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Public Administration and the Unspeakable:

American Postmodernism as an Academic Trail of the 1990s

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Research Papers from the Department of Social Sciences, Roskilde University, Denmark.

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Abstract

The last decade has seen a debate on postmodernism as a meta-theoretical basis for American public administration. This working paper digests a number of articles and books and maps key points of the discussions based on their temporal progress in the 1990s. Important themes in the debates are then discussed, there are five, namely social constructivism and anti-foundationalism; pragmatism; hermeneutic analysis and critical theory; deconstruction, narrative and linguistic analysis; and quantum theory. There are quite large differences among many of the participants, but they all share interests in three problem fields: the role of values in public administration; public participation and community; and the role of public employees as intermediaries between politics and citizens. Strictly speaking, there are rather few true postmodernists, but there is a large group of theorists that share a strong skepticism towards the generalizing type of theory and instead recommend more situational analysis. At the same time, most may be labeled pragmatists with a strong interest in having public administration as an instrument to achieve a better society on the basis of democratic participation rather than abstract analysis.

Keywords: Postmodernism - Public Administration - USA

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Introduction

> *unspeakable*
> adjective
> 1 a : incapable of being expressed in words: UNUTTERABLE b: inexpressibly bad : HORRENDOUS
> 2 : that may not or cannot be spoken <the bawdy thoughts that come into one's head – the unspeakable words – L.P. Smith> <unspeakable collections of consonants – Rosemary Jellis>
>
> From Merriam-Webster Online

To most people, postmodernism in unspeakable: (1a) it is unutterable in the sense that the concept is difficult to express in words; (1b) to many it is also horrendous because it signifies conditions they will not accept; (2) and therefore, to many people the expression should be stricken from the active vocabulary. So, among some senior mainstream faculty in the social sciences, utterances in that direction made by junior faculty may mean a "no tenure" vote when that time is due. Articles sent to them for peer review are either ignored or recommended to be turned down without much substantial comment. In class, students using the (in)famous word are ridiculed to silence.

And yet… the word persists. Publishers appear to be sending books on postmodernism to the market. If the customer is king, there surely must be something in the unspeakable of worth? Ah, but then, tenured faculty members do not care for sales.

In most of the Public Administration academic circles, the reaction from most scholars to postmodernistic thought has been at best, one of neglect, and at worst, a frown and a sneer. But nonetheless, a postmodern debate has appeared. In this paper, this relatively amiable American scholarly debate will be reviewed in order to call to the attention possible uses to those, tenured or not, who do their trade with an open mind. The method applied to this theme is to focus on a relatively small group of American scholars over a 10-year period, and from their writings tease out a number of themes as they emerged from the scholarly debate. This is no attempt to write a major scholarly history, but time sequences appear to have some meaning in this narrative, so it is structured around several phases from 1988 to 1999.

This is a working paper, part of a larger project on the fragmentation of the public sector. It mainly reports within some categories, and further work in order to use it analytically in an European perspective is pending.

1. Changes in Public Administration

It has not gone unnoticed in the academic literature that changes have occurred and are continuing to occur within the traditional realm of public administration. There is no unified agreement upon what the changes are about, however, and even less agreement as to an assessment of the changes.

The vocabulary used by PA researchers is, however, slowly being expanded, and some concepts are becoming rarer in analyses. Concepts like organization, hierarchy and control are increasingly being challenged as the central concepts of the discipline (Bogason 1991), and concepts like network (Bogason and Toonen 1998), governance (Rhodes 1997) and hollowing out (Peters 1994) are becoming more and more frequent. Public Administration is a discipline that is oriented towards practice, and therefore one may suppose that these changes in vocabulary are more than cosmetic. Something is changing in the public sectors in the Western countries. The scope and magnitude of the changes may be discussed, but signs of change are easy to spot.

While there may be a significant degree of agreement that this is something to watch (for), there is less agreement regarding how to treat the changes analytically. The problem for the analyst is first, whether there is any change in the object of research. Most agree that something is happening. The second problem concerns research itself: is there any reason why research should change, given the changes in the research objects? Stated differently: If society is changing so that some postmodern conditions are found, must research then also change into something postmodern? This is where we find quite sharp divisions. We sketch some of those in crude alternatives, but of course, there are researchers that are somewhere in between the extremes, trying to compromise polarized research principles into something more workable.

Many (modern) theorists continue their work based on the traditional social science concepts and methods, using surveys, in-depth structured interviews, document analysis and statistical analysis of existing (public) data. They structure their analysis by formal statistical categories, i.e.by level of government, by formal organizational divisions, by sectoral or program divisions, by formal categories of personnel and by formal categories of recipients or clients. Recognizing that these categories are in one way constructed abstractions, they nonetheless subscribe to a "realist" view of research and treat them as something that is "out there", independent of the analyst, and use the research results for (attempted) objective advice on how to make the public sector work better.

Other (postmodern) theorists denounce that line of research. They deny any interesting links between the formal categories and research questions. They do not accept the realist positions regarding what one may find no matter whether it is perceived by the analyst; they follow an "anti-foundationalist" view that links research results much closer to the approach of analyst and the interaction between the analyst and the objects of research. Formal categories are seen as instruments of

power in that they force the analyst to do research on the basis of instruments that were not created for the research questions, instead, research questions are channeled into what may be answerable from a formal point of view. In that particular sense, formal categories may be of obvious interest to the researcher. Else, the researcher must create categories on their own initiative.

Of course, these matters are not only discussed within one field of social research. The discussion below pertains to issues within the discipline of Public Administration. There are significant and connected discussions within several academic fields, particularly policy analysis and evaluation theory. We shall not deal with those discussions in any comprehensive way, but we may touch upon themes from them here and there to illustrate comparable features.

2. Relating Postmodernism to Public Administration

As indicated above, postmodernism is ambiguous as a concept, and it has created much controversy:

> "There perhaps has not been an intellectual perspective introduced into discourse in the United States that has produced as much controversy, indeed, conflict, as has semiotics in its contemporary form of deconstruction and postmodernism" (White and McSwain 1993, 18)

Some of the problems are illustrated below; postmodernism is difficult to place in intellectual schools, and reactions to it are often overly negative and making the substantial message blurred, at best.

When the debate on postmodernism began to take form there were a number of groups that each felt the necessity to push for a development within the discipline. We shall follow Richard Stillman's (1995) categorization of competing schools to set the agenda for what Public Administration as a field should be contemplating. He identifies six schools of thought, all eager to refound the agenda for public administration as a field in the US:

- the *reinventors*, based on Osborne and Gaebler (1993) who promote governance rather than government. They call for a more entrepreneurial spirit among public administration leadership and a reduction of bureaucracy and red tape, in favor of action from a plethora of rationales, and with no admiration for any particular form of organization as long as it gets things done quickly and cheaply. Their focus is particularly on service delivery;
- the *communitarians*, based on Etzioni (1993) and others relying on the common good as practiced in American localities; this group wants a moral stance as defined by the community to be the carrier for local action, and people to act - in many ways - on the basis of those values rather than based on any particular technique or management fad;
- the Virginia Tech/VPI, *Blacksburg Manifesto Refounders* with Gary Wamsley and colleagues (1990) and their community-cum-agency perspective based on constitutionalism; where the public administration staff carries a particular responsibility to promote the principles of the constitution and the rights

therein, no matter what individual may for the time being rule from the top of the elected office. Those principles are to be held high in processes where the administrative staff act in unison with those citizens who need public (re)action;

- the *phenomenologists*, *critical theorists*, *interpretive theorists* and *postmodernists*, with a number of various theorists who published an anthology - which we shall return to below - in 1990 (Kass and Catron 1990), unified by the idea to use subjectivist principles to define the field's nature and legitimacy;
- the "*Tools*" people with Salamon and colleagues (1984) as representatives; unified by a view that one must understand the working parts of the "program" set up by politicians and administrators if one wants to understand how public administration works;
- and the *New Bureaucrats* based on tradition as found in Merton and Friedrich, with more recent writers as Gerald Garvey (1993), showing how big government actually can work, open to leadership, responsive to democtatic oversight, accountable to the public interest, flexible, fluid and adaptive to change.

Stillman's heart is with the last group which sees that big government can do it right, that is, separate politics and administration and adapt to changes in political signals. He deplores the general anti-statism present in both the communitarian and postmodern ways of thinking.

We shall mainly discuss group number four. In a way, Stillman is right in linking postmodernism to phenomenology, critical theory and interpretive theory, but at the same time, the three last mentioned themes also live by themselves with no connection to postmodernism. They are not identical; they are part of the same critical discourse, but that is far too large a theme to be covered in one paper. On another count, Stillman's categories may not form quite watertight compartments - there are, for instance, links from the postmodernists to the 'original' Refounding or Blacksburg group. Several of its researchers have published within both strands of thought, a fact that was made clear in the introduction to the second book from the group (Wamsley and Wolf 1996). And in so far as one considers research organization to be of importance, one might note that there are institutional links between both groups. Furthermore, it is not easy to exclude some of the communitarians from some postmodern ideas, linked as many of them are to lines of thought like feminism and green movements, all having a mobilization of the public as common denominator. One may also challenge some of the groupings within the six categorizations, his quoting Stivers (1993) as postmodern may be questionable in so far as that book discusses societal or structural determinants for conditions of women's life in ways; these are far from Foucault's ideas of power, or Derrida's linguistic deconstructions of the contemporary world. We shall return to other theorists whom Stillman place in this category - Hummel, Harmon and Jun - and discuss their relations to postmodernism.

So there will probaly always be problems in categorizing scholarship. At this point, we shall use one particular characterization, following Rosenau (1992, 14-17), who warns against any fixed categorization of postmodernists, but nonetheless comes

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up with a quite useful distinction between *affirmative* and *skeptical* postmodernists. The skeptics are pessimistic and see fragmentation, disintegration, malaise, meaningslessness and societal chaos, Baudrillard, Heidegger and Nietzsche being examples. From that perspective which seems to dominate on the European Continent, we can expect environmental degradation, untamed capitalism and disaster to strike. The affirmative ones have a more optimistic view, and are interested in understanding processes to make things otherwise by political oppsition, social movements and the like, examples would include Baumann, Rorty and maybe Burrell. From that perspective, which is more Anglo-American, there is more hope if action is taken, and in that context, various values and their consequences if lived through become important to analyze and understand.

The skeptics typically make deconstructive and linguistic analyses of phenomena and refuse to involve themselves in a dialogue about what to do. They do not accept to have any particular "responsibility" towards the world and therefore let their analysis stand for any one to criticize it and do what they see fit. They are in the extreme cases utterly nihilistic and cannot take a stance regarding the desirability of any particular behavior, and consequently, their understanding of the individual is one of non-involvement - just be yourself. The affirmative groups do precisely the opposite: they engage themselves in discussions of how to organize, how to engage in discourse, how to understand the world around them from particular angles, typically from those who have by tradition been oppressed - because of gender, race and other circumstances. Still, the personal projects of individuals are to be respected, we are not talking about any one-voiced movement, speaking for all, nor any demand for everyone to participate at all times.

3. American Trends in Discourse

The 1990s have witnessed an increasing number of postmodern publications in American Public Administration. We are by no means talking about an all-embracing agreement to do otherwise, on the contrary, the trend is marginal in relation to the bulk of publications. But it is consistent with the postmodern critique of the social sciences and therefore deserves closer scrutiny.

The nucleus of the critique is located in a fairly small, but organized group of researchers, PATNET, the Public Administration Theory Network[1], formed in 1981 and with its first national conference in 1988. The background was a dissatisfaction with the predominance of practitioner orientation within the main organization for public administration, ASPA, the American Society for Public Administration. The group now has an annual conference in the USA, and it is expanding its activities to an intenational scale with a conference in Australia in 1999 and a planned conference in Europe in the year 2000. PATNET has its own journal, the *Journal of Administrative Theory & Praxis*, formerly the *Dialogue*, now in its 21th volume. A series of books, *Advances in Public Administration*, edited by leading

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[1]The activities of the PATNET, its conferences and journal, can be monitored from its website, http://www.isis.csuhayward.edu/alss/puad/patnet/

PATNET members, was started under the auspices of SAGE Publications, but it has been discontinued by the publishing house after five volumes. Two other journals, *Administration and Sociery*, and *American Review of Public Administration*, have been somewhat sympathetic to communicating the debates, they are edited by scholars associated with the PATNET group.

In the following subsections, about 85 articles and books from that American discourse are discussed. First we tease out the emergent themes that came in the late 1980s and early 1990s, then we focus on the postmodernism that began to get foothold in the first half of the 1990s. Third, we discuss three books from 1995 by some of the participants in the discussions on postmodernism, followed by an important conference which in 1996 took stock of the development.

