

Oh no!! It's Pomo: A Case for Postmodern Discourse

Matthew N. Gardner

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Approved by

Advisory Committee

\_\_\_\_\_ Kathy Rugoff \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Lewis Walker \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ John Clifford \_\_\_\_\_  
Chair

Accepted by

\_\_\_\_\_ Dean, Graduate School \_\_\_\_\_

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
DEDICATION .....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of Purpose .....	3
WHOSE POSTMODERNISM? .....	5
POSTMODERN OPPOSITION .....	9
POSTMODERN PEDAGOGY .....	15
The Postmodern Classroom .....	17
Postmodern Linguistics.....	22
Postmodern Grammar Lessons .....	24
POSTMODERN POLITICS? .....	28
CONCLUSION.....	37
WORKS CITED .....	39

## ABSTRACT

The rhetoric of postmodernism is dense, difficult, and widely interpreted. It is this abrasive and ambiguous nature that has often led to many of postmodern discourse's more beneficial aspects being either overlooked or disregarded. In this thesis, I have clarified some of the discourse's more complex aspects, addressed its opponents, and highlighted its strongest points, and in doing this, I have shown the various uses for postmodern rhetoric as per practical application. Citing both postmodern and modern scholars, I have argued, ultimately, for postmodern rhetoric's implementation and fusion with the modernist rhetoric that so dominates our Western democratic sphere. I have chosen to examine two specific areas that I believe to be the most formative and influential in constructing our ideas of what it means to be a thoughtful, productive American citizen: education and public administration. I specifically analyze the pedagogical "tools" postmodern discourse has to offer and argue for its inclusion and implementation, not only in the University classroom, but also in classrooms all across America, to students of *all ages and educational levels*. In the chapter on postmodern politics, I maintain that our public administrators, policy-makers, and politicians all would benefit greatly by acknowledging and understanding the rhetoric of postmodernism and incorporating it into our contemporary political sphere.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family—Ma Mabel, Mom, Dad, Ray and Jenn—whose support and encouragement through the years has helped to shape me into the person I am today, and to my girlfriend, Brooke, whose love and roseate outlook continue to shape me into the person I will become.

## INTRODUCTION

When Francis Fukuyama, in his polemical text on the state of politics of the Western world, declared the establishment of the capitalist, liberal democracy as “the end of history,” he was not without his detractors (1). Some pointed to the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the first Gulf War as undeniable, marked points of humankind’s *history*. Though these were undoubtedly noteworthy events of our collective history, Fukuyama was not suggesting they and others like them would cease to occur. Rather, he was suggesting the current *socio-political landscape*, at least that of Western liberal democracies, had reached a definitive end due to what he perceived to be an inability to progress beyond the justice and proficiency produced by societies operating under the economic model of late capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Depending on how one views the effectiveness or fairness of Western capitalistic societies, this may seem to be a frightening conclusion indeed. However, if some are alarmed by Fukuyama’s assessment that the world politic has idled, then they may seek solace in one Western establishment that *is* constantly changing, one that can perhaps resuscitate this stagnancy of social progress resulting from such a fixed system, and that is the protean institution of Academia.

Since its inception, the University system has seen its curriculum and its importance as a knowledge producing institution change at varying rates. Often times, the University would find that its sound, established pedagogy had come under fire by newer, more radical ideas in fields such as philosophy, psychology, or the hard sciences<sup>2</sup>. And the past four decades—an era of expedited and unprecedented change—have been no different thanks to the initiation of the fairly inchoate branch of philosophy known as *postmodernism*.

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<sup>1</sup> Fukuyama declared in a follow-up article to *The End of History and the Last Man*, “[his] assertion that we have reached the ‘end of history’ is not a statement about the empirical condition of the world, but a normative argument concerning the justice or adequacy of liberal democratic political institution” (27).

<sup>2</sup> By “hard” sciences, I mean to refer to empirical sciences such as biology, physics, or chemistry.

Introduced in the mid-sixties on the back of groundbreaking post-structuralist linguistics, postmodern discourse was met with a guarded acceptance. The carefully reasoned objectivity of the modernist era—which had hitherto been the bailiwick of academic thought—was severely questioned, as the one goal of postmodern philosophy (according to some) appeared to be the discrediting of the modernist project. Postmodernism’s practitioners were regularly branded as nihilists seeking to disrupt centuries of “credible” and “scientific” “knowledge.”

Despite the initial reluctance of “modernist” university disciplines to acknowledge this remarkable new method of thought, postmodern discourse would slowly permeate the academic arena and arise most noticeably in the University’s humanities departments. The writings of Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard would become standard texts in evaluating language, culture, and history and their effect on the human subject. Through this rhetorical lens, Western intellectuals have been forced to reexamine practically every branch of knowledge as the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, science, anthropology, linguistics, history, and law, among others, all would scramble to reevaluate a now less than certain methodology.

Postmodernism has certainly changed the face of academia, but the question “did anyone else take notice?” still remains. The abrasive philosophy, however popular in intellectual circles, has for the most part failed to exist beyond the halls of the University. Because of its esoteric beginnings, ambiguity, limited circulation, and other reasons I shall cite, postmodern discourse—a crucial adjunct of and supplement to modernist discourse—has failed to gain acceptance (or in many cases even be acknowledged) by a mass audience. Some critics, whom I will discuss later, have gone as far as to completely disregard postmodernism’s influence, maintaining that it is a barrier to “real” progress, and its nihilistic stance offers no real means for praxis. It is here that I would like to begin the discussion, as these are the typical refutations any card-carrying

postmodern rhetorician must be equipped to combat if there is to be any revival. So I ask, “What *is* the value of postmodern discourse, *especially* in relation to modernist discourse? Does it exist today beyond the realm of academia? And if not, where could it? Or better perhaps, how could it?” But before I can begin to answer these questions, it is important to examine the various features involved in this complex undertaking.

### Statement of Purpose

In this essay, through examining the rhetoric of both modernist and postmodern discourses in two specific fields—education and public administration—I will argue that adopting and enacting a *postmodern* ideological position, as a supplement to a modernist view, has several advantages. I maintain that there are many valuable features—which I will examine in detail—involved in the rhetoric of postmodern theory/philosophy (absent from modernist discourses) that remain to be acknowledged, addressed, and, ultimately, implemented. It is my hope that these features will be given the careful attention they deserve, a consideration that would undoubtedly lead to their implementation. Such an action, I argue, would be invaluable to teachers and public administrators when addressing and trying to come to terms with the seemingly intractable social differences that directly lead to problems such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and many other intolerances, which only later emerge as political conflict and, subsequently, violence and war.

