



Clayoquot Alliance Working Paper Series

Postmodern Interpretations of the Policy Cycle

Nandita Patel

School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

Email: *nppatel@uvic.ca*

Date: *October 2002*

Not for citation without the permission of the author(s).

The Clayoquot Alliance for Research, Education and Training is a unique partnership, founded with the goals of forging creative links between the University of Victoria and the communities of Clayoquot Sound, providing a forum in which community interests and needs become academic concerns, and making the education and training resources of the University more accessible in the region. For additional copies of this paper, and for information about the Clayoquot Alliance, please visit: www.clayoquotalliance.uvic.ca/ or contact info@clayoquotalliance.uvic.ca.

Introduction: what is *postmodern*?

The objective of the following set of papers is to stretch the conventional discourse on the policy cycle to consider questions and complexities posed by postmodern theories on the subject of textual interpretation and power dynamics in order to develop practical solutions to problems related to issue identification, policy formulation, policy implementation and evaluation. But because previous academic work in this combined area is relatively limited (in the US, some work on the topic has been carried out by Hugh Miller, Charles Fox and David Farmer; in Canada, an article by Richard French in *Optimum* attempted to set the ball rolling), these papers also serve a heuristic purpose: they represent the first interdisciplinary stab at trying to come to grips with some very complex issues around the policy cycle by adopting a postmodern lens. Based on these two objectives, then, the papers can be viewed as both a *process* in which they attempt to arrive at the best solution to the problem, and a *product*--a small contribution intended to initiate or expand a postmodern dialogue on the policy cycle.

In a strictly historical sense, the term 'postmodern' denotes the period that follows the Second World War--or the period that constitutes the present, as we know it. As an intellectual and cultural movement, it encompasses knowledges developed over the past 50-60 years in the theories of social sciences, philosophy, art, architecture, music, and film. Many theorists would argue, moreover, that a movement called poststructuralism heavily influenced the production of these knowledges. Loosely defined, the latter stands for a kind of intellectual activity within literature and linguistics studies following that of structuralism. (The conceptual details of both structuralism and poststructuralism are outlined in paper I.) Those craving neat and tidy definitions for such terms, of course, will be disappointed, but for the sake of simplification one can use the two terms interchangeably to the extent one understands that even though in the

current context, poststructuralist theory represents only one strand of postmodern theory, the intellectual roots of the latter can be traced back to those of the former. As Steven Best and Douglas Kellner attest, "postmodern theory appropriates the poststructuralist critique of modern theory, radicalizes it, and extends it to new theoretical fields" (26).

Most postmodern theorists would be the first to point out that conceptually the term 'postmodern' represents so many different things to so many different people that it resists any attempt to assign a fixed meaning to it. But for the purposes of understanding the basics of postmodern theory, it seems necessary at least to attempt to disentangle its various significances, even as we acknowledge the inherent shortcomings of such an exercise.

For some, the term postmodern theory represents at once a continuation of the theories and concepts of modernity--the period marked by approximately the first half of the 20th Century--as well as a sharp backlash against it. According to these postmodern critics, the modernist movement was characterised by an attempt to overturn the theories and practices of Enlightenment rationalism and liberal humanism but it failed to do so because it unwittingly merged into the image of exactly that whose shadow it sought to shake off. (See Roland Barthes' "From Work to Text" to understand this position in linguistic and literary theory. Barthes started off as an advocate of structuralism--the parallel of modernism in linguistic and literary theory--but later became a poststructuralist.) Others maintain that postmodern theory denotes an extreme skepticism of *all* traditions of knowledge--including those developed around the assumptions of Enlightenment rationalism, humanistic liberalism and modernism--founded upon its own self-established definitions of True, Good and Beautiful. (Even though one might make a successful case that Derrida's argument falls under this rubric, in keeping with the thrust of his own thesis/antithesis, he himself prefers to resist all attempts to label and pigeon-hole his thought-

system. Nonetheless, see Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" to understand this position in linguistic and literary theory). When taken to its conclusion, this type of postmodern theory manifests even a self-conscious agnosticism about its own agnosticism (see Stanley Fish's "Critical Self-Consciousness, Or Can we Know What We're Doing?" to understand this position in literary and legal theory). According to others, postmodern theory represents a school of thought that emphasises a plurality of worldviews and a multiplicity of ideologies over against one that rejects the possibility of such a variety and insists upon a single universal intellectual and ethical framework with which to view reality. (See Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* for this position in literary theory.) Yet others hold that postmodern theory stands for a constant evaluation and re-evaluation of the power dynamics that constitute a society and its practices in order to understand the nature of the forces that oppress/repress/suppress as well as that of the forces that are oppressed/repressed/suppressed. (See Foucault's "Truth and Power" to understand this position. Also see the works of Jacques Lacan for a poststructuralist-psychoanalytical perspective on this topic). And some argue that postmodern theory represents a study of the *zeitgeist* of the period after the Second World War (see Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*).

Certain critics of postmodern theory attack it for what they consider its nihilism--a viewpoint, they claim, that emphasises moral and ideological relativism and therefore reduces *all* notions of True, Good and Beautiful to nothingness. More pragmatic critics maintain that postmodern discourse presents abstract and esoteric theories about social and environmental justice that promise much but deliver little when put to the test of practical reality. Others dismiss its "post-adolescence-cynicism" as little other than radical chic. And still others argue that when stripped of its bewildering jargon and hair-splitting arguments about plurality,

postmodern theory is simply old wine in a new bottle, namely that it stands for little other than good, old-fashioned self-criticism.

But even though the term remains extremely contested both across disciplinary boundaries as well as within them, for the purposes of these papers, we loosely outline some very general notions that represent postmodern theory. In *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner nicely illustrate the fundamental notions that constitute postmodern theory (1-5). Their views are summarised below. According to them, postmodern theory provides a critique of:

- the modern search for a foundation of knowledge
- the modern belief that theory mirrors reality
- totalising macroperspectives or metanarratives on society and history
- modern assumptions of social coherence and notions of causality
- rational and unified subjects

Instead, Best and Kellner point out, the different types of postmodern theories hold that:

- theories/foundations of knowledge at best provide partial perspectives on their objects and therefore all cognitive representations of the world are historically and linguistically mediated

In other words, Best and Kellner tell us, the postmodernists recognise:

- locally-based microtheories and micropolitics that challenge a broad array of discourses and institutionalised forms of power
- social multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation and indeterminacy
- the theory of socially and linguistically decentred and fragmented subjects (refer to Paper I to understand this.)