In the remainder of the 1990s the discussion has continued in journals, and more books have emerged. We shall deal with them in a later section of this paper.

3.1. The emergent themes

Changes rarely come overnight, and the development towards postmodern public administration is no exception. Some roots may be found in the development of organization theory towards cultural analysis and a subsequent challenge of our general understanding of organizational phenomena. But most organizational theorists dealt with private organization or generic organization, not with public organization. Moreover, most of them were located in the business schools, and few public administration theorists - dominated as they are by political science thinking and hence an interest for top level policy-making rather than ordinary organizational life - followed what was happening there closely. An early indicator of calls for change for our understanding of organizations was Gareth Morgans book, *Images of Organization* (Morgan 1986), in which he followed contemporary trends in organizational and cultural sociology and discussed how our thinking about organization may be understood as metaphors rather than anything "real". The usual organizational metaphor is an instrumental one where we break down activities into parts, as if we were dealing with a machine; this way of thinking is typical of the bureaucratic mindset. Organization then becomes bureaucracy in most cases, and our possibilities to liberate our lives when it comes to organization thus become severely restricted. Morgan suggested that we think in terms of imagination rather than organization, to strengthen the creative side of our thinking, to break free from the past.

Morgan did not write particularly about public administration, his writing was generic to organization, but it is therefore also applicable to public organizations. Morgan's concept of imaginization became the catchword for the printed outome of the first PATNET conference in 1988, the anthology *Images and Identities of Public Administration* (Kass 1990, 10-12) - one should note, though, that several of the articles had previously been published by the *Administration and Society*. The images used were several; thus the following metaphors were used in articles dealing with the roles of public administrators in the political system if they wanted to get more legitimacy: the 'phronemos' (practical reasoner) (Morgan 1990), a member of the

'democratic elite' (Fox and Cochran 1990), the 'steward' (Kass 1990) and the 'responsible actor' (Harmon 1990). Other contributors discussed the challenges to Public Administration as a field: It should be reborn from the ashes, the 'Phoenix project' (White and McSwain 1990), it should adopt an 'unfinished democracy revolution', and it should be understood in terms of icons like the 'pyramid' (old PA) and the 'circle' (new PA) (Hummel 1990). The authors, then, were deliberately downgrading the traditional aspiration for conceptual precision followed by exact (preferably quantitative) measures to demonstrate accurately the extent and variation of the object of the research. Instead, they wanted the reader to relate to the subject of discussion, contemplate, and let the imagination wander on the basis of the impulses from the metaphors used in the text. In a wider context, a number of the authors would let a better sense of community develop based on continuous processes of dialogue, built upon and rebuilding shared senses of meaning and value, with the public administrator plaing an active role. Other authors suggest more institutionalized approaches to making the public administrator a key element in both policy-making and implementation. This is to be done by feeding the practical capabilities - phronesis - and wisdom of the public administrators into the processes, a task that goes far beyond the technical rationality and requires interpretive and critical skills (Kass 1990, 15-16).

Only one article in the anthology explicitly addressed postmodern conditions (Hummel 1990), and it had a positive image of what postmodern conditions will bring. Namely, a world of hitherto unknown possibilities, based on interaction in circles where dialogue and reflection is King, based on synthesis and coherence, rather than on the imposition of analytic and specialized solutions from the world of Modernity. A comparable radical understanding of democratic forms is present in a discussion of "full democratic rule" meaning that all adults have genuine opportunity to participate in public discussion of issues that affect the conditions of their lives and achieve outcomes consistent with their choices (Adams, et al. 1990, 228-229). The conditions discussed seem somewhat more likely to occur under high modernity, but the very active roles of the public administrator in democratic processes which permeate many other chapters are not quite in step with the normal discussions of modernity. A chapter calling for practical reasoning (White 1990) involving discussion, debate, and deliberation, directed at what we should believe and value, likewise defies the regular modern conceptions. Postmodernism is more directly present as methodology in a chapter which is based on Foucault's *episteme*, or frame of mind (White and McSwain 1990, 36), in this particular article conceptualized as the technicist episteme which controls the lives of people in a hyperpluralistic society; a condition which the authors deplore, and which has decisive postmodern features. But they are certainly not the same as those Hummel discusses. Finally, Michael Harmon (1990) analyzed what postmodernists might call a simulacrum, Forrester's British naval hero from Nelson's days, Horatio Hornblower, and his remorse from letting a seaman - his steward - escape condemnation and hanging because of a breach of discipline, by deliberately turning his back to the steward in a moment when he could jump ship and swim to his salvation. We shall return to Harmon and his ideas of responsibility later.

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Another set of roots to an understanding of the PATNET discussions may be found in a small number of articles in *Public Administration Review* in the second half of the 1980s, where interpreration and critical theory were discussed as research methods (Daneke 1994, 62). A number of those and subsequent articles were published in an anthology in 1994 (White and Adams 1994), and the editors have taken stock in an introductory article (White and Adams 1994). They were careful not to turn down traditional positive PA-research completely, while they called for more analysis based on critical and interpretive research. The "postmodern threat to knowledge" is presented as a linguistic and deconstructivist discussion, making knowledge relative. The authors agree to the need for narrative, but refuse to be relative because there is a need for "types of knowledge that lend some degree of stability to our natural and social existence" (White and Adams 1994, 16); they prefer Habermas and his more modernistic view. In so far as narration is a fundamental epistemological category - and here the authors lean themselves towards Jameson (1981) - knowledge in whatever form within PA is narrative, and all forms of knowledge hence deserve equal status within theory building, but this must then be guided by interpretive and critical reason.

> "A profession that limits its chief concerns to the degree of scientific rigor of its research is too narrow" (White and Adams 1994, 21).

These roots, then, were linked to postmodernism and its critique in terms of how research should be done, but without any wholesale acceptance by those who discussed it. They were receptive towards change, but not willing to become postmodernists in their research, and first of all, they turned relativism down. In terms of institutional links, it is noteworthy that the articles were drawn from *Public Administration Review*, a mainstream journal, and the book was sponsored by the American Society for Public Administration which publishes *PAR*. Nonetheless, many may see it as quite an accomplishment to be able to collect so much opposition to mainstream research and have it sponsored by the mainstream professional organization. But of course, a number of possible voices are not heard in the volume.

3.2. Towards postmodern analysis

It seem, then, that these two books, reflecting research from the late 1980s and early 1990s and approaching postmodernistic analysis, were not genuinely postmodern in their approaches. They discussed themes relevant to postmodernism, like social developments towards fragmentation and empowerment, but apart from the exceptions mentioned above, they made no full step towards postmodern analysis. There are, however, a few examples of postmodern analysis which were published in the early 1990s. They are found scattered in various journals, and we turn to some of those to follow the paths towards a major discussion that took place in the Mid-1990s.

Hummel (1989, 179-180) was one of the first theorists to use the phrase "postmodern" about public administration conditions; he did not define the concept, but indicated the meaning by a number of claims: that one must favor

regulative policing instead of direct management; let private contractors take care of the growth of public tasks; trust citizens, not administrators; pursue effectiveness rather than efficiency; use top-down controls by administrators and bottom-up knowledge of the employees at the same time; cut back and still keep quality. This would de-emphasize the use of the federal administration for social equity, social justice and similar traditional concerns, and the actual creation of policy contents would tend to become privatized. Hence, no public insight into policy concerns, and little active use of the 'public inerest'; it would be a question of whether the concept of *public* administration could survive; ultimately, the Republic would be at risk (Hummel 1989, 190). Those conditions were to seome degree the results of Reagan and Bush administrations, conditions which Hummel clearly did not condone.

Linda Dennard shares the prize for being first with Hummel by in 1989 publishing a hilarious, small piece on "The Three Bears and Goldilocks meet Burrell and Morgan" (Dennard 1989), where a postmodern perspective, disguised as "Radical Humanist Paradigm" was put on the adventurous Goldilocks, who

> "was wandering in a dark and solemn woods on a journey of self-discovery. Tired and despairing from the vacuous ethos of technicist society, she lay down to rest ..." (Dennard 1989, 385).

This perspective is contrasted with three others from modernity, of which one is the functionalist paradigm, according to which

> "at 0600 hours, Goldilocks strayed from her Triple A Travel Agenda and got lost in the woods. She set her digital compass for North ..." (Dennard 1989, 384).

At the time of publication of *Images and Identities* Gary Marshall (who did not publish in it) and Orion White (who did) published a co-authored article which they claimed to be the first one to introduce postmodernism (as a method) to the American PA community as such (Marshall and White 1990). It was a deconstruction of the Blacksburg Manifesto (which White had co-authored), seeing the paradigm of the Manifesto as a

> "constitutionally grounded agency, sensitive to regime values, as expressed in Supreme Court decisions and in American sociopolitical traditions, that interacts with its environment (including the public) using a specific dialogue to create a community of meaning, a 'common sense' in the high sense of the term, in which the public interest, as a guiding light to administrative action, can be found" (Marshall and White 1990, 63).

The authors see the manifesto as a reaction to the market metaphor dominating PA in the 1980s, and they understand it as taking an interpretivist approach to language. This meaning that social processes are vehicles of language; any utterance is open for situational interpretation, as opposed to legal positivism which dominates the functional understanding of language. In a Kuhnian sense, the

manifesto creates a common language, a *lingua franca*, that contains shared meanings and institutionalize our answers to issues. The public interest is then created within this framework in a Socratarian process where the process creates the meaning, not so far from Habermas' ideal speech situation. But when one deconstructs the Manifesto, the underlying understandings are brought to the fore, and one seeks the opposites of what is discussed in the text. The aim is to reveal their non-irreducibility; and the result then is that the Manifesto is on the one hand advocating for the agency, but having within it nonetheless its opposite, the market, in the process view (Marshall and White 1990, 73). By modern standards, such a conclusion - that the continuance of the agency is actually dependent on a type of market - would be ironic; by postmodern standards, it shows that the Manifesto is just yet another discourse which must be carried out.

The authors might have made a stronger point about the lack of particular truth claims in a postmodern discourse, and therefore, binaries like the "state/market" are not really accepted. They co-exist, whereas under modern conditions they are opposites, trying to dominate one another.

Jay White, one of the editors of the 1994 book on *Research in Public Administration*, had an article in the 1990 *Images and Identities*, calling for practical discourse as an alternative to the rational decision-making model. This meant using dialogue among decision makers about the rightness of the ends to be sought and the means to achieve them, and thus he approached Habermas' reflexive learning, requiring

> "discussion of beliefs and values, which ultimately results in their acceptance or rejection based on argumentation" (White 1990, 148).

This distancing from the absolute and top-down rational understanding of the world was further elaborated in two articles in 1992. One dealt with narrative analysis (White 1992), which had a less determined criticism that the 1994 article, and tended to approve of theory as a relative thing: Truth in research is one of consensus.

> "Facts are nothing more than well-established concepts that a community of scientists agree to; theories are networks of linguistic propositions that purport to describe ... events; theories are a collection of concepts linked in some inductive, deductive, or circular logical relationship" (White 1992, 80).

He followed poststructuralism, which denies the invariant relationship between signified and signifier, prescribes relativism and thus denies the particular truth value of knowledge, but not knowledge in itself. Following E D Hirsch and Piaget, White presents "corrigible schemata" which form a basis for interpretation until proven wrong, and thus opens for the possibility to deliberate the meaning of a text (White 1992, 78-79). He acknowledges the narrative turn; knowledge is based on stories (Jameson), all we know is dressed in some sort of narrative, but White does not support Lyotard's view that there must be differences in understanding; the task for the researcher is to do an interpretation in the sense that the reader puts himself in the chair of the writer. Beyond that, the researcher can apply critical

analysis, meaning that the reader uses value judgments to indicate what the text may mean for different audiences, i.e. what its significance is.

A second article (White, 1992) basically underscores those points, it was a more general presentation of postpositivism, poststructuralism and postmodernism. Postpositivism underscores that facts as givens are replaced by facts reached by consensus; practical discourse may be a scientific vehicle to obtain consensus, by argumentation, deliberation, persuasion, imagination, interpretation and the use of open criteria for what constitutes a good theory, and narratives may be used in their context. Poststructuralism places language as a less precise instrument for research than most modernistic researchers would feel comfortable with. Postmodernism, finally, sees science as just another sort of narrative and thus gives it no privilege. The implications for Public Administration may be quite great: No knowledge has a particular privileged stance. Furthermore, narrative analysis becomes important: research results should be disseminated as part of stories, and such stories would serve the purpose of interpretation and critique - as one has already seen by the use of cases, descriptions, interpretations. There was, however, a need for more discussions of methodology to serve those purposes (White 1992, 172-174).

