavoidable, but it is valuable precisely because it impairs any historian’s commitment to discovering ‘the true nature of the past’” (Munslow, 2009: 318).

Whether desired or not, relativism has been suggested as a path leading to perspectivalism. Perspectivalism suggests “each observer sees according to its own point of view” which means that each point of view is irreducible and equally privileged (Latour, 1988: 14). While we construct and read from our own perspective, this plurality of approaches “doesn’t lead to subjectivism because we can all agree what we have different perspectives on” (Jenkins, 2009: 12). In some senses, a form of consensus emerges. Each is entitled to her own narrative and all agree that there are no grounds for claiming that yours is any better than mine (Law, 2008). What is of interest for our upcoming discussion of amodernism is the following: while it could be claimed that historical representations are grounded by the historian that provide them, I will argue that they otherwise ‘float’ above the ‘practices’ that have influenced their construction.

Postmodern treatment of context: put events in context to do history

The potential of history has often been described in terms of the role it can play in placing organizations and their present practices in their context of emergence. For example, Jenkins (2003: 35) notes, “that the past/history really is sort of a containing object which we are somehow in … the past is both all around us and in us.” Contexts are used “to frame events” (Jenkins, 2009: 6). For postmodern historians, the past as history acts as the context, or the container in which the present is assumed to take place. Historians are tasked with providing interpretations of the past whose “link with the present” serves to illuminate or explain a present condition (Hobsbawm, 1997: 214). After all, the value of studying the past lies in its explanatory role or its capacity in “providing perspectives on the present that contribute to the solution of problems peculiar to our own time” (White, 1985: 41; Jacques, 1996). Postmodernists prefer present-centered histories (Mannheim, 1985; Jenkins, 1995). These stand in contrast with those of a modernist kind where history is created free from the biases of the present context, with the past studied for its own sake on its own terms.

Whilst moderns have criticized present-centered histories, postmoderns have argued that not only are they desirable but unavoidable. Though many extant reasons may explain this, White
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(1985) and Jenkins (1995) have each stressed that it is precisely the methodological tools and modes of emplotment used by historians ‘today’ that give structure and meaning to past events. Those tools, if only by the fact that they are developed through historians’ conventional practice, lead to knowing the past as history – constituted through those very conventional practices. Because the latter is inescapable, postmoderns argue that present-centered histories are our lot.

As the above paragraphs attest, historians’ treatment of context is itself contested. For example, though Jenkins (1995) argued for present-centered histories, he also suggests that contexts can be arbitrarily figured. After all, you can always “‘produce another context’, you can simply add ‘more in’ and historians can never know if they have constructed the ‘right’ context and filled it with the ‘correct’ substance required to yield, say, explanatory meanings of a historical kind” (Jenkins, 2009: 6). Others have critiqued historians’ treatment of context due to its assumed continuity, stability and the fact that it is treated as having an uncontested, already established existence (prior to our efforts to define it). After all, might not historians’ practices construct the context? Might not the social context actually feature as the past as history? These points are taken up in the section discussing amodernism.

Role of the postmodern historian

Though the role that the postmodern historian plays in the craft of history has been touched upon in previous sections, a few points are worth reinforcing before proceeding further. The first point is that in the craft of postmodern history the historian is assumed as the ‘creator’ of the knowledge of the past. That history is cognitive, or embrained, is highlighted in Jenkins’ (2009: 7) statement that history is “an act of the imagination.” Similarly, Hobsbawm (1997: 10) emphasizes the cognitive nature of history when he notes that the “problem for historians is to analyze the nature of this ‘sense of the past’ in society.”

Not only is it worth mentioning that it is the responsibility of the ‘historian’ to assemble the past as history, but it is the historian, not the past, who dictates what happens in history (Fox-Genovese, 1997; Jenkins, 2003). Collingwood (1956: 236) articulates the point succinctly when he notes that it “is the artist, and not nature, that is responsible for what goes into the picture.” Given that the past is assumed as shapeless, it is up to historians to impose a narrative structure on the past according to the various modes of ordering (or emplotment) made available by a community of historians (Jenkins, 1995; White, 1985). Thus instead of focusing on establishing a detached view, as would modernists, postmodern history places emphasis on the individual historian’s choices (Kalela, 2012). As noted, the historian faces many choices during the process in which history is constructed from its traces (Jenkins, 1995, 2003; White, 1985; Munslow, 2009; Kellner, 1997). Above all, the craft of history is never a neutral task, as the historian’s position on the ideological spectrum influences how s/he tells the tale. The historian’s intentions inevitably influence the nature of the tale told, the historian is always involved in the moment of writing (White, 1985; Kellner, 1997).