Because there remains so much dissension as to what *postmodern* might mean, in the opening chapter, I first intend to examine the various rhetorical positions surrounding the very idea of “what *is* the postmodern?” In the following section of the essay, I will analyze the rhetoric of postmodernism’s modernist opponents, in their varied incarnations, and the final

section will be devoted specifically to examining the rhetoric of modern and postmodern approaches in the previously mentioned fields of education and public administration. In doing so, I will point to the failings of adhering to strictly modernist rhetoric in these specific settings, and show where postmodern discourse just might be able to strengthen and build upon what modernism has gained. To do this, I will explore the pedagogical theories of Stanley Aronowitz and Stephen Giroux, from their seminal book, *Postmodern Education*, as well as other more recent educational theorists to examine the ways in which the modernist rhetoric of traditional pedagogy might be refashioned with postmodern discourse, for use in *all levels* of education. Following this, I will highlight the modernist-laden rhetoric of public administration and will then suggest how certain postmodern rhetorical moves could be more useful in the political discursive sphere, after which I will make concluding remarks.



## WHOSE POSTMODERNISM?

To better understand the discourse of postmodern theory, it is necessary to examine just what is meant when the term *postmodern* is used. This remains a formidable task, however, as Ihab Hassan notes: “Like all categorical terms—post-structuralism, modernism, and even romanticism, for that matter—postmodernism suffers from a *semantic* instability: that is, no clear consensus about its meaning exists among scholars” (588). This unclear consensus should not be discouraging, but encouraging rather, as it points to the openness and variety of postmodern discourse. This is important because, as I will argue later, postmodern discourse, instead of being seen as quite varied, is often reduced and limited by the rhetoric of its opponents.

As the base “modern” would suggest, *postmodernism*—in all its forms: philosophy, art, architecture, music, dance—is inextricably linked to *modernism*. It is defined both by and against the tenets of its precursor. It is in reference to this idea that Hassan comments, “postmodernism sounds not only awkward, uncouth; it evokes what it wishes to pass or suppress, modernism itself. The term thus contains the enemy within” (588). This, however, is a reduction we could probably do without. So often, the very prefix “post” marks a superiority that isn’t always warranted. This can have various effects. Most often, defensive posturing against postmodern discourse occurs, and hope of any real examination is lost.

It is also important to note that *postmodernism* “requires both historical and theoretical definition” (Hassan 589). This, however, should not imply that the two are mutually exclusive; quite to the contrary, the rhetoric of postmodernity (“historical”) and postmodernism (“theoretical”) regularly intersect. As for the first reference, many would agree that we are amidst a *postmodern era* now and cite globalization, advancements in medicine and technology, the Internet, cyberspace, virtual reality, mass communication and information, and other

contemporary features as proper justification. However, the high-tech gadgetry of a specific era cannot alone justify its nomenclature, so one must look deeper to discern the very point where the two dimensions meet.

Postmodernity as an era can also refer to a specific time and place when and where the *discourse* (the theoretical side) of *postmodernism* occurs. And this postmodern discourse, if one must proffer a date, began most concretely in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> The dense, highly technical, philosophical prose used by the small group of French intellectuals (some of whom I named before) writing in the late 60s and 70s would first establish the postmodern discourse community. However, the rhetorical verbiage that would best exhibit the postmodern mindset (and come to serve as a battle cry for the postmodern movement) is offered in Jean-Francois Lyotard's monumental *A Report on Knowledge: the Postmodern Condition*, published in 1979. In this text, Lyotard maintained that the postmodern condition is "marked by incredulity toward the metanarrative" (3). This single phrase, restated, reprinted, and repeated ad infinitum, would take postmodern discourse to a new level, and during the 1980s, "postmodern doubt" became a full-blown *topos* for the American *intellectual* community. The term, *topos*, I borrow from rhetorician Rosa Eberly's book *Citizen Critics*. In this work she states that *topoi* are "recurring inventional structures [...], [which are] concerned with the production—invention and judgment—of discourses" (4-5). It is in this sense that I mean to suggest this brilliant

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<sup>3</sup> Most scholars are reluctant to give a specific date as to when the postmodern movement began. Ihab Hassan has pointed to instances of the word "postmodern" being used as early as 1934 when it was offered as "*postmodernismo*" by Federico de Onis in his *antologia de la poesia espanola e hispanoamericana* (Hassan 587). He also tracks its progression throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century noting several other usages and variations. However, for my purposes here, I have chosen to examine the era in which I believe postmodern discourse has had the greatest impact: the period beginning in the 1960's up until the present.

reduction—“incredulity toward the metanarrative”—would become a point of departure for much of the discourse surrounding postmodernism.

Throughout the past twenty years, the rhetoric surrounding the word “incredulity,” alone, has been quite different for those who stand against postmodern discourse and for those who stand with it. Its opponents have reduced the term consistently to imply first “disbelief,” then perhaps “unbelief,” and then ultimately, nothing other than sheer nihilism. However, just as soon as postmodern opponents began to reduce and negate what this Lyotardian trope might mean, postmodern proponents co-opted the phrase as well, and added their own rhetorical spin. Nicholas Burbeles’ explanation of the phrase offers an example:

Postmodernism seems to be about denying the possibility of these [metanarratives], and rejecting as monolithic and hegemonic the ones that Western traditions have embraced. But the key term in this phrase (in translation, at least) is “incredulity”—a fascinating and unexpected word. Incredulity is not denial or rejection or refutation; *it is an inability to believe*. In this difference I think we see what is most distinctive and penetrating in the postmodern insight. (par. 5)

This idea of *ambivalence* towards, rather than an all out rejection or refutation of specific metanarratives, is for the most part, a better summarization of what is meant by the phrase “postmodern doubt.” It is rhetoric like this that more accurately portrays what postmodern discourse is about, a rhetorical positioning that makes the seemingly abrasive discourse appear more appealing to teachers and public administrators, who might hope to implement such strategies in either the classroom or the political arena.

However, despite the prominence of the postmodern conversation in the university and small intellectual circles, we now find ourselves well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the typical K-12 educators and public administrators are none the wiser. This minimal circulation again begs the question, “Why has postmodern discourse not caught on?” But before beginning to answer such a question, it might be best to examine the rhetoric of those opposed to it.

## POSTMODERN OPPOSITION

For those within the current postmodern discourse community, the entire gamut—from dogmatic acceptance to outright disavowal—is in play. This wide array of postmodern thinkers remains, as expected, divided on several issues regarding the usefulness of postmodern rhetoric. Certain progressive postmodern thinkers, who do acknowledge the deconstructive value of postmodern discourse, yet see some of the more rigid tenets as counterproductive, tend to prefer the discourse of a watered down or almost quasi-metaphysical postmodernism exhibited by such pragmatic thinkers as Richard Rorty. There are others, such as Jean Baudrillard, who strictly follow the deconstructive nature of postmodernism and warn against any true application for the theory. However, it is not these thinkers that I wish to address, but the rather large constituency of *modernist* rhetoricians, philosophers, intellectuals, and academics (from both the left *and* right), who, in firmly confiding in the modernist rhetoric of *reasoned, scientific* inquiry, fail to see the deleterious effects caused by the continual production of modernist rhetorical constructions based on the notions of *progress* and *empiricism*.