Other researchers discussed the uses of language in public administration. Charles Fox published a diuscussion of the uses of concepts, in his case professionalism, in a fixed or in a (re)interpretative sense (Fox 1992). He recommends uses of language in the Wittgensteinian sense: the meaning of words cannot be understood outside of the contexts in which they are used - that is, a relativistic stance. Consequently, he does not accept the sociological normal definition of (objective) elements of professionalism like technical skills, level of training, tests of competence, associations, codes of conduct and sense of public responsibility (Fox 1992, 3-4). Instead, it is suggested that the dynamism of words and their antonyms may better grasp the possibilities of "professionalism". Examples of such pairs are professionalism/laity; professional/amateur; professionalism as achievement/ascription and finally, class or working position versus other classes. (13) Thus, Fox can offer an ideal of a calling, as a serious endeavor with a performance ethic, a drive to achieve, being autonomous and still perform an exercise of (public) power. Elitism and paternalism are then excluded, and it it not possible to exclude the non-knowing, to follow personal greed, and to do service to economic power and the protection of guild interests.

Shortly after, and in a similar vein, Orion White and Cynthia McSwain (1993) gave a strong push towards relativism, by discussing the possible uses of semiotics and the postmodern understanding of the world in public administration. The emphatically stressed that they did not want to sell semiotics, they just wanted the reader to think it over. Their trouble with Public Administration, as it had developed in the US, was its tendency to develop the Big-T-truth understanding where the experts know the answers to the problems of the community; the authors maintained that only where there is mutuality can there be community and hence democracy.

"Where there is a belief in Truth, there can be no community" (White and McSwain 1993, 24).

In their description of semiotics, they depart from Saussure, Jakobson and Chomsky; language is not to be understood in a diachronic way, but as synchronic and basically self-referential. They supported the way Derrida has carried the message further and makes the text also unstable; they saw deconstruction as an important device where

"meaning is entirely emergent from a floating, shifting rhetoric, a major device of which is the posing of binary oppositions that cannot upon examination be sustained as truly in opposition" (White and McSwain 1993, 29).

Basically, they then adhere to a structuralist argument. Semiotics points to how the self is constituted by the cultural order of signification, and the cultural order maintains the sense of self that it has constituted in its subjects, making culture and identity synonymous. But if one then turns to the problem of shaping small-t-thruths, those compatible with community,

"...facts become shared purposes, something that can only be achieved in community. What stops the endless sliding of commutable signifiers and hence creates a 'fact' is a common purpose, something we want to do together." (White and McSwain 1993, 33).

This, then blows away the modern way of thinking, based on skepticism. Skeptics must believe in a way to discern true from false, and hence have fixed knowledge. Not so in the postmodern understanding.

"In the community, openness comes from true and pervasive doubt, of everything including one's own precious beliefs" (White and McSwain 1993, 33).

Consequently, there is a risk, but that risk precisely is what the community has to live through during its processual reconfirmation of being that community. In another article from 1993 (McSwain and White 1993), this view also is found; they discuss the needs for organization theory to understand the changes that are taking place under postmodern conditions. They see transformational organization theory - which does not build on the rational world view but on mutual personal development and hence cooperation rather than competition - as a temporary bridge into this new world and new consciousness. It is based on understanding the unconscious in organizational life by identifying the symbolic forces that set up the tendencies towards various patterns of action by organizational members. "Correct" action is found, then, not by specification of goals from above, but by establishing a dialogue about the situation within which the action takes place (McSwain and White 1993, 89). Problems are solved through processes of dialogue and then action, not by some inidividual setting up solutions to be implemented by the organization.

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Among postmodernists there were some that followed the linguistic path, but not in the de-centered-self tradition inspired by Derrida. An alternative was to situate the individual. In 1993 Fox and Miller (1993) published their first stab at what postmodern analysis of public administration might mean. First, postmodernism means a number of radical changes in our understanding of the world: it involves movements from centripetal to centrifugal, i.e. from centralization to fragmentation; from metanarratives toward disparate texts, i.e. from the grand theories to more or less circumstantial evidence; from commensurability and common units toward incommensurability, i.e. difference rather than likeness; from universals toward hyperpluralism, i.e. toward fragmentation instead of generalized units of analysis; from Newtonian toward Heisenberg's quantum physics, i.e. from causal theory to the unpredictable analylsis of the microcosmos, where the intervention of the researcher is felt (Fox and Miller 1993, 5-6). The analytical interest is on interpretative analysis of the world conceived as texts in a broad sense; in terms of understanding people within public administration, this requires sincere and authentic face-to-face communication, "Authentic Discourse", more or less in a Habermasian way (see below, Fox 1993). Postmodern trends in society, particularly new ways of symbolic policies, may threaten this and produce more insincere discussion where the trust of participants is betrayed (Fox and Miller 1993, 12-14). In other words, the authors fear the social consequences of postmodern trends, but at the same time take postmodern trends in the research community sincerely, and point to ways of circumventing those consequences of postmodern conditions that are adverse, particularly to people with few personal resources.

Later that year, Charles Fox (1993), published a discussion from a manuscript by him and Miller (see below) of discourse theory as a means to better analysis of public administration. He criticized two other alternatives. *Constitutionalism*, so important in the Blacksburg Manifesto, understands the administrative state as a major instrument to fulfill the principles of the constitution; Fox perceives such an approach as too linked to elements of a closed system that may not be in a position to answer to contemporary problems, a closed system which should be disintegrated in order to allow for

> "overlapping sets of phenomenological practices of varying degrees of stability and ... relevance, merit and validity ... to account for the influence of instituional and cultural sediments on behavior, while avoiding reifying particular formal institutions". (Fox 1993, 58)

Communitarianism is the other alternative, with roots to the ancient polis of Greece and the New England town, with the active citizen and the town meeting as ideal core, combined with citizen action based on practical wisdom - the pragmatic American view. Fox, however, has serious doubts that a community can always be as benign and just vis-a-vis minorities as presupposed; he questions whether citizens are as active as desired, and that involvement may be based on self-fulfillment rather than community goals. The result is

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> "a democracy that is for the people but not of and by the people. ... the best democracy we can get in our postmodern mass consumer society is a discourse of the non-apathetic, of those citizens whose warrant for entry is political intentionality ... I do not regard this solution as the ideally best one" (Fox 1993, 62)

The solution, then, to the problems of understanding the role of public administration in society is *discourse analysis*. First, Habermas is used to define an ideal policy discourse, based on essentially equal participants in a dialogue that is authentic, i.e. based on reasonableness, to be justified by the thus active subject, who is supposed to give a substantive contribution to the discourse. The particular stance then is that those who are apathetic simply do not qualify for participation because they are not *serious* participants.

> "Sincere desire gets you in, attentiveness and contribution keeps you in". (Fox 1993, 66)

The immediate consequences of the approach were that policy networks would become the focus of the analysis (the discourses would be related to various policy issues), and that democratic theory would be satisfied in terms of free participation for any one with no one having a special say. Therefore there would be no particular elite that could dominate the discourse.

In a separate publication the same year, Hugh Miller (Miller 1993) had argued for a more active role for the administrator in a political system whose voting system tended to discourage the politicians from attending to the general public interest and instead favor particular voter interests. The key to the process would be a discourse, much along the lines suggested by some authors in the 1990 anthology on *Images and Identities*. In accordance with the linguistic turn in policy analysis by theorists like Frank Fischer (1989) and Deborah Stone (1988), they were calling to attention the normative and symbolic settings for formulating policy goals. Hence,

> "the answer is not 'found' or 'discovered', but is arrived at through a discourse ... (which) is democratic to the extent that participation is not capriciously shut off to anyone willing to ante up with 'intention and attention'" (Miller 1993, 111).

Thus, Fox and Miller had prepared the attentive scientific community for some major points of their book-to come.

Relativism, however, was a theme of considerable disagreement. Mesaros and Balfour (1993) criticize Guba & Lincoln (Guba and Lincoln 1989) and other relativists claiming that 'out there' is always experienced relative to a theoretical framework, thus merging ontology and epistemology into one. Mesaros and Balfour see this as misrepresenting hermeneutic understanding. They recommend a mix of realist and hermeneutic understanding. Based on Gadamer, they assert that there is a constant interaction between observers and the objects they observe, and that

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> "the working-out of appropriate projects, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed by 'the things themselves', it the constant task of understanding" (Mesaros and Balfour 1993, 28).

Thus we meet a reality, which is different from Guba's idea that realities only exist in respondents' mind. Using Heidegger, they claim that relativity relates to meanings of individuals based on their interests, not the world as such. Realism, i.e. a paradigm criticizing positivism, uses critical theory, phenomenology and hermeneutics to understand a social reality, and still understands the roles of perspectives.

Another theorist taking a linguistic and relativistic turn is David John Farmer, who published a discussion of the social construction of concepts in 1994, later reprinted (Farmer 1998). He introduces a linguistic analysis of the concept of efficiency based on semiotics and the roles of signs and signifiers, and shows how there is no one particular linguistic meaning of the term. Rather it varies with the purpose of the author or agancy behind a report, as in the discussions led by the OECD, Reinventing Government campaign etc. Furthermore, there is a latent meaning that one cannot escape, but which is rarely addressed, like the link to Protestant values (Calvinism), modernism and capitalism. One thing, then, is the face value of the concept based on the matter-of-fact definitions of it. Another thing is what one may call the myth operating beyond the control of the actors. Finally, Farmer sees the concept of efficiency as one only having privilege in a society that emphasizes control. This means that for postmodernists with their fragmented views on society, it is not important; for modernists, who strive for control based on public intervention, it is.

Richard VrMeer (1994) took issue with the Derridean understanding of deconstruction in a 1994 commentary. He saw no particular new in the Postmodernism criticism of traditional social science, in his opinion critical theory has done most of that, too, and furthermore, postmodernists are chasing scapegoats: very few, if any, have the old positivistic understanding today. Secondly, he criticized what he sees as an reification of language, particularly in the metaphor as used by Gareth Morgan; it is a problem to transfer meaning by metaphors in language use. It may lead to

> "serious ontological errors by shear mis-taken-ness as we presuppose a reality behind any expressible transference between terms" (VrMeer 1994, 89).

Finally, he saw a passivity in Postmodernism because of its understanding of the decentered self; he saw the link between knowledge and conscious action as the interesting and challenging aspect of organizational analysis. Language in itself would have no ontological roots, analyzing speech acts would be an empty process. The inidividual self had to be present.

In an article later the same year (Jun 1994), Jong Jun echoed that concern, without confronting postmodernism directly:

> "Praxis (...) forces our attention back on the importance of continuously reconstructing organizational reality through a reflexive evaluation of goals, norms, structure, and strategies, as emphasized in a learning theory of Chris Argyris and Donald Schön" (Jun 1994, 205).

Thus he called for socio-phenomenological research based on socially constructed knowledge, studying praxis from the subject's point of view.

In sum, the debates on various sides of public administration in the early 1990s had placed emphasis on the nature of postmodern conditions, i.e. the question of social constructivism in research, both in terms of understanding the institutions in play, and in terms of the language used in any analysis. There was no agreement on the role of the individual, so there were basically two roads laid out by the debate: analyzing the speech acts (or "the text"), or analyzing purposeful action.

3.3. Three Books over the counter

As indicated above, two books on postmodern public administration were on their way for some time, and they were published in 1995: Fox & Miller's *Postmodern Public Administration* (Fox and Miller 1995), and Farmer's *Language of Public Administration* (Farmer 1995). In addition, Michael Harmon published a book on responsibility in a critical vein towards modernity and its understandings. We shall deal with them in that order.

Some of Fox/Miller's central ideas have been presented above: Their refutation of several schools of thought on American Public Administration and the need for discourse theory; the need for analysis based on interactive networks, and the model for authentic discourse than leads to their understanding of the active citizen as a worthy agent in public affairs.

The basic premise of the book (Fox and Miller 1995) is a dissatisfaction with the actual working of the basic model of Western democracy, the "loop model". This is in essence the input-output-feedback understanding of democratic decision-making, with its connotations of dividing lines between politics and administration, and the idea of the neutral public employee that lets the politicians deal with citizens and then faithfully executes the political decisions. Citizens' informed choices are exerted through voting; dissatisfaction with incumbents of political office will mean replacement by a competing candidate by next election. This understanding of the political process is out of step with reality, Fox & Miller maintain, and attempts by both the "Blacksburg manifesto" (Wamsley, et al. 1990) group and the communitarians (Cooper 1987) deserve praise, but do not radically enough change the premises for democracy. Fox and Miller's alternative is authentic and sincere discourse, which we presented above.