What is noteworthy in postmodern history is that historians reflexively acknowledge their presence in the moment of writing. Whereas the modernist historian writes from a detached, third-person voice where the ordering hand of the historian is never acknowledged, the postmodern historian situates the history as an outcome of her/his scholarly efforts. In doing so, s/he stresses that it could always be otherwise, thus another historian could configure the facts as history differently. The latter serves to de-privilege the historian as an authoritative voice in the doing of history. This opens the opportunity for reflexivity where it is possible to reflect “critically on the politics of knowledge inherent in any given interpretation or position” (Gunn, 2006: 3). In the quest for reflexivity, postmodern historians, including White (1985), suggest that
historians must acknowledge their chosen mode of emplotment as one of many alternatives. Doing so means being transparent about what informed their choice as well as illustrating how it flavors the content of the resulting history.

**Past modern history, past postmodern history, the end of history?**

As the previous paragraphs have illustrated, postmodern historiography offers a thorough critique of modernism. Based on the issues outlined above, postmodern historiographers have been quick to signal the death of modernist history (Jenkins, 2009). While postmodernism has ‘offered’ much critique, it has also been its subject. In particular, some have questioned whether it “has become at least partially exhausted” (Calás & Smircich, 1999: 658). These critiques have probed whether the moment of postmodernism has passed and if it is now time to open “up space for other theoretical approaches to appear” (Calás & Smircich, 1999: 649). The critique of postmodernism has spread to postmodern historiography too. The latter has been most intensely pursued by Jenkins (2009: 16) who offers, “we can now live without histories of either a modernist or a postmodernist kind” (Jenkins, 2009: 16). In denouncing modernist and postmodernist histories, Jenkins claims (2009: 17) “without regrets or nostalgia … we can now wave history goodbye and look forward to a future – which is where we all have to live after all – unburdened and unspoilt by the historicised/historical past.”

This drastic signal of the end of history of “any kind” is only somewhat surprising. In many senses, the rationale inherent in Jenkins “end of history thesis” (Munslow, 2009: 315) is similar to that offered by Foucault’s (1979) anti-historical stance upon which were premised his notions of archaeology and genealogy (Burrell, 1988). Though Foucault did emphasize the “importance of an historical understanding” it was sought after to foster an understanding and reconstruction of the “present” and not the “past” (Burrell, 1988: 225). Thus, Foucault’s histories of the present “traces connections among the arbitrary rather than the intentional, the accidental rather than the planned, in the historical constitution of contemporary practices. These connections denaturalize everyday activities and institutions that we take for granted” (Calás & Smircich, 1999: 655).

It is this very attitude that Jenkins (2009: 18) adopts as he asks whether there is “any reason why we ought to study things under the aspect of their past-ness rather than under the aspect of their present-ness, which is the aspect under which everything offers itself for our contemplation immediately?” Should we follow Foucault (1979) and Jenkins (1999, 2009) in assuming that the study of history is dead? Is it time, as suggested by Latour (1999b: 146), to decide between either rendering the discipline obsolete or rather time for ‘reformat(ing) the question’ of history? In the sections below, I attempt Latour’s (1999b: 169) solution and try to “historicize more, not less.”

**Amodern management and organizational history**

It would have been better if histories had never been modern. (Jenkins, 2009: 15)

I begin the discussion of amodernism with a quick review of some of the critical arguments made to date, particularly noting that postmodernism developed as a reaction and utter rejection of modernism. To that effect, we can understand the composition of postmodernism as largely influenced, if not limited by, modernism. Amodernism, as a conceptual position, shares in the postmodern critique of modernism but goes further and argues that instead of seeking to move past (or post) the theoretical damage imposed by the condition of modernism, and thus also to
be limited by it, that “it would have been better if histories had never been modern” (Jenkins, 2009: 15). It is time to consider an alternative historiographical space. One that is neither modern nor postmodern. Following Latour (1990, 1993), we can call it amodern.

Amodernism, drawing on the work of Bruno Latour (1990, 1993), constructs a theoretical position that is ‘prior’ to that of the condition of the moderns and postmoderns. It proposes a theoretical space that is untouched by the rigid disciplinary categorical apparatus of Kant, unaffected by modernist tendencies to universalize and essentialize, to avoid producing accounts that are reductionist, linear, natural, neutral, or written in the third-person.

