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**Towards a Postmodern
Public Administration:
Epoch, Epistemology or Narrative?**

ROD A.W. RHODES

JEAN MONNET CHAIR PAPERS

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Epoch, Epistemology or Narrative?***

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Jean Monnet Chair Papers

Towards a Postmodern Public Administration: Epoch, Epistemology or Narrative?

ROD A.W. RHODES

1995

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Abstract

Postmodernism has surfaced in the study of Public Administration and this paper surveys these incursions. It does not provide an introduction to postmodernism but asks what lessons can be learnt from this *stimmung* or mood. I distinguish between postmodernism as epoch and as epistemology. Postmodernism as epoch refers to the shift from a modern to a postmodern society. This new historical period is variously conceived as, for example, post-fordism or post-industrialism. I conclude the available evidence does not support postmodernist claims. Significant change is happening in governing and administering Britain but it is best explored as, for example, the new governance. Postmodernism as epistemology refers to post-structuralist philosophy and deconstructing, for example, the meta-narratives in organization theory. I conclude that, although postmodernism challenges Public Administration to rethink its modernist assumptions and methodology, it is a fatal distraction which renders nugatory the study of public administration. Although a few lessons can be learnt from the postmodernist critique, I argue for a reflexive Public Administration or critical debates between analytically structured narratives within the social practice framework of Public Administration.

'Once, the idea that the future is in human hands was confidently asserted. Thus modern arrogance denied the divine and diverted all hope to human resources. Today the human is being displaced, decentered, and the grip on the future seems once more up for grabs. While this opens the door to everything from Foucault's play of power to the Age of Aquarius, it also renders more plausible the possibility that Providence was not such a bad idea after all. Perhaps postmodern apocalyp- tics will have to make space for a vision of a (re)new(ed) earth, that anti- que agent of social change, and the original partner of final judgement. Nietzsche would turn in his grave' (Lyon, 1994, p. 86)

Introduction

Diagnosing trends and spotting fashions for the year 2000 is a risky busi- ness. To do so in a lively and controversial fashion is to court the disaster of combining prediction and rhetoric. With my courage in both hands, this paper aims to stimulate debate by examining the ascendant fashion of postmodernism in the social sciences, and asking if it is relevant to the study of Public Admin- istration. Postmodernism is controversial and seen by many as a pernicious and flawed enterprise. It is beginning to influence Public Administration. This paper explores the challenge, focusing the question, 'what can postmodernism teach us about change in, and the study of, public administration?'¹

The banal answer is, 'it all depends on what you mean by postmodernism?'² Rosenau (1992, p. 17) comments that: 'the term postmodern is employed so

- 1 I would like to thank Charlotte Dargie for her help with the bibliographic search on CD ROM and for comments and advice on the first draft. The Department of Public Policy and Managerial Studies at De Montfort University; the 25th Anniversary Conference of the PAC, Civil Service College, Sunningdale, 4-6 September 1995 and the Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, Universität Mannheim provided welcome opportunities to try out some of the ideas in this paper. Andrew Dunsire (University of York), Clive Gray (De Montfort University); Lotte Jensen (University of Copenhagen); and Janice McMillan (The Robert Gordon University) all provided helpful comments on the first draft.
- 2 There are already numerous introductions to postmodernism and I do not propose to add to the list; see, for example: Bernstein (1991); Lyon (1994); and Rosenau (1992). I will quote primarily from the literature which applies postmodernist thought to the study of Public Administration and the related subjects of organization theory and policy analysis.

broadly that it seems to apply to everything and nothing all at once'. Critics like Callinicos (1989, pp. 5 and 122-3) identify at least 15 different uses of the prefix 'post-', concluding that 'the idea of post-industrial society is nonsense' and its proponents are 'of small calibre intellectually, usually superficial, often ignorant, sometimes incoherent'. Even a sympathetic critic like Bernstein (1991, p. 11) considers the term 'slippery, vague and ambiguous' and provides a definition conspicuous primarily for its generality. He sees postmodernism as 'a *stimmung* or: a mood – one which is amorphous, protean, and shifting but which nevertheless exerts a powerful influence on the ways in which we think, act, and experience.' Evocative and dramatic phrases like postmodernism as 'the death of reason' (Hassard, 1994, p. 303) may resonate but communicate little about its intellectual content. To structure my discussion of this 'mood', I distinguish between postmodernism as epoch and as epistemology.

Postmodernism as Epoch

Postmodernism as epoch refers to the shift from modern to postmodern society; to the arrival of a new historical epoch. The literature on socio-economic change in the latter half of the twentieth century is voluminous. It is not my objective to provide a comprehensive review. For students of Public Administration, the central text is Stewart Clegg.³ He argues (1990, pp. 9-17), modernity is 'characterised by processes of differentiation and their management as a central organizing principle'. Postmodernity comes after modernity and is characterised by, therefore, 'de-differentiation' or 'disassembling ... extant forms of the division of labour'. So:

Where modernist organization was rigid, postmodern organization is flexible. Where modernist consumption was premised on mass forms, postmodernist consumption is premised on niches. Where modernist organization was premised of technological determinism, postmodernist organization is premised on technological choices made possible through 'de-dedicated' micro-electronics equipment. Where modernist organiza-

For broad surveys of postmodernism in organization theory and Public Administration respectively see, for example: Clegg (1990) and Fox and Miller (1995).

3 The term is also used in political science as a way of characterising political change. For example, Richard Rose (1991), pp.3, 6, 8 and 22-27 uses it to describe the complex, uncertain and interdependent environment confronting the American President.

tion and jobs were highly differentiated, demarcated and de-skilled, postmodernist organization and jobs are highly de-differentiated, demarcated and multi-skilled. Employment relations as a fundamental relation of organization ... increasingly give way to more complex and fragmentary relational forms, such as subcontracting and networking. (Clegg, 1990, p. 181)

So, Clegg seeks to show that the traditional Weberian organization has been replaced by a new postmodern organization which does not have clear boundaries with its environment. He marshals empirical research from all over the world to support his argument, employing the conventional research tools of mainstream social science. Clegg's de-differentiated organization belongs to that family of theories about change in modern society known variously as post-Fordism and disorganised capitalism.⁴ For Stoker (1989, pp. 145-7) the main characteristics of the new post-Fordist regimes are: flexible production, innovation and segmented marketing (see also Jessop, 1992, p. 14). Such small batch production encourages smaller business units, and large-scale corporations are decentralising, franchising and subcontracting. There is a matching shift in management culture to emphasise quality and service to the customer. The changes in the role of the state are less clear cut but include, for example, fragmenting service delivery, the extensive use of contracting-out, the drive for efficiency using business methods, substituting markets and quasi-markets for bureaucracy, and consumerism. The state no longer delivers services direct but contracts with – 'enables' – the private and voluntary sectors. Once again, we herald the death of bureaucracy.

These several versions of the new epoch have been the subject of swingeing criticisms. As Thompson (1993, pp. 188-90) pungently points out 'manufacturing remains the *core* activity of capitalist society' and concludes that post-Fordism:

as a way of organizing work and the economy has never fitted most sectors of industry in the UK; ... mass production and mass consumption are far from dead; and ... there is little evidence that customized niche markets are the main trend ...