The real challenges, however, Fox & Miller find in the trends towards postmodern conditions in society: words, signs and symbols are increasingly unlikely to mean anything solid or lasting. We see media-induced consumerism, we watch the thwarting of political dialogue into one-way "political figure" utterances and increasing closure of politics into self-referential, introverted groups - a "neo-tribal" fragmentation of society. The self-conscious enlightened individual is transformed into a decentered self, identified maybe mainly by external symbols like the Nike running shoes and your favorite brand of pop soda. Such conditions are not promising for democracy, and to quote one major problem:

> "When community is reduced to a series of otherwise atomized individuals brought together usually by the coincidence of their comsumptive activity, the community does not develop political skills ... meetinggoers are not participants" (Fox and Miller 1995, 69).

"Meetinggoers" are quiet observers that do not get involved. The possible solution Fox and Miller see is based on the original Habermas, calling for interassociation democracy in the form it seems to be developing in "extrabureaucratic policy networks and other formations" (Fox and Miller 1995, 75). Participation in authentic discourse would require "warrants for discourse", meaning that one has to involve oneself with sincerity (creating trust), and intentionality in the situation (creating orientation towards solving a problem at hand). Furthermore, one must be attentive (creating engagement, but also the ability to listen), and give a substantive contribution (creating a sense that the process is going forward) (Fox and Miller 1995, 120-127). These are normative demands, expressing the authors' hope that there is, even under postmodern conditions, a possibility to sustain a democratic system of governance, requiring increased levels of direct citizen participation in public affairs.

So, to overcome the problems of postmodern conditions that "deprives the culture at large of any robust basis in shared reality" one must base decisions on the local realities that can be created by local warrants for discourse. Fox & Miller do not claim that this will create panacea, and they do understand that those who willingly do not pay attention have no legitimate demands on the contents of public affairs.

An observer might draw the conclusion that while Fox and Miller recognize and criticize the postmodern trends, their solution to the problems is hardly rooted in postmodern theory, it is more like the demands set up by the original modernists to the functioning of civil society. But those reformers probably had a solid understanding of the duties of the enlightened elite to care for the rest of the society. Under postmodern and fragmented conditions, quite a few, the weakest in economic and social terms, may fall through and hence not get the attention they need in their capacity of being weak. One may wonder whether this is an acceptable situation from Fox & Miller's perspective.

Except for the article above, David John Farmer's ideas had not been circulated much in print before the book came out. It is long (300 pages), complex, rich in contents and cannot easily be summarized. We shall only draw upon a few of its

features, those most relevant to identify Farmer's own approach to the analysis of public administration. The basic approach is described as follows:

> "Reflexive interpretation is concerned with why we see (understand) what we are seeing (understanding) and with the possibilities for seeing (understanding) something different by changing the lens" (Farmer 1995, 13)

The link to deconstruction - by changing the lens - should be obvious. And like Derrida, everything is seen as "text". The direct elements of analysis are our languages as instruments for our understanding of public administration phenomena, and the analysis is reflexive in that it is focused on the lens(es) used for our interpretation rather than the objects we are interpreting. It follows that those objects cannot be but social constructions constituted through uses of language. The interpreter acribes various prereqisites for the interpretation, perspectives that determine what can and what cannot be part of the analysis. The perspective may come from Frederick Taylor; then the observer would see activities through a lens of administrative efficiency. An observer from the school of "New Public Administration", on the other hand, would look for relevance, equity, fairness of representation (Farmer 1995, 17).

Farmer, then, is not concerned with the physical appearance of public administration, its decisions, its organizational structure, the number of classes of employees etc. as such. The object of the discussion is public administration theory. Farmer is interested in how we understand what is going on in public administration as interpreted through administrative theory. He aims at developing understandings below the surface level by using a hermeneutic circle, i.e. a forward-and-back series of iterations of interpretations, starting with a general hypothesis which directs attention to parrticular features of public administration theory. Some features fit into the hypothesis, others do not, creating a need for another interpretation, etc. The hypothesis Farmer uses as a starting point is that modernist public administration theory shows contraries, paradoxes, in each set of its major underlying lines of development. Hence, it is limited in its capacity to understand and explain what it set out to explain.

This, in turn, is devastating to the self-understanding of modernist scientific theory, based as it is on the enlightenment and its demand for science to govern the development of the world - a unilateral understanding, and an appreciation of the one and only right solution being available. This is subject to the condition that a proper analysis has been carried out of the pros and cons of alternative lines of action. The first half of the book is devoted to a critical analysis of features of modernity, as they apply to theories of public administration: how specialization limits the perspectives to something quite national-American and narrow; how aspirations for scientific status hamper an understanding of values linked to administrative practice; how desires for technoligical advancements in the direction of social engineering neglect necessary information of a political, sociological and economic kind; how attempts to use methodologically individualistic or public choice based theories lead to false understandings of public sector problematics,

and, finally, how even hermeneutic (modernist) approaches to public administration create contraries and thus lose the privileged status for truth they pursue.

Farmer does not accept any one-sided definition of the nature of postmodernity, but a reliance on skepticism, "properly understood" (Farmer 1995, chap 9). It concerns a comprehensive series of negations of hitherto accepted understandings of the (modern) world, denying: the centered subject, the foundationalist and epistemological project, the nature and role of reason, macrotheory, grand narratives, macropolitics, and the distiniciton between reality and appearance. This has consequences for the way research may be carried out: instead of getting research results, we get extended discourse, open to continuing processes of deconstruction. Compared with modernity, the status of researchers, and particularly theorists, is severely degraded (at least as perceived by a modern theorist); there is no longer a privileged position for any form of science.

For Farmer, postmodern analysis means the understanding of four analytical elements which may only be hinted at in this paper. Imaginization was one of the first concepts (as we learned from Morgan (1986), referred to above), and it is for postmodern analysis what rationalization is for modern analysis. It means that one thinks of possibilities in a wide range (where modernity would tend to reduce possibilities to the "doable"); imaginization is placed between perception and intellect, and is used to transform impressions into thought. Thereby, particulars are becoming important, instead of the generalizing trends by modern subsumption of any activity under a rule. Deconstruction, the second element, is a pervasive way of approaching an understanding of phenomena, it is not restricted to being an analytical method or a critique. It is a way of appreciating texts under particular circumstances with an aim to dismantle received views of what that text stands for. The third element, deterritorialization, means that modern understandings of representation are negated; postmodernity means the end of the logocentric metaphysics of presence. This is where the social constructivist understanding of research activities becomes important; the realization that not much may be understood by itself, but only as part of an human interaction about understandings of the phenomenon. Finally, alterity means a moral stance that counterweighs the standard bureaucratic-efficiency understanding of public administration, an anti-administration stance in Farmer's terms, reducing authority and helping service-orientation. There is not only one way of understanding, diversity must be furthered; thus there would be no category of "woman", but a white, Jewish, middleclass, a lesbian, a socialist, a mother; all calling for a particularized understanding of their circumstances.

So, what David Farmer does, is actually a clever deconstruction of public administration as we know it, and thereby invites us to rethink the whole discipline; a challenge most public administration theorists probably would shy away from, because they are forced to speak about it in concrete terms in their daily lecturing and coaching of students.

As we saw above, Michael Harmon had published his 1990-article on responsibility with a simulacrum, Hornblower, as the illustrative component in *Images and Identities*

(Harmon 1990). His book (Harmon 1995) dealt with the same topic in a much more detailed analysis. The basic argument focuses on the consequences of rationalist thinking about how to realize responsible government. The rationalists - basing their thinking on the premises of modernity with its market capitalism, representative democracy and bureaucratic organizations of control - argue that reponsible action is synonomous with legally correct action. But in spite of this seemingly clear understanding, their idea of responsibility connotes multiple and conflicting meanings, rendering it inhererently paradoxical. Harmon elaborates three paradoxes, corresponding to three basic understandings of the term of responsibility (Harmon 1995, 8-10). Rationalism splits the meaning of obligation and freedom and creates the paradox of *obligation* which attenuates individuals, who are bound to obey superiors within the rules of the contract set up with them, from being essentially free. The paradox of *agency* comes on the one hand, from an overassertion (by conservatives) of the role of the individual in terms of guilt, and hence a neglect of the role of collectivities in the relations that must come up when some one is held accountable. On the other hand, to hold collectivities solely responsible for the conduct of individuals (a liberal reaction) is creating nothing but victimization. Rationalism finally creates the third paradox of *accountability* by splitting personal responsibility and political authority into two spheres, hence making them incompatible.

Paradoxes cannot be solved, but one can learn to live with them. Harmon has a common way of discussing the three rationalistic paradoxes, namely by pointing to what happens if one understands social life as a dynamic interaction, and thus stops pondering a paradox as an insurmountable mountain and instead pursues a pragmatic way of action. For instance, insight into the creation of interests and obligations as mutual processes answers the paradox of obligation. Taking personal agency and moral answerability as being in dialectical relations with one another ameliorates the paradox of agency. Combining the authority of public servants with a role of facilitating practices of citizens and fellow public servants eases the paradox of accountability. In other words, Harmon introduces the skeleton of a social constructivist approach to the problems he confronts. However, he stays with the sketch and does not pursue a relativist course further. He links the resolution of paradoxes to *practical action*, claiming that practical action in the face of paradox is

> "to reject any strict distinction between the factual and the moral. Factual understandings of social life always presuppose categories of moral appraisal, while moral judgment is inevitably limited, but also enabled, by factual assessmend of their meaning and their likely auccess or failure" (Harmon 1995, 205).

Harmon thus recommends reasoned action to be considered above principled, abstract thinking. As examples from the world of public administration he discusses some instruments of administrative reform. For example, one may decentralize powers to create more flexible contexts for creatively resolving differences - rather than creating small organizations to be able to pinpoint whom to blame, if necessary. Likewise, administrative discretion would be understood as an

engagement in mutual interpretation and mutual responding - rather than seen as action by autonomous individuals enlightened by rights and duties.

Philosophically, this line of reasoning is pragmatic in character, and there are some signs of relativism or at least denounciations of universal, abstract principles. Still, it is not a postmodern text. The understanding of a common good and the necessity for community is too strong, and makes the text a sophisticated, modern analysis - the uses of a simulacrum, Horatio Hornblower, notwithstanding.

These three books, then, from members of the PATNET group, indicated the range of modernism/postmodernism within the group. On a scale from the most to the least degree of postmodernism, Farmer has the most, Harmon the least, and Fox/Miller are somewhere in between.

3.4. Clarification of standpoints

From the standpoint of discourse, a climax was reached at the 1996 PATNET conference in Savannah, when a panel of theorists: Adrian Carr, David John Farmer, Charles Fox, Charles Goodsell, Ralph Hummel, Gary Marshall, Hugh Miller, Cynthia McSwain & Orion White (the "McSwites") discussed "What is real". Carr (Australian), Goodsell and Hummel were those most skeptical towards postmodernism. The discussion took place on the basis of papers they had circulated among one another before the meeting. The papers and discussions were published in *Administrative Theory and Praxis* no 1, 1996, as a symposium. There are so many lines of argument and threads of thought that one cannot possibly in a short paper do them full justice, the points below cover only parts of the comprehensive themes of the discussion, and they put the spotlight on the postmodernist views.

Those of the participants who addressed conditions in contemporary society were mostly in agreement that there are changes taking place which deserve attention from researchers in public administration, and that the responses cannot just be based on "more of the same". Ralph Hummel, reversing his positive understanding of Postmodernism from *Images* of 1990 - expressed this, with some degree of irony, in terms of two metaphors: The shape of post-modern public administration is a pyramid, striving for monopoly of force. However, it is situated behind a multitude of circles, which are individuals or temporary groups of 'mutually signifying individuals' (*Symposium*, 94). In other words, it is difficult to enforce decisions in any coherent way since there are many points of resistance against the traditional solutions offered by the public sector. In particular, the question was raised as to what value those public interventions would have since postmodernists see the world as not consisting of generalizable factors beyond the rather trivial. The answer of the modernist is that one must do proper analysis in order to find a proper solution. The response from the postmodernist is that since there is no privileged knowledge, that is, knowledge which is of a higher standing than other forms (the traditional claim from scientists about their knowledge), any intervention should appear as the outcome of relationships between those concerned by the

decision. Knowledge should be discussed and negotiated rather than imposed (*Symposium*, 107, 114).