**Latour’s conceptualization of amodernism**

Latour’s notion of amodernism, as considered in the early 1990s (Latour, 1990, 1993), is an alternative conceptualization developed as part of a broader movement whereby the methods of anthropology were used to problematize the enterprise of the natural sciences (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). Although Latour’s notion of amodernism was perhaps not explicitly intended as a comment on history, or an historical category for that matter, contained within it are consequences for history quite distinct from modern or postmodern approaches. These implications are helpful in developing an alternative space for ‘doing’ history. In the paragraphs that follow, I take the liberty of borrowing Latour’s notion of amodernism as a label (though I am conscious of the dangers in doing so) to describe a distinct and hopefully fruitful alternative conceptualization of historiography.

Latour’s notion of amodernism stems from a disregard of Kant’s rigid disciplinary categories imposed through modernism in which the ‘social’ world became the object of study of the ‘social sciences’ and the ‘natural’ world that of the ‘natural sciences’. These categories shaped what each was to study, thus the world of objects or non-humans became the responsibility of the natural sciences while the world of subjects or humans that of the social sciences. Amodernism, for Latour (1993), represents the desire to transcend this human–nonhuman divide by focusing on the relations established between them – ‘in practice.’ This new constitutive relation re-defined the “divided loyalty between humans and non-humans” (Latour, 1990: 156). Whereas “the old settlement limit(ed) historicity to subjects and ban(ned) it for nonhumans” (Latour, 1999b: 156), the amodern approach looks at the multitude of configurations that human–nonhuman associations take as they engage in practice. Studying the natural and the social from the perspective of distinct categories neglects the fact that in practice we only ever encounter combinations of human–nonhuman actors. In practice, actors are not isolated as the categorical ways we use to study them imply. After all, reserving history for the ‘social’ denies that “nature shares with society the same historicity” (Latour, 1996: 89). Latour (1993) argues that this relational constitution more appropriately positions the social as composed of human–nonhuman associations and that this was the case prior to the development of modernism – and thus also prior to postmodernism. He offers that any illusion to the contrary was produced by virtue of the convincing categorization of knowledge and knowing imposed by and naturalized through modernism. For Latour we have never been modern and by virtue of this, he denies that we could have ever been postmodern, “since this would imply a belief that we have been what we have never been” therefore his (1990: 164) explanation of the social settles on amodernism.

Latour’s work has garnered much attention with many scholars from various fields drawing on, and also further developing, his theoretical contributions (Callon, 1986, 1999; Law, 1994, 2008; Law and Hetherington, 1998, 1999; Mol, 1999, 2002; Haraway, 1988, 2004). Recently, some have even extended Latour’s work toward theorizing and doing history in M&OS (Durepos, Mills & Helms Mills, 2008; Bruce & Nyland, 2011; Durepos & Mills, 2012a, 2012b; Durepos, Mills &
Weatherbee, 2012; Myrick, Helms Mills & Mills, 2013) as well as information systems (Bonner, 2013). What unites these contributions is the similarity of their ontological and epistemological orientations.

**A modern ontological and epistemological orientation**

Amodernism shifts our focus away from the modernist necessity for accurate representations of reality (realism), or the relativist nature of a reality mediated through knowledge and text (the anti-realism of the textual turn) to ‘practices.’ Focusing on practice means tracing the many shapes that that human–nonhuman associations take when engaged in activity (Mol, 2002). If history “making is an everyday practice” (Kalela, 2012: xi), why not study the various compositions it takes in its situated practices?

To study the various compositions that an object may take in situated practices is to study how it is ‘performed’ or ‘enacted’ through those practices (Law, 2008; Mol, 1999, 2002; Latour, 1999b; Law and Hetherington, 1998; Law & Urry, 2004; Tsekeris 2010). Whilst postmoderns have emphasized “representation” through “knowledge” of a phenomenon, the amoderns focus on “enactment” through “performance”. Understanding history as but one of many “representations” of the past would imply falling back “on the divide between ontological and epistemological questions that we” can begin to “abandon” through amodernism (Latour, 1999b: 145–46). Abandoning this separation is encouraging if we consider the “ontological character of representation” where “representation not only describes but also works upon the world that it described” (Law & Benschop, 1997: 175). Amodernism considers a “philosophical shift in which knowledge is no longer treated primarily as referential, as a set of statements about reality, but as a practice that interferes with other practices. It therefore participates in reality” (Mol, 2002: 153).

