Reinventing Government
as Postmodern Symbolic Politics

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A theoretical orientation known as postmodernism has swept through university humanities departments over the past decade. Can postmodernist insights be used to help public administration understand the situations in which it is currently conducted? In this article Charles J. Fox argues the affirmative by applying concepts developed in postmodern thought to the reinventing government movement. Specifically, it is argued that much of reinvention can be understood not as substantive reform but as symbolic politics of a particularly postmodern kind.

The title of this article stands as a claim that something can be learned from viewing the reinventing government movement as an example of postmodern symbolic politics. It is not, however, a claim to exclusive truth; it would be wrong to dismiss an entire movement and all of the dedicated participants as cynically engaging in "nothing but" symbolic politics. I admit, both affirmations and negations of reinvention can be telling without ever uttering "postmodern." What can an interpretation add that is based on a historical shift that few acknowledge? To answer that question, and to redeem the claim, I need first to explicate those aspects of postmodernism relevant to the task. Second, I need to adduce elements of the reinvention movement which may be plausibly subsumed under those aspects.

Relevant Aspects of Postmodernism

I have, with Hugh Miller (1995), argued that fruitful insights about contemporary public policy and administration follow from viewing these as aspects of the postmodern condition. Doing so requires, at least for the sake of argument, that one accept that advanced industrial countries are undergoing a fundamental change. In other words, the work and study of public policy formation and implementation now occur in a context so fundamentally different from the past as to justify the judgment that we have crossed over from one era (modernity) to another (postmodernity). As a word of warning (self-defense), let me quickly add that the epochal rupture did not occur all at once. Postmodernism can be traced as far back as Nietzsche while gathering momentum in the years after World War II. A full-fledged explication of the transformation and its implications is beyond the scope of this article. Only the production-symbol aspect of postmodernity can be sketched here.
In its production aspect, the transformation from modernity to postmodernity is associated with the widely noted move from an industrial to a postindustrial society; from an economy based primarily on the production of material goods to one based primarily on information technologies, services, marketing, credit, and consumption. To be sure, this transformation, like the earlier move from agricultural production to industrial production, is one of dominant tendencies or ideal-typical profiles. Of course, we still produce agricultural and industrial commodities but as the paradigm case of farm labor was replaced by the paradigm case of the assembly line, the paradigm case of work today is an office where symbols are analyzed and manipulated. This development has also been heralded as the advent of the information age. Toffler (1980) and Gingrich make a similar point about first, second, and third waves. As an aside, postmodernism (as a theoretical orientation) adds that allied philosophical, epistemological, ethical, political, cultural, and societal developments are of sufficient magnitude to warrant epochal differentiation.2

The main implication of the production metamorphosis for the purpose of this argument is the theory of hyperreality or what I call self-referential epiphenomenalism. Again, only the surface of the argument can be expressed here. The postmodernist3 analysis finds that words, symbols, and signs are increasingly divorced from direct real-world experience. Part of this results from the switch from a society based primarily on production to one based primarily on consumption and information. Production requires group activity and communication based on the manipulation and processing of physical objects. There is a rootedness based on the direct interface between humans and material; symbolic meanings are similarly rooted. Contrariwise, in the consumptive economic mode of postmodernity, symbols float away, as it were, and procreate with other symbols leading to what Jameson (1991) calls “the free play of signifiers.” As the designs of products to which symbols are attached become too complex for the consumers to master, symbols lose their mooring lines. Marketers take advantage of this and manipulate the symbols and attach them to other symbols. Thus do machines become sexy, cleaning fluids repair dysfunctional families, and to purchase a particular brand of colored carbonated water is to signify membership in a generation. Some articles of clothing are favored precisely because their manufacturer’s name is prominently displayed; wearing, say, “Nike” signifies lean, fit, graceful, sexy, Michael Jordan—much more important than a shirt. The logo or symbol becomes more important than the functional product. Similarly in politics symbols, often purposefully misleading, replace deliberation over policy. Willie Horton becomes a logo for Massachusetts penal policy, “read my lips” for a fiscal policy, and Clinton a modifier signifying “big-government-tax-and-spend” when attached to “health plan” or “welfare reform.”