The traditional modern understanding of Public administration is that it must further a common good - a difficult concept, but still a worthy one; the government is for all, not for particular groups. Postmodernists deny that there is any such thing as generalized justice á la Rawls, so they claim an openly skewed form of justice, namely one that helps the oppressed - women, minorities, the destitute, those that traditionally have had no voice in public affairs and therefore deserve particular attention from the public servants (*Symposium*, 128). The answer of the modernist is: How can postmodernists give those people a privileged place when they claim that science can no longer determine privileged knowledge (*Symposium*, 58)? The answer back would probably be that one has to make a choice of perspective, a choice than can be argued for, but not proven beyond the frame of the perspective.

In terms of analysis, the postmodernists advocated for two types of approach. Some stood up for deconstructive analysis, focusing on text as the basic entity which then can be interpreted in various ways; deconstruction would mean that the underlying values become the object most sought-for; those are the ones that exist, often as opposites to the object of the text itself. For other postmodernists, constructivism is the basis for analysis; from phenomenology one can take the intentional and active body-subject, an individual, but not the lonely rational actor, rather one with a lifeworld. Such an actor, however, is in a world of social construction and hence has no privileged position vis-a-vis other people, their actions then are understood in processes of Giddens' recursive practices of structuration. Constructivism then is used to attack, first, "absolutes" of grand theorizing, second, reductionism and "small truths", i.e. claims that are not put into perspective, and third, reifications or atttempts at making concepts real (*Symposium*, 103-105). Both deconstructivists and constructivists might be unified by the 'epistemology of doubt' (*Symposium*, 114) which would deny the public agency the right to solely, and "based on facts" determine what is right, and what is wrong to do. Instead, solutions must come, based on interaction between those the decisions on the issue will affect.

If one should summarize the modern critique, the main points would be that of paradoxes (which some of the postmodernists probably would happily accept!): Why denounce modern logic when postmodernists themselves debate in a similar logical way. Why let the less fortune and destitute come in focus of moral concerns if one is not allowed to determine privilege on the basis of analysis. And why are postmodernists in a privileged position to criticize Enlightenment if no one in their opinion should have a privileged positition (*Symposium*, 59)? Furthermore, a criticism was voiced from the standpoint that postmodernists appear as cynicists that do not involve themselves in anything. If one look at the good administrator, s/he is one of personal involvement, in that sense s/he is a person of passion (*Symposium*, 98); a divergence, one should note, from Weber's understanding of the modern administrator.

4. To be continued...

The development of the field after the 1996 PATNET *symposium* shows no stalemate, on the contrary. In this section, we shall relate a selection of those publications to five subjects. Important themes were social constructivism versus foundationalism; pragmatism, practical discourse and the meaning of practice and praxis (community of meaning); hermeneutic and interpretivist analysis linked to a revival of critical theory; deconstruction, language and narrative analysis; and possibilities within the "new science" based on the principles of quantum physics.

This section mainly treats topics of meta-science. In the last section we discuss various applications to public administration themes.

4.1. Social constructivism and foundationalism

The basic theme in the discussions on social constructivism versus foundationalism concerns the stances on objective knowledge: Is it possible to go along the classic Durkheimian (1965) line and measure social facts, preferably in a quantitative fashion and as something being there unrelated to the observer, or may we only understand the world around us as an ongoing discussion of our subjective perceptions of social conditions, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) contend?

An article by Geuras and Garofolo (1996) criticized the "subjectivist" theorists in public administration for not being able to state the ethical basis for the values they insist practitioners must apply to be able to make their decisions. The authors ventured to bundle Jay White, Michael Harmon, Richard Box and Fox & Miller with Marcuse, Habermas, Denhardt, Lyotard and Jameson in a group whose members all would subscribe to a subjective perspective for public administration theory. And by doing so, they maintain, it is not possible to establish an ethical basis for judging, say, abortion. Harmon is quoted for avoiding to "identify standards for proper conduct for public servants". White is taken to task for raising no concerns in his discussion of Lyotard's "sense of loss and meaninglessness". Fox and Miller are seen as presenting modernism as having comparatively some advantages, yet "with all its flaws, we must wonder why postmodernism is more appealing" (which is what the authors derive from Fox & Miller's discussion), and

> "we need to wonder why, even in postmodern circumstances, it is not possible ... to adhere to a set of fundamental moral principles that, we believe, transcend neotribalism, subcultures, and hyperreality" (Geuras and Garofolo 1996, 9)

As an alternative, the authors recommended reliance on Kant, whose "first principle is the self-evident law of non-contradiction to which all rational beings must adhere".

Some of those who were thus criticized did not take the criticism lightly, they responded in the ensuing issue of *Administrative Theory & Praxis*. The rejoinders were quite harsh, suggesting that Geuras and Garofolo misread those they

criticized, and that they criticized at a petty level - "Philosophy 101", (Kouzmin and Leivesley 1997, 97), "they repeatedly present only caricatures", (Harmon 1997, 16).

Michael Harmon's elaborate rejoinder probably best indicates the hard core of the differences between the parties. He stated that being a subjectivist does not mean that one accepts to reduce judgmental values to some individual, 'emotivist' preferences and that

> "it is this misinterpretation ... that leads ... to the unwarranted conclusion that all forms of subjectivism must necessarily regard arbitrary individual preferences as the only conceivable alternative to a universalistic ethics" (Harmon 1997, 5)

That said, Harmon presents an elaborate discussion to show that the alternative proposed by Geuras and Garofolo - using Kant's first principle quoted above - is neither self-evident nor rational. In essence, any virtue can become a vice if it is taken to excess and that same virtue may compete with another, equally good one. Many moral choices are not made between an obvious good versus an equally clear bad, they often are made between contradictory impulses, and the tension between opposing principles is impossible to eliminate or resolve by using a higher order principle, a universal moral truth. Such problematic situations are what Harmon (1995) discussed as paradoxes, using Hornblower as an example, concluding that there is no single rational solution to the problem. Therefore, morality is a question of process rather than any absolute value, it is a relationship, and it consists of the sentiment, feeling, or impulse of being *for* the Other; morality is an act or process of self-constitution. The morality of ends, then, is dependent on the morality of process, i.e. of social relationships that are meant to regenerate and maintain the social bond, which permit moral impulses of being *for* the Other to be expressed (Harmon 1997, 15-16).

The retort from Garofolo and Geuras (1997) essentially brought nothing new to the table, the disagreement as to acceptance of foundational truth simply remained.

Later that year, Morcöl (1997) linked the epistemological sides of social constructivism in research explicitly to quantum physics, and criticized the foundational theorists. First, the correspondence theory of truth claims that there is a reality existing unrelated to the observer, made up by discrete entities and events that are related to one another in a deterministic fashion. To describe those, the scientist creates words that have discrete and fixed meanings. Constructivists, on the other hand, claim that reality is cognitively and socially constructed. Second, the foundational distinction between subject and object is a prerequisite in order for an external world to exist. Constructivists reject this, claiming that there is nothing in reality that exists apart from the construing subject, and quote quantum physics that nothing can be observed without interference in its creation. Thirdly, constructivists deny the idea of discrete entities and events have exact borders; instead there are only relationships and interconnectedness of some order. Fourth, then, knowledge is a process of cognition, not a mirror of external reality, a level of

representation that is autonomous from external reality, self-organizational and maybe even self-referential.

This line of thinking was used to defend the uses of metaphors in organizational research. A metaphor

> "is a comparison between cognitive and experiential domains ... metaphorical comparisons actually transform the pictures in different cognitive domains though these comparisons and create new ones" (Morcöl 1997, 47).

and he rejected the criticism from non-constructivists that metaphors would confuse similarities for identities and similar problems.

The Blacksburg group also had developed points of view on foundationalism and written a sequel to their first book on the *manifesto*; in the introductory chapter (Wamsley and Wolf 1996, 27-32) the editors leaned towards poststructuralism as a suitable approach in an era of postmodernism; analyzing text would become important to uncover social relationships and then deconstruct the context. They thus followed the trends towards denying privilege to any particular concept, and by questioning possibilities of representation, they recommended a sort of enforcement of dialogue on the participants, who were then creating a number of small t truths - i.e. localized and contingent as opposed to generalised "grand narratives" - truths. The editors used Giddens' (1984) understanding of structuration, with emphasis on agency creating meaning in an institutional context. Consequently, a focus on process - of relationships with mutual recognition by the actors - would be important, as would be discourse grounded in a shared problem, concern or goal, and carried through without manipulation.

In this anthology, the McSwites integrate Continental skepticism from Derrida with American affirmative values. They see the development towards postmodernism as a possibility rather than a constraint. In their view (McSwite 1996), and following Derrida, postmodernism means a rejection of the possibility of unambiguous representation or identity. Places change - cities lose their meaning as locus of civilization, and people become disembedded. The personal identity becomes part of an open-ended, unspecified metaphor of personal development, which is relative and thus explorable for each individual (what does gender mean for an androgynous person?). In other words, the Capital T Truths are gone, and truth(s) must be sought for the at this time relevant purpose. This means that American pragmatism in the tradition of Mary Parker Follett may reenter public administration. Thus, practical discourses are initiated, and this means new forms of involvement and relationship, "a process-based communitarian approach to governance", based on the ideas of the confederation and philosophy of pragmatism (McSwite 1996, 222).

4.2. Pragmatism

Pragmatism goes back one hundred years or so in Public Administration, and it has always been in a conflict with modernistic, scientific approaches the field. Depew and Hollinger (1995, xiv-xvii) speak of three periods of American pragmatism. The first was linked to progressivism, and on the influence of Darwinism, evolutionary theory in philosophy. The practical consequences were to push America from an unregulated forms of capitalism to more regulated versions. A second phase came when German scientists came to the US before and under WW II and challenged American positivism; they did not, however, succeed in overthrowing the rationalistic approach; things turned towards the technocratic and rationalistic for many years, probably helped by the war efforts and the development of operation analysis and other tools of social engineering. The third phase can be said to start with Kuhn, and pragmatism started to link itself more with the humanities, with Rorty as a spokesman, claiming that one cannot pursue essentialist or universalist ideas without 'blocking the road of inquiry'. Instead, one should let "a thousand flowers bloom".

McSwite, (1997, 132) see pragmatism as the true foundation of Public Administration, and they mention representatives like Dewey, Follett, Lewis, Mead, Wright Mills, Veblen and Wilson. Pragmatism may be understood an attitude toward reality and human experience, meaning that one has to be open towards continuous experimentation. The pragmatist has the understanding that reality is best apprehended through action. Fact/value, foundationalist/relativist and phenomenology/positivism dichotomies are all bypassed by the continuing testing of hypotheses by the pragmatist.

Snider (1998) discusses Mary Parker Follett as a key example of a pragmatist. The core principle of pragmatism is a

> "view of reality as indeterminant and flexible, of morality as inherent in action, of practical consequences as determining meaning, of knowledge as pluralistic and provisional (…)" (Snider 1998, 276).

Pragmatists emphasize experimentation end experience; Snider brings in some quotes by Mary Parker Follett: "People must socialize their life by experience, not by study. …. Ideas unfold *within* human experience, not by their own momentum apart from experience". Likewise: "We need then those who are frankly participant-observers, those who will try experiment after experiment and note results, experiments in making human interplay productive". Follett, then, does not recognize the functional administrator's call for ability to organize for strategy and success, lead by the top; this is the result of processes of relating, not of managing (Snider 1998, 279). Pragmatists, then, deny the principles of rational action by picturing social relationships as collaborative, grounded in joint project and joint action.

Miller and King (1998) follow the pragmatic line by challenging the dichotomy of theory and practice, launching a plea for practical theory which is a

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> "critical reflection on practice as well as imaginative reflection on possible modification of that practice" (Miller and King 1998, 58).

They see theories as instruments for transforming reality, rather than having the role of mirroring its essential and invariant features. In their review of the field, Public Adminstration has found no foundational truths to form guideposts for practitioners, the contents of the discipline defies precise measurement, generalizability across cultures, or universal truths - but theories may be used as frames for discussions to reach some contingent agreements on possibilities. Actually, there are predictable elements in social life, but not due to deductive, rationalistic theory; it is due to humans generating patterns in their daily practices. The practices are of a vague, fragile sort of predictability. Theory, then, is potential action under consideration, which may be understood from a phenomenological perspective, or as Giddens' structuration processes (Giddens 1984). What matters from that perspective, is practical discourse with practitioners who have discretion to experiment.

> "Practical theory, therefore, takes place at the tangled overlap of practitioners' thoughtful reflection on action and scholars' deconstruction and critique of recursive social life" (Miller and King 1998, 57).