Even though in the current context, many philosophers across the world can be considered card-carrying postmodernists, its two central figures continue to be the French-speaking intellectuals Derrida and Foucault. While Derrida's clear attack on structuralism makes it easy to

categorise him as a poststructuralist, Foucault's theories problematise the rational tradition of the Enlightenment and perhaps mark him as a postmodernist and not as a philosopher of language and linguistics per se. (This latter view, however, remains open to debate--many theorists do categorise Foucault as a poststructuralist.). In English studies, moreover, Derrida's contribution to poststructuralist discourse is also known by the term he introduced as "deconstruction". It stands for an attack on structuralist modes of literary analysis and represents instead a critical approach to reading a text in such a way as to highlight its inherent contradictions and lack of semantic stability. Foucault's contribution to this type of discourse is more in the field of social history than literary theory or linguistics, although feminist/post-Marxist/new historicist literary critics often appropriate his central ideas, just as they appropriate Derrida's arguments, in order to read texts in a *certain* way.

In the field of policy studies, an intellectual movement that could be said to run parallel to that of structuralism (but not poststructuralism) is constructivism (Again, refer to paper I for conceptual details on structuralism and poststructuralism.). Parsons summarises Guba's interpretation of the latter paradigm as follows (71):

- realities exist as mental constructs and are relative to those who hold them;
- knowledge and the knower are part of the same subjective entity; findings are the results of the interaction;
- identifies, compares and compares the various constructions that exist (hermeneutical and dialectical).

But a successful case can be made--although, based on the limited research for this project, it hasn't been made to date--that a theory within the field of policy studies that runs parallel to some postmodern notions is one that predates constructivism. That theory is the one propounded by Charles Lindblom in the 1960's that decision-making can actually be viewed as "the science

of muddling through." It is a view--not unlike that of the postmodernists--that emphasises the futility of attempting "superhuman comprehensiveness" and focuses instead on the necessity of mutual adjustment and negotiation in the process (Refer to Parsons for details on Lindblom's theory).

The purpose of these papers, in any event, is to take arguments within the field of policy studies to the step *after* constructivism so as to a) make the readers more conscious of the constructedness of even constructivism; and b) explore the possibility of developing a truly postmodern discourse for the policy cycle. The overarching argument for this project is divided into four papers. Each paper is based on a quadrant of Dobell's commitment-compliance cycle for policy-making:

- Problem Definition/Agenda Setting
- Solution Analysis/Policy Formulation/Rule Making and Mandates
- Policy Implementation and Delivery/Action
- Evaluation

Paper I very generally provides readers with a background on structuralist and poststructuralist theory with a view to preparing them for the argument in the rest of the papers, especially Paper III and IV. It starts by outlining the structuralist view that most human activity is expressed in some sort of language, either natural or constructed. Based on this premise, it examines the stage of problem definition in the policy cycle. It argues--not unlike the constructivist Deborah Stone--that problem recognition and interpretation is "contingent on core assumptions, world view, and social location." But it problematises the constructivist contention that "there can be no absolutely conclusive proof of anything outside a shared paradigm of understanding". The issue at stake here, after all, is whether it is at all responsible to promise a state of shared understandings? Can it ever be achieved in cultures marked by deep diversity?

Paper II begins by examining traditional notions around policy formulation, solution analysis and decision-making. Based on Foucault's views on truth/objectivity and power, however, this paper provides a rationale for problematising the validity of the term "objective". Implicit in its argument is the question, "are instruments of public policy 'objective' and 'valid' only if they're backed by the power of the dominant ideology?".

Paper III begins by making the poststructuralist case that meaning is neither a function of syntax nor an inherent feature of the shapes that are called words. It once again outlines the poststructuralist arguments made by Derrida. It also outlines Stanley Fish's reader-response contention that textual interpretation is a function of the ideologies and values that shape a discourse and construct a text and, therefore, the meaning of the text is rightfully located in the cultural and political assumptions of the reader. It then examines these arguments against the practical challenge confronting the authors of public policy, i.e., the need to stabilise the meaning of a text/policy in order to ensure that decisions made in Ottawa have the same significance in Clayoquot Sound. The issue at stake here is, if texts cannot serve as stable/coherent guides to aid the "correct" interpretation of the author's intentions, how can policies be properly implemented?

Paper IV outlines conventional notions of policy evaluation and then explores the issue that if texts cannot serve as guides to aid the "correct" interpretation of the author's intentions on account of their self-referentiality, how can policies be used as benchmarks to measure the performance of public servants for purposes of auditing and accountability?

Conceptually, Papers I, III, and IV build on each other in tandem. Paper I is the most explicitly postmodern: it presents a poststructuralist rationale for interpreting policies as texts. Paper III up from where the first leaves off, but it does so implicitly. It takes the postmodern rationale presented the first paper as a given and uses it as the basis for exploring the various

difficulties associated with interpreting texts and, therefore, implementing policies. It then goes on to question traditional theories about policy implementation and identifies two intermeshed dilemmas in the process of policy interpretation. It ends by attempting to present broad solutions to these dilemmas as a means to improve the performance of policy implementers. Paper IV is the least explicitly postmodern. But, once again, it is based implicitly on the rationale presented in the two other papers as it problematises certain accepted doctrines about policy evaluation, accountability and performance measurement systems. Paper II, on the other hand, presents an argument that is more postmodern than poststructuralist and, therefore, is related conceptually to the rest of the papers but not directly.