As more signs detach themselves from lifeworld elements that they were presumptively designed to denote, they enter a realm that postmodernists call hyperreality. Once a sign takes up permanent residence in hyperreality, any kind of reality which may be called empirical loses influence over it. Better, hyperreality has a life of its own outside and hovering above the experiential reality of day-to-day life. Celebrities, the O.J. Simpson case, sports, and much of electoral politics exist therein, with only the most tenuous relationship to the phenomenological reality of daily life. Moreover, hyperreality or hyperspace is extremely volatile and thin. The subjective expression of the same thing is the lament about America’s nano-second attention span. It is also the case that exactly what gets paid short attention is random and arbitrary; which of hundreds of children’s need for an organ transplant becomes known depends on whether Bosnia, Somalia, Newt, Bill, or a congressional vote has hogged hyperspace for that moment. Finally, although there may well be logic to the ascension of symbols to hyperspace (e.g., white Bosnians over black Rwandans), there is no consistent logic that might be unpacked for analysis and correction.

If the postmodern thesis is correct, the result would be the loss of a certain “concretized” rationality. Rational will formation becomes increasingly difficult when language loses its ability to communicate the discrete work-a-day reality of public policy implementation and organizational life. Worse, symbols interacting in hyperspace without benefit of mooring in work-a-day reality can only come back around to distort any reform of that reality.

What has this to do with the reinvention movement? To answer that question, I need to analyze Osborne and Gaebler’s (1992) book and its application to the federal government through the National Performance Review (NPR). I will attempt to show that epiphenomenal symbols too often trump sound, consistent, reality-based theory.4

Postmodern Aspects of The Book by Osborne and Gaebler

There are many good things about The Book. It has a lot of common sense and makes many good points (e.g., too many rules, need for more teamwork). One would not say about it, however, that Max Weber, Leonard White, Luther Gulick, or the Brownlow and Hoover Commissions could have written it (Garvey, 1995; Moe 1994). Actually, no current, respectable academic could have written it either, at least not for a tenure decision. That is not just because it is a best seller, it is because it violates the (modern) enlightenment canon of rationality/consistency that is still the governing norm for the academic guild. No dissertation committee on which I have served would approve it because it has no consistent theory that strings together the little pearls of uplifting stories that it recounts. The implication is that The Book is not modern, it is postmodern. Two facets are illustrative: the style of argumentation and the tolerance for contradiction. A third aspect, the conflation of opposing theories, will be covered in the following section on reinvention within the National Performance Review.

There is to the style of Osborne and Gaebler a certain breathlessness. Discussing steering versus rowing, for instance, they say “[S]teering requires people who see the entire universe of issues and possibilities and can balance competing demands for

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2 The postmodernist analysis finds that words, symbols, and signs are increasingly divorced from direct real-world experience.

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resources.... Rowing organizations tend to defend 'their' methods at all costs" (p. 35). They go on to defend these generalizations by anecdotes. Obviously, steering is good, rowing is bad. Steering leaders are heroic. Be a steering entrepreneur, do not be a rowing drudge. Where have we encountered styles like this? I suggest, self-help books (lose weight, love yourself, get in touch with your inner child), business best sellers, and Sunday sermons. The Book is like the growing phenomena of "motivational" speakers, that strange mixture of entertainer, provocateur of cathartic laughter, and trainer, with well-rehearsed slick speeches that earn grand fees at increasing numbers of professional association meetings. As a class of argumentation, it is more rhetorical than scientific (Moe, 1994). A metaphorical category is introduced (rowing and steering) and supported by anecdotal evidence and examples. Are the examples representative? Are there counter-examples? Are we getting the whole story in the examples or only carefully chosen vignettes? What protocol of valid inference are being used and abused?