The McSwites set forward similar ideas in their book from 1997 (McSwite 1997); their general idea is - as it also was expressed in the 1996 PATNET conference (*Symposium*), see above - to assume a personal posture of permanent doubt, place experimentation in a collaborative context, and then make the results the operational definition of truth. This is pragmatic social construction of reality: Our perceptions of the world are socially conditioned, and we need to state our sense of purpose in order to be able to "measure" our world, we do not perceive in limbo. That purpose, however, is not derived solely from the preferences of the individual, it is created in relationships with other people, in public administration it may be reached by pragmatic collaboration between administrators and citizens.

4.3. Hermeneutic and Interpretivist Approaches

The turn towards social constructivism and pragmatism led to stronger recommendations for the use of non-quantitative approaches in research. In some of the literature, this was discussed mainly as a means to avoid outright deference to postmodernism. Several called for more extensive use of "critical theory" rather than to follow the postmodern turn.

Jun (1997) saw the interpretive approach as helpful for administrative analysis in its focus on explaining the world from the perspective of the actor in a social situation. It forces the observer into a position of understanding of meaning, it redirects attention to relations between actors, by emphasizing the actor as an active, purposive and creative subject, and it recommends to study actions in a non deterministic (non-causal) manner from the subject's point of view. All this is researched by interpretation of human expressions, emotions, conversation, artifacts and symbols. He called attention to a critical theory perspective; public

administration analysis grounded in a critical theory perspective would be apt to discuss fundamental institutional change,

> "advocating a critical synthesis of institutional issues and human value issues, subject and object (...)" (Jun 1997, 150).

Critical theory is value-critical when applied to administrative research, and it may integrate various explanatory perspectives into a larger framework. Having Harmon's book on responsibility in mind (Harmon 1995), Jun thought that for administrators, a critical analysis would mean self-reflexivity where e.g. responsibility is actively made (through the establishing and maintaining of relationships) rather than taken or accepted.

> "The interpretive perspective reveals the problematic presuppositions of public administration, it reaches the foundation of the knowledge and the practice of public administration, where practice perpetuates processes no longer adequate to the requirements of problems" (Jun 1997, 152).

Yanow (1997) followed a comparable line and makes it relatively clear how an interpretive analysis may actually be carried out.

> "By treating clients and potential clients as active creators and interpreters of meaning in their own right, interpretive analyses conceptually restore agency to them. .... In application to policy analysis, reader-response theory leads us to look for policy meaning not in Congressional intent nor in policy language alone, but in (potential) clients' interpretations as well, thereby treating them as active participants in meaning processes" (Yanow 1997, 172-173).

Such analyses will address three questions: What meanings are at play, how are they being conveyed, and how are they being 'read'? A starting point may be to identify the communities of meaning or communities of interpretation involved and relevant to the policy issue in question. Some problems might emerge: the importance of tacit policy issue knowledge, some of which may be realized through oppositional discussions of the policy, or by 'policy silence', linked to power issues. The subject for theorizing in interpretive policy analysis then is how humans reason and act in policy contexts, possibly with multiple meanings as a result.

Zanetti and Carr (1997) made a case for applying critical theory to the analysis of public administration, particularly one should use the Frankfurt School (examples are Adorno, Habermas, Horkheimer and Marcuse); the aim would be to make agents work towards emancipation. Participatory research has roots to the Frankfurt school, and to Gramsci's ideas of a class of "organic intellectuals" to transform society, in that it empowers actors by collaboration, dialogue and education. Joining these insights into administrative analysis means that one can perceive the role of the administrator as one of mediating in a critical analysis, in a process of realizing the tensions and strains that come from contradictions, oppositions and negations.

> "In promoting reflection combined with revelation as the necessary pathway to emancipation, we are promoting critical theory and the dialectic which is an integral part of its logic. ...(it) embraces ... the historical and culturally-mediated interpretation of 'truth', a Marcusean understanding of how such a mediated interpretation bears its hallmarks in the needs, desires, and wants which become exposed, and finally, a Gramscian understanding of hegemonic consciousness as the necessary prelude to consequential hegemonic engagement" (Zanetti and Carr 1997, 220).

The call did not deviate much from the calls of the postmodernists in terms of the needs for using the puclic employees in active roles, but the political undertones were less liberalistic.

4.4. Deconstruction, Narrative and Language

In the early discussions of postmodernism in the 1990s, the linguistic turn in the social sciences was noted by several theorists. This line was strengthened by several discussants after 1996.

David Farmer had presented his concept for bureaucratic analysis in his book published in 1995, and he kept arguing for a deconstructivist approach, seeing deconstruction as particularly suited for analyzing the most central socio-political theme of postmodernism. In particular, he had an interest in the ethics of the difference which privileges marginalized and suppressed voices - minorities, women, those of policed sexualities, the economically and politically colonized (Farmer 1997, 13-14).

He edited a book on "anti-administration", published in 1998. In its introductory chapter, he characterized postmodern analysis as a liberating endeavor, aspiring towards full accomplishment of what citizenship should entail, enabling a radical 'listening to the other' - the overall idea of anti-administration is to negate the administrative-bureaucratic, rational power, and to liberate marginalized voices. (Farmer 1998, 2-5). At the core is skepticism in its philosophical sense, holding that the capacity of human minds is limited, in contrast to the philosophers of the Enlightenment who saw rationality as our savior.

A lengthy quote from another chapter of the anthology makes his purpose quite clear:

> "The play of irony is a weapon that postmodernists use in seeking liberation from the constraining effects of conceptual categories and metaphors, because they hold that failure to deconstruct texts results in human suffering. There should be no objection to a sensitive use of (say) categories in developing important 'little t truths', truths within a language or a way of life. But it is part of postmodernism's philosophical skepticism that the categories of a language do not guarantee noncontingent (or transcendental) Big T truth, the whole and complete truth about itself. Undeconstructed categories mean that we get 'facts' not quite right. .... Thruths which seem to be

interpretation-free facts are shown, through deconstruction, to depend on hidden assumptions (oppositions and metaphors) manufactured by the language used" (Farmer 1998, 42-43).

In several articles (Farmer 1997),(Farmer 1998) he demonstrated how to deconstruct bureaucratic efficiency: First, it is a social construct, dependent on how people construe it. It follows that efficiency is culture specific, and modernist - secularist, Weberian, linked to the advancement of production. Since it is not a term that is found in all cultures, it is not an objective fact, but something desired under particular circumstances, as in the discussions led by the OECD, Reinventing Government campaign etc. Third, the binarity between efficiency and inefficiency is ambiguous, e.g. it does not guarantee a just outcome. Finally, the concept of efficiency is only privileged in a society that emphasizes control; this means that for postmodernists, it is not important; for modernists, it is. The role of deconstruction, then, is to question what lies under seemingly well-established categories of the bureaucratic phenomenon.

Gillroy (1997:164-167) had a similar point of view, seeing an advantage of postmodern theory in that language does not have a timeless meaning, but reflects specific contexts. Postmodern analysis then can be used to make administrators reexamine their fundamental assumptions based on fixed paradigms and concepts, categories. The major concept of modern administration is efficiency; under postmodern conditions, alternative values like fairness, equality, utility, autonomy, may be furthered, but then they must meet the formal requirements of the modern strategy to get recognition - in the policy design phase.

(Tennert 1998) discusses the linguistic roots of theorizing from an anti-foundationalist perspective: Wittgenstein, Davidson and Rorty. Anti-foundationalism is defined on the basis of Stanley Fish:

> "that questions of fact, truth, correctness, validity and clarity can neither be posed nor answered in reference to some extracontextual, ahistorical, non-situational reality, or rule, or law, or value; rather, anti-foundationalism asserts, all of these matters are intelligible and debatable only within the precincts of the contexts or situations or paradigms or communities that give them their local and changeable shape" (Tennert 1998, 241).

His line of analysis is that sentences are only true by their relations to other sentences; language cannot be isolated from the individuals who speak them. Following Rorty, science for Tennert simply is a forum for unforced agreement, where communities test other beliefs against their own. This is ethnocentrism in the sense that we are bound to our language and our own web of beliefs; our judgment of the beliefs of others are rational or reasonable depend on our attempt to weave their beliefs into our own. So questions of "big science" drop out. The notion of praxis in public administration - i.e. theory guiding practice - drops out. Constructing general narratives of accomplishments after the fact may be thought of as recontextualization rather than as theorizing. Public administration as Science, then, is constructed as a series of language games, none of which has beforehand

greater value than others, and which can be defined and re-defined many times. The popular themes like accountability and democracy, then, become meaningless outside of a particular context and problem, one should avoid grand theorizing.

Two British observers (Bevir and Rhodes 1998) gave the following bid for a narrative analysis. A field of study such as Public Administration may be understood as a co-operative intellectual *practice*, with a *tradition* of historically produces norms, rules, conventions and standards of excellence subject to the critical debate, and a *narrative* structure and context which gives meaning to the activity of organizational analysis. Objectivity is then reached by encounters and subsequently comparisons between narratives, in field work (is it meaningful to people out there), in reconstruction processes of narratives (logic, consistence), and in processes of redefining and translating concepts, based on judgments of the community. Rules for intellectual honesty apply: taking criticism seriously; using established standards of evidence and reason, and preferring positive theories that open new avenues of exploration. Objectivity, then, is a product of local reasoning. Decentering, dilemmas and discontinuities are at the heart of anti-foundationalist social science; by giving room for individual action (within institutional constraints), by stressing the need for focusing on ways PA conceives of and responds to unsolvable features, and by underscoring that absolute generalizations may always be understood otherwise.

4.5. The new sciences and quantum theory

In management theory, the first part of the 1990s saw some initiatives based on social science implementations of Heisenberg's quantum physics (Overman 1996). This way of understanding society perceived postmodernism as a collection of ideas, mirroring conscious and unconscious dynamics of change in our society; and as an era relating to modernity, rather chaotic as so often seen in times of change. Quantum/chaos theory is emerging, and a vision is coming that

> "characterizes nature in less hostile terms than the linear, control-oriented ones perceived necessary by Descartes, Bacon, Darwin and Hobbes (suggesting) the possibility of less hostile social relationships" (Dennard 1997, 150).

As seen by Dennard, Postmodernism was not a new order, but a self-aware search for a new and more inclusive order, a transition period; to what we do not know. It would, however, be required from Postmodernists and their collaborators within the New Sciences, feminism, and multiculturalism, that collaboration would take place as a cooperative co-evolution among interdependent human beings; and the role of government, then, were to sustain processes rather than regulating them. As a social construct creating meaning, postmodernism promotes diversity; instead of denying difference or seeing it as a threat, it should be recognized as "no problem", happening, but we can go on nonetheless. Identity and the self is not fixed under postmodern conditions - as the maximizing rational choice individual under modernity; it is evolutionary in a non-linear and adaptive manner, therefore processes can evolve rather than be seen as fragmented (Dennard 1997, 159-160).

Such processes should be understood at a micro (quantum) level. Self-organizing is essential in communities, and may occur at levels that public administration is not at all geared to handle; on the contrary, such formal organization may be hurt the subtle processes of mutual adaption among people in the community.

> "Perhaps citizens do know what is best for themselves and their communities. Further, they may know best at quantum levels of human process which are only distorted by the more left-brain practices required to comply with administrative procedures". (Dennard 1997, 391).

Consequently, a nearly extreme micro-level perspective is necessary for analyzing such localized phenomena of self-organization. What this may entail, the following quote indicates:

> "In many respects, quantum administration shifts focus from structural and functional aspects to the spiritual characteristics and qualities of organizational life" (Overman 1996, 489).

And

> "Gone is the expectation of objective reality, certainty and simple causality. In its place are inter-subjectivity, uncertainty, context, many worlds and many minds, nonlocal causes, and participatory collusion". (Overman 1996, 490)

Above we discussed Morcöl's defense for metaphorical analysis. On the other hand, he did not in an ensuing metaphorical analysis find much applicability of the "new sciences" within public administration, except for quantum theory which seemed to be applicable to learning processes (Morcöl 1997, 310). In particular, there seemed to be promise in applications to complex relations between many organizations, to participatory problematics, and to situations of indeterminacy.

This was echoed by Evans (1997) who found five indicators of shifts towards the "quantum world":

- A shift from the part to the whole - the properties of the parts must be understood as dynamics of the whole;
- A shift from structure to process;
- A shift from objective to epistemic science - descriptions are not independent of the observer;
- A shift from "building" to network as metaphor of knowledge - knowledge has no fixed foundation;
- A shift from truth to approximate descriptions - the true description of any object is dependent on a web of relationships associated with concepts and models (Evans 1997, 358-359).