We are not simply talking about “knowledge of realities, but also realities themselves, that are generated in the practices of production” (Law, 2008: 36). Thus, it becomes less about acknowledging the historian’s gaze or perspective to understand the politics inherent in knowledge production of the past. No longer are we only interested in “different perspectives on a single reality” but in the “enactment of different realities” (Law and Urry, 2004: 397). The focus of study becomes more about how to follow “objects while they are being enacted in practice” (Mol, 2002: 152). And if practice becomes our point of entry for understanding how the past becomes history, epistemology loses its postmodern reverence and questions of epistemology are decentered, if not bypassed. Perhaps it is time to begin to ask ourselves “whether ‘knowing’ is the metaphor that we need” (Law, 2008: 3). Can we still get away with explanations of the social that reduce everything to text? If, as Mol (2002: vii–viii) suggests, epistemology “is concerned with reference” and “representations” only, how do we account for practices and the multiple enactments that an object may take in these practices? How do we account for the fact that objects have effects? While the latter query invites questions of ontology to assume center stage it is far from resembling the realism of modernism, as “ontology is no longer a monist whole.” It becomes “ontology-in-practice” (Mol, 2002: 157).

In the shift of emphasis in the realm of ontology what becomes of interest is how any study of the social both “constitutes and describes its object of interest” (Calás & Smircich, 1999: 663). As Mol (2010: 260) explains, actors “are enacted, enabled, and adapted by their associates while in their turn enacting, enabling and adapting these” (Mol, 2010: 260). For the amoderns, the point of interest is less how a researcher comes to ‘know’ an object (decentering researchers’ perspective), and more about how a particular practice “attunes to, interacts with, and shapes its subjects in its various and varied practices” (Mol, 2002: vii). Of concern is how a practice, institution, or activity “‘enacts’ the object of its concern and treatment” (Mol, 2002: vii). An amodern
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historiography then, would focus on practices to understand how history as a nonhuman actor assumes its composition – how it is enacted.

The social sciences, and by virtue of this the historical enterprise itself, play a central role in the composition that history assumes in practice. It is the case where, as Law and Urry (2004: 390–91) suggest, “social inquiry and its methods are productive: they (help to) make social realities and social worlds.” Following Law (2008: 5), what is argued is that social science methods “produce the reality they describe” and do so in a “wide range of locations” (Tsekeris 2010: 141). If it is as Law and Urry (2004: 392) suggest, namely that methods “participate in, reflect upon, and enact the social” past, then this has profound implications for undertaking research of any kind (Law, 2008). This includes how we ‘do’ history. Perhaps a useful starting point for historical reconsideration then is to contemplate considering history an ‘actor’ (Latour, 1999a).

Before entertaining this challenge it may be useful to describe what is entailed by an actor. Actors are heterogeneous in that they hold intact a combination of humans and nonhumans who come to pursue like interests and thus come to act as one. Their stability as an actor takes effort and depends on the enrollment of whatever actors are deemed necessary to achieve the task. As Latour (1999b: 311) explains, it “is through trials that actors are defined.” Thus, actors are never understood as a ‘fait accompli’, but instead as “a set of associations … made of shifting compromises” (Latour, 1999b: 163). They are actors in the ‘doing’.

Because an actor is “in itself the conceptual frame” (Calàs & Smircich, 1999: 663), what becomes worthy of interest is a focus on the series of trials of actors. These include “the complex and controversial nature of what it is for an actor to come into existence. The key is to define an ‘actor by what it does’ or what it has done” (Latour, 1999b: 303). In some senses, the emphasis is on tracing an actor’s emergence. The actor assumes its composition as an outcome of itself. Its emergence arises from the chains of translation through which the actor has traveled. It arises from “the work through which actors modify, displace, and translate their various and contradictory interests” (Latour, 1999b: 311). After all, everything that the actor touches along its temporal course of practice alters the composition of the actor and each “change in the series of transformations that composes the reference is going to make a difference” (Latour, 1999b: 150). However, our task is not to document the travel of a single, untouched entity through time but instead to document the “modifications of the ingredients that compose an articulation of entities” over time (Latour, 1999b: 162). It is the aim of modern history to trace or (re)assemble the composition of an actor and thus, to ‘do’ history.