If, as A.N. Whitehead once remarked, the obsession with consistency is the "hobgoblin of small minds," Osborne and Gaebler have large minds indeed. A major contradiction stems from the uncritical acceptance of both principle agent/homo economicus assumptions on the one hand and human relations/TQM views, on the other. They lament (p. 112) that managers do not have sufficient power to fire laggards. Along the same lines, they argue (pp. 126-127) that managers cannot promote, fire, layoff, or pay for performance. Whatever the efficacy of these measures, it cannot be denied that they enhance power up the hierarchy and that strengthens hierarchy itself. This is in stark contradiction to the later emphasis on teamwork, empowerment, and cooperation. Here, they quote Harlan Cleveland (1985): "Leadership of the informed is different: it results in the necessary action only if exercised mainly by persuasion.... Collegial not command structures become the more natural basis for organization" (p. 253). Then they emphasize the need for job security (tenure?) so that employees will sign on, support, and own organizational innovations (p. 265).

Close textual exegesis could uncover many more inconsistencies and contradictions (see Nathan, 1995; Moe, 1994; Carroll, 1995; and Kettl, 1995). Osborne and Gaebler seem impervious to such protocols of modernity. For instance, they blithely assert the need to embrace both markets and community (p. 309). Market theory is based on atomistic individualism whereas community is based on group solidarity—deeply contradictory social philosophies. Papering over them with an epiphenomenal one-liner is at best naive, at worst cynical; either way, it is postmodern.

A popular book that gets people to think about governance in ways more benign than is encouraged by, say, Rush Limbaugh or G. Gordon Liddy has to be in some way welcome. At a high level of abstraction, the message that industrial (modern) era bureaucracyp may no longer be the most appropriate social governance formation is a salutary one (see Moe, 1994, and Moe and Gilmour, 1995, for a defense of statism). When what is essentially a self-help-motivational book claims to chart a paradigm revolution (Introduction and chap. 11) and when that claim is embraced by powerful legitimate officials, what real effects does it have? I address this issue in the next section.

The National Performance Review: Reinvention Meets Governance

From my point of view, informed by postmodern philosophy and analysis but rooted in the desire for democratic will formation in pursuit of effective public policy, the Clinton presidency is enigmatic. For the first time in a long time, Clinton seems to be a legitimate, intellectual policy wonk, familiar and even comfortable with the incredible complexity and interrelatedness of policies. He is the first President in my memory that could contribute and be welcome in my graduate policy seminars. The flexibility of mind required for sophisticated policy analysis, however, seems often to leave him rudderless. Rudderlessness or lack of ballast are reciprocally related to flexibility and quickness afoot. Thus, the Clinton presidency is the most comfortable of Democratic administrations (still not as good as the Hollywood original) with postmodern symbolic manipulation. At the end of the day, when the voters finally line up to vote, flexibility combined with well-wrought public relations may win them another turn. This because the presidency is now a perpetual campaign for poll approval and potential reelection. But who he lives by the symbol may also die by it, as other talented symbolic manipulators (e.g., Speaker Gingrich, Rush Limbaugh) with the advantage of both financial and numerical superiority, diminish the status of a policy wonk by derisive dismissal. The political struggle, in other words, occurs in the realm of hyperspace with the struggle between evocative symbols only randomly related to phenomenological work-a-day public policy reality. Wedge issues (e.g., affirmative action, abortion, immigration, flag burning), pollster- and focus-group-designed issues (Gingrich's Contract with America), bumper-sticker policy analysis, and much ado-about-nothing-empirically-important issues (e.g., Foster nomination) flit across the American consciousness in rapid succession. More, the American consciousness seems increasingly unable to distinguish Bobbitt, Woody and Mia, O.J., and Tanya and the characters who differ from them only because the back drop is the Capital, the White House, or the governor's mansion. In this context, what happens when the postmodern reinvention initiatives meet with a postmodern presidential administration and its competitors engaged in a perpetual campaign?