Some important consequences would be that the understanding of management changes from top-down control to empowerment of bottom-up processes; that

organizational structure is created by webs of relationships, not vice versa; and that strategic planning is impossible, but visualization and strategic co-evolvement with the environment is possible. In sum, the appeal lies in the rejection of linear understanding of organization and management, and its opening the possibilities for practices that evoke relationship and meaning for our collective endeavors in governance.

5. Themes for Public Administration

Public administration is a discipline closely linked to practice. This is not to say that focus must be on the practitioners in a narrow sense, like how to organize for a particular purpose, or personnel administration. A broader perspective links the actors of the public sector to wider horizons. In the American discussions on postmodernism, several societal perspectives have come out with particular strength; these are the values of public administration, public participation in decision-making, and the role of the administrator as an intermediary between local political decisions and the community. All three themes are interrelated, but we shall discuss them under separate headings.

5.1. Values in Public Administration

According to Inglehart, a high degree of economic security has led to a gradual shift from materialist values (primarily interests in economic & physical security) to postmaterialist priorities (focus on self-expression and the quality of life) in the Western societies (Inglehart 1997, 4). He offers three versions of postmodernism. One rejects modernity, its rationality, authority, technology and science, based on the Enlightenment. The second revalorizes tradition and particularly norms typically linked to the local community, albeit not old marital and sexual mores. The third version stresses the rise of new values and lifestyle with great diversity and stress on individual choice.

In all cases, postmodern values emphasize human autonomy and diversity instead of the hierarchy and conformity that are central to modernity. Inglehart (1997, chap 1) summarizes the following trends of interest particularly to politics and administration. The bureaucratic (modern) state has met its limits because it strips away spontaneity, personal likes and dislikes, individual self-expression and creativity. It has effectively coordinated many actions, but new values pay less attention to economic effectiveness and more to the quality of life; happiness is no longer equal to economic security. Social problematics have changed from the material distribution of goods (property, income, jobs) to distribution of bads which cannot easily be summarized as material (risk of nuclear technology, genetic research, environmental degradation). Since there is quite some insecurity linked to these trends, there is now in politics less faith in hierarchy, more in individualism and participation, and this is creating problems for the old political regimes.

Values have been in the focus of several great debates within the American Public Administration research community (Scott 1997), see also Marshall and Choudhury (1997). The first Minnowbrook conference in 1968 actively encouraged the

involvement of values in Public Administration programs: to get involved in welfare programs, affirmative action, ethics in government etc; in short, a client-orientation as part of the active practice of administrators. The second Minnowbrook conference in 1988 continued this normative and anti-positivist stance, stressing the interconnectedness of Public Administration - globally, biologically, economically - reducing the usefulness of a rational decision-making model, and calling for a more holistic understanding. Postmodern thoughts, however, undermine this rather rationalistic and in a sense optimistic understanding of the possibilities for equity within the field.

A major general concept that has united the field has been the public interest or the common good - understood as the general value that administrators had to adhere to. Several theorists have discussed how it fares under postmodern conditions. As we saw above, the McSwites (1996) have discussed the concept on the basis of an understanding of postmodernism as beginning with a rejection of the possibility of representation or identity; thus, cities lose their meaning as locus of civilization and people become disembedded. Under modernism, the concept of the public interest makes administrators adhere to a number of constitutive rules or values that the term reinforces. But ethical codes do not operate unambiguously, "one person's ethical act is another's evil deed". Therefore, the need for arbitration arises, but when acceptance of the arbitration processes wanes as may be the case under postmodern conditions, problems arise in this respect; the administrator oriented towards modern conditions cannot deliver the promised 'heavenly city' (McSwite 1996, 204-206).

Marshall and Choudhury (1997) discussed the Blacksburg manifesto and its understanding of the public interest. The manifesto emphasizes that the public interest is a concept that is under continuing review: experimentation rather than solutions, dialogue about ends and means, learning processes, skepticism towards grand designs, awareness of the potential of contribution from each participant, and greater attentiveness to the language of public discourse. This is high modernism. But postmodernism gives feelings of depthlessness, commodification and hyperreality; in the light of Derrida's understanding of multiple meanings of text, like these binaries regarding the public interest from the manifesto: efficiency/reflection, certainty/contingency, science/social process, facts/values, objectivity/subjectivity would in this understanding be self-referential and they cannot be taken for granted as valid; for instance, a public administrator may be understood as a guardian, a teacher, a minister, or a parent. Thus there is a crisis of identity based on ambiguity. Therefore, the manifesto's attempt at ordering the public interest in binaries above has no resonance in the fractured experiences of the public (Marshall and Choudhury 1997, 125-129). In a postmodern discourse, oppositional binaries are

> "apprehended in a compositional form by making disparate interests and identity inclusive of administrative decision. ... (one) must continually seek the concurrent application of postmodern strategies of observation and dialogue (e.g. deconstruction, ethnography, discourse analysis). Thus, public interest as a symbol is re-presented differently in light of the postmodern

experience, expressing what is unstated, suppressed, or unattended to in the traditionalist and modernist conceptualizations of the term" (Marshall and Choudhury 1997, 129).

From a less postmodern perspective, Jun (1997) discusses the uses of the public good, common good or public interest, as a concept in contemporary research as a normative concept, ambiguous and difficult to define, but it refers to the shared values and interests of citizens in a civil society. Public goods are social outputs or value realizations that people in a community wish to obtain for a common good. Following Dewey's pragmatism, Jun advocates for the public good as coming out of people's participation in the community regarding affairs that affected them, and as a political obligation, and he refutes Rorty and Derrida who separate the public and the private realm, and minimize the public space. Jun sees the possibility for a dialectical relationship between the public realm and the private, public discourse would make individuals want to realize the interests of others, and people would be able to identify their commonalities.

Several echo this stance in different ways. Ventriss (1998) criticizes postmodern approaches for neglecting any basic understanding of substantial values like human rights, justice, and equity; these should not be regarded merely as metanarratives serving a particular constellation of power. Ventriss looks for "islands of freedom", where we can resist the demand for action according to the (modernistic) functional needs, and instead being able to practice our capabilities for initiatory, agonistic action and spontaneous independent judgement (Ventriss 1998, 98). Likewise, Morgan (1996) takes issue with postmodern ideas like Fox & Miller (1995), arguing that

> "the constitutional legacy provides the foundation on which all meaningful public administration discourse, theory and practice must rest" (Morgan 1996, 42).

Here, he is close to the Blacksburg manifesto. In his opinion, the devolution of government to state & local governments and to private and non-profit sectors will not reduce the need for administrative action and involvement, and the role will be to uphold constitutional values in the new institutional patterns of action. In the process of institution-building in new ways the individual administrator will play a stronger role; particularly under postmodern conditions where time, interest and level of commitment to governance has waned, or taken an oppositional stance.

Gillroy (1997:164) sees an advantage of postmodern theory in that language does not have a timeless meaning, but reflects specific contexts. Postmodernism then can be used to make administrators reexamine their fundamental assumptions based on fixed paradigms and concepts, categories. But still, the major concept of modern administration is efficiency; under postmodern conditions, alternative values like fairness, equality, utility, autonomy, may be furthered, but then they must meet the formal requirements of the modern strategy to get recognition. This may be particularly important in the policy design phase, and this requires an

understanding of how to create a "Comprehensive Policy Argument" to further alternative ideas, a demanding task.

Orosz (1998) discusses the marginalization of certain voices, particularly those doing non-mainstream research. (173) The case in point is one of using focus groups in research on administrative praxis, from a critical theory and action research perspective. There is interest in whether praxis is meaningful to theory, but dialogue about "critical theory praxis (the doing of critical, feminist and postmodern research) is less so. What to do if one is thus ignored? One may write a 'resistance narrative' which relates the topic one wants to purvey to some (discipline, mainstream) which has already legitimacy, but in such a way that it is explained why this story must be different - and how it nonetheless sheds light on the referent phenomenon. There still is too little interest among even the more advances administrative theorists for the value of narratives based on lived experience as a basis for theory. Thus, theorists marginalize those who seek that kind of learning.

McSwite (1998) has summed up many of the differences between schools of thought by discussing the relationship between the "New Normativism" (neoinstitutionalism and interpretivist organization theory, increasingly accepting social constructivism) and the "Discourse Movement" (process-oriented and post-modernists, focusing on the necessity of discourse because of the limitations of human consciousness). Common enemies are found among the "New Theorists", who are the real modernists, sticking to methodological individualism and empiricism. New Normativists like the Blacksburg Manifesto group want values to be embodied in stable institutions, where they can be expressed in the concrete practices of the institutions (since they cannot, anyway, be defined). This is where there is some degree of authoritarianism in the New Normativists: they advocate for a solid foundation for the exercise of authority. Among Discourse Theorists, mainly postmodernists, authority is not at all an issue, but the consequences are, or rather, they are constantly questioned in processes that aim to create synergy - something that would not otherwise be there - where the essence of the process is doubt. A final difference is that New Normativists still take abstractions like values and generalized facts seriously, where discourse theorists want to keep our orientation concrete and empirical (McSwite 1998, 379-380).

5.2. Public Participation and Community

As we have seen repeatedly above, there is much interest in community and the involvement of citizens in public affairs among many of those that approach postmodern thinking, but also in many of the more modernistic and "in-between" approaches.

Antonio and Kellner (1994) have raised the question which of the problems that arise for the 1990s postmodernism can really address - have postmodernists exaggerated the ruptures that have come in the 1980s in terms of neo-conservatism, market victory, end of history, resurgence of nationalism etc? They have a problem in that they discard the basic assumptions of social theory in terms of possibility of

truth and false. They have a problem in that they reject historically based global theories (as opposed to master narratives and grand narratives) and therefore reprieve themselves the possibility to gain a historical perspective on their own views. They fail to get e.g. the post-fordist patterns with centralized financial controls and decentralized production patterns. The authors offer an alternative understanding that

> "New critical social theories must be anchored normatively in differentiated historical subjects who are capable of forming themselves into publics (through their communicative capacities and self-organizational activities) rather than in the homogeneous will of emancipatory subjectivity" (Antonio and Kellner 1994, 146).

Green (1996) in a less negative vein towards postmodernism calls it an iconoclastic philosophy, leaving dim prospects for current institutions, people becoming increasingly impulsive and ungovernable, and public institutions being on the verge of disintegration. But on the other hand, some see this as a promising era, giving new hopes for family and community, churches, markets etc., which were eroded by national policies. Developments in institutions towards communitarism and theoretically towards new institutionalism and its insistence on processual views, structuration, reflexivity and knowledgeable agents, transcend rationality in the modern calculative or instrumental sense. This in turn changes the role of statecraft, away from determining accomplishments and instead focusing on conditions for life that will shape public life beneficially for a generation or more. The role of public administration is then to be active in the processes that bring those together who can create statecraft, being "knowledgeable agents" operating at all levels of an inter-institutional mire.

Box (1996) discusses new forms of local governance, suited for the challenges of the 21st century, and accommodating some of Fox & Miller's (1995) ideas about the warrants for discourse. Postmodern thoughts refute rational collective action - the world is becoming too fragmented and contentious, so large-scale institutional enterprises will fail. Long-standing agreements over values and goals are threatened, change is rapid, stability and trust is under siege. Localism is becoming symptomatic, meaning that there is a special interest in communities and the relations residents have with those who share the experience of their local surroundings. The present era is one of citizen governance, partly based on a communitarian understanding of citizenship; from centralized, expert-based systems to decentralized, citizen-centered systems. (91) The legacy of the institution of community governance includes

> "localism (...), citizen involvement and self-determination (...), de-mystification of professionalized systems, a desire to avoid the excesses of political intrusion into routine administration (...), elite groups are an important feature, an impressive technical-professional capacity, and lively debates about the structure and scope of community government". (Box 1996, 91)

In order to avoid the problems of the "loop democracy" that Fox & Miller (1995) have criticized, Box suggests to use citizen boards (functional) more to direct services and to let the old municipality council have a mainly coordinating role.

Jun and Campodonico (1998) put local processes in the perspective of globalization, particularly as it relates to the developing countries. Globalization particularly concerns a number of economic issues pertaining to activities in firms, like working conditions, investments and capital flow, bank links, free trade and dispute solutions, to enhance international competition and promote export possibilities. Adverse consequences have been strain on the eco-system and some human communities in civil society, downward pressure on wages, insecurity, hollowing-out of tax-base, the richer countries and individuals have become richer, labor has been taxed more than capital. The negative effect is strongest in the developing nations that do not have strong local governance traditions, nor effective national legislatures. Therefore, the authors call for support from the national governments to local autonomy, public/private local partnerships, trust building, participation of NGOs and citizens, community-based economic programs, more information openness, and more connections between citizens and administrators.