All in all, the decision to adopt a postmodern lens to assess the status quo in the realm of policy-making was inspired by a postmodern rationale: the assumption was that a critical/cultural framework existing *outside* the epistemological context of the object of examination would reveal more about the object than a critical/cultural framework that was *inside* the framework and, therefore, subject to the same critical/cultural limitations as the object itself. In other words, the papers attempted to avoid a critical/cultural framework that, in the end, would point only to itself and its own inadequacies and, in doing so, render the exercise of evaluation futile. At any rate, it should be pointed out that in their attempt to generate doubt--some might even call it irreverence--about most unquestioningly embraced values and assumptions underlining the policy cycle, all four papers are truly postmodern.

Paper I

Through the Looking Glass: defining policy issues from a postmodern perspective

Can postmodern theories developed primarily in the arts and the humanities have even the slightest bearing on well-worn definitions and interpretations of the policy cycle? The aim of public policy, some would say, is to assist in the pragmatic task of governing the “real” world. The aim of the arts and the humanities, others would say, is the exact opposite--to provide an aesthetic and intellectual space that serves as an escape from the dehumanising effects of the “real” world. What can the latter have to say, therefore, that can be of any importance to the nonsense and matter-of-fact world of public administration?

This paper bravely (or foolishly) seeks to explore exactly this question, regardless of how remote the possibility might be that postmodern theory can contribute meaningfully to traditional notions of the policy cycle. It begins by outlining very generally the basic tenets of structuralism as a starting point to trace--again, very generally--some of the most influential postmodern arguments from the arts and the humanities about textual interpretation. The specific thrust of the argument in this paper is to test accepted notions about issue identification and problem definition/formulation by adopting structuralist and poststructuralist critical frameworks as the means of evaluation. In other words, the rationale for writing this paper is postmodern: the objective is to assess the status quo with a critical/cultural framework existing *outside* the epistemological context of the object of examination so that it is not subject to the same critical/cultural limitations as the object itself. Put another way, the paper attempts to avoid a

critical framework that, in the end, points only to itself and its own inadequacies and, in doing so, renders the exercise of critical thinking futile.

The rational model for policy analysis holds that "policy or strategy is formulated consciously, preferably analytically, and made explicit and then implemented formally" (Mintzberg and Jorgensen qtd in Pal 5). Based on this model, a rationalist would hold that a policy issue/problem can be defined as a "substantial discrepancy between what is and what should be" (Dery in Parsons 17). A structuralist theorist would argue, however, that any strategy formulated/analysed by policy makers actually reflects a natural language, a system of signs, which predates the consciousness of policy makers. S/He would hold, therefore, that what appears to be a conscious act of deliberation and expression on the part of policy makers is in fact nothing more than the exercise of holding a mirror upto the collective cognitive laws that make deliberation, expression and analysis possible in the first place. It is for this reason, the structuralist would say, that policy issues can be identified and problems can be defined only within the parametres of a shared paradigm of understanding. The problem definer/policy maker, after all, the structuralist would assert, serves as nothing more than a space--a venue--where the various forces that constitute these collective cognitive laws come together to make the policy issue comprehensible.

The structuralist critic would make her/his case by first tracing the cyclical structure, the gyre, that characterises the policy-making process and then drawing attention to the generality of that structure across all systems of policy-making. The purpose of such an exercise, for the structuralist, would be to establish the primacy of the collective form of policy-making that remains covert in the process of deliberation but is indeed the glue that holds the process, and therefore the policy, together. In its absence, the structuralist would say, things fall apart!

The reasons for attempting to establish the primacy of a collective system of policy-making, according to the structuralists, would be manifold. Some of them would contend that regardless of the content of each individual policy, the collective form that makes all policies not only intelligible but also possible is in itself a subject worthy of rigorous intellectual enquiry. This is because, they would argue, the exercise of emphasising the structure of the policy-making process is necessary to draw attention to the constructedness of the policy issue itself. The process of identifying the issue and defining the problem, after all, they would point out, "is contingent on core assumptions, world view and social location" (Pal expounding Stone 96) of not only the problem definer but also those affected by the problem. Understanding the problem in the terms of those most affected by it, in other words, would necessitate that those identifying the issue and defining the problem have at least a common intellectual framework to observe and apprehend the situation, if not the shared experience of those living the situation. Put another way, then, the structuralists would argue that the structure of the policy cycle serves as a metaphor to demonstrate that identifying an issue is not so much a function of the individual interpretation of a policy maker who defines the gap between reality and a desired state of affairs as it is of understanding, through a shared critical framework, the complex interrelatedness of the dynamics that construct the reality of a situation. And reality itself, they would argue, is a matter of understanding the collective cognitive laws that shape specific cultural conventions.

Other structuralists would take this argument a step further and observe that the collective cognitive laws that constitute the structure of policies don't just run parallel to the rules of linguistics but are in fact constituted by those very rules. Policies, they would argue, are not merely the intentions of policy-makers inscribed in a set of self-effacing signs and structures called words. The intentions of policy-makers are actually encoded in a language that is pre-

constructed according to the rules of linguistics. These intentions are then re-encoded in a set of signs and symbols we call words. When words are aligned according to the rules of linguistics, they produce intelligible meaning. On a formal level, moreover, the structuralists would point out that the gyre, the structure of the policy-making process, reflects a natural language, a system of signs that foreshadows the constructed language because it is the first to be structured according to the rules of linguistics. Both the content and the form of policies, therefore, they would assert, are products of a set of linguistic rules.