Because I have not been a close-up observer of the National Performance Review, I must rely on others. I have found two very recent treatments to be particularly instructive. They are Carroll (1995) and the especially insightful Kettl (1995). (Page numbers below refer to these two works.)

Kettl (p. 11) argues persuasively that "the concept of 'reinventing' government was so attractive, yet so broad that virtually any reform could fit within it"; "reinventing government is what has been termed a 'conflicated aggregation'" (Fox and Miller, 1995). Different political motivations were gathered up under it, but more important for my purposes, totally incompatible theories could be at least momentarily conflated under its banner. Kettl
usefully aggregates the theoretical thrusts to three: downsizing, reengineering, and continuous improvement (see also Carroll, 1995; 304). Downsizing, the most atheoretical of the approaches, holds that government is just too big and (do not blame Kettl or Carroll for this analogy) will become more healthy by the simple measure of putting it on a diet, reducing its caloric (tax) intake. Like the body, the fat will be burnt off first, before threatening the vital organs and muscles. This is the theory behind tax-limitation measures like Proposition 13 and provides much of the current support for deficit reduction and budget balancing. In the event, as Kettl (p. 38) rightly puts it, “[D]ownsizing has thus largely become a symbolic tactic, a way for elected officials to resonate with the concerns of the voters without directly attacking the problem of making government work better.”

One might typify reengineering theory as a top-down shake up; a micro-revolution to be ironically led by elites (the positions of whom were vouchsafed by the given). Question everything (except the privilege of those at the top), throw out all received assumptions and conventional wisdom, look for breakthrough strategies, “focus on customers, radical change, nimble organizations and information technology” (Kettl, 1995; 41). Many of Speaker Gingrich’s ideas fit in this mold.

The third theoretical thrust, continuous improvement, is, I suspect, the aspect picked up by the academic community as the promising element in reinvention. Indeed, Kettl (p. 44) maintains that “[m]ore than any other set of ideas, the continuous improvement movement drove the Gore report.” Continuous improvement is the latest incarnation of the human relations school of public management, theories y and z and most recently TQM. It affirms participative management, intrinsic over extrinsic motivation, employee empowerment, bottom-up reform using the knowledge of the line-employee, and communitarian values over atomized competitive homo-economicus value maximizers. In the current postmodern environment, however, political events move across hyperspace too rapidly to wait for continuous improvement to prove itself. Under continuous improvement, one is supposed to look to quality, not arbitrarily set downsizing savings targets. Continuous improvement promises savings, but the exact amount and locus cannot be predicted with precision.

Now, using Kettl’s categories, I suggest that the postmodern aspects of the reinvention movement have overwhelmed the rational-consistent-scientific-enlightenment or modern aspects; the symbolic has defeated the phenomenological; the hyperreal has come back around to adversely affect the work-a-day real. To make that point, I am obliged to affirm that “continuous improvement,” although sometimes itself overlayed by epiphenomenal public relations symbolism, has at least a foot in organizational reality as it is experienced by the inmates. As Kettl (pp. 44-45) puts it “[t]he discussion of continuous improvement, however, sits side by side with the argument for downsizing and reengineering.” The advocates of continuous improvement would argue quite vigorously that managers cannot be expected to take risks when their jobs are on their line. Nor in their view, can reengineering comprehend the full range of reform needed to make any organization work better.

Again quoting Kettl’s (p. 46) truly insightful summation of the conflict between the three theoretical thrusts, while explicating a subtext of my own:

One might typify reengineering theory as a top-down shake up; a micro-revolution to be ironically led by elites... managers often find themselves attempting to cope with externally imposed downsizing targets [the output of epiphenomenal symbolic politics of voter manipulation], by reengineering their processes from the top down [using political appointees with only a thin understanding of organizational missions, culture, and implementation protocols] while encouraging their employees to improve quality from the bottom up.