When Alan Sokal, a full time physicist and part time cultural critic, published his now-infamous hoax article in the cultural studies journal *Social Text*, he wittingly unleashed a maelstrom of academic commentary on the state of postmodern affairs. His attempts to undermine postmodernism and point out the inherent fallibility in engaging in such a falsified, “lazy” critique would at first seemed to have dealt a crushing blow to postmodern proponents. However, Stanley Fish, with much at stake in the issue, [he was “executive director of the Duke University Press, which publishes the journal *Social Text*” (par. 31)] would argue that Sokal’s assertions were unfounded in his rebuttal published in the *New York Times* shortly after the hoax

was uncovered. He discounted Sokal's underlying claim that postmodernism had rendered science a mere "social construction" with that matter-of-factness so characteristic of Fish:

What sociologists of science say is that of course the world is real and independent of our observations but that accounts of the world are produced by observers and are therefore relative to their capacities, education, training, etc. It is not the world or its properties but the vocabularies in whose terms we know them that are socially constructed—fashioned by human beings—which is why our understanding of those properties is continually changing. (par. 4)

Fish's article tersely and cogently declared what some postmodern supporters seemed to have been saying all along: that postmodern discourse is in no way trying to usurp the purported *laws* of scientific evaluation, but more, postmodern critiques of the sciences are created in an effort to *evaluate* the intersection of social politics and scientific methodology from a less objectified position so as to destabilize some of the more erroneous claims (such as those of the recently resigned president of Harvard, Lawrence Summers) made possible by racist, sexist, and overall hegemonic scientific research. This in no way should have seemed like a threat to those in Sokal's field who rely on the objective standards of scientific reality in order to, say, shoot a rocket into outer space; however, it should serve as a wakeup call to those in his field who fail to see the distinction between sending a shuttle into the great beyond *and* our very human and emotional responses to such an event. Nonetheless, Sokal's hoax did serve as a call to arms for all those who rallied behind him, namely, leftist humanists, who view postmodern rhetoric as a direct threat to scientific progress, and conservative ideologues, who view postmodernism as nihilistic, academic hokum.

One adamant supporter of Sokal from the left, Barbara Epstein, divides postmodern discourse into two branches: a strong and weak postmodernism. This *strong* version of postmodernism “tends to take the form of an extreme social constructionism, a view that identities, relations, [sic] political positions are constructed entirely through interpretation, that there is no identifiable social reality against which interpretations can be judged, no ground in material or social reality that places any constraints on the formation of identities or perspectives” (par. 29). What seems curious is that Epstein, in her diatribe against postmodern discourse, does not dismiss these methods so much as the people who practice them, or the group whom she refers to as the “postmodern subculture” (par. 40). Epstein contends, “there is an intense *ingroupyness*, a concern with who is in and who is out, and an obscurantist vocabulary whose main function often seems to be to mark those on the inside and allow them to feel that they are part of an intellectual elite” (par. 40). Epstein’s putative claim that postmodern discourse is only for the “elite” fails to acknowledge why postmodern discourse *is* so difficult. Here, it must be noted that the language of postmodernism originated from various European philosophical discourses (specifically Greek, German, and French) and was generated by mostly French writers, who, in compiling such philosophical jargon, coined much of postmodernism’s terminology. The translation (yet another degree of separation) of these highly sophisticated concepts, which were being used by postmodern rhetoricians in never-before-imagined ways, only obfuscated and alienated many who attempted to comprehend the intimidating discourse. It is because of this, and not through any intentions of its advocates, that postmodern discourse is often deemed abstruse and recondite. However, that is not to suggest it is inaccessible. Much to the contrary, postmodern discourse’s slow infiltration is a sign that it *can* be acknowledged, comprehended, and instated if only modernist rhetoricians would explore the rhetoric of

postmodernism more thoroughly and carefully, rather than dismiss it altogether with faulty logic and erroneous claims.

So rather than flatly denying any practical uses for postmodernism and aiming her critique at “self-righteous” postmodernists, who are “cooler-than-thou” (par. 39), Epstein dodges the real question entirely because, when pressed, modernists like herself are unable to refute the brand of postmodernism that could be most beneficial: the one she refers to as *weak* postmodernism. In fact, Epstein explicitly states that the “weak, or restrained, version of postmodernism [...] is much more plausible than the strong version described above. This version argues that language and culture play a major and often unrecognized role in shaping society, that things are often regarded as natural which are actually socially constructed. This is a valid and important perspective” (par. 32). The phrase, “this is a valid and important perspective,” hardly sounds like an attack against postmodern application. It is rather an acknowledgement of the many benefits that could arise from postmodernism’s implementation, especially regarding things that seem natural as socially constructed.

Epstein continues to weaken her argument *against* postmodernism, suggesting, “we would argue that although we do not possess ultimate truth and never will, it is nevertheless possible to expand our understanding, and it is worth the effort to gain more knowledge—even if that knowledge is always subject to revision” (par. 28). Exactly! Is this not what postmodern rhetoric has been asserting all along? That we *can* get closer to the *truth*, or at least that which represents the *truth* in our day-to-day lives, through postmodern methods of multiplicity, active interrogation, and scrupulous re-evaluation?

Epstein, however, does not rest there, and her most erroneous claim comes at the end of her essay where she avers, “No doubt, one reason that postmodernism has taken hold so widely



is that it is much easier to be critical than to present a positive vision” (par 55). Certainly this may be true, but since when was a “positive vision” absent from postmodern discourse? This assertion—which has been ongoing in the postmodernism/modernism debate since the early 80’s—is not only blatantly false but also an affront to the inordinate number of anti-foundationalists (Michael Berube comes to mind) who are quite dedicated to uncovering the ways (that I will address in the following chapters) in which the rhetoric of postmodernism might benefit contemporary society.

What Epstein seems to miss, as do so many others, is that postmodern discourse—weak or strong—*just by being acknowledged* has for the most part already accomplished its task. The debate should not be about who is able to most eloquently support their claims for antifoundationalism, through word-play, connivance, or mobius strip self-referentiality, but in understanding that it has already found a chink in the armor of modernist thought, one that Epstein rightly acknowledges: that our ideological positions, actions, and differences—all once believed to be natural—are now viewed as constructions.