The composition of an actor is never accomplished. The various topographical arrangements through which the past can be performed or enacted as history remain open. They are configured in the moment of performance as we ‘do’ history. In fact, their performance reveals the actors’ topographical arrangement. More to the point, it is at the moment of enactment or performance of the past as history that its conditions of possibility reside. As Mol (1999) notes, those conditions of possibility are not given but are in the making – continually – in the possibilities of configurations in which history can be performed. What is of interest then, is “how it is that the representational practices that make up worlds – and so the worlds made up in those practices – co-ordinate themselves” (Law & Benschop, 1997: 175). What is also of critical interest is the specific topographical arrangements that come to assume durability as these help to make certain enactments of history more ‘real’ than others (Law & Urry, 2004). These travel through time, they enroll some actors, displace others and are performed differently depending on different sets of practices.
An example of an ‘academic paper’ illustrates this idea. From the point at which its constitutive ideas are developed to the final product, the academic paper travels through various mediums and is touched by a multitude of hands. These include but are not limited to conference reviewers, a patient and concerned author, journal reviewers, and academics in the conference audience where the paper is presented. The point is that the paper travels, and is altered (though also alters those met) at each point in the chain. Thus, it displaces and is displaced. The paper will change because it will be altered based on the reviews. The content will likely change each time it is presented at a conference or research exposition as those who receive the ideas interpret it varyingly. The reviewers are also displaced when they encounter new ideas presented in the paper. Furthermore, the paper will be performed differently based on the set of practices in which it is enacted. The ideas performed in a conference presentation will present a different enactment of the ideas than those inscribed on paper. This example features one academic paper (one actor) and different (more than one) performances of the same academic paper or actor. What we have acknowledged is that the actor is more than one, but less than many. This raises for us the issue of multiplicity.

_**A modern nature of representations of the past and/or history: multiple**_

Whittle and Spicer (2008) have offered that analyses that focus on multiplicity have yet to make their way into M&OS – a circumstance threatening the potential to develop analytical tools that facilitate those very analyses. A modernism offers a call for tracing multiplicity. Multiplicity stands in contrast to singularity and plurality. It implies “more than one but less than many” (Law, 1999: 11). To say that an object, theory, or history is multiple is to imply that the same object may be performed differently in various practices or relations (Mol, 1999, 2002). Thus we are not talking about one singular history produced by the historians’ community as their opinions on ‘what happened’ converge. This would imply the production of one (dominant, hegemonic) history by many historians (see Figure 12.1). Less so are we talking about the process through which historians create different histories by virtue of viewing them from different perspectives (see Figure 12.2). As noted, the latter leads to what Mol (1999) calls perspectivalism. Perspectivalism is amendable to different eyes on the same object, each constructing ‘a different knowledge’ of the object by virtue of the choice of perspective. These types of analyses leave the object itself untouched and instead focus on ‘knowledge’ of the object.

Multiplicity takes us away from the dualism of singularity and plurality (Law, 1999). It moves us away from ‘knowledge construction,’ from ‘singular realities,’ and from the desire for ‘many unrelated singular’ versions of perspectivalism. Instead of merely ‘observing’ reality, the focus shifts toward ‘enactment’ and ‘performance’ of reality (of the past) itself, as it happens in practice (Mol, 1999, 2002; Law, 2008). Instead of merely trying to ‘represent’ the past as history, the focus is on how it is manipulated in practice. The emphasis is on how historians inevitably interfere with the object of analysis as they partake in its performance (Mol, 1999, 2002). This is multiplicity. What becomes of interest is how one version of the past is enacted as history in different sets of practices. As Law (2008: 55) notes, we are not dealing with different perspectives on one object, but “with different objects produced in different sets of methods assemblages.” Multiplicity refers to the process through which those very practices give each enactment of the past, each history, a different shape, order, essence or feel (see Figure 12.3). We are talking about the enactment of different versions of the past, and calling these histories. Thus, they are not different histories, but different versions of the same phenomena. Histories are “more than one but less than many,” they are “somewhere in between” (Law, 1999: 12).
To speak of multiplicity of history is to foreground the ‘practices’ in which history ‘making’ takes place. Instead of “understanding objects as the central points of focus of different people’s perspectives” the emphasis centers on understanding histories as “things manipulated in practices” (Mol, 2002: 4). To speak of multiplicity is to make a point about ‘enactment’ and ‘performance’ as opposed to mere ‘representation.’ We are reminded again of the lost reverence of postmodern epistemology in favour of amodern ontology (Mol, 2002). But if reality itself is multiplied, if the past as history is multiplied, then what are we to make of the relationship between ‘different versions’ that histories may take as they are performed (Mol, 1999, 2002; Law & Urry, 2004; Law, 2008)? What becomes of analytic concern are the relations between different enactments of the past as history, as well as the relations within which one enactment comes into being. This solicits from us new questions, such as what version of an object can be performed by virtue of the set of relations in which it is localized? With this, different enactments of one history can be understood as outcomes of their relations of investigation (Law & Benschop, 1997; Law & Urry, 2004). Histories then come to be considered as relational actors.