The problems of citizens and community in an "anti-government" era are discussed by King and Stivers (1998). The anti-government sentiment of the American people is based on the anti-bureaucrat movement in the media and among presidents as leading politicians; the feeling that administrators overuse their powers; the failure of effective policies; the sense of being powerless vis-a-vis government. What about the politicians? The authors show that lawmakers in representative government use generalized knowledge about citizens, based on statistics and comparable instruments. Citizens, on the other hand, think in personal terms, or "lived knowledge": US government is not a democracy of lived knowledge; law aimed at citizens excludes us as individuals; administration works with cases, not individuals, representation creates alienation. Using Arendt, the authors claim that democratic knowledge must be constructed from re-presented to experienced knowledge by opening up the public space and thereby easing processes that let human thoughts and ideas be tested by the examination of other citizens. Here it is important to be able to put oneself into another's place, to understand from another viewpoint. Citizens create their sense of the common through active conversations with neighbors. That is when "government becomes us" (King and Stivers 1998, 46-48).

Spicer (1997) has some clear, normative suggestions for public organizning under postmodern conditions, arguing that the state as a purposeful agent is problematic in a postmodern understanding, while the civil association may be more appropriate. The problems coming from the postmodern conditions are that one would deny the possibility of such a shared political metanarrative that ties the ends sought by the state to a betterment of human conditions. Instead, we have a number of incommensurable language games (Lyotard), an atomization of society, so what we get is multiplicity and diversity, which is a challenge for the state in the above understanding. In contrast, a civil association is a platform where people see

themselves free to pursue own interests, but within rules of conduct that limit their individual spheres of action. It is a sort of procedural regime, permitting individuals to follow own ideas, and participating in a discourse about the commensurability of those with the ideas of other people within the association. This is consistent with Madisonian federalism, and postmodernists like Rorty's understanding of individuals and cultures getting together without intruding on each other's privacy. The role of public administration, then, is to limit the monopolization of political discourse by particular subcultures that try to reduce the range of language discourses in order to promote their own ends. Public employees then, should serve to solve disagreements among different interests and visions of the public good.

5.3. Public Administrators as intermediaries

Several authors above hinted at an intensification of the relations between public employees and citizens in the processes of strengthening community

Already when *Images and Identities* was published in 1990, the theme of "stewardship" was important, and Catron and Hammond (1990) in their epilogue discussed possible images of the public administrator which came from the discussions in the anthology. Namely the functionary, who is the traditional subordinate administrator; the opportunist/pragmatist who is the utility-maximizing employee; the interest broker/market manager as the disinterested arbiter; the professional/expert technician like the competent analyst; the agent/trustee acting on behalf of the public; the communitarian facilitator asking their colleagues to work in the 'proximate' environment of the face-to-face group; and the transformational social critic monitoring political processes on behalf of the citizens, against oppressing trends. Many of those were conventional in the sense of being social roles, but the two last ones are transcending our normal understandings of Public Administration employees, and inviting to do practical discourse in 'projects of human life', where Public administrators deepen their own appreciation of their roles and enhance the image of public service (Catron and Hammond 1990, 250).

Dennard (1996) sees the role of the public administrator under modernism as, based on a personal devotion, the "dubious and often unrewarding task of regulating society for its own good." The challenges of postmodernism should not be passively watched. The modernistic solution to problems has been to fight what is wrong in a system rather than analyze the potential for something different, and now is the challenge to ask for adaptive processes to create a democratic environment. So citizens do not strive for getting access to a bureaucracy, they are integrated into it; this is a change of relationship. The trick is to see beyond opposites, 'we' in the organization and 'they' out there. Therefore, empowering people or making representative bureaucracy belongs to modernistic opposites. One should instead speak of reengagement of government with its people, and participation of public administrators in their environments as conscious actors in a democratic system. Prescriptions for democratic government would include several forms: personal involvement of administrators; addressing people in order to

address the whole; listening actively to what people say; accept that people are different and not accessible through models; understand people's emotions about their situation; assuming responsibility for involving oneself into the difficult problematics.

McSwite wrote a book (1997) on the general theme of how administrators may have a legitimate role in democratic affairs. A major problem under postmodern conditions is the decentering of the subject which has been lost or alienated into limbo, in contrast to modern discussions that seemed to focus on a human nature that could be identified, e.g. as an economic maximizing agent, or as a altruistic person in the community. Discourse oriented relationships, i.e. a mutual surrender to one another, is offered as an alternative understanding to the egoistic (rational choice) model; it is argued that the problem of legitimacy will evaporate once such a reframing of discourse and institutions is accomplished (McSwite 1997, 15). Corresponding to this image we have seen a 'facilitative' Public Administration, striving towards involving citizens through efforts towards collaboration. This movement, however, remains with traditional understandings of legitimacy and therefore may not succeed; instead, the MsSwites see a need for using the 'idea of reason' dealing with the problem of coming to terms with the "implacable, immutable sense of otherness" that is evoked in our human social relations. The advice is to let go of the 'pointless' discussion of legitimacy because it has institutionalized and maintained a particular understanding and structure of government. Instead one needs to go back to the true foundation of merican Public Administration: Pragmatism (discussed above). Fact/value, foundationalist/relativist and phenomenology/positivism dichotomies are all bypassed by the continuing testing of hypotheses by the pragmatist, who denies the prerequisites of rational action by picturing social relationships as collaborative, grounded in joint project and joint action. In short, the idea is to assume a posture of permanent doubt, place experimentation in a collaborative context, and make the results the operational definition of truth (McSwite 1997, 135). 'Collaborative pragmatism' was at the heart of the Confederation, in populism and progressivism in the beginning of the 20th century, and now present in postmodernism. Our perception of the world is socially conditioned, and we need to state our sense of purpose in order to be able to "measure" our world, we do not perceive in limbo. Such purpose is created in relationships with other people, in community. The relationship is reached by pragmatic collaboration between administrators and citizens, based on an understanding of "process theory".

In their book on citizen governance, King and Stivers (1998:71-75) discussed possibilities and problems in citizen-administrator collaboration as an "us"; the scientific, rationalized, professional knowledge is an obstacle from the bureaucracy; on the other hand, there are problems with citizen's accountability, their carrying out certain roles, and how much power they should get; established societal interests may work against participation, as may organizational features. The book presents a great number of cases of how citizens and administrators may cooperate actively, and the editors conclude that certain features stand out: go towards more facilitative, less expertise-driven approach; balance technical-driven approach with experience-driven; use the lived experience of citizens; differentiate between

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government for, by and with the people; develop mediation skills; use advocacy to empower; have a public service frame of mind; think about the role of administrative and organizational realities; favor active citizenship. As to habits of mind, it is important to give up the hierarchical (dominance) way of thinking and understand the importance of having power with citizens, in horizontal relations, sharing authority, and thus less emphasize professional norms. (202-203) In sum, the images of the active administration are: transformative, facilitative, public-service practitioner, task-oriented but inclusive and balanced convener, and listening bureaucrat.

6. Concluding remarks

The discussion of postmodernism and its relations to the field of American Public Administration began in the late 1980s, and soon resulted in an interesting anthology based on the ideas of imaginization by Gareth Morgan. Over a period of ten years, a group of theorists have discussed and broadened the theme, 45 of them have been included in this working paper discussion, having produced about 85 articles and books of relevance for our topic. More has been written, but I have not aimed at being totally inclusive.

Concerning postmodernism, three books stand out above the others, each presenting its version of how to understand such a line of research. In spite of its title, the book by Fox and Miller (1995) has maintained the strongest links to modernity; first, the authors clearly denounce much of what may go on in society under postmodern conditions, second, their call for authentic discourse has strong connections to Habermas who, after all, is not postmodern. McSwite's book (1997) is a mix of fairly concrete discussions of the development of modernistic public administration and analyses of the schools whose task it has been to analyze the field. Their advice to take up the pragmatic challenge and set up a process view of public administration has - as in the case of Fox & Miller - a strong bent towards helping citizens out in coping with their administration. The book by David Farmer (1995) is the most abstract discussion of postmodern research, challenging our understanding of the world, and deconstructing public administration quite thoroughly without giving the student hungering for research recipes much advice. Do it yourself!

During the 1990s, the Blacksburg group seems to have strengthened their differences. The original manifesto (drafted in the early 1980s) was strongly (late) modernist, associated with the public agency, and linked to the constitution as a guarantee of due process all over the US. In the second volume (Wamsley and Wolf 1996), that perspective seems to be if not absent, then much less significant. To indicate the span among the participants, Linda Dennard discusses quantum theory, the McSwites discourse analysis, and John Rohr faithfully sticks to an analysis of the modern state and its positive influence on citizens' rights. The two first authors show little interest in the public agency, the last one very much so.

Pauline Rosenau (1992) divided the world of postmodernists into the affirmative and the skeptical ones. Nearly all of the Americans belong to the affirmative camp.

They strive, first of all, to enhance the accessibility of public organizations to citizens, an empowerment. The possible exception is David Farmer, who does not so clearly express the wish to help out. On the other hand, his analyses are replete with discussions that criticize the authoritarian state, supporting the views of the minorities of various kinds.

So, in any case most of those who are attracted to Postmodernism are so based on the affirmative perspective and are involved in questions of democracy, marginalization, minority policy, feminism, human rights and comparable movements of liberating citizens. Likewise, there is a wide interest in themes of ethics, legitimacy (of administrators), Public Administration as stewardship, justice, and the public interest, all highly value-laden according to most perceptions, but not necessarily in a one-eyed way.

All postmodernists and many of the somewhat-modernists are strong supporters of social constructivism and most of them are anti-foundationalists. This is where the toughest debates have been found vis-á-vis the modernist camp in public administration, but it is no particular feature for public administration theorists, the cleavage is found in all the social sciences. The same goes for the introduction of quantum theory in the field, there are strong links to a larger movement within the social sciences, based on a micro-approach. A more parochial feature for the public administration discipline is that in one way or another, most of the postmodernists subscribe to pragmatism. On the other hand, you need not be a postmodernists to be a pragmatist. At the meta-theoretical level, pragmatism is the alternative to the utilitarian (rational choice) approach, demanding experimentation and learning through experience, based on democratic understanding with its multiple realities and conflict. This gives the analysis a certain flavor of liberalism, since the idea is to let changes be played out in order to let people learn by doing, and have principles accommodated at the local level to local wishes.

A strong dividing line may be found in the stance towards narrative analysis, and closely related, deconstruction. The further this type of analysis is carried, the stronger the severance from traditional social science; there is common ground in hermeneutic (critical) analysis which many of the anti-foundational but still modernists theorists apply, but when Wittgenstein is becoming the centerpiece in theoretical terms, most of the participants in the debate declare their uneasiness and lack of interest and understanding. They are more interested in approaching action research in a dialogue with their research objects. Full-fledged American postmodernists analyze their texts at some distance - this is where they tend to be classic academics, maybe not in an ivory tower, but pretty close by keeping a physical distance to their research object.

We may conclude, then, that a great many of the participants in the debates are not postmodernists, even though they were labeled so by Stillman (1995). One should distinguish the postmodernists from users of critical theory even though they do not agree as to what this means. A few have a clear former Marxist bent, but most use Habermas as their major academic reference, and apparently many use the phrase "critical" as a label to distinguish themselves from the American mainstream

public administration scholar. The Blacksburg refounders whom Stillman treated as one grop have split into several with little meta-theoretical ground: postmodernism (McSwite), quantum theory (Dennard) and constitutionalism (Rohr) are somewhat separate in their understanding of what social science is about.

These theorists, however, have common enemies and in Stillman's terms, they share a contempt for the reinventors that threaten the traditions of public administration, they have a critical stance towards communitarians who tend to monopolize the definition of Truth in the community, and they are not much interested in public administration technicalities regarding what tools that might and might not work. Likewise, big government is out of bounds.

But out of the debates have come strong demands for analyses that explicitly face the problems of values in our research; this again is closely linked to the anti-foundationalist trend. Furthermore, a large group of the theorists discussed above take a strong position in supporting an increased citizen participation in public affairs, and to strengthen minorities in that respect; feminism stands out loud and clear for several of the discussants. Finally, the theme of the role of the public employee in public affairs is of great importance to most of the theorists in the debates. After all, this is what most of them have to teach to some degree sooner or later.

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