It is through this gaping aperture that postmodernism must insert its rhetorical practices and methods so as to reconfigure the modernist discourse that dominates practically every discursive sphere. It may be that in order for modernist discourse and scientific rationality to again flourish, they need to be refashioned with what postmodern discourse has given us: that is, a more discerning view of *truth* to the point where we must not so much wrench these *truths* for their validity from relative perspectives, but examine just how the Truth, or truths, or even falsehoods are enacted and incorporated into our mainstream ideology and our lives. And if this is done carefully, citizens will then (1) encounter more open, less reductive ideas from which to

choose and incorporate into their own narratives, and (2) gain the peace in knowing that these ideas were arrived at through active interrogation and not passive and tacit infiltration.

## POSTMODERN PEDAGOGY

Modernist rhetoric, throughout the past century, has had enormous and, until recently, unchallenged success. And while the discourse's prominence is related mostly to its ties with the institution of education (most often the university) where it is propagated and legitimized, it is also here in this seat of academia, where a discourse of dissent has arisen. Yet that discourse, as I have stated, does not appear to be trickling down to lower educational levels. For this reason, a closer look at the rhetoric of traditional pedagogy is warranted. This closer look should not only reveal the shortcomings of modernist discourse, but also highlight the need for a *postmodern* rhetorical approach. What I am suggesting is that it is the task of teachers to meticulously evaluate their own discourse and include postmodern rhetorical approaches directly within their teaching methods.

I do clearly understand the implementation of postmodern discourse into pedagogy to be a difficult exercise—one that Stanley Fish argues is downright impossible. In his essay, “Postmodern Warfare: The Ignorance of our Warrior Intellectuals,” he maintains, “Postmodernism is a series of arguments, not a way of life or a recipe for action” (33). In contesting the ability to implement such a theoretical approach, Fish ultimately reduces postmodern discourse to an argumentative strategy rather than a practical tool. However, many others argue that postmodernism *can* provide “a recipe for action.” Perhaps the most celebrated postmodernist of all, who dedicated much of his life to re-writing and re-interpreting the objectified history of the West, Michel Foucault, certainly thought so. Of his oeuvre, Foucault maintains:

I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area. I

would like the little volume that I want to write on disciplinary systems to be useful to an educator, a warden, a magistrate, a conscientious objector. I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers. ("Prisons")

Two such "users," Stanley Aronowitz and Steven Giroux, put this to the test as they argue consistently throughout *Postmodern Education* that a postmodern discourse *can* provide useful, practical insights for educational, instructional, and pedagogical techniques. Their book, while promoting postmodern rhetorical approaches, is also scrupulous enough to keep in mind the objections, like those of Barbara Epstein, which maintain that the "postmodern subculture" is often too elite, obscurantist, and inaccessible. Aronowitz and Giroux understand and acknowledge this rather common protestation and suggest it is the mission of teachers to filter out these notions of obscurity and inaccessibility and provide students with a genuine understanding of postmodern rhetoric's antifoundational approaches. They state affirmatively, "the challenge, in our view, is to combine the intellectual work of cultural reclamation with the work of pedagogy. This would entail a deliberate effort to avoid the tendency toward exclusivity on the part of intellectuals" (34). The result of this postmodern/pedagogy synthesis, as suggested, is that the dense, esoteric jargon of postmodernism would not discourage the novice readers of primary, elementary, and high schools (and even undergraduate institutions). This would be left to the educators, who would then only deliver what lies at the center of postmodern discourse: that certain narratives, which often masquerade as truth, are arbitrary, in the sense that they are mainstream, popular, or (perhaps the most harmfully objective) "standard" for reasons not tied to internal essence or objectivity but constructed as such with the ideological scaffolding of a given cultural/linguistic/social system. What has to happen in order for postmodern rhetoric to make its way into the classroom is that our *educators* must be able to handle and properly

disseminate the admittedly difficult ideas of post-structuralist linguistics and postmodern rhetoric/language evaluation. And this can only be accomplished by thoroughly reevaluating just how and what is being taught to teachers, especially teachers of English.

### The Postmodern Classroom

Much of what is taught to school age children—dates, facts, scientific processes—falls under the guise of “knowledge” (and undisputable, legitimate knowledge at that). However, what students often miss in their consumption of such facts (and what postmodern rhetoric might illuminate) are the power structures and contingent values which regularly influence what constitutes such knowledge. Referring to this process, one critic, Clive Beck, asserts, “The learning of isolated facts and skills can be equally boring and meaningless. It is often through the drawing of broader connections between phenomena and the exploration of their value implications that learning comes alive” (par. 40). Jon Stewart’s satirical textbook, *America*, rather humorously addresses this very idea of the “knowledge” students are gaining in the classroom. In the margin of one of the pages, reminiscent of a classic high school textbook layout, there appears a “Were You Aware?” information box pertaining to the Magna Carta. Inscribed within is the blurb, “The fact that the Magna Carta was written in 1215 is, by law, the only thing you are required to know about it” (2). Stewart’s humorous rhetoric is pointing out the ridiculousness of what constitutes knowledge taught to our school-aged children. One of the most influential documents in Western history, which arguably is the basis for the U.S. constitution, is noteworthy not for this, but because its birth year offers an arbitrary figure, 1215, with which countless 10<sup>th</sup> grade world history teachers are able to measure the breadth of their students *intellect*.

Because internalization of arbitrary facts and figures is one of the means with which students' abilities are measured, why not offer students more fields, ones they might have a greater interest in, from which to study? Aronowitz and Giroux suggest that instead of relying so heavily on, as modernist rhetoric claims, the great canon of western education, teachers should include a sort of pastiche-style pedagogy, one that offers students a variety of discourses and a multiplicity of "knowledges." They suggest, "[Let us] start, not from the new great texts, much less from the old great texts, but from the texts of the vernacular experience: from *popular culture*, not only in its visual form but in its visual artifacts as well" (35, emphasis mine). "Popular culture" offers an excellent point of departure for students' evaluations because what makes certain cultural artifacts popular is a contemporary process of constant reinvention influenced by the various people within a specific culture. Exploring what is "popular" and how that comes about would be a crucial way for students to understand the processes of legitimization that so often take place. The crucial difference, however, with this technique is that students would be examining something *immediate*. Thus, by seeing the more local and specific processes occurring every day right in front of them, which serve to legitimize specific artifacts, students would then be able to make the "broader connections" between what is going on now in contemporary culture and what has been going on throughout history steering us towards where we now stand.

The teaching of popular culture in the classroom is certainly one alternative, yet this should also be a space where students can learn about the culture of those outside the Western tradition. One place this type of pastiche-style pedagogy could be most easily implemented is in English and Literature classes where students, through teacher initiatives, could be able to see the various cultural artifacts outside of traditional reading requirements. While post-colonial

literature courses have sprung up all through academia in the past fifteen years, students in high school settings have rarely, if ever, picked up the fiction of Salman Rushdie or Ngugi wa Thiongo, much less any literature of American Indians and rarely even African-American writers, save during that one special month of February.