In short, the new epoch theories 'lack any substantial empirical basis'. Whitaker (1992) in a careful review of the literature concludes the case for a

⁴ See, for example: Jessop, 1989 and 1992; Lash and Urry, 1987; and for an excellent critical review of applications to British local government see: Cochrane, 1993, Ch. 5.

new world of work is 'non-proven' (see also: Reed, 1992, pp. 226-37). The evidence on flexible specialization is 'thin' and 'the flexible firm thesis is difficult to substantiate' (p.190). Rather than moving to an era of disorganized capitalism, capitalism is becoming ever more tightly organised (p. 191). Most tellingly, Cochrane (1993, p. 92) complains 'the notion of post-Fordism becomes increasingly slippery and ... almost as flexible as the specialization which it claims to identify'. For Public Administration, the core defect is that the theory does not identify a distinctive post-Fordist state. The theory should identify distinctive changes in the state and show they are a direct result of the shift to post-Fordism. With few exceptions (see Jessop, 1992, pp. 27-32), it does not do so, nor does it provide an accurate account of governmental change; bureaucracies may change but they are still with us (see: Rhodes, 1994, 1995, 1996a; and Thompson, 1993).

In sum, Britain has not entered a postmodern epoch and the evidence there is single secular wave sweeping us into the twenty-first century is, at best, mixed. Lyon (1994, p. 85) claims that postmodernism 'invites participation in a debate over the nature and direction of present-day societies'. Without denying this claim, we do need to ask whether postmodernism is necessary either to identify or to explain trends in British government. Too often, the term signals a trend inadequately specified and lacking in empirical support. Indeed, it is difficult to come up with a reason for lumping these several theories together under the label postmodernism other than the relentless need for novelty in the social sciences.⁵ There is no necessary link between the ontology and epistemology of postmodernism. It also obscures the fact there are already several attempts to characterise modern British Public Administration which have stronger empirical support.

Christopher Hood (1995) identifies five trends in public administration: globalization, economization, managerialization, informatization and juridification (see also: Hood, 1990b). Globalization refers to the convergent trends in the administrative reform agenda, especially the impact of the new public

⁵ I did not lump post-modernism, post-Fordism and their kith and kin together. It is an almost conventional grouping. See, for example: Clegg (1990); Hassard (1994); Parker (1992); and Thompson (1993) all of whom distinguish between 'post-modernism' as historical period and 'postmodernism' as theory and method and cover a disparate set of theories under post-modernism. As Parker (1992), p. 10 points out, 'One cannot combine an idealist epistemology and a realist ontology and expect to produce a coherent theory'. Whether postmodernism aims at 'coherent theory' is a question for deconstruction but, as Hassard (1994), p. 318 comments, 'postmodernism must reject the very idea of theory construction at the institutional level'.

management.⁶ Economization refers to the spread of economic rationality to aspects of social life normally excluded from the market economy. Managerialization refers to the spread of private sector management techniques and styles to the public sector and increased managerial discretion to put the '3Es' of economy, efficiency and effectiveness into practice. It also claims these managers form a new class. Informatization refers to the information flows and computer networks that form the new core technology of public administration. Juridification refers to the increasing use of law as a medium of control through the spread of formal norms and standards in regulatory law. Hood describes his analysis as a modest exercise in 'weather forecasting' and is cautious in his discussion of these 'emerging issues', arguing that 'return and recurrence' is a feature of the subject's intellectual life. In short, he identifies important trends without recourse to millennial excess.

Rhodes (1994 and 1995a) predicts the 'hollowing out of the state' will lead to 'the new governance'. Hollowing out of the state encompasses four trends:

- (1) Privatization and limiting the scope and forms of public intervention.
- (2) The loss of functions by central and local government departments to alternative service delivery systems...
- (3) The loss of functions by British government to European Union institutions.
- (4) Limiting the discretion of public servants through the new public management (NPM) ... and clearer political control (Rhodes, 1994, pp. 138-9).

Hollowing out fragments service delivery systems, erodes the central capacity to steer, undermines traditional modes of political accountability, and creates 'the new governance' or the shift from 'linear ... "policy to bureaucratic action" processes' to 'methods and outcomes of purposive social control eschewing the primary use of either coercive regulation or an extensive public sector' (Dunsire, 1995, p. 34). Policy is made and implemented by functional policy networks. Contrary to the textbook picture of a unitary state with a

⁶ Dunleavy (1994) also identifies the globalization of the new public management as a key trend but goes further to predict that the core competencies of government will be eroded as expertise in service provision becomes concentrated in a few trans-national corporations.

strong executive, Britain has become a 'centreless society' where there is no one sovereign authority but multiple centres.⁷

Not everyone has been able to resist the 'post-' prefix when discussing change in public administration. So Yeatman (1994) heralds the arrival of 'the post-bureaucratic paradigm' (see also: Barzelay with Armajani, 1992). However, linguistic excess to one side, the content of this label is familiar. For Yeatman, the defining characteristic of post-bureaucratic model of public administration is 'mutual adjustment as the central type of co-ordination mechanism'; 'a tolerance for ambiguity'; 'loosening of control'; increasing significance of 'trust in public managers'; and 'accountability to customers'.

There is also a considerable measure of agreement about the causes of recent changes. Most accounts include the effects of: economic depression and fiscal pressures leading to budget deficits; the 'New Right's' ideological distrust of 'big government' and accompanying determination to redraw the boundaries of the state; Europeanization which further increased regulation and introduced new administrative pressures (for example, regionalization); public disenchantment with government performance which alleges, often at the same time, that government does too much and too little and whatever it does, it doesn't work; international management fashions, especially NPM; and information technology which made it easier to introduce NPM. (see, for example: Rhodes, 1995, pp. 4-6; Wright, 1994, pp. 103-8).

I do not want to defend or criticise any of these accounts. I seek only to show that each offers an analysis of change in public administration without making the excessive claim that we have entered a new epoch and the difficulties attendant on using the label postmodern.

Postmodernism As Epistemology

Postmodernism as epistemology refers to post-structuralist philosophy and deconstructing the meta-narratives of the social sciences. This section provides

⁷ White (1989), pp. 523-5 and Yeatman (1994), pp. 292-4 distinguish between post-bureaucratic and rational choice approaches to governance. For this brief survey, I need only one alternative to the postmodern analysis of change in public administration and focus on the post-bureaucratic approach.

an introduction to the postmodern theoretical and methodological critique of the social sciences in general before turning to the specific cases of public administration and organization theory.⁸ This simple sounding task faces a nigh insuperable problem because there are ‘as many forms of postmodernism as there are postmodernists’ and the enterprise ‘is always on the brink of collapsing into confusion’ (Rosenau, 1992, pp. 14-15). Also, Parker (1992, p.2) argues it ‘is difficult to summarize it to their satisfaction’ because ‘many of its adherents refuse the language and logic of “definition” in the first place’. However, because postmodernism is new to Public Administration, clarity demands I identify briefly some of its central themes before concentrating on its application to the subject.

The Characteristics of Postmodernism

Theory

Postmodernism challenges modernism, especially the rationality at the heart of modern social sciences. To paraphrase Bernstein’s view (1991), it asks if there is a determinate, universal, natural, ahistorical framework into which all social science vocabularies can be adequately translated so we can evaluate rationally the validity claims of each vocabulary. Postmodernism rejects such foundationalism: ‘I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives’ (Lyotard, 1979, p. xxiv).

What is modernism, therefore, and what are its defects? Gergen (1992, p. 211) argues that modernism has four characteristics.

1. *A revival of Enlightenment beliefs in the power of reason and observation*, – through reason we can develop and test theories about the world.
2. *A search for fundamentals or essentials*. – we may lay bare the secrets of the universe,
3. *A faith in progress and universal design* – we can be assured of a steadily improving future.