**A modern relationship of past and history: relational**

To say that histories are relational actors implies a shift of focus on their situatedness, and more specifically, how they assume their composition by virtue of it. Histories as relational actors are not facts with an essence in and of themselves but instead assume their constitution by virtue
of the relations in which they reside. As Mol (2002: 54) suggests, “nothing ever ‘is’ alone. To be is to be related.” Relationalism gives us an opportunity to bring histories “down to earth” (Law & Mol, 2001: 609–10; Law, 2000: 2) not, however, to its roots or point of origin, nor to its foundation. Instead, relationalism re-associates (or re-lates) histories within the relations of its constitution. Thus, to speak of relationalism is to acknowledge “relations produce effects, including material effects” (Law, 2001: 3). Some of these include inscription devices. Histories, too, are inscription devices that are outcomes of relations. Viewing them as such moves us away from universal histories that are unconditionally true and toward those grounded in their relations of investigation (Law & Mol, 2001; Law & Urry, 2004; Law, 2008). Histories then become localized (Law, 1994).

Relationalism moves us quite far from the realism of modernism and the relativism of postmodernism (Law & Urry, 2004; Tsekeris 2010). Whilst postmodernism introduced the emancipatory potential that could arise from plural knowledge of the past, such analyses were critiqued “for their lack of strong political engagement and for their remoteness from ‘the real world’” (Cáls & Smircich, 1999: 659). The plurality of postmodern histories foregrounded an emphasis on constructing many ‘knowledges of the past,’ but lost in the background was the notion that each actor participates in reality itself. Lost was the notion that each assumed its composition by virtue of its inherent relations of production. Also lost were the “complex relations between the different modes of ordering” realities of the past (Law, 2001: 2). The relativism of postmodernism led to many disconnected, independent narratives floating about, thus untied and ungrounded. Relationalism ties analyses “down to earth” (Law & Mol, 2001: 609–10; Law, 2000: 2) and it situates histories as enacted outcomes of their relations, which have ‘real’ material effects (Law, 2008). To say this is to avoid falling prey to the monolithic realism of modernism. As Law and Urry (2004: 395–96) note, the argument is neither relativist nor realist. Instead it is that the real is produced in thoroughly non-arbitrary ways, in dense and extended sets of relations … In sum, we’re saying that the world we know in social science is both real and it is produced.

If reality, or in this case the past as history, assumes an ontological presence with real material consequences, then how do we, as co-participants in its production account for its process of enactment? To begin with a shift of focus is necessary. Instead of assuming that it is “entities that come first and relations among them only subsequently” (Emirbayer, 1997: 281), relations enter the foreground (Habers, Mol & Stollmeyer, 2002; Law, 2008; Tsekeris 2010). Instead of focusing on stable states, or on one actor, the emphasis moves to the relations that allow the actor to assume and maintain its composition. To focus on relations implies to look “in-between” (Latour, 1988: 35). In the “betweenness,” “everything is suspended” and “unfinished” (Cooper, 2005: 1691–92). More importantly then, relations need to be seen as “active” (Cooper, 2005: 1704).

Relationalism emphasizes movement and fluidity. Relationalism re-tools analyses to view actors in practice, involved in building, connecting, translating, and associating. It is in this way that histories are produced. After all, as Law (2008: 58) notes, realities and in this case realities of the past “are not explained by practices and beliefs but are instead produced in them. They are produced, and have a life, in relations.” Relations are revealed in practice (Mol, 2002), as actors form associations, and are subject to displacement (Law, 2000, 2001). Implied in this is that those associations are a potential site of change for actors. The “betweenness” (Cooper, 2005: 1691–92) of actors is a site of oscillation (Law & Benschop, 1997), where one
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has the potential to become another. But a condition of latency and undecidability precedes the moment where actor ‘becomes another,’ before one’s composition is altered or displaced. Thus, at the site of relations, in the space in-between, resides latency and the possibility of what may become (Cooper, 2005).

Latency implies potential for what can be manifest in the relations of production as to “say that something is latent means that it is unclear, indefinite and even nebulous” (Cooper, 2005: 1693). Latency “suggests something dormant, quiescent, virtual, waiting to be expressed, as well as something malleable, plastic and even formable” (Cooper, 2005: 1693). The site of relations, thus of latency, “exceeds all representation” (Cooper, 2005: 1693), it can “accommodate a multiplicity of mutable forms” (Cooper, 2005: 1701). The space in-between actors, in-between the past and history, or in-between how actors perform history is one of becoming, of potentiality and one whose conditions of possibility are open (Cooper, 2005; Law, 1999). It is in this space that the past performed as history assumes its composition. This space ‘in-between’ is inherently exciting as it allows us to dream of what may become (Latour, 1999a: 19). For it is at this site where the potential for translation, transformation and displacement resides (Latour, 1999a) and it is at this site where the past is translated as history, or a history is translated and reinterpreted as it is read (Cooper, 2005).