The debate within and over NPR has been cast in symbols that resonate in postmodern hyperspace. NPR’s “works better,” “costs less,” must surely be a take-off on Miller Light’s “taste’s great,” “less filling.” Miller Light (itself a logo) can redeem its claim by employing retired sports heroes (each a logo themselves residing peacefully in hyperspace) to affirm a synthesis. When hyperspace invades work-a-day organizational reality, however, synthesis is not so easily accomplished. Let me, in the following paragraphs, adduce the unsynthesized inconsistencies surrounding first, downsizing versus employee morale, second, performance measurement, and third, customer service.

First and most obvious, and carried over from the inconsistencies of Osborne and Gaebler’s book, is the contradiction between the job security necessary to carry out bottom-up, continuous improvement initiatives, on the one hand, and those initiatives that threaten the livelihood of affected officials. As Kettl (p. 15) puts it: “...the ghost of deficit reduction lurked behind every promise of empowering workers or improving performance...the threat to their jobs became the defining element of the NPR for most federal employees.” The quick and cheap political victory for the Clinton administration of buying into the rhetoric of downsizing and the money saved by cutting the “bloated bureaucracy,” could not be resisted. The shallowness of the analysis was startling. How did they know how much to cut? Divide the number of middle managers by one-half under the assumption that it is twice as many as needed. Then add a quarter back to perform needed analysis functions (Kettl; 17). How can any worker have confidence in a management team that swears by strategic planning internally and then turns around to make decisions in this bizarre manner? This especially so when, as shown by Paul Light (1995), the real bloating in the federal government is the result of adding hierarchical layers of political appointees at the top. Why would any career employee take real entrepreneurial risks under such conditions? It is no wonder that morale is dismal (Kettl; 27). The point here is that a postmodern symbol, “cutting bloated bureaucracy,” has come back around to negatively affect work-a-day reality. It has likely fatally undermined the chance for needed reform. “Costs less” has defeated “works better.”

The relationship between the Government Performance and Results Act (G Pra) of 1993 and the NPR reveals another startling contradiction. As explained by Carroll (1995; 306), the G Pra establishes “a strategic planning and performance budgeting framework and system for the federal government to be developed and administered by the [Office of Management and Budget] OMB.” Implementation of both G Pra and NPR will be difficult.
and administered by the [Office of Management and Budget] OMB." Implementation of both GPRA and NPR will be difficult because two very distinct and contradictory lines of thought reside uncomfortably together under the call for enhanced performance measurement. One, the continuous improvement aspect of NPR, is associated with TQM. The other, codified in the GPRA, is but an update of traditional hierarchical accountability to management. The contradictory aspects are perhaps obscured by their more superficial similarities. They share, first, a commitment to abandon the now discredited measurement of inputs or mere outputs in favor of assessing results, or in the language of policy implementation studies: outcomes and impacts. Second, both emphasize mission statements or clear goals and objectives with benchmark measurements built-in and following therefrom. They diverge in that the GPRA stems from the traditional use of measurement to assess performance and place blame by way of what is taken to be objective once-and-for-all standards. TQM performance measurements, on the other hand, are an integral part of organizational learning. In a kind of hermeneutic circle, missions are articulated with bottom-up participation, benchmark measurements are then, also communally, articulated. Assessment of the extent to which benchmarks were or were not reached are then, again communally, assessed. Then, according to the organizational learning that has occurred through that assessment, benchmarks are adjusted or new ones established. Performance measurement, by this understanding, is as much art as it is objective science and more a motivational team goal setting than the setting of standards by which to measure failure and blame those who have failed. As Kettl (p. 64) puts it "performance-based management is most fundamentally about communications, not measurement." TQM and organizational learning type performance measurement, I maintain, is not only possible within the federal government and NPR, but desirable. And, it would be work-a-day real.