⁸ I know organization theory exists as a separate discipline with its own departments in and outside business schools. None the less it has been a major influence on, and a core subject in, the study of Public Administration for all the postwar period. The two subjects are closely related and what concerns organization theory today will influence Public Administration tomorrow.

4. *Absorption in the machine metaphor.* – the model theoretical picture stresses the systematic (typically causal) relationships between or among basic elements. (Emphasis in the original).

Inevitably, there is scant agreement about these characteristics.⁹ For example, Lyon (1994, pp. 21-7) lists differentiation, rationalization, urbanism, discipline and secularity, concluding that ‘Modernity – is a phenomenon of great diversity and richness, hard, if not impossible, to summarize’ (p. 27). Whatever the content, the critique is scathing. Thus, Lyon (1994, pp. 29-36) lists the discontents of modernism as alienation, exploitation, anomie and loss of direction, and the bureaucratic bondage of the iron cage. We live in a society of strangers subjected to ever greater degrees of control. In short, modernity is: ‘ambivalent’; ‘a two-edged triumph’; and riddled with ‘inner doubts and contradictions’.¹⁰ The tone of the critique is captured by Rosenau (1992, p. 5):

Modernity entered history as a progressive force promising to liberate humankind from ignorance and irrationality, but one can readily wonder whether the promise has been sustained. As we in the West approach the end of the twentieth century, the ‘modern’ record – world wars, the rise of Nazism, concentration camps (in both East and West), genocide, world-wide depression, Hiroshima, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Persian Gulf and a widening gap between rich and poor – makes any belief in the idea of progress or faith in the future seem questionable.

Modernism is rejected. In its place, there is the postmodern project with the following central tenets in its epistemology.¹¹

– ‘*External reality*’: social science tries to discover external reality, ‘postmodernists hold that there are no adequate means for representing it’ (and see Gergen, 1986, for an extended discussion).

– A ‘*constructivist theory of reality*’: ‘To the extent that the mind furnishes the categories of understanding, there are no real world objects

⁹ See also the discussion of Cooper and Burrell (1988) below pp. 15-17.

¹⁰ For an impressive exegesis of this ambivalence, and its challenges as well as its discontents, see: Berman (1988). For the modernist reply in general see: Giddens (1990); Habermas (1985); and Taylor (1991). For the modernist reply to the critique of organizational analysis, see: Reed (1993).

¹¹ Postmodern literature is both diffuse and difficult. I found Rosenau (1992) the most helpful guide to the literature and, as I cannot improve on her account, I have paraphrased it. All quotations in this section are from Rosenau (1992), Ch. 7 unless indicated to the contrary.

of study other than those inherent within the mental makeup of persons' (Gergen, 1986, p. 141).

– A '*contextualist* theory of reality': 'all knowledge claims (all facts, truths, and validity) are "intelligible and debatable" only within their context, paradigm, or "interpretive community" (Fish, 1989, p. 141) ... 'Reality is the result of social processes accepted as normal in a specific context'.

– Reality is a '*linguistic convention*': 'If language itself is relative and even arbitrary, and if language is the only reality we know, then reality is, at most, a linguistic habit.' 'There are no independently identifiable, real world referents to which the language of social description is cemented' (Gergen, 1986, p. 143). Truth is a language game.

– *Intertextuality* is the post-modern substitute for causal explanation. 'Everything one studies is related to everything else' so it is impossible 'to untangle the threads'.

– *Ethical relativism*: objectivity is impossible. Social science research is pervaded by values and 'no particular value system can be assumed superior to another'. The language games are incommensurable.

Methodology

Postmodernism is anti-positivist. Its preferred methodology is deconstruction.¹² Rosenau (1992, p.121) identifies the following guidelines to deconstruction.

– Find an exception to a generalization in the text and push it to the limit so that this generalization appears absurd; in other words, use the exception to undermine the principle.

¹² Discourse *analysis* refers to 'a neutral set of methodological devices for the analysis of speeches, writings, interviews and conversations' (Howarth, 1995, p. 116) and is, therefore, central to deconstruction. It should not be confused with, although such devices are part of, discourse *theory* which 'analyses the way systems of meaning or 'discourses' shape the way people understand their roles in society and justify their political activities' (Howarth, 1995, p. 115). Discourse theory draws on postmodernism and is one the ever-burgeoning 'schools' of thought in this epistemological tradition. The key proponents are: Laclau and Mouffe (1985). For an accessible summary see: Howarth (1995). I cannot consider individual schools in a paper providing a broad survey. Ellis (1989) provides a withering critique of deconstruction's 'neutral' methods.

- Interpret the arguments in the text being deconstructed in their most extreme form.
- Avoid absolute statements in deconstructing a text, but cultivate a sense of intellectual excitement by making statements that are both startling and sensational.
- Deny the legitimacy of all dichotomies because there are always a few exceptions to any generalizations based on bipolar terms, and these can be used to undermine them.
- Nothing is to be accepted; nothing is to be rejected. It is extremely difficult to criticize a deconstructive argument if no clear viewpoint is expressed.
- Write so as to permit the greatest number of interpretations possible; ambiguity and ambivalence are not to be shunned but rather cultivated. Obscurity may ‘protect from serious scrutiny’ (Ellis 1989: p. 148). The idea is ‘to create a text without finality or completion, one which the reader can never be (sic) finished’ (Wellberg, 1985, p. 234).
- Employ ‘new and strange terminology so that familiar positions may not seem so familiar and otherwise obviously relevant scholarship may not seem so obviously relevant’ (Ellis, 1989, p. 142)
- ‘Never consent to a change of terminology and always insist that the wording of the deconstructive argument is sacrosanct’. More familiar formulations undermine any sense that the deconstructive position is unique and distinctive (Ellis, 1989, p. 145).

The contrast between the modernist and postmodernist projects is succinctly captured by Rosenau (1992, p. 137). Thus, modern social science:

requires simplification. It surrenders richness of description and feel for complexity in return for approximate answers to the questions, often limited in scope, that are eligible for consideration within its own terms.

Whereas, for postmodernism:

‘Only an absence of knowledge claims, an affirmation of multiple realities, and an acceptance of divergent interpretations remain. We can convince those who agree with us, but we have no basis for convincing

those who dissent and no criteria to employ in arguing for superiority of any particular view.

Obviously, I have done no more than lay out some of the bare bones of some postmodern approaches. The most useful way to flesh out this account is to look at applications to Public Administration.

Postmodernism, Public Administration and Organizational Analysis ¹³

Public Administration

There is already a full-length treatment of postmodern public administration; Fox and Miller (1995).¹⁴ They argue that 'American representative democracy is neither representative nor democratic' and 'governance' can only be improved by 'successive approximations to authentic discourse' (p. xiv). Part I of the book criticises the practice and theory of American government and administration. For example, they single out for criticism John Rohr and the Blacksburg manifesto's attempt to refound public administration by legitimating the administrative state using the American constitution and its principles (see Rohr, 1986; Wamsley, 1990). Fox and Miller want public administration to act in the public interest; reject technicism and positivism; 'distance' themselves from professionalism as 'guild protectionism'; and seek closer contact between public administration and the citizenry. But they reject the search for constitutional legitimacy for public administration for more authentic discourse through participation in policy deliberation. They argue America is made up of neotribes talking past one another in a game typified by symbolic politics and competition for meaning, not material goods (p. 43):

There is no inquiry, no debate, no agreed-upon grounds for asserting truth claims, no propositions to be tested, no persuasion, no refutation, and no requirement that words connote the same phenomenon for everyone (p. 69).