Because some opponents might view this as an example of “liberal” teachers practicing reverse discrimination against the Western tradition, it might be better to reconfigure our usual thinking of the traditional Platonic (read modernist) teacher-pupil structuring altogether. In his article concerning the implication of postmodern methods in pedagogy, Clive Beck is correct to point out the rather hegemonic experience of teachers disseminating knowledge to their students. He maintains,

We must think increasingly in terms of “teachers and students learning together,” rather than the one telling the other how to live in a “top-down” manner. This is necessary both so that the values and interests of students are taken into account, and so that the wealth of their everyday experience is made available to fellow students *and to the teacher*. (par. 41)

One way this might be accomplished is by allowing students to have a say in constructing their own course syllabi. The students, themselves, could choose what readings would be assigned from a “bank” of widely represented cultural artifacts. This would then provide an excellent opportunity (even if works were chosen from the same narrow paths) for teachers and students to begin a postmodern dialogue concerning not only the texts themselves, but also *why* specific texts were chosen and what that says about “value”: how it is firmly assigned, yet contingent upon a variety of social, ethnic, and cultural factors operating all around them, including their very classroom. A close examination of the rhetorical processes of production, dissemination,

and circulation is a method of postmodern discourse that would allow students to see how value becomes attached to not only works of art, but also to various races, sexes, social classes, cultures, and religions.

The rise of the Internet and its ability to provide boundless information has led to an increasing number of “student directed” or “independent learning” schools, where students are directly shaping what they learn, by researching subjects of their own choosing independently. These schools, which foster the active educational experience, are also the perfect space to implement a postmodern rhetorical pedagogy—one that could teach students to understand the significance (which modernist discourse fails to do) of the Foucauldian connection between knowledge and power. Such a method of student-directed teaching can allow students to assign their own value to their own self-accumulated “knowledge.” However, a useful supplement to this strategy would be a *teacher*-directed postmodern dialogue concerning the ways in which value becomes assigned to specific types of knowledge by various apparatuses like the media and the University or by specific cultures, groups, and religions. If students were able to see that value is a relational, relative, and contextual construction, then they might be able to see that, in effect, all forms of knowledge can be said to have “value,” and therefore dogmatically attaching oneself to one specific knowledge or narrative is counterproductive to mediating our numerous social, cultural and political differences.

Again, this in no way should be viewed as an outright disavowal of modernist methodology, just that modernist discourse, if it still must exist (and it certainly seems to be sticking around), has much to learn from its postmodern progeny—and vice-versa. As Aronowitz and Giroux maintain, much of what has been gained from modernist interrogation *is* still valuable, only it must be made aware of the postmodern conditions in which it exists—



“those ideas of the project of modernity that link memory, agency, and reason to the construction of a democratic public sphere *need to be defended* as part of a discourse of critical pedagogy within (rather than in opposition to) the existing conditions of a postmodern world” (59, emphasis mine).

So why not implement postmodern rhetorical methods with school age children? Can our history books not also contain chapters on theories of history? On how as Harold Bloland articulates, “[in postmodern discourse] overarching is the notion that history is not a smooth, rational, progressive unfolding of events but a series of ruptures and fragmented disjunctures” (124). If educators were able to add such postmodern twists to their already modernist pedagogical arsenal then students would begin to see the variety of knowledge postmodern discourse offers. And certainly this could lead to students celebrating these nascent and peripheral cultural formations along side more standardized cultural forms, which would then benefit both marginalized students who would certainly feel a new sense of empowerment and representation and majority students who would gain a new awareness from such diversifying and humanizing measures. It must be noted that the continual perpetuation of modernist discourse and unchallenged acceptance of certain mythologies has not offered us any universal template for peaceful living, and it has not led us down any path of utopian existence. Rather, more so, it has further stratified our divisions and marginalized those not collusive with specific mainstream ideologies. If there was not such a premium placed on certain types of knowledge [“cultural currency” is a term Aronowitz and Giroux use to highlight the value certain knowledge carries in the socio-political marketplace (56)], but an interest and enthusiasm for more forms of knowledge, then more groups—typically those whose voice and opinions were previously restricted—would be able to experience unprecedented worth and value.

## Postmodern Linguistics

When the post-structuralist movement first began in the 1960s, the field of Linguistics was shaken to its Saussurian foundations. Structuralist linguistics, which had long prevailed under the careful watch of modernist eyes, was completely turned on its head by Derridian “*grammatology*” and other post-structuralist claims. Modernism’s “science” of language—one would have thought—had some serious issues to reevaluate and reconcile. However, according to Robert Hodge, many of the most crucial aspects of post-structuralist (or postmodern) discourse have been completely disregarded by the discipline throughout the past 30 years, and today, “Linguistics still remains the official discipline for the study of language, because of the continuing authority of the modernist models of science it invokes” (242). What he goes on to say is perhaps even more noteworthy:

But language itself is not the static object constructed by Linguistics. As everyone outside Linguistics realises, language in use is dynamic, fluid, volatile, interconnected with all areas of life and thought, uninterested except in all its protean forms, embedded in all its situations of use. The result is a crisis in Linguistics, and a problem for the study of language. (242)

This postmodern rhetorical stance—that language “in use” resists a standardized scientific study—has led Hodge to offer a solution to this outdated Linguistic model: what he calls a “postmodern science of language.” In Hodge’s view “[Linguistics] has tried for most of the twentieth century to construct itself as a ‘science’, a scientific study of language opposed to humanist approaches” (241). However, Hodge maintains some of these humanist approaches—“literary studies and philosophy of language then, cultural studies and discourse analysis now”

(241)—are still quite valuable in discerning meaning from a language system. And it is this void in the modern Linguistics discipline that has created room, as Hodge eloquently states, for a new framework for looking at language in all its forms, in all its connections, in search of a more viable form of Linguistics (comprehensive and illuminating about how language really is, usable for many purposes), nourished equally by ideas from science as the humanities. It aims to be constructive, not destructive; respecting difference; elegant, open, powerful and inclusive. (244)

What Hodge then does, and what could also be duplicated by English and Language Arts teachers, is offer several examples of the type of linguistic (or rhetorical) analysis he believes better embraces this idea of postmodern “uncertainty, unpredictability, ambiguity, and contradiction that characterise the phenomena of language” (241). To do this, Hodge examines George Bush’s speech following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, *through various systems*: “the linguistic, the social, and the political, each interdependent, separate yet affecting and affected by the other two” (246). What this allows him to do is arrive at a meaning that has taken much more into account than the few standard questions modernist Linguistics asks about the semantics of a specific phrase. Teachers might ask their students to view through a postmodern rhetorical lens certain texts, speeches, or even everyday phrases, which acknowledge a multiplicity of “systems,” until they begin to see the malleable nature of language. A simple interrogative phrase, such as, “What time is it?” could be wrenched and evaluated from numerous angles (context, tone, volume, and countless others, right down to the gender, race, and age of the speaker) to highlight language’s protean makeup. And if students can see the ways in which language is often inexact (“fuzzy” for Hodge) and contingent upon various

grounds, then they might also be able to see how language manufactures meaning and how that meaning might be something less than certain.