The GPRA, however, is unlikely to be implemented in a positive nonpunitive way. It was passed, after all, as another attempt to bring the bureaucracy to heel and was a symbolic victory for government bashers of all stripes. Congress holds the leash. This is fundamentally contradictory to the thrust of the NPR. The NPR wants to blunt congressional micro-management (Carroll; 302; Kettl; 33-34); that is one of the subtextual meanings of cutting red tape. The GPRA, conversely, invites more of it. The likely result is meaningless symbolic measurement designed more to hoodwink the bosses than to inform an ongoing organizational learning process. As Carroll (p. 306) observes: "GPRA will proliferate red tape and increase Congress' oversight powers." The tendency for the GPRA to revert to form is especially likely since, as Kettl (p. 63) observes: "the GPRA depends on technology that does not now exist. There is no budgetary system, no performance measurement system, and no career track within government for the people to do the work."

The third NPR issue that I wish to scrutinize is "customer service." A commitment to customer service resonates, first, because virtually every citizen can cite a personal experience of bad treatment by some unhelpful arrogant government bureaucrat. It is also an attractive alternative to top-down hierarchical control and is consistent with empowering line employees while also constraining their discretion by empowering the customers with whom they interact. Despite these advantages, many public administration scholars have weighed in against the idea for several different reasons. Some object to the term "customer," because it marginalizes the idea of citizenship. Those with reverence for the Constitution are not aesthetically pleased with the crass sound of "We the customers of the United States of America...." Functionalists note that government does more than serve: it regulates, mediates, commands, and invests (Carroll; 309). Especially at the level of the federal government, a very small percentage of civil servants will have direct contact with clients/customers unless fellow bureaucrats across agency lines can also be thought of as customers. Still other scholars note that it promotes hypersensitivity to customer wishes and promotes a culture of whining and complaining (Kettl; 58). The interpretive lens of postmodern symbolic politics allows further exploration of the disconnect between the symbol "customer service," and day-to-day agency reality.

I would like to offer up for affirmation or derision the conjecture that the "customer service" orientation is a (not necessarily calculated or conscious) reaction by the progovernment community to launch a counter-offensive against the relentless attack on it by antigovernment zealots. It is a fundamentally postmodern response to a postmodern problem of perceptions influenced by hyperspace. To recast citizens as customers is to accede to the notion that government is no longer accepted as "we," but "they." "Damn-gummint" is an alien and hostile force, a threat to freedom and a thief of hard-earned individual income. As Miller and L (1995) have written, damn-gummint is a conflated aggregation, the illogical and shifting mingling of perceptions, symbols, examples, and nonsequitur inferences. Consider that every customer has had a bad experience with some private enterprise. But, "damn-bidness" is not a conflated aggregation in high circulation. Damn-gummint is the product of profound ignorance exacerbated by ambient but not specific instances of gotcha journalism, the abandonment by the people of linear print news reading, the conflation of news and entertainment (e.g., "Hard Copy"), negative even dirty campaigning, and right-wing radio talk-show hyperbole. Recent polls indicate that 50 percent of the population could name Gingrich as Speaker; 64 percent could identify Judge Lance Ito; only 4 in 10 know anything about the Contract with America, only 24 percent knew of the Clinton federal deficit reduction; only one-third knew that only the wealthy paid higher income tax under the Clinton economic package (Kurtz, 1995). Perschuck (1995; 992) has unpacked some of the rhetorical tactics used by Gingrich and the libertarian right:

- associating free-market, antigovernment policy initiatives with broadly shared values and symbols, such as freedom, family, work, opportunity;
- associating government programs and regulations with negative values and symbols—bureaucracy, oppression, waste, elitism, corruption....
- budget cuts for education and social welfare programs become tax relief for working families; workplace health and safety regulation becomes oppression of small business.