¹³ There is also a literature on postmodern policy analysis which emphasises the social construction of policy and policy analysis. See, for example: Bobrow and Dryzek, 1987, Ch. 10; Dobuzinskis, 1992; Schram, 1993; and White, 1994.

¹⁴ Shorter discussions include: Caldwell, 1995; Rosenau, 1992, pp. 86-8. Lynn and Wildavsky (1990) provide an authoritative survey of American Public Administration. Their book does not discuss postmodern approaches and none of the key postmodern authors are cited in the author index.

Their goal is to substitute authentic discourse for symbolic politics.

Part 2 summarises the underpinnings of discourse theory, covering phenomenology; constructivism, structuration theory and the public sphere as an energy field. They use these several elements to argue that 'public policy is ... not the rational discovery of objective Truth' but 'the struggle for meaning capture':

the clash of metaphors, similes, and analogies, strategically crafted arguments, and rhetorical gambits are the actual determinants of policy ... The game is not about truth but about meaning capture; truths are won, not found. (Fox and Miller, 1995, pp. 112-13).

However, the struggle for meaning is neither democratic nor authentic, so Fox and Miller (1995, pp. 118-27) argue for a pluralism of discourse and stipulate four 'warrants for discourse' which are necessary conditions for authentic communication; namely, sincerity, situation-regarding intentionality, willing attention, and substantive contribution. They argue that 'insincerity destroys trust' which is essential to authentic discourse; that situation regarding intentionality ensures the discourse is both about something and considers the context of the problem; that willing attention will bring about passionate engagement; and participants should offer a distinct point of view or specific expertise. These 'process norms' are said to 'police the discourse'.

Finally, Fox and Miller discuss policy networks as an example of a nascent form of discourse. The conventional account of policy networks treats them as an instance of private government, arguing that networks:

destroy political responsibility by shutting out the public; create privileged oligarchies; and are conservative in their impact because, for example, the rules of the game and access favour established interests. (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992, p. 265)

An alternative interpretation suggests citizens could be regaining control of government through their participation in networks as users and governors, by creating a 'postmodern public administration'.

Networks of publicly interested discourse which transcend hierarchical institutions provide a feasible model for public administration. Some policy networks, interagency consortia, and community task forces exhibit potential for discourse. In these nascent forms are found think tank experts, legislative staff, policy analysts, public administrators, inter-

ested citizens, process generalists, even elected officials participating together to work out possibilities for what to do next. (Fox and Miller, 1995, p. 149)

Organizational Analysis

Cooper and Burrell (1988) and the series of articles in *Organization Studies* about individual postmodern authors are a landmark in the recent development of organization theory.¹⁵ Cooper and Burrell compare modern and postmodern approaches. They distinguish between critical and systemic modernism, the former referring to critical reason (as exemplified in the work of Jurgen Habermas) and the latter to instrumental rationality (and for example the work of Daniel Bell). Systemic modernism is the dominant form of rationality:

Post-industrial society is organized around knowledge for the purpose of social control and the directing of innovation and control (Bell, 1976, p. 20)

However both forms of modernism share ‘the belief in an intrinsically logical and meaningful world constituted by Reason’ and:

(1) that discourse mirrors the reason and order already ‘out there’ in the world, and (2) that there is a thinking agent, a subject, which can make itself conscious of this external order’ (Cooper and Burrell, 1988, p. 97)

Post-modernism rejects this grand narrative. The key concept is ‘*difference*: a form of self reference in which terms contain their own opposites’ and there is, therefore, ‘no *singular* grasp of their meanings’ (p.98). Social action is a ‘language game’ in which actors make ‘moves’ following known ‘rules’. Human agents do not control. They ‘construct *interpretations* of the world, these interpretations having no absolute or universal status’ (p. 94).

The postmodern approach rejects the grand narrative of organizational analysis in which:

¹⁵ I only want to illustrate the postmodern approach in organization theory so I focus on Cooper and Burrell (1988). Other relevant contributions include: Clegg (1990); Gergen (1992); Hassard (1994); Marsden (1993); Parker (1992); Reed (1992); and Thompson (1993).

the concept of organization ... functions as a metadiscourse to legitimate the idea that organization is a social tool and an extension of the human agent (p. 102).

The modernist conception of organizations treats workers and managers as objects of study with functional characteristics. The postmodernist approach denies that organizations structure relationships. They are constituted through discourse. So:

to understand organizations it is necessary to analyse them from the outside ... and not from what is already organized. It becomes a question of analysing ... the production of organization rather than the organization of production' (p.106).

Cooper and Burrell offer few examples of their preferred approach in action. However, they do suggest that:

The task of postmodern thought is to expose the censoring function of formalization and ... to show that the 'informal' actually constitutes the 'formal'. The 'formal' and the 'informal' reflect each other ...; to the extent that they can never be separated, they are not just mutually defining but can be said to be the same or self-referential. It is from this point of view that ... Foucault and Derrida view and analyse the 'formal', so that it is no longer a privileged and unassailable site in social discourse (p. 109).

Postmodernism unmasks formal organizations; it deconstructs organizational narratives. They are not 'the rational constructions of modern institutions' but the 'ever-present expression of autonomous power' (p. 110). And the researcher does not have a privileged position:

academic work must be recognised for what it is – more as words in a competing babble of voices with no voices having a particular claim to priority over others (Parker, 1992, p. 6).¹⁶

¹⁶ I cite Parker (1992) because, on pp. 4-8, he is summarising Cooper and Burrell (1988) and the series of articles in *Organizations Studies*.

Critical appraisal

It should now be clear why postmodernism cannot be ignored. It has arrived both in mainstream Public Administration and the study of organizations. The key question is what can we learn from it. Already there is an extensive critical literature on postmodernism in the social sciences and I do not pretend to offer a definitive summary (see, for example: Callinicos, 1989; Dews, 1986; and Rosenau, 1992). As with my resume of key postmodernist tenets, I provide a short summary of the major criticisms before turning my attention to the weaknesses of postmodernism in the study of Public Administration.

General

From the welter of criticism, the following are particularly relevant to discussing postmodernism and Public Administration.¹⁷

- They criticise theory building but ‘an anti-theory position is itself a theory position’.
- They use the modernist intellectual tools of reason, logic and rationality in their own analyses.
- They refuse to evaluate any interpretation as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ but argue that social science should focus on the excluded and the marginal.
- The text is treated in isolation; there is no intertextuality.
- They employ implicit criteria of evaluation because they do make ‘good’ and ‘bad’ judgements about social science theory.
- They reject consistency norms when applied to themselves but apply them to modernists.
- Few postmodernists drop truth claims; what they write is not only ‘a local narrative, relevant only for its own constituency’; postmodernism is an undertheorized meta-narrative (Thompson, 1993, p. 197).
- They simultaneously claim linguistic determinism and linguistic indeterminacy. If language explains everything, postmodernists privilege

¹⁷ The problems of summarising the postmodern approach are greater when attempting a synthesis of the numerous critiques. For example, Hasard (1993, p. 12-13) considers ‘reflexivity’ a defining characteristic of postmodernism whereas Rosenau (1992, pp. 176-80) argues that its unreflexive dimension is one of its major weaknesses.

language over the social. If language is nondenotational, then they manipulate language so it is devoid of all meaning.