If some of the latter observations baffle the common sense and fly in the face of real experience, then it is exactly what the structuralists seek to achieve. Meaning, for them, is not that which exists on the surface as "common" and "real". Meaning, for them, is a matter of underlying structures and covert linguistic rules that manifest themselves through individual and collective human subjects. And their self-assigned task with regards to public policy, they would say, is to make explicit these covert rules and classify them neatly not only to tidy up the general clutter within which public policy loiters palely but also to (re)establish a set of principles to understand its general structure. As Barthes, a structuralist, once said, "structuralism is not a set of beliefs, but two complementary practices: analysis and synthesis". Structuralism developed as a major movement in literary circles in the 1960s. Ferdinand de Saussure's theories on modern structural linguistics from the early decades of the century were revived in this movement. According to him, words/signs--or the structures that constitute the content of policies--represented a collective linguistic code that underlies all meaning and therefore deserve to be the real subject of enquiry. He maintained that even though words/signs serve as the currency of information, they exist as interdependent entities whose relationship with each other is worthy of attention in itself. For Saussure, the rules that governed these relationships constituted the system

of language, or *langue*. He held, however, that these rules manifested themselves only through actual speech, or *parole*, produced by individual subjects. His main concern, therefore, was to deduce the general *langue* through instances of a specific *parole*.

In attempting to identify the overarching *langue* that held together all expressions of *parole*, Saussure argued that in any constructed language, the relationship between the sign (signifier) and the object it represented (signified) remained strictly arbitrary. If the combination of the letters ‘c,’ ‘a,’ and ‘t’ evokes a familiar feline in the anglophonic mind, he said, it was much less a matter of any inherent quality possessed by the word than a matter of a culturally and historically constructed literary convention. He noted, moreover, that the word ‘cat’ was not known for what it was but for what it was *not*—it relayed meaning because it distinguished itself from ‘mat’ and ‘bat’ and so on. The signified, then, as Saussure illustrated, was a product of the difference between various signifiers.

Saussure's ideas had a significant impact on numerous intellectuals across Europe and North America. Structuralism, they maintained, was the exercise of "rethink[ing] everything through once again in terms of linguistics" (Jameson 7). The chief proponents of structuralism in Europe were Russian Formalists such as Roman Jakobson, Jan Mukorovsky, the French ethnologist Claude Levi-Strauss and the French critic Roland Barthes. In North America, structuralism found its major advocate in Jonathan Culler.

The relevance of structuralism to the literary community was that it drew attention to the fact that literature relayed meaning only because of certain pre-articulated literary conventions. In other words, structuralism held that meaning was much less a product of literature than literature a product of meaning. As Johnathan Culler put it "to read a text as literature is not to make one's mind a *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring to it an

implicit understanding of operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for" (918). Meaning derived from literature, then, for the structuralists, was more a matter of possessing an implicit knowledge of the values and perceptions that constituted the shared culture of literary discourse than a matter of grasping correctly the "facts" that lay at the heart of the written words.

The relevance of structuralism to the intellectual community at large was that it drew attention to the constructedness of all forms of meaning across academic disciplines. An intellectual movement in policy studies that ran parallel to structuralism was what Frank Fischer and John Forester termed "the argumentative turn" (qtd in Pal 22). According to Fischer, "the argumentative turn entail[ed], among other things, the critical study of the structure of argument in policy analysis (qtd in Pal 22). The underlying assumption of this movement was that "facts are always constructed through values and perceptions, or more accurately, through deep theories that structure our cognition of reality" (Pal expounding Fischer and Forester 22). For these theorists too, then, it could be argued, meaning was a product of values and functions. And reality, for them, it could be said, was a function of structures rather than vice versa.

In a single stroke, therefore, structuralism and its parallels in other academic disciplines liberated meaning from the shackles of "reality", the presumptions of "rationality" and the fetters of "fact". But in the same stroke, paradoxically, structuralism imposed a straitjacket of sweeping linguistic and cognitive laws on meaning. By insisting upon a "coherent and comprehensive theory" of structures as the ultimate thought-system, structuralism unwittingly (or not) contradicted one of its own fundamental tenets, i.e., that all expressions of meaning are arbitrary. In other words, structuralism begged the question, if expressions of meaning are truly arbitrary products of historically and culturally defined conventions, how could each and every one of them be little other than "intersubjective interpretations of *common* experiences"? Put another

way, if it was structuralism's contention that all culturally and historically defined conventions were actually varying palimpsests of a deep(er) universal theory that underwrote all cognition of reality, was the arbitrariness of meaning a culturally and historically constructed illusion? Or, was cultural and historical diversity itself an illusion? In a word, then, was it structuralism's claim that all cultures across history and geography were nothing more than different incarnations of the same Supreme Structure?

The rhetorical nature of these questions suggest that in spite of its self-deifying ambitions, structuralism amounted to nothing more than an inescapably circular attempt to replace one set of organising principles with another. If nothing existed outside the scope of the Supreme Structure, or the shared paradigm of understanding that it represented, then, in the final analysis, the structure only referred to its own self. In endeavouring to overwrite the principles of humanistic rationality with the principles of linguistic rationality, therefore, structuralism achieved little other than the distinction of substituting one set of god-terms for another.

It is exactly these god-terms that French philosopher Jacques Derrida attacked mercilessly in his 1966 paper, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences", which announced the arrival of poststructuralism to the rest of the world. In it, Derrida lampooned structuralism's quasi-scientific attempt to regulate all modes of reality according to the rules of linguistics, or other deeper theories of cognition. He argued that the flaw with "the whole history of the concept of the structure" was that it was *logocentric*, or centred around a critical foundation that it considered absolute. But this self-affirming centre that held the structure together, Derrida pointed out, was actually just as much a part of the structure as the structure itself. Put simply, Derrida illustrated that the centre could neither exist outside the

scope of the structure nor escape the limits/limitations of structurality. It wouldn't be far-fetched to say, then, for Derrida, things *always* fell apart because the centre could *never* hold.

Derrida's theories pick up from where those of Saussure's leave off. He agrees with Saussure that the word 'cat' is not known for what it is but for what it is *not*—it relays meaning because it distinguishes itself from 'mat' and 'bat' and so on. The signified, he concurs, is a product of the difference between various signifiers. But, unlike Saussure, he argues that if the meaning of the signified is dispersed over various signifiers, it is not immediately present in any one sign. Meaning, therefore, for Derrida, is neither fixed nor stable because it is constantly dispersed over innumerable alternatives.