It is in these relations that actors assume their altered composition. An actor’s multiple compositions across time, its trials and trajectories, emerge by virtue of the many actors encountered and relations established (Law, 2008; Law & Mol, 1995; Emirbayer, 1997). Indeed it is in “these stories [that] the bits and pieces achieve significance in relation to others” (Law & Mol, 1995: 276). As Law (1999: 3) explains, actors “take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities” (Law, 1999: 3). Their composition is performed in and by virtue of those relations (Cooper, 2005; Latour, 1996, 1999b; Law, 2000; Mol, 2010).

How do we understand the composition of a history as an actor? How do we characterize its constitution? If the composition of the socio-past as history is made of actors, then clues of its composition are formulated through tracing the relations or associations that allow actors to hold a particular shape (Latour, 1986). In short, we must “trace connections” (Law & Mol, 1995: 291). We must re-assemble the associations that hold historical actors intact. We must trace actors’ trajectories, their chain of associations, and bring our focus to the many translations that occurred at each link in the chain. Tracing the trail of actors’ associations gives us insight into how these actors perform the socio-past as history. Following “the actors themselves” gives us insight into the composition of history (Latour, 2005: 12). Doing history then means taking part in tracing the connections that hold the socio-past together in a given constitution. It means focusing on the ties that glue the elements of the socio-past and looking specifically at which elements are altered through these associations. In doing so, we are not only sketching associations but also unconsciously tracing a ‘context’ as it is the practices of actors themselves that create their own context.

A modern treatment of context: practices of actors create the context

If histories are created in relations, then it is those very relations that act as the glue that holds histories intact. Histories come to be viewed as an outcome of relational actors engaged in social practices. The way histories assume their composition is similar to the ‘social context’ (Latour, 2005). Latour (1986: 273) explains that the social or society “is not the referent of an ostensive definition discovered by social scientist.” A negative consequence of this modern notion of the social is that it “designates a stabilized state of affairs” to that which should be understood as an unstable, unfolding performance (Latour, 2005: 1). Latour (1986: 276) explains that the social
“is not what holds us together, it is what is held together.” What is held together are various heterogeneous actors engaged in practices. Latour’s (1986, 2005) conceptualization of the ‘social’ is therefore critically useful in understanding how the practices of actors, as they are engaged in performing the past as history, create context.

To summarize, the principle idea in its most basic form is that “any practice creates its own context” (Latour, 1990: 169). This notion defiantly disturbs popular modern and postmodern treatment of historical context. Whereas moderns felt it possible to reconstruct the historical context of an event to foster a greater understanding of it, postmoderns celebrated histories for their ability to illuminate phenomena in the present context. In both instances, the context is assumed as a ‘container’ in which we place phenomena to foster greater understanding of it.

Amodernism refutes the ‘putting’ of something into the social context or container to understand it because the ‘social context’ or ‘container’ is what actors produce when they perform the past as history. Latour (1988: 27) explains that no “matter how sociologists and historians love to put texts, ideas, and events in their context, this context is always made up of shifted characters.” Since the context is always being assembled before our very eyes, it is not possible to put those actors within it to explain them. In short, the context, either past or present, could never be used to explain phenomena. The context or social “are instead what need explaining” (Latour, 1986: 271). A series of different questions then emerge. For one, what series of associations between actors hold the social, or social past (socio-past) for that matter, together? Another is to ask what is the topographical configuration through which the social past oscillates as history? Or again, how does the socio-past as history keep its form? The socio-past as history, in this sense, is far from the context in which everything is ‘framed’, it is rather “construed as one of the many connecting elements circulating inside tiny conduits” (Latour, 2005: 4–5). The socio-past as history is what is created through our very efforts to define it (Latour, 2005).

If seen this way the articulation of the socio-past as history becomes the major puzzle. This is what needs to be explained, as opposed to being used to provide or frame the explanation. If the socio-past as history is an outcome of the social context, its composition is what needs questioning, and not what is used to formulate the answer (Latour, 2005). For my amodern argument, the socio-past as history is not only an outcome of the social but at one with it. History making is a ‘social’ practice.