In sum:

the problem with post-modern social science is that you can say anything you want, but so can everyone else. Some of what is said will be interesting and fascinating, but some will also be ridiculous and absurd. Postmodernism provides no means to distinguish between the two. (Rosenau, 1992, p. 137)

Specific

There are three ripostes to the postmodernist critique of Public Administration. First, it misrepresents the modernist project. For example, as Reed (1993, p. 168) argues:

the overriding emphasis which the postmodernist critique of the modernist project gives to the dissolution of the meta-narratives of reason, science and progress, and the corresponding 'loss of unity and integration' which this produces, may be guilty of grossly overestimating the totalizing momentum of modernist thinking and underestimating the fragmenting and localizing consequences of its chequered history as an integrating narrative. The tendency to overstate the intellectual imperialism and institutional authoritarianism inherent within the modernist project, and the 'disciplinary regimes' that it fostered, produces a narrative drive every bit as 'totalizing' in its aspirations as the tradition from which it wishes to escape.

Second, poverty, inequality (especially inequalities of power, including bureaucratic and state power), environmental degradation and unemployment are a few of the many brute facts confronting citizens, yet postmodernism renders social science impotent to help them.

The new postmodern form (of Public Administration) does not provide 'how to do it' information because there is no clear conceptual scheme, no single right answer or best approach, if truth and theory are abolished. ...For post-modern public administration there is no longer any 'right' policy or superior guiding wisdom, no remaining shared assumptions because of the impossibility of modern truth or theory. How, then, is the post-modern administrator to deal with urgent environmen-

tal and economic crises that require the immediate attention of government agencies?’ (Rosenau, 1992, pp. 86-7).

Third, the core of the critique is not new. For example, the Minnowbrook papers provide a sustained critique of mainstream Public Administration covering such ‘postmodern topics’ as the limits of positivism, the impossibility of value-neutral analysis, anti-hierarchical approaches to organization, social action approaches to organization theory, and public administration serving egalitarian values (Marini, 1971).¹⁸ Public Administration is multi-theoretic and characterised by methodological pluralism (Rhodes, 1991). There is no dominant paradigm (Hood, 1990a).

Finally, there are important lacunae in the work of Fox and Miller (1995) and Cooper and Burrell (1988). For example, Fox and Miller’s discussion of policy networks as nascent discourse owes more to the critical modernism of Habermas than to postmodernism and fails to explore the significant constraints on authentic discourse within the network. There are important limits to the new role of citizen as user. Governments still restrict access to information and there are clear limits to the knowledge of citizens. There is an obvious conflict between the tenets of accountability in a representative democracy and participation in networks which can be open without being formally accountable. These differing views of networks pose different challenges for the public manager. Is their role to regulate networks (in the sense of maintaining relationships)? Do they act as guardians of the public interest? Do they still have the authority and legitimacy to claim a privileged position in the network? Can they be privileged actors in the network without undermining the discourse?

The problem with Cooper and Burrell is their focus on the text and language games.¹⁹ As Thompson (1993, p. 198) argues, they cannot explain the historical production and distribution of knowledge; and, while textual analysis ‘may allow us to spot inconsistencies and metaphors, it does not allow us to

¹⁸ Andrew Dunsire reminded me of Marcuse (1964), Reich (1971) and Roszak (1969) and the flight from reason in the 1960s. Personal correspondence dated 27 June 1995.

¹⁹ Given the primacy accorded to language, the criticism that ‘if intelligibility is a criterion, it is a test many would fail’ (Thompson, 1993, p. 198) is not a cheap shot. Postmodern writing is marred by both obscurantism and an unwelcome tendency to demonise opponents.

reveal the interests and power structures that underpin texts' (p. 196).²⁰ Every analytical framework has limitations but 'that does not invalidate social theory that seeks to generalize and make truth claims across ... limited territories' (p. 197).

Perhaps I take their arguments too seriously. Often, postmodernists will insist on the play-like quality of their approach (Gergen, 1992, p. 215). The critique of mainstream social science is, therefore, justification enough. But the methodological critique is rarely original and all too frequently overblown. The attack on reason is overstated yet contains its own implicit notions of truth. The accounts of organizational analysis and public administration verge on caricature. A reflexive stance is not peculiarly or uniquely postmodernist; it is a long-standing feature of modernism.²¹

None the less, its proponents argue the critique can sensitise Public Administration to avenues of exploration to which it has turned a blind eye; it 'intensifies tendencies already in effect' (Rosenau, 1992, p. 184; Lyon, 1994, p. 50). There are a few, and only a few, lessons to learn from postmodernism and they stem from postmodernism's critique of modernist assumptions in, and the positivist methodology of, Public Administration. For example, postmodernism would treat Public Administration as a totalising meta-narrative imbued with notions of reform, efficiency, progress and modernization. It would deconstruct notions of 'good public administration' for their underlying values and assumptions; explore the ways in which the idea of progress could be used to explain policy failures; and undermine the rationalizations for continued 'rational' social engineering.²² I have my doubts about the distinctive, postmodernist nature of such claims. Although the practice of public administration – with its claims, for example, to 'reinvent Whitehall' (Rhodes, 1995a) – may be imbued with notions of reform, efficiency and progress, Hood (1990) and Rhodes (1991) argue the study of Public Administration does not have a single meta-narrative; it is multi-theoretic. Hood and Jackson (1991) and Goodin and Wilenski (1984) 'deconstruct' the concepts of administration and efficiency respectively but neither would see their work as remotely postmodernist. Similarly, Rhodes's (1996) analysis of the shift from hierar-

²⁰ Criticising Cooper and Burrell from a postmodern position, Parker (1992), p. 12 complains 'they do nothing to explore the nature of the relation between author, text and reader'.

²¹ On 'reflexive modernity' see: Giddens (1990), pp. 37-52 who argues that the break with foundationalism provides 'a fuller understanding of the reflexivity in modernity itself'.

²² These examples emerged in conversations with Beate Kohler-Koch (Mannheim) and Pat Dunleavy (LSE).

chy to markets to networks ‘deconstructs’ the ‘marketisation’ of public services thesis! Equally, the rhetorical uses of rational analysis to justify policy failures is a feature of ‘critical enlightenment’, but is it postmodern (see: Bobrow and Dryzek, 1987, Ch. 11). Alternatively, Foucault’s micro-level analysis of the ways in which discipline and control are internalized in prisons and hospitals complements Weber’s analysis of bureaucracy (Read, 1992, pp. 164-8). In effect, he treats modern organizations as ‘disciplinary technologies’ and poses the question for Public Administration of, for example, whether the new public management can be seen as a more effective form of surveillance and control than the bureaucracies it claims to replace.²³

However, the postmodern project is antithetical to social science generally, not just Public Administration. At best, it is a call for critical detachment; for a scrutiny of our core values and assumptions. At worst, it renders the enterprise of Public Administration nugatory, and unnecessarily so. In place of a postmodern Public Administration, we need a reflexive Public Administration which takes cognisance of the postmodernist methodological critique by focusing on critical debates between analytically structured narratives within the social practice framework of Public Administration. However, this statement rewrites many of the subject’s methodological assumptions and needs to spelt out in more detail; a task to which I now turn.