Put another way, it is Derrida's radical claim that all attempts to stabilise the significance of structures by embedding them within a fixed cultural and historical context are as misleading as the structures themselves. This is because the context--or the values and perceptions that constitute them--is itself expressed in a series of words, signs and symbols, the meanings of which are equally unstable. In other words, he argues that the values and perceptions that define deep theories of cognition are themselves subject to the same instability as the reality they try to process, organise and regulate.

Based on this premise, Derrida goes on to subvert any notion of a "transcendental" evaluative framework that exists outside the world of structures and attacks all thought-systems that claim as their origin an absolute or "metaphysical" structure of reasoning. He maintains that the critical foundation, used to ascribe meaning to structures is itself not absolute. Rather, he says, it is the product of a culturally and historically defined cognitive convention and, therefore, equally indefinite, indeterminate and assailable as the culturally and historically defined structure. In other words, poststructuralism illustrates that the collective cognitive laws that the

structuralists' brandish as that which make the exercise of deliberation, expression and analysis possible in the first place are themselves mirror images of what they seek to reflect. And like all mirror images, they remain as flawed as the object they reflect because, in the final analysis, all that is left is an endless series of self-deprecating mirror images.

Taking to task all *logocentric* thought-systems that invoke the metaphysical centre, therefore, Derrida attempts to collapse their founding principles. To this end, he calls into question the fundamental bipolarities upon which such thought-systems base their structure and interrogates the rigid hierarchies that separate any two opposites within the structure, such as *langue* and *parole*, facts and values, objects and their reflections. He argues that because the distinguishing feature of one becomes the defining feature of the other, the two are more alike than different.

To illustrate this point further, it might help to systematically trace the steps that lead to this conclusion. Let's take the binary opposites *fact* and *value* as an example. The rational model would hold, on the one hand, that the objective of science is to uncover indisputable facts through the exercise of reason and observation. The same model would hold, on the other hand, that the objective of values, perceptions and sentiments is the exact opposite--to encourage a plurality of meaning and provide a space that serves as an escape from the dispassionate and neutral world of science. But Derrida would make the case that this definition of fact props up its own identity only by excluding that of values and perceptions. Values and perceptions, then, Derrida would argue, are not merely the "other" but an integral part of the definition of scientific fact because they represent what it is *not*. But in doing so, values and perceptions, paradoxically, also represent what science *is*. The exercise of excluding values and perceptions from the definition of fact, therefore, is an act of repressing that which is at once known and unknown.

Yet the difference between the two terms represents nothing more than a cultural and historical construct--one that can be de-constructed or re-constructed. In Derrida's final analysis, then, the distinctions between fact and values/perceptions are absolute only because they've been made so by shared conventions. Yet the thought-system that makes it so is as constructed by culture and history as the binary opposites it claims as absolute.

It is necessary to note here, however, that it would be a mistake to dismiss Derrida's arguments as nihilistic or nonsensical. Derrida's theory doesn't seek to deny the existence of meaning, facts and values. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate that all systems of critical thought—including those proposed by rationalists, structuralists and even the poststructuralist—are culturally and historically constructed. And because these thought-systems are themselves fraught with cultural and historical paradoxes, all interpretations derived from culture and history are equally arbitrary, if not equally valid.

In identifying policy issues and defining problems, then, poststructuralist theorists would agree with the structuralist view that "values, perceptions and interests play a huge role in this phase" (Pal 22). But they would challenge the structuralist contention that "there can be no absolutely conclusive proof of anything outside a shared paradigm of understanding". The poststructuralists would maintain that the shared paradigm of understanding is itself a cultural construct--or, perhaps, a cultural metaconstruct--that eventually points only to itself and not a universal framework of understanding. And the nostalgia for absolutely conclusive proof, they'd quickly point out, is only a reflection of that cultural metaconstruct. The issue at stake, then, they would say, is determining whether it is at all responsible to promise a state of shared understandings, especially in cultures marked by deep diversity.

The problem with this poststructuralist position, however, is that it fails to explicitly acknowledge one important point: the human condition—as we know it—is by default historically and culturally situated, and the cognitive processes the poststructuralist's point out as (meta)constructed are an essential feature of our practical way of life. Perhaps this is because the cognitive framework by which we express ourselves--or which expresses us—presents us with no alternatives to itself. In other words, we have neither the freedom to break away from some variety of culture and history nor the freedom to abandon the exercise of critical thought. (This is not to say, of course, that we do not have the freedom to alter culture and history for future generations and, thereby, the form, content and nature of critical thought. It only means that some variety of critical thought, regardless of how it is expressed--and altered--culturally and historically, is fundamental to our existence as we know it.)

In light of this inescapable situatedness, then, it becomes necessary to view cognitive laws as tools that serve to fulfil the quotidian requirements of our practical existence. That said, however, it is equally necessary to recognise that this concession still does not address the larger issue at stake: is it at all responsible to promise a state of shared understandings, especially in cultures marked by deep diversity. In other words, even though poststructuralism illustrates that the collective cognitive laws that the structuralists' brandish as that which make the exercise of deliberation, expression and analysis possible in the first place are themselves mirror images of what they seek to reflect, is there really nothing beyond the endless series of self-deprecating mirror images?

While this paper does not dare to address that question with any semblance of confidence, the answer certainly does not lie in diffidence or defeatism. Perhaps the first baby step in grappling with the issue of conflicting cultures, then, is to resist being refracted by the mirror

and, instead, walking *through the looking glass* to the other side(s). Put another way, perhaps the solution is to crossover into the cultural/cognitive reality of the Other(s) in order to *grow* one's own identity. The postmodern answer, therefore, is not to create a false dilemma between a cultural mosaic that insists upon clearly demarcated monocultures/critical frameworks and a melting pot that erases differences to create an overarching monoculture/critical framework. The postmodern answer, perhaps, lies in defining values, perceptions and social locations within the context of an ever-widening cultural/critical gyre-- a structure in a constant state of flux--so that every policy issue is seen as ensconced in a labyrinth of multiple worldviews and cognitive laws.