### Postmodern Grammar Lessons

While postmodern discourse can certainly help us in evaluating language and closer approximating its intended *and* unintended effects, the ability to *legitimize* language, especially the language of marginal cultures and discourses, remains perhaps its most beneficial aspect. The vast melting pot that is the United States is one nation that simply cannot afford to overlook the marked differences in its people and culture. Yet when examining these problems, too often modernist rhetoric intrudes, and our differences are viewed as being in competition with another, moving linearly, “progressing” in a race towards an ultimate *über*-culture. One area where this scenario has played out most evidently is in the school system, where efforts to teach grammar, or more specifically “Standard English” have been widely debated.

The modernist hold on grammatical studies, I am contending, is responsible for more students being marginalized and deemed inferior than perhaps any other single discipline. Under the rhetoric of modernism, minority students’ (namely African-Americans’) language (their speech, pronunciation, word choice, etc.) is often viewed as *substandard*. However the rhetoric of postmodernism, which posits the arbitrariness of a power standard, can allow such students to see that their *culturally-influenced* linguistic and dialogic code, which does differ substantially from that of Standard English, is just as linguistically legitimate as far as a means of communicating and constructing one’s own identity and reality. Where it remains illegitimate is in spaces that adopt modernist discourse’s presupposition that we have already arrived at a complete version of English, one that everyone should adhere to prescriptively and at all costs.

As for postmodern discourse's influence on our understanding of language, much of what has been uncovered has been slow to infiltrate primary educational levels. Whereas at the university level there are certainly English, Linguistic, and even Sociology and Psychology courses which do acknowledge postmodern discourse and its focus on the dynamics of language, there still seems to be an insistence upon the modernist pedagogical method of the straightforward dissemination of *Standard English* to primary school aged children. In this crucial stage of linguistic development, modernist discourse deprives students of specific knowledge about language (how it is weightless, at best an approximation, and loaded with meanings set in place by historical, cultural, and social exterior systems; *and* how despite this arbitrary nature it is able to remain functional) that would give them an important new perspective on the constructive power it wields in developing our identities.

This modernist concentration on the standard forms has led to not only the ignoring of the diversity and richness of cultural dialects, inflections, word choice, and perhaps most fascinating, clarifying grammatical constructions, but also to a tacit subordination of these largely legitimate variations of the English language. The socio-linguistic work of scholars, such as the work of William Labov, who has meticulously, and I dare say, "empirically" shown how the speech codes of African-American speakers follow specific grammatical rules just like that of standard English<sup>4</sup>, has, for the most part, largely been ignored when schools go about shaping their pedagogical mission.

Some black educators, in an effort to combat this, have been able to fuse together, or "codeswitch" between, two versions of the English language. Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, a prestigious educator at the University of Pennsylvania, has obviously been able to navigate the mainstream cultural-linguistic waters in order to gain his prominent position in academia, yet

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<sup>4</sup> Labov's groundbreaking, "The Logic of Non-Standard English," (1969) offers several examples.

what remains most interesting is that he has been able to do so at no loss to his African-American cultural linguistic heritage. Listen to Dyson (a prolific author who regularly promotes his books on television spots) speak, and one cannot help but notice the various word choices and sentence structuring he implements. Despite some of his choices obviously stemming from the lexicon of a minority culture—such as the phrases “dissed” or “hook-ups” (pars. 3, 14)—one would be outright wrong to suggest that Dr. Dyson sounded, “unintelligent” or “inferior.” It is actions such as these (the fusion, or pastiche of various forms) that postmodern rhetoric encourages, which could be most beneficial to teachers who must decide how they are going to teach “English” to students from a variety of backgrounds.

Here, I might be careful to acknowledge the stance of conservative and/or modernist rhetoric on the supposed benefits of grammatical correctness, yet what I am suggesting is not a total deconstruction or watering down of our *national, standard* version of English, I am just advocating that students should be taught the consequences (both good and bad) of not being in accord with such a version. It is high time that educators stop seeing certain students’ inability to properly grasp the various aspects of Standard English as a failure, and more perhaps as an act either of defiance to hegemonic culture or compliance with one’s own historical, cultural legacy. Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu published their article, “Black Students’ School Success: Coping with the ‘Burden of Acting White,’” nearly 20 years ago concerning this very idea, yet few have taken notice of this important revelation. Their theory suggested, “Academic achievement is not valued in the [African American] community because it is perceived as conforming to standard norms of success among white Americans [...] Moreover, it does not pay off for blacks like it does for others” (Tyson, Darity, and Castellino, 584). If more educators were able to take these factors into account, then they might begin to construct a postmodern

rhetorical pedagogy that will allow minority students to gain entry into the standard-speaking matrix without the loss of any crucial part of their identity.

## POSTMODERN POLITICS?

The second discursive field that is still heavily influenced by modernist rhetoric and could perhaps most benefit from a postmodern reinvigoration is the field of public administration. Since the Enlightenment's social contract philosophers (Hobbes, Rousseau, and Locke) first laid the groundwork for Western democracy, political life in Western nations has been decidedly infused with modernist rhetoric. This has continued up through our contemporary setting as many modernist rhetoricians still figure quite prominently in the political sphere. Take for instance, the recent rhetorical positioning of two scholars, Francis Fukuyama and Robert Frank, who both continue to make misguided claims with scientific discourse at their defense.

Fukuyama's recent appearance on the CSPAN network's "BookTV" offered an excellent example of this type of modernist rhetorical approach. There promoting his new book *America at the Crossroads*, Fukuyama was having to constantly field questions posed by a live call-in audience concerning the war in Iraq. Though he often had to defend his waffling position on the war itself, he still seemed to be discussing the matter, *in the face of his admittedly incorrect assessment to go to war*, with a resolute objective understanding. He constantly referred to "empirical" evidence (no evidence really, only the word "empirical") which he assured his listeners would ultimately reveal to us the proper way to deal with such volatile administrative situations as armed takeovers, nation-building, military occupation, insurgency, and the like. Again, situations like these, which involve the various dynamics of socially constructed ideologies, such as imperialism, nationalism, and xenophobia, in actuality have no objective answer, no "empirical" methodology able to take into consideration and accurately interpret all of these unanchored, constantly-in-flux factors.