Beyond Postmodernism

I am sceptical about the postmodernist contribution to the study of Public Administration. Its contribution is essentially negative, providing ‘an opportunity to reappraise modernity’; and drawing ‘attention to (modernity’s) limits’ (Lyon, 1994, pp. 70 and 73). This section of the paper attempts a positive response to the postmodernist critique. We can respond to the challenge of postmodernism, not by embracing it, but by consulting and reinterpreting our own traditions. So, in this section, I respond to key arguments in the postmodernist’s methodological critique by: building on Michael Reed’s analysis of the

²³ Michel Foucault is regularly cited as source of inspiration for a postmodern approach to organizational analysis. He rejected the label postmodern (see: Gane, 1986, p. 3 and citations) but see: Burchell, Gordon and Miller (1991); Burrell (1988); Foucault (1979); Gordon (1991); Gergen (1992), Reed (1992), pp. 162-8; Wolin (1988); and for a critical appraisal see: Dews (1987), chapters 5 and 6; Reed (1982), pp. 162-8 and citations; and Thompson (1993), pp. 198-201.

state of organizational analysis; identifying the narratives in Public Administration on which we can build; and discussing new avenues of exploration.²⁴

Reed (1992, chapter 6 and 1993) focuses on the continuities in the study of organizations. He argues the old and new organization theory share 'analytical forms and substantive concerns'. There are recurrent 'master themes' and the subject should try 'to recover its sense of historical continuity'. He argues against the fragmenting tendencies and relativism brought about by the post-modern critique. There is:

a growing realisation that epistemological uncertainty, theoretical plurality and methodological diversity do not necessarily entail a terminal drift towards a disordered field of study characterized by total disarray over philosophical fundamentals, substantive problematic and conceptual frameworks. Indeed, it is the lines of debates that are initiated and developed by different modes of inquiry that hold the field together as a reasonably coherent intellectual practice. They provide the problematicatics, frameworks and explanations that, together with the institutional arrangements within which 'organizational analysis' is actively carried on, link together epistemological claims and disciplinary practices in such a way that a coherent field of study can be sustained.

This field of study is:

1. a co-operative intellectual *practice*;
2. with a *tradition* of historically produced norms, rules, conventions and standards of excellence subject to critical debate; and
3. a *narrative* structure and context which gives meaning to the activity of organizational analysis. (Paraphrased from Reed, 1993, p. 176).

24 The attractions of modernity remain considerable. As Lyon (1994, p. 78) observes:

If all the postmodern can offer is randomness and chaos, play and pastiche, consumerism and unconcern, then modernity held some attractions. And if the postmodern condition appears unable to support itself without at least implicit reference to motifs more properly found in paradigms denied by postmoderns, then something is awry in postmodernism.

Not only is something awry but the postmodern critique of modernity is 'totalising' and modernity is a project awaiting completion. For Habermas (1985, pp. 293-326) the future lies in communicative reason. For Giddens (1990, pp. 36-53 and 150), it lies in a radicalised, reflexive modernity. For Taylor (1992 pp. 16, 28-9 and 66-8), it lies in the moral ideal of authenticity or self-fulfilment through dialogue. See also: Lyon (1994), pp. 78-84.

Thus, practice, tradition and narrative provide the framework for thinking about organizational analysis. They provide:

for a negotiated and dynamic set of standards through which rational debate and argumentation between proponents of rival perspectives or approaches is possible. These standards are historically embedded within social practices, traditions and narratives which provide 'embedded reasons' ... for judging an argument true or false or an action right or wrong. (Reed, 1993, p. 177)

These criteria are not universal and objective but they are 'shared criteria for assessing ... knowledge claims' and the postmodern critique 'radically underestimated' the 'significant, grounded rationality' in practices, traditions and narratives and the 'shared sense of theoretical direction and meaningful substantive focus' (Reed, 1993, p. 177).

Although Reed's argument focuses on organizational analysis, it is as relevant to the study of Public Administration which is also characterised by a plethora of competing approaches. In place of the bureaucratic, functional efficiency meta-narrative, we have an intellectual enterprise with a shared language and agreed foci. Communication is possible because the language and foci are widely shared within the subfield. By incorporating new perspectives, such as postmodernism, into this continuing debate we prevent the subfield ossifying even if the changes are only incremental.

Postmodernism would call my 'analytically structured narratives' a 'self-referential discourse' and my 'social practice framework' an 'interpretive community' (Fish, 1989, ch. 7) but it is not so limited or introspective. Narratives are a device for anchoring knowledge. The Public Administration community's continuing debate defines and redefines the criteria by which we judge the knowledge claims of individual members of that community. It is not self referential because the knowledge claims can be 'reconfirmed' by encounters with practitioners and users. So, we translate abstract concepts into conversations in fieldwork. These encounters and their conversations produce data which we interpret to produce narratives which are then judged by evolving knowledge criteria of the Public Administration community. Reconfirmation occurs at three points.

– When we translate our concepts for field work: i.e. are they meaningful to practitioners and users and if not, why not?

- When we construct narratives from the conversations: i.e. is the story logical and consistent with the data?
- When we redefine and translate our concepts because of the Public Administration community's judgement on the narratives: i.e. does the story meet the agreed knowledge criteria?

Reconfirmation is an iterative process. Concepts are redefined in the light of academic judgements and again translated for new encounters, conversations and stories (and for a more formal account of this double hermeneutic see: Giddens, 1993, p. 170).²⁵ So, the central task is to identify new avenues of exploration which build on existing traditions and narratives and I have four suggestions for the marriage of old and new: governance, institutional analysis, the ethnography of administrative culture, and globalization.

Governance

Dunsire (1995, p. 34) suggests that Public Administration became public policy and management in the 1980s and 'the name may well become "governance" in the 1990s'. But what does this term mean? There are at least six possible meanings.

- As the minimal state; or 'governance as the acceptable face of spending cuts' (Stoker, 1994, p. 6)
- As corporate governance; or 'the system by which organizations are directed and controlled' (Cadbury Report, 1992, p. 15).
- As the new public management; or the shift from government delivering services or rowing to governance or steering through policy decisions (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, p. 34).
- As 'good governance'; or the marriage in developing countries of the new public management with the advocacy of liberal democracy (Leftwich, 1993).
- As a socio-cybernetic system; or 'socio-political governance ... directed at the creation of patterns of interaction in which political and traditional hierarchical governing and social self-organization are complementary' (Kooiman, 1993, p. 252).

²⁵ My thanks to Lotte Jensen (Institute of Political Science, University of Copenhagen) for her advice on this section in general and the double hermeneutic in particular.

– As self-organising networks; or managing networks of interdependent organizations.

Rhodes (1996) defines governance as *self-organising, interorganizational networks* with the following characteristics.

1. Interdependence between organizations. Governance is broader than government, covering non-state actors. Changing the boundaries of the state meant the boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors became shifting and opaque.
2. Continuing interactions between network members, caused by the need to exchange resources and negotiate shared purposes.
3. Game-like interactions, rooted in trust and regulated by rules of the game negotiated and agreed by network participants.
4. No sovereign authority, so networks have a significant degree of autonomy from the state and are not accountable to it. They are self-organising. Although the state does not occupy a privileged position, it can indirectly and imperfectly steer networks with the consent of network actors.²⁶

This stipulative definition provides a useful tool for exploring trends in British government especially the characteristics of hollowing out, the effects of the new public management and the rise of intergovernmental management. For example, the new public management has an intra-organizational focus whereas governance directs attention to interorganizational linkages and the problem of many hands where so many people contribute to a policy that no one contribution can be identified; and if no one person can be held accountable after the event, then no one needs to behave responsibly beforehand (Bovens, 1990).

²⁶ Andrew Dunsire in his discussant's note on my PAC conference paper (6 September 1995) regretted that my definition left out 'some element' of steering by the state.

'I would begin from Rhodes' formulation, but add the means by which the government actor may (however indirectly and imperfectly) steer the transient dynamic of network operations away from undesired configurations and towards desired ones - with no privileged position or authority save what is readily acknowledged'.

I had already conceded this point in my discussion of intergovernmental management and steering (Rhodes, 1996). Subsequently, I amended this list of network characteristics to accommodate Dunsire's point.