Now I know that it is impolitic and maybe even antidemocratic to question the wisdom of the people. It smacks of a decidedly out-of-fashion brief for false consciousness. Postmodern philosophy would also disapprove because an argument for "false" con-
sciousness is simultaneously an illegitimate claim to knowledge of "true" consciousness. Actually, what I am arguing is that there is a-consciousness or fleeting-consciousness about things political and governmental. It is not the people are dumb, it is that too many passively consume symbols, like any other TV offering, without sustained intellectual effort to make any sense of it; not dumb but ignorant. The decline of unions, political parties, ethnic neighborhoods, and other mediating institutions leaves voters and citizens without mooring lines and, so to speak, adrift in hyperspace with sensory overload. Remember, an entire industry has grown up of pollsters, focus group facilitators, media consultants, and political advertising artists whose efforts are directed not toward disseminating truth but so construing some concatenation of babel as to deliver victory to their employer. Should we be surprised that they have become good at what they do?

This analysis, I recognize, is not mainstream public administration, nor even political science. But neither of those traditions can explain the demise of the demos. I mean by demos the fear or expectation of political philosophers from Aristotle to John Adams, and Madison to Marx that the underprivileged in a democracy would use their political power to balance, if not confiscate and redistribute, the wealth of the few. Aristotle, for instance, argued for the salutary political effects of a large middle class preventing either the politics of envy or the unalloyed exploitation of an oligarchy. What begs for explanation is why a stagnating or declining standard of living for the majority of Americans and an expanding wealth of the top fifth (Pearlstein, 1995a) leads to a conservative reaction further favoring the top fifth. Why does damn gummint become the whipping boy when it is corporations that are downsizing, laying off workers, making them temps, and canceling their fringe benefits? Why is there no check by the demos on corporate executive compensation and the declining share of profits and productivity increases going to labor (Pearlstein, 1995b)? Why do voters not vote their economic interests? One answer is that no one really offers them the clear opportunity to do so. Or, if the offer is made, it is quickly drowned out in hyperspace dominated by postmodern wedge issues, whipping boys, red herrings, and scapegoats. Or, if the offer is taken, it is canceled out by the lack or mediating institutions to provide vigilance against issue and legislation capture by the PACS and monied lobbyists.

My conjecture, based on listening to motivational speakers, is that the customer-service orientation, in addition to being those things mentioned three paragraphs previously, is the attempt on the part of the public administration community to carve out a position in postmodern hyperspace. It is their public relations gambit; their attempt to manage perceptions. Consider this report from Moe (1994; 111, emphasis mine):

After his talk, the Vice President turned the meeting over to a motivational consultant, John Daly who told the assembly that optimism and effective communication were the keys to the success of NPR. “It doesn’t matter how good you really are, but how you communicate how good you are.” As a reporter present noted: “[Daly] ended his remarks by discussing customer strategies used by the Disney company [the ultimate postmodern logo manufacturing company, CJF] and led the group in a refrain from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and off to work they went.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show that the reinvention of government movement is not just what it appears to be to public administrationists trapped in the logic of modernism. The internal contradictions of the reinvention movement have been insightfully and sophisticatedly drawn out by public administration scholars. Why do these contradictions, bizarre calculations, and Orwellian linguistic manipulations find purchase? I suggest, although in no way claim to have proved it, that an analysis based on postmodern philosophy aids interpretive understanding.


Notes

1. A more robust and careful explication of postmodernism occurs in Fox and Miller (1995).
2. Whether events and tendencies are regarded as continuations or shifts is a judgment call perhaps better left to future historians. One need not accept the rupture theory of postmodernism, as for instance Anthony Giddens (1990) does not, to use nonetheless the analytical tools of postmodern theory. Still, it is neither consistent nor credible to talk of ineluctable change from second to third waves as Gingrich does and also call for a return to the family values of first and second waves. Wave theory, in other words, may be judged a trivialization of postmodernism.
3. Postmodernism and postmodernism are used to signify the theory as opposed to postmodern and postmodernity to signify the era.
4. For a critique rooted in institutionalism and public law, see Moe and Gilmour (1995). Although Moe and Gilmour criticize in passing the use of such metaphors as "red tape," theirs is not the same kind of semiotic analysis that I am offering.
References