Another modernist rhetorician, Robert Frank, while not arguing about the politics of the Iraqi War, did take on another widely politicized subject in American life—the union of marriage. Frank, an economist at Cornell University, recently published an article concerning the “economics” of polygamy in the *New York Times*. His piece was an awkward attempt at rebutting the “conventional wisdom” that polygamy mostly harms women. Frank certainly has his own reasons for wanting to disprove such a claim, which I won’t go into here, yet it is his method—the rhetoric he employs—that remains much more intriguing as it was, as one might have guessed, heavily modernist.

Robert Frank, teeming with ethos provided by, among others, his position at a prominent university, attempts in this essay to answer questions about social engagement and interaction (more specifically relationships, love, and marriage) objectively and definitively with the modernist rhetoric of scientific certainty. The two “sciences” he invokes are, not surprisingly, economics and, quite curiously, evolutionary Darwinism. Because mathematical postulates and formulas are standard “empirical” data that generally accompany economic “laws,” modernists will often call upon the rhetoric of economics in order to defend a wide array of given points. No different here, as Frank suggests that legalizing polygamy “would create an imbalance of men over women among monogamist,” and thus, “with women in chronically short supply, men would face even more intense pressure than they do now to get ahead economically, to spend even longer hours honing their abs.” He then concludes, “In short, the logic of supply and demand turns the conventional wisdom about plural marriage on its head. If the arrangement harms others, the most likely victims are men, not women.” Frank’s glib assessment that “the logic of supply and demand” shows why men, not women, would suffer more is yet again, another classic example of modernist discourse deferring to empiricism. Frank’s use of the word

“logic” is a clever rhetorical spin imparted to make anyone in disagreement seem *illogical*. This reduction is so clever in fact that one might even miss Frank’s most glaring leap in “logic”—the very fact that he is using an economic model to predict the affairs of human beings. This, however, is no matter for a skilled rhetorician like Frank who offers the most putative claim of all suggesting why he is able to make such a leap. He insists, matter-of-factly, that “The law of supply and demand applies no less to social relationships than to ordinary commercial transactions.” It does? And what, might I ask, is this based upon? Where is the “empirical” evidence that suggests this? Yet he offers no such indication.

Frank’s second bit of rhetorical maneuvering occurs when he again yields to scientific rhetoric, or specifically, evolutionary Darwinism. Midway through his article Frank chooses to include a story about the mating habits of another “polygamous” species—bull elephant seals. The anecdote is meant to show how the polygamous nature of seals drives males into extreme competition, where they must battle for the rights to “harems” of up to 50 female seals. Because Frank’s “survival of the fittest” assessment is “scientific,” “logical,” and has been “reasoned” thoroughly with the aid of “empirical” evidence, many of his readers will defer to such “facts” and disregard the very “fact” that Frank is comparing men and women to 6,000 and 1,500 pound bull elephant seals.

The rhetorical concept of *scotosis* might lend an explanation as to why such a deference to empiricism occurs so often in modernist rhetoric. *Scotosis*, according to Paula Mathieu,

are rationalized acts of selective blindness that occur by allowing certain information to be discounted or unexamined[.] Scotosis is a term that can help explain more fully the rhetorical process of interpellation[.] One isn’t duped, nor

are false needs created. Rather, one is persuaded by the justifications offered within the narratives to remain [...] within its parameters. (114-115)

It is this blindness, produced by a rhetoric that claims the authority of scientific experimentation, “empiricism,” is the be all and end all that must be overturned. And postmodern discourse, which accounts for multiplicity and urges we examine all aspects, could certainly work towards eliminating such blinding measures.

Taking this idea further, one postmodern rhetorician, Hugh Miller, suggests one remain quite suspicious any time the term “empirical” is uttered. He avers,

Empiricism [itself] is a metanarrative, [yet one] that insists it is not a metanarrative, a politics that insists it is apolitical. Instead, empiricism perseveres in maintaining that its symbolizations provide a denotative link between language and reality; that it is capable, in a neutral manner, of capturing real things external to its symbolizations. (471)

This production of modernist rhetoric, that empiricism can accurately capture “real things” may be true in certain instances (certain instances that do not necessarily involve social circumstances) and may also be the impetus behind empiricism’s solidification. Alan Sokal’s classic remark, which invites any antifoundationalist to denounce objectivity by stepping off the balcony of his 21<sup>st</sup> floor apartment, comes to mind as an obvious example of what empiricism has been able to gain (“Afterword” 97). Yet what this reduction fails to do is distinguish between the physics of a body falling in motion and a body reacting socially to a perceived social circumstance. The point that seems to have been missed is that a reliance on science-based empiricism in *all instances*, regularly leads to narrow, unchallenged dogmatic approaches that result in disaster (see the quagmire in Iraq). Miller understands that empiricism *can* genuinely

lead us to valuable assumptions, and even “heartily endorse[s] the strategic use of empirical facts” “on pragmatic grounds” (472). However, Miller offers the caveat that “an unyielding commitment to the empirical, as if it were some final arbiter of performance, accountability, or results leads to numerous practical problems in public administration” (472).

Not having an empirical basis for our sociological behavior should not, however, be a cause for concern. Just because postmodern discourse suggests we are unable to provide an objective answer to such difficult social dilemmas, by no means does it suggest we stop trying. What we should do, and what a postmodern *Weltanschauung* would allow, with its insistence upon constant reevaluation and skeptical humility, is to formulate numerous possibilities, cornucopias of methods to enact, in a sort of “guess and check” method at more local levels. What we do not need is a cabal of Randist neo-con intellectuals, who are so cocksure (to borrow a phrase from Bertrand Russell) of their “reasoned” approach, producing a discourse that allows no room for other ideas.

What seems to be ironic is that despite modernist rhetoric’s constant calls for accountability, Fukuyama and other Randist rhetoricians often dismiss their erroneous judgments and consistently push the same narrow agenda. This narrow agenda of “capitalism at all costs” appears to them to be air tight when supported by their “reasoned” methodology of the “science” of economics. However, the straw man rears his head when we begin to question the ability of reason and science to provide us with, as I have discussed, empirical evidence not for economic issues, but for social, cultural, and political phenomena. After all, the Ayn Rand objectivist credo is “the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute” (aynrand.org). Yet, as I have shown repeatedly, where science may prove itself to be empirical

in certain closed situations like that which occurs in the fields of mathematics, physics, chemistry, and perhaps even economics, it is whenever we have tried to pinpoint a scientific basis for our sociological and psychological functions that we have miserably failed (the outdated practice of Freudian psychotherapy comes to mind).

The perpetuation of the modernist rhetoric of “reasoned objectivity,” especially in the political and public administration arenas, has continuously led to problems. Michael Spicer maintains that because certain postmodern conditions have come to exist within our contemporary political setting (i.e. our acknowledgement of a multiplicity of social and political narratives), then our public officials must have at their disposal the rhetoric of postmodern discourse—namely that of “value pluralism” (a term he uses to designate this postmodern understanding of multiplicity and diversity)—when evaluating problems in public policy (679).