Role of the amodern historian: co-participant of the practices in which history is produced

If history making is a social practice, then how does this impact the role of the historian? So far, we have assumed that amodern histories are what heterogeneous actors inevitably enact as they speak of the past, or behave in light of a past. The consequence of this for understanding the historians’ role is twofold. The first follows from Latour (2005), where it is implied that to talk of histories is to make a comment on the composition of the social as it happens today. Far from being assumed or pre-given, the composition of the social is enacted by heterogeneous actors and not reserved solely for ‘human historians.’ The second is related to the first in that it offers a comment on who is engaged in history making as well as where it occurs. Assuming an amodern lens with the focus on practices (of all kinds) means history making is said to occur in all types of practices and accordingly, it informs a crucial part of the social. Histories are not only enacted in the classroom, university offices, textbooks, or television documentaries, they are “learned in a multitude of places, and in a variety of ways” (Kalela, 2012: 75).
Actors of any kind have the potential to participate in this practice (Kalela, 2012). As a result, shared histories emerge with no specific author but are what families, communities, neighbors, and friends agree upon to understand and cope in the present (Kalela, 2012). But the enactment of the past as history is not just reserved for people. It is performed by inscription devices by virtue of their relation with humans (and vice versa). It is performed relationally by actors engaged in practices (Law, 2008). Historians are no longer “independent actors standing outside reality, so to speak, who can choose for or against it” (Mol, 2002: 179; Latour, 1986). Historians “become active co-participants rather than arrogant masters of” their “world” (Tsekeris 2010: 146). Far from being the producer of the history, far from producing embraimed or cognitive knowledge of the past, historians are active participants in “the never-ending social process of history making” (Kalela, 2012: 1). The historian loses her privileged position.

The historian’s role, then, becomes one of participating with the actors themselves: learning “from the actors without imposing on them an a priori definition of their world-building capacities” (Latour, 1999a: 20). Thus, the historian no longer decides between various tropes of modes of emplotment while figuring the past as history, they do not “tell anyone the shape that is to be drawn – circles or cubes or lines – but only how to go about systematically recording the world-building abilities of the sites to be documented and registered” (Latour, 1999a: 21). It goes without saying, then, that the historian’s work is never finished, never assembled, but constantly being re-figured and reassembled (Kalela, 2012; Latour, 2005).

Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed three conditions in which historiography may be undertaken, namely modern, postmodern, and amodern. As the title of this chapter suggests, it was to feature ANTi-History. In respecting Latour’s (2005) advice that we should never start off by assuming as given what we wish for our analyses to show, I have decided not to begin by assuming ANTi-History as a stable, pre-given and uncontested approach. Instead, I wish to end by suggesting it as a name that stands on behalf of the ideas presented in this chapter. As noted in other venues (Durepos & Mills, 2012a, 2012b), ANTi-History is an alternative approach to historiography which draws on actor-network theory, postmodern historiography, as well as the sociology of knowledge. ANTi-History assumes the past is performed as history by following actors and tracing the constitution of their world-building activities in practice. Amodernism, the idea to which this chapter has been dedicated, offers clues about the philosophical grounding and condition through which ANTi-History flourishes as an alternative approach to history.

A historic turn is currently underway in M&OS (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Booth & Rowlinson, 2006). Although the amount and nature of scholarly attention that it has attracted has begun to make an important impact in the field, most would agree that its influence has yet to rival the magnitude of, for example, the linguistic turn. In providing a partial explanation for the latter, one might begin by questioning ‘for whom’ the historic turn has consequences? In other words, are efforts for more historical analysis the sole responsibility of those who have thus far contributed to this debate and as a result might call themselves organizational historians (see for example, the work of Rowlinson, Booth, Hassard, Carter, Jacques, and Mills)? In this chapter, I have sought to show via amodern ANTi-History and its focus on practice that ‘history is what all of us do every day.’ If there is ever such a thing as an ANTi-Historical historic turn, my hope is that it will show us that adopting an historical perspective is not only the responsibility of historically minded M&OS scholars, but instead our collective enterprise.
Notes
1 I do this conscious of the dangers of oversimplification inherent in organizing complex discussions in a tabular format.
2 Brown (2005: 159) describes moral relativism as “the notion that morality changes with the ages, and that the historian is unable to confer moral blame upon historical figures because they lived under different moral rules.”
3 Thus, as objects out there no longer needing consideration.
4 For example, in postmodernism, history was used to illuminate present-centered phenomena, thus it was used to frame a presented-centered phenomena. Could the moderns and postmoderns have confused the questions with the answer?

References


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