Governance directs attention to trends in British public administration in the same way that, for example, Clegg (1990) directs attention to the advent of the postmodern organization epoch.²⁷ It is a tool for exploring advanced industrial society without the baggage associated with 'postmodernism as epoch'; it is a realist ontology without an idealist epistemology.

Institutional Analysis

Fox and Miller's postmodernist account of institutions contrasts sharply with the Weberian notion of bureaucracy. They stress 'institutional malleability' (p. 91) and recursive (or habitual) practices (pp. 87-8), viewing 'institutions as habits, not things' (p. 91):

institutions ... owe their existence not to some objective realm outside the social practices of individuals in groups, but within them. ... social reality is socially constructed or constantly socially renewed by human behaviour patterns regulated by recursive practices (p. 89).

'Institutions' have also been 'rediscovered' in the mainstream social sciences. For example, Thelen and Steinmo (1992, p. 2) employ a definition of institutions which is not limited to formal organizations but also covers informal rules, procedures and standard operating codes (see also: Rhodes 1995b).²⁸ Lowndes (1994, pp. 7-29) identifies six varieties of the 'new institutionalism'.

The *mythic* institution views the formal structure of an organization as the product of its institutional environment and its taken for granted assumptions about the organization. Formal structure is decoupled from work activities. It is the environment's theory about the organization and its activities which serves to legitimate the organization and increase its chances of survival. (See, for example: Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

- 27 Although this paper concentrates on British government, the concept of governance also facilitates the analysis of policy making in the European Union. See, for example: Kohler-Koch and Jachtenfuchs (1995); and Rhodes, George and Bache (1995).
- 28 Fox and Miller's postmodern approach to institutions is not new, forming the core of Silverman's (1970) critique of organization theory. Equally, it is a moot point whether institutions were neglected outside of American behavioural political science. Cavalier assumptions are made about the impact of behaviouralism on the study of politics in Europe (see: Thelen and Steinmo 1992, pp. 4-7). Institutions remained a focal point of analysis in Britain (see: Rhodes, 1995b).

The *efficient* institution can be found in the 'new institutional economics' which explores the conditions under which markets or hierarchies are efficient organizational frameworks for economic exchange. For example, Williamson (1975) argues the most efficient organizational form minimises transaction costs.

The *stable (or historical)* institution reduces uncertainty and creates a stable environment for economic transactions. North (1990) stresses the historical development of institutions and the importance of culture and tradition in forming informal constraints and the rules which are the basis of institutions and their transactions.

The *manipulated* institution refers to the rational choice literature which argues that political institutions are manipulated by rational, self-interested politicians and bureaucrats. The institutional public choice approach as developed by Dunleavy (1991) argues that bureaucrats do not necessarily maximise their budgets but 'bureau-shape'; that is, change the work they do and how they do it, creating for example agencies which are small, collegial, policy advising elites.

The *disaggregated* institution refers to governance (above pp. 23-4) and the growth of governmental structures by differentiation and reintegration through policy networks and policy communities of government departments, pressure groups, professional and economic interests (Rhodes, 1988).

The *appropriate* institution stands in stark contrast to the manipulated institution because it emphasises the role of institutions in simplifying the environment and creating islands of certainty in an incoherent, inchoate world. Rules and procedures filter the world and create confidence that people will act appropriately. Costs, benefits and rational calculation are replaced by actors constructing meaning within their institutions, sharing an identity and behaving consistently. (See, for example: March and Olsen, 1989)

The new varieties of institutionalism are, therefore, an agenda for Public Administration.²⁹ The study of institutions is the historic core of the subject. We are now being challenged to employ wider definitions and while looking

²⁹ They are also on the postmodern agenda. Howarth (1995, p. 132) concedes that discourse theory has ignored institutions but argues that, conceptualised as '*sedimented discourses*' or '*discourses* which, as a result of political and social practices, have become relatively permanent and durable', they are '*legitimate objects of discourse analysis*'.

back to the tools of the historian we are also enjoined to locate the analysis in explicit theoretical contexts: methodological pluralism and the multi-theoretic approach are the order of the day (Rhodes, 1995b).

Ethnography and Administrative Culture

Dunsire (1995, pp. 25-33) discusses this final tendency at some length. He provides a resume of the inconclusive debate about the extent of cultural change in the British civil service but concludes with the telling remark that it is 'rather surprising' this debate took place with little or no reference to 'cultural theory' (p. 31) and the work of Mary Douglas (see, for example: Douglas, 1982; and Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky, 1990).

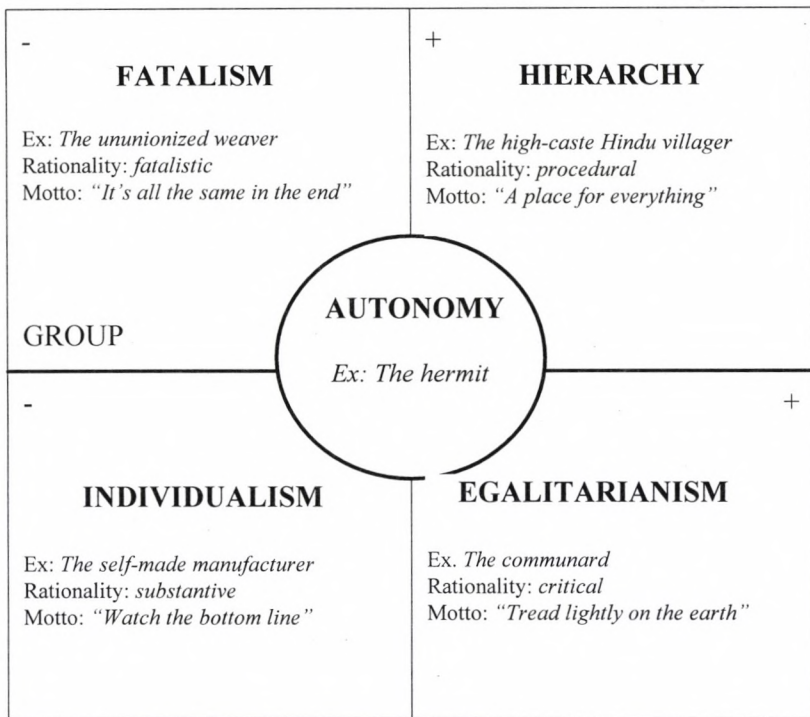
Douglas's model is based on two forms of social control:

Group refers to the extent to which an individual is incorporated into bounded units. The greater the incorporation, the more individual choice is subject to group determination. *Grid* denotes the degree to which an individual's life is circumscribed by externally imposed prescriptions. The more binding and extensive the scope of the prescriptions, the less of life that is open to individual negotiation. (Thompson and others, 1990, p.5; Douglas, 1982, pp. 190-92 and 201-3).

Group pressure and rules are two 'modes of social control' or 'forms of power' which produce five 'ways of life' (Thompson and others, 1990, pp. 6 and 7-10). Strong groups and weak rules give *egalitarian* social relations. Strong groups and binding rules give *hierarchical* relations. Weak groups and few rules gives *individualistic* relations. Exclusion from a group with binding rules leads to a *fatalistic* way of life. Finally, where the individual withdraws from all forms of social control the way of life is that of the *hermit*. Figure 1 illustrates these ways of life.