Defining the problem then becomes a matter of assessing a situation neither in a polarised vacuum nor in neatly demarcated--but polarised--stakeholder perspectives. Recognising the problem, moreover, becomes a much more complex exercise because the situation has to be assessed from an interrelated perspective that emphasises more than just one set of values and assumptions, or one overarching interpretation of reality. The real solution, then, lies in empowering policy makers/issue identifiers to recognise more than merely the dominant view of the world in a given situation. The problem definer/policy maker, therefore, in spite of what the structuralist might assert, should serve as much more than an unanimated space--or a lifeless venue--for the coming together of various cognitive laws that shape reality. The postmodern policy maker should possess the power to exercise her own agency in widening the cognitive gyre, or walking through the looking glass, in her quest for the most appropriate problem definition.

Paper II

The Politics of Policy Formation and Solution Analysis

Aaron Wildavsky makes the case for a kind of policy analysis that "speaks truth to power". But French postmodernist Michel Foucault argues in *Power/knowledge* that "truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power. . . Truth is a thing of the world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as truth. . . . (131)" In light of the latter statement, then, this paper seeks to evaluate the politics of policy formulation and solution analysis. Put another way, with a view to finding a better alternative, this paper attempts to make explicit the interestedness of the forces that determine not only the policy agenda and its outcomes but also the range of instruments employed to achieve those ends.

According to Leslie Pal, "conventional discussion of [solution analysis] usually proceeds by laying out the basic categories and outlining some of the objective characteristics of each of the instruments [of policy]". Objectivity in the policy cycle, as we know it, implies the application of dominant epistemological and cultural frameworks to assess a policy issue and determine a strategy to address it. As many postmodernists including Foucault point out, however, the critical framework employed to make such determinations is itself steeped in values, beliefs and attitudes. In other words, the postmodernists point out that the dominant critical framework that is applied to formulate the policy is itself developed either by systematically "othering" the critical frameworks of already marginal cultures, or by an out and out exclusion of the frameworks that represent such cultures. What serves as "objective" within a

given context, therefore, according to the postmodernists, is that which is *considered* objective by people and institutions in positions of authority. And *all* strategies offered to address policy issues, they say, *are made* to fall within the realm of the larger agenda established by those who represent the institutions of power. In the final analysis, then, they'd point out, the exercise of policy design is not so much "about choosing the most appropriate instrument to deal with the policy problem" (Pal 132) as it is about choosing the most appropriate instrument to further a certain political agenda. And as Richard French tell us in "Postmodern Government", the "attempt to suggest, as the policy sciences movement did, that the analysis of means is the value-neutral province of policy science, while the choice of ends is the logically separable responsibility of politics, is a self-serving mystification" (47).

Intermeshed with this position, however, is a larger problem. Postmodern thinkers would point out that by insisting upon characterising the analysis of means as "[a] value-neutral province of policy science" and casting the choice of ends, instead, as "the logically separable responsibility of politics", proponents of a process of "neutral", policy formulation overlooks their own complicity in *creating* a problem in at least two ways. First, the postmodernists would say, they overlook their responsibility in identifying certain situations in value-laden terms and earmarking them as policy issues. (This is not to say that those who subscribe to a different set of values may not also view the situations as such. But it does mean that what might be characterised as an issue by those managing the policy-making process may *not* be viewed as such by those who subscribe to a different set of values.) As a corollary, moreover, on account of its inherent political character, the process of "neutral" policy formulation neglects to identify certain situations as policy issues and, thereby, completely shuts them out of the policy agenda. Second, the postmodernists would say, they underestimate their responsibility for the outcomes

of the selected policy. This is because the criteria established to recommend/select the most suitable strategy from the available options are also steeped in values and beliefs.

In the process of policy design, however, it seems reasonable to raise the question, "so what if the critical process by which we formulate policies is steeped in either covert or overt values and beliefs? Is there a state of being, after all, that can ever exist beyond a set--any set--of values and beliefs and, therefore, outside the ambit of power?"

The criticism, however, is not that the process of policy formulation and the array of options it offers as a means to address a problem reflect dominant political interests. The quarrel is that this process furthers its own ends covertly, under the self-serving mask of neutrality and objectivity. The issue, in other words, is not one of *politics* versus *neutrality*. The issue is that, on the one hand, the powers that establish the rules seek to keep their agenda cloaked under the guise of disinterestedness so as to further their own interests with the least amount of resistance. But, on the other hand, those who're left out of the rule-making process seek to unmask the interestedness of this process -- albeit, to participate in the process and further their own agenda. The conflict, therefore, is not between right and wrong. The conflict, as the postmodernists have often pointed out, is between one type of politics versus another; one view of the world against another; one type of *constructed* truth versus another.

The view, moreover, that adopting a "balanced" or "centred" perspective on issues represents objective rationality while "extreme" positions represent political biases and prejudices is also a "self-serving mystification". Neutrality, after all, as the postmodernists tell us, is a position steeped in values and attitudes, not free from it. Even as it masquerades as a position that takes no sides--or, inversely, as a position that is on everyone's side--therefore, it does little other than satisfy the political ambitions of those it seeks to serve. And in its attempts

to persuade others that it remains disinterested, selfless, noble, and above all, rational, it implicitly makes the case that it is most deserving of power because it is least likely to be corrupted by it. Its neutral guise, therefore, is used as a means to further its own political interests. The problem, therefore, is not that the position of neutrality/rationality seeks to attain or sustain power. The problem is that it seeks to do so while sanctimoniously pretending not to.