The main reason why Spicer feels public administrators and policy-makers should be aware of such postmodern rhetorical methods equipped in dealing with plurality is, quite simply, because they so often find themselves in positions where a multiplicity of values and ideologies must be held. According to Hendrick Wagenaar, whom Spicer quotes, “public programs are structured in such a way that they regularly confront the administrator with difficult choices, [and] resolving value conflict is an intrinsic part of administrative life” (qtd. in Spicer 679). However, this issue of holding and resolving irreconcilable ideas is something Spicer feels a postmodern approach might be able to aid. He argues that while recent political and social sciences have acknowledged the discrepancies and incongruities that often arise in issues of public policy, they have failed to produce any model that would allow for reconciliation, noting that “the record of the social sciences in contributing to public administration and policy is

simply not that impressive” (685). Because of this unimpressive track record, Spicer goes on to suggest that a newer, postmodern rhetoric is needed in our postmodern environment.

Before furthering this argument, Spicer first acknowledges why some policy makers may still prefer such an outdated modernist approach (what he refers to as a “science-based instrumental rationalism”) in evaluating public policy and administration issues. The passage addressing this is worth quoting at some length:

The appeal of this type of science based instrumental rationalism is quite understandable in that, at least on the surface, it appears to provide us with a way in which the findings of empirical social science can be harnessed to meet the practical day-to-day decision-making needs of public managers and policy makers. (678)

He then suggests why this is incorrect:

However, value pluralism in public administration may be seen as limiting the usefulness of precisely this type of instrumental rationalist approach. This is because, for such an approach to be helpful to administrators or policy-makers in making choices among different courses of action or different institutional designs, then the ends or values that are sought by them must ultimately be either compatible or commensurable with each other. Should these ends, in fact, turn out to be incompatible and incommensurable with one another, then, an instrumental rationalist approach simply cannot provide administrators with any guidance in choosing among them. (678)

It is important to note that while Spicer maintains “science-based instrumental rationalism” is unable to resolve differences in values that may arise, so too may be the “value-pluralist”

approach postmodernism offers. However, it is not the job of either to arbitrate these incommensurabilities so much as it is their task to acknowledge and accept the conditions in which such a plurality of ideas come to exist.

Spicer suggests one of the conditions that perhaps allows these pluralities to subsist is the existence of numerous value systems or moral/ethical standards that often bear upon the ideas and values we choose among. And it is these value systems, themselves, which must also be fully wrenched and closely examined. Spicer argues, “Given that public administrators must make decisions that involve incompatible and incommensurable values or ends and that interpretations of facts are inevitably shaped by those values, then public administration enquiry needs to encourage a greater awareness of the values that it expresses in its own discourse” (684). And according to him, there is one reasonable way this can be accomplished, and that is by “consulting political philosophy [so as to understand] the values that are intimated in the administrative ideas, which we espouse, and also the administrative practices, which we follow” (685). Or in other words, he is suggesting we move beyond the modernist approach of centuries past and evaluate problems in the postmodern era, with the tools of postmodern discourse. Though this may seem like an impotent suggestion to some, it is one that could do no worse than the efforts of “social science [that have failed] to produce ‘anything approximating law-like generalizations which would apply to major issues as policy formulation, decision making, and strategy’” (Mitchell and Scott, qtd. in Spicer 685).

Proponents of postmodern discourse in the political and public administration realms must understand that when we enter this complex social matrix, all bets are off. Meaning that the various social, cultural, and political institutions which shape our lives are far too complex: they often shift and overlap and defy any objective, comprehensive understanding. There can

only be a continual striving towards finding a more suitable framework for evaluating our social actions and implementing our social agendas through, perhaps “reasonable” inquiry, yet only if it remains fashioned with a postmodern awareness of uncertainty. And the more ideas created (as postmodern rhetoric would certainly allow for) the more voices included, the more “accurate” the framework will be. It should be of little concern that in matters directly related to our social behavior, no discourse will be able to determine the best mode of production for a nation, the best way for a nation to distribute its wealth, or the best way for a nation to educate its public. What a postmodern discourse might do, however, especially in the field of public administration, by insisting on constant interrogation of systems and institutions, instead of adhering to the stale methods modernism offers, is discover a more suitable approach that takes into account the multiplicity of voices involved.



## CONCLUSION

The rhetoric of modernism, in its many forms, has survived often unimpeded for several centuries. And this lengthy stay might very well lead one to believe that modernist discourse will continue for centuries to come. However, the sweeping changes in our global economic, scientific, and technological communities, which have occurred in the past 30 years, must also reconfigure how we understand and comprehend the very complex world around us. This change, however slow and erosive, does seem to be taking place somewhat with the increasing awareness of postmodern discourse. As Harold Bloland states,

Newspapers and magazines, in chronicling abrupt changes in our lifestyles and life circumstances, report almost casually that we are already citizens in a postmodern world. Postmodernity has become a catchall referent to the rapid bizarre changes associated with the recognition of America's new, more precarious position in the world and of the changed conditions in which we live. Many terms associated with postmodernism have entered the mainstream vocabularies of popular culture, media descriptions of news events, technological innovations, and entertainment. (126)

Yet this is still not enough. Such dilettantish usage of the highly complex term *postmodernism* simply will not do; postmodernism needs to be understood and comprehended in much more specified and useful ways. And one way postmodern discourse might be able to most *accurately* enter the ideology of contemporary Western societies is through its use in the two fields I have suggested, education and public administration. It is these two areas—which greatly influence and shape our ideas of what it means to be a productive, thoughtful American citizen—where modernist rhetoric seems to be most rampant. By implementing postmodern rhetorical strategies

in the classroom, which pay closer attention to knowledge multiplicity and even more specifically *language* (how it is inexact, loaded with circumstantial meanings, and yet despite this, how great an impact it has on shaping our identities), students might be able to actively construct their own narratives—narratives that better account for the variety and diversity of the world around us. And also, if politicians, policy makers, and public administrators can use these same tools of postmodern rhetoric in the political arena, then the decisions they make would certainly be more informed.

In order to shake this rather incorrect assumption that postmodern discourse is recondite, unusable, or useless, the rhetoric of postmodernism must not only infiltrate more areas, but it also must offer accurate, meaningful descriptions, not shamefully pejorative definitions, of what is meant by the idea *postmodern*. Modernists need not grumble, shake their heads, and mutter “Oh no!” at the mentioning of postmodernism. Rather postmodern rhetoric needs to be embraced, saluted perhaps, for it has much to offer to its modernist progenitor. And this offering is most crucial now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as we continue to condense and bring together the world and its widely different people and cultures.

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