The attempt to introduce 'managerialism' (Hood, 1991; Pollitt, 1993) and change the culture of the higher civil service in the 1980s and the 1990s can be interpreted as a shift from a hierarchic to an individualistic way of life. Cultural theory opens more interesting lines of analysis:

Margaret Thatcher's avowed aim is to create an 'enterprise culture' (individualism). The major obstacle, Thatcherites believe, to the establishment of such a culture is the clutter of institutional structures based

FIGURE 1 *Grid and group*

- Grid + *Prescribed: externally imposed restrictions on choice*
 Grid - *"Free": many options open to negotiation*
 Group + *Integrated*
 Group - *Individualized*

Source:

Thompson and others, 1990, p.8; and Schwarz and
 Thompson, 1990, p.7 as adapted by Dunsire 1995, p.32.

on a careful balancing of privilege and obligation (hierarchy). If hierarchy and individualism were the only two viable social positions, it would follow that policies that dismantled hierarchy would produce an increase in individualism. But ... there are four viable social positions (and thus three routes into and out of each of the quadrant), then, we would predict, radically shifting social transactions away from hierarchies may also create ... a 'culture of poverty' (fatalism) and a 'culture of criticism' (egalitarianism). (Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky, 1990, p. 79)

So, cultural theory predicts that managerialism will not just create an individualistic culture but also increase both fatalism and egalitarianism as well as eroding the old hierarchical culture. Such outcomes are believable but it is an interpretation which conspicuously lacks supporting evidence. Public Administration describes administrative change. Cultural theory provides tools for analysing it and explaining the several outcomes of managerialism. And again this 'tendency' enjoins all who work in the subfield of Public Administration to employ explicit theoretical frameworks to guide and interpret their fieldwork.

Globalization

Inflated claims are made for globalization; for example, that the global economy dominates national economies. International interdependence is not new 'but the existing intensity of such linkages is' (Editors, 1994, p.2). Unfortunately, the term has no agreed meaning and there is no 'finished theory of globalization' (Amin and Thrift, 1994, p. 1). I focus on one of the several dimensions associated with globalization; the fate of the nation state. The earlier discussion of governance focused on the *internal* 'hollowing out' of the nation state (Peters, 1993; and Rhodes, 1994). I use 'globalization' to discuss the *external* hollowing out of the nation state (Cerny, 1996; Held, 1991; Hirst and Thompson, 1995; Jessop, 1992; McGrew, 1992; Saward, 1995).³⁰

³⁰ Clive Gray commented that I did not pay enough attention to the relationships between social, economic and political change and administrative organizations, comparing hollowing out unfavourably with, for example, regulation theory. Personal correspondence dated 24 August 1995. Also Michael Saward (1995) criticised my work on hollowing out arguing for the distinction between internal and external hollowing out. He also supplied me with many references to globalisation. My thanks to both for their help and to Ronen Palan (Newcastle) for additional advice. This section responds to their criticisms.

'Hollowing out' refers to the loss of state capacity upwards to, for example, the European Community and downwards to, for example, special purpose bodies. Hirst and Thompson (1995, p. 415) suggest that:

States are less autonomous, they have less exclusive control over the economic and social processes within their territories, and they are less able to maintain national distinctiveness and cultural homogeneity.

Held (1991, pp. 151-7) suggests that four processes are limiting the autonomy of nation states: the internationalization of production and financial transactions; international organizations; international law; and hegemonic powers and power blocs (see also: Saward, 1995). Jessop (1992, p. 27) argues the powers of the state are being displaced 'upward, downward, and outward' because of: the rise of new technologies; the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism; the internationalization of financial and industrial flows; and regionalization (p. 11). In a similar vein, McGrew (1992, pp. 23-6) argues that four processes intensify globalisation: great power competition, technological innovation and diffusion, the internationalization of production and exchange, and modernization (see also: Amin and Thrift, 1994, pp. 2-5; and The Editors, 1994, pp. 2-4). He also distinguishes (pp. 7-9) between transnational relations linking individuals, groups, organizations and communities; transnational organizations operating across national boundaries ranging from transnational corporations through the International Political Science Association to the International Red Cross; and transgovernmental relations and the many inter-governmental organizations. He concludes that the 'image of a cobweb, with no single focal point around which relations and interactions revolve, well describes the de-centred character of global politics' (p. 13).

Hirst and Thompson (1995, p. 409) admit the nation state's capacities for governance have weakened but 'it remains a pivotal institution'. It is essential to the process of 'suturing':

the policies and practice of states in distributing powers upwards to the international level and downwards to sub-national agencies are the sutures that will hold the system of governance together (p. 423).

The state is 'the source of legitimacy in transferring power or sanctioning new powers both "above" it and "below" it' (p. 431). They envisage the state as a 'source of constitutional ordering' in:

A world composed of diverse political forces. governing agencies and organizations at both international and national levels (which) will need

an interlocking network of public powers that regulate and guide action in a relatively consistent way, providing minimum standards of conduct and relief from harm (p. 435).

This network model of interactions is relevant to British membership of the EU. Rhodes, Bache and George (1996) argue that transnational policy networks emerge when: they are a feature of national policy making; there is a high degree of resource dependence in the policy sector; policy making is depoliticised and routinised; where supra-national agencies are dependent on other agencies to deliver a service; and where there is a need to aggregate interests and strengthen functional representation.³¹

So, globalisation posits a world of complex interdependencies characterised by governance without government. Rosenau (1992, pp. 3-6) distinguishes government from governance by suggesting that government refers to 'activities that are backed by formal authority' whereas governance refers to 'activities backed by shared goals'. Governance is 'a more encompassing phenomenon' because it embraces not only governmental organizations but also 'informal, non-governmental mechanisms'. So you get governance without government when there are 'regulatory mechanisms in a sphere of activity which function effectively even though they are not endowed with formal authority'.

Globalisation puts both governance and hollowing out in a broader context. It raises important questions about: the impact of the international system on the administrative structuring and restructuring of the nation state; the relationship between the nation state, the rule of law and the international system; and the effect of the internationalisation of policy making on domestic steering capacities. It suggests explanations for such changes. The adequacy of these explanations is not the point at issue. The globalization thesis challenges the parochialism of Public Administration by seeking such explanations for administrative reform and policy change beyond the confines of the nation state (see, for example: Dunleavy, 1994).

31 For a more detailed discussion see: Kassim (1993); Marks (1993); Peterson (1995); and Sbragia (1992).

Conclusions

This paper has four conclusions.

- Postmodernism as epoch lacks empirical support.
- Postmodernism as epistemology renders the enterprise of Public Administration nugatory.
- Postmodernism sensitises Public Administration to few new avenues of exploration.
- The practices, traditions and narratives of Public Administration provide a more fruitful framework for development suggesting four new avenues of exploration: governance; institutional analysis; the ethnography of administrative culture and globalization.

The pay-off from this brief exploration of a large and often baffling literature is small. Rhodes (1991, pp. 551-54) called for: an explicitly multi-theoretic approach; methodological pluralism; avoiding trivial organizations; Public Administration to set its own research agenda; and the defence of public bureaucracy. Public Administration does not need the postmodern challenge to recognise the merits of methodological and theoretical pluralism. Seeing Public Administration as debates between analytically structured narratives within a social practice framework promotes a critical, multi-theoretic stance and such reflexivity is not a feature postmodernism. The four areas for development reflect a concern with epochal change, the complexity of social life and institutions as power but none of these incipient developments are a product of the postmodern critique. Of course, if postmodernism is only a mood, then Public Administration may have sensitive antennae which have detected the changing mood of the social sciences. There is, however, a more important conclusion to this exploration; Public Administration should not turn to postmodernism for its future but to its own practices, traditions and narratives.

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