This said, however, it must be clarified that the line of argument so far seeks neither to incriminate all covert critical frameworks for their so-called neutrality nor call for their wholesale abandonment on the charge that they're all steeped in some form of politics or another. The question at stake, actually, is that even if the political nature of not only the choice of policy ends but also the critical framework adopted to analyse the means is laid bare, does it make a difference to the overall outcomes of the policy process? After all, Foucault himself tells us that, "a society without power relations can only be an abstraction." In other words, the case may be made that no matter what the situation, some sort of critical framework will be adopted to analyse its consequences, and regardless of which critical framework is adopted for the purpose of analysis, some sort of political bias will remain inherent in it. Practical wisdom, after all, shows us that no matter which strategy is adopted to address a problem, there is no such thing in public policy as a feasible pareto-optimal change. Put another way, then, lived experience demonstrates to us that regardless of the political slant of a selected strategy/solution, some people will always be worse off, left out or marginalised even as some others will benefit. Common sense dictates, moreover, that this asymmetry should not stand in the way of social and economic progress, no matter how the latter is defined. According to practical wisdom, therefore, the unenviable challenge confronting the policy process is not simply that of making the best *choice* from a given array of options. The dilemma is that of making the most appropriate *trade-*

off between the goals and distributional consequences that might be achieved by selecting among the available options.

But to accept that power relations infuse every aspect of our practical existence is not to endorse the view that the only pragmatic response to such knowledge is to ignore it. As Foucault says, "to say that there cannot be a society without power relations is not to say . . . that those which are established are necessary. . . ." (222). "Instead", he observes, "the analysis, the elaboration and the bringing into question of power relations and the 'agonism' between power relations and the intransitivity of power relations is a permanent political task inherent in all social existence" (222-3).

Foucault's views encourage the examination of the process of policy formulation and instrument selection from a different vantage point so that even though the challenge confronting the process is that of making the most appropriate trade-offs among options, it becomes essential to emphasise the *interrelatedness* of these options. In other words, the task of the policy-making process, from this perspective, would not be simply to pick one option and lament the inevitable loss of the other(s). The task of policy-making would be to comprehend the complexity of the context within which the policy issue exists and formulate a strategy by adopting a critical labyrinth--instead of a critical framework--to address this complexity. The critical labyrinth would serve as an interrelated web of critical frameworks that would accommodate competing stakeholder viewpoints. And the overall aim of such an exercise would be to create a hybrid of critical frameworks so as to prevent the persistent domination of any one stakeholder viewpoint over the other(s). In other words, the aim would *not* be to supplant one framework with another but to keep increasing the scope of the labyrinth so that every new stakeholder viewpoint would

be interwoven with the rest, with confidence that their values and perspectives will be relevant even where they cannot be decisive.

Needless to say, however, it would be a utopian oversimplification to think that such a critical labyrinth would resolve or reconcile the differences stemming from deeply diverging worldviews. Complex issues representing interests that conflict with each other, therefore, would certainly continue to rage: solutions that support the economy, for instance, would continue to undervalue the damage done to the environment and/or society. But a critical labyrinth would represent a first step in drawing attention to the constructedness of each worldview and neutralising the efforts of one set of stakeholders to marginalise the views of the other(s). A heightened awareness of power relations on the part of every stakeholder, in other words, would serve at least two goals. On the one hand, it would make the more dominant stakeholders view their own critical frameworks more self-consciously and self-critically. On the other hand, it would empower marginalised stakeholders not only to articulate their own critical frameworks in a democratic environment but also to resist/challenge the dominance of the more privileged stakeholder viewpoints, if necessary. The overall outcome of such an exercise, in other words, would be the opening up of new avenues for communication and crosstalk between various stakeholders.

The success of any such enterprise, however, would depend on either the willingness of dominant stakeholders to relinquish some power so as to make possible an open and democratic dialogue, or the ability of marginalised stakeholders to encourage that willingness in those who possess power. It is here, then, that Foucault's theories become harder to work out because there exists no apparent incentive--other than the ethical--for dominant stakeholders to alter their worldview or cooperate to change the status quo. Moreover, a mere awareness of power relations

appears insufficient to empower marginalised stakeholders. In other words, the marginalised will not attain power unless their cultural and critical frameworks are recognised as such by institutions representing authority. Assuming agency, therefore, requires more than a mere knowledge of asymmetries in power. It requires a cooperative Other who is willing to share power. Or it requires leaders who can create an overall context conducive to a relatively more even distribution of power.

Opening up the process of policy formulation to critical frameworks from less privileged cultures, then, calls for the use of rhetoric to persuade those in places of authority to open up to other ways of thinking and knowing. This requires that marginalised stakeholders make not only an ethical and emotional appeal for equity/justice but also a logical appeal for "new and improved" policy outcomes. Larger changes in the overall cultural and epistemological context within which the policy issue exists, however, can also open up the process of policy formulation. Altering the judicial, executive and economic forces that make up the situation at stake, in other words, can bring about political change necessary for participatory decision-making. But doing so requires leaders who can employ rhetoric in a certain way to create a mobilised civil society pressing for a more participatory process.

If the process of decision analysis, nonetheless, is the practise of identifying "who gets what, when [and] how" (Laswell quoted in Parsons 246), then, opening up the policy formulation process to critical frameworks from other cultures entails more than just the exercise of ensuring that the "who/which" includes voices/critical frameworks beyond those represented by dominant forces. The process of policy formulation, after all, occurs not only at the meta-analytical level but also the inter-analytical level. The act of opening up the policy formulation process, therefore, should also call attention to the power dynamics of "how" decisions and implemented

are made in an interactive or participatory context. Put another way, it is necessary to recognise that even if a variety of epistemologically and culturally specific critical frameworks participate in the process of policy formulation, the question will still remain as to which framework/labyrinth of frameworks provides the most effective strategy to address the policy issue.

The complexity of this question, actually, stems from two factors. First, different critical frameworks interpret raw information in different--even conflicting--terms, and this leads to a multiplicity of complementary or contradictory understandings of the extant situation and interpretations of the policy issue. Second, based not only on their understanding of the policy issue but also their inherent ideological/cultural bias, different critical frameworks seek to attain different objectives through the policy formulation process. At stake in this debate, then, is the definition of "the most effective strategy". And the ideal participatory context is one that allows for the formulation of an all-encompassing definition of "the most effective strategy" so that the concerns of every stakeholder are adequately addressed by it.

The difficulty stemming from the desire for an ideal participatory context, however, is two-fold. At the abstract level, the challenge lies in establishing a context that minimises the negative effects of imbalances in power. At the practical level, the challenge lies in developing instruments that can make "the most effective strategy" both possible and practicable. The challenge, in other words, lies in determining "how" to create and sustain an ideal participatory context so as to get the most inclusive policy outcomes.

While there are some theories that outline the steps necessary for establishing a context that minimises the negative effects of imbalances in power, Foucault warns against the process of " 'normalization' --the increasing rationalization, organization, and homogenization of society

in modern times" (David Couzens Hoy 130). For Foucault, in other words, homogeneity serves as the equivalent of hegemony. But Foucault's theories fail to recognise that minimising the negative effects of imbalances in power cannot come about by mere resistance to dominant forces. Any such state of affairs will necessitate some level of homogenisation--at least to the point that all stakeholders/leaders agree that a relatively even distribution of political power between different cultural/critical frameworks is desirable/just/ethical.

The task of developing practical tools necessary for establishing "the most effective strategy", moreover, poses an equally complicated challenge. Rhetoric offers the promise of an instrument that can harmonise several competing viewpoints in the same instance because its malleability allows it to be interpreted in several ways and, therefore, satisfy several cultural needs simultaneously. But even rhetoric is not free from Plato's charge that, in the final analysis, it is a hollow endeavor because it does little other than create the perception of a reality that doesn't actually exist. For this reason, rhetoric remains guilty of creating only illusions and deceiving all whose concerns are at stake. An instrument that can *truly* harmonise competing viewpoints, nonetheless, will have to be one that can emphasise a *substantive* interrelatedness of viewpoints reflecting the longterm enlightened self interest that comes from the recognition that in a full and finite world we are inevitably interdependent and our interests do ultimately coincide. Perhaps the first step towards achieving this goal will necessitate the collapse of all politically/culturally constructed binary oppositions, including the false boundaries created between disciplines and their theories and practices.

Paper III

Textual Freeplay and Problems of Policy Implementation

In their essay, *A Conceptual Framework of the Implementation Process*, Sabatier and Mazmanian define the process of policy implementation as "the carrying out of a basic policy decision, usually made in a statute." They make the case that successful implementation or "the translation of statutory objectives into the policy decisions of implementing agencies" (538) depends on, among other things, clearly and consistently articulated objectives. Some postmodern philosophers of language, however, have argued that clarity, consistency and precision in language is a matter of cultural convention rather than any inherent feature of a written or spoken word. If this is so, can policies written in Ottawa be successfully implemented in Clayoquot Sound? This paper explores that question in some detail.

Some postmodern critics hold that the cognitive process that leads--or doesn't lead--to deliberative action entails a language that not only constructs the concept of the deed but also the cultural and political context within which that deed carries significance. Public policy, then, for the postmodernists, is an exercise inscribed in signs and symbols, and like all other products of a deliberative process, it owes its very existence to language. This is because, they argue, all systems of human thought and decision-making can only be expressed in language and, therefore, cannot exist outside its realm. Every system of human thought, for them—including public policy--is a text in some form or the other. And public policy, they say, is whatever *language* chooses to do or not to do.

Poststructuralist critic Derrida maintains that no word can ever embody only one stable meaning, because it inherently carries traces of other meanings—the meanings of that which it is

not—with it. Language, for him, is more like a huge tangled web where meaning is in a constant state of freeplay and can never be pinned down. If meaning is constantly divided and never fully present in a sign, then Derrida holds that the exercise of reading amounts to no more than an activity that constantly postpones any decidable meaning. For even if a sentence comes to an end, Derrida points out that the web of language within which meaning exists doesn't. As a consequence, meaning is constantly dispersed over innumerable alternatives. Put another way, it is Derrida's radical claim that all attempts to stabilise the significance of a word by embedding it within a fixed political and cultural context are as misleading as the words themselves. This is because the context itself is expressed in a series of words, signs and symbols, the meanings of which are equally unstable. Put simply, the con-text is itself a text.

Based on this premise, Derrida goes on to subvert any notion of a “transcendental” evaluative framework that exists outside the world of texts and attacks all thought-systems that claim as their origin an absolute or “metaphysical” structure of reasoning. In other words, he maintains that the critical framework used to ascribe meaning to texts is itself not absolute. Rather, he says, it is the product of a culturally and historically defined text and, therefore, equally indefinite, indeterminate and assailable. For Derrida, then, every text contains the seeds of its own dissolution—and regeneration.

Stanley Fish, the *enfant terrible* of contemporary North American literary theory, and professor of law and literature at the University of Illinois, makes the exact same claim as Derrida but perhaps more explicitly with regard to laws/policies and texts. In *Doing What Comes Naturally* he argues “[it] is not that there are no such things as texts and [policies], but that our ability to point to them or perform them depends on prearticulations and demarcations they cannot contain; and it is only so long as such prearticulations and demarcations are in place—and

in a place we cannot locate because it locates us—that texts and [policies] will have the immediate palpability that they seem to have” (301). But “[o]ne cannot ground the differences between literary and [bureaucratic] interpretation in the different kinds of texts they address, because the textual differences are themselves constituted by already differing interpretive strategies, and not the other way round. Nor can one turn this insight into a new reification of difference by assuming that the strategies specific to [public policy] and literature are themselves basic and unchanging, for they are no less historically achieved (and therefore contingent) than the texts they enable us to produce” (304).

Fish calls this the anti-foundationalist argument and makes the case that “value judgements having to do with validity, factuality, accuracy and propriety can still be made[,] but in every case these entities and values, along with the procedures by which they are identified and marshaled, will be inextricable from the social and historical circumstances in which they do their work” (345).

Needless to say, the implications of Derrida’s and Fish’s argument on public policy are rather provocative: it seeks not merely to generate skepticism about most accepted doctrines, but to destabilise the very theory that the words representing a policy are neutral and translucent signs simply serving as a means to reflect the correct intention of its authors. When taken to their logical/illogical conclusion, then, postmodern theorists such as Derrida and Fish seem to make the radical case that language always means much more than it seems to say. But if this is so, can policies written in Ottawa be successfully implemented in Clayoquot Sound?

This said, however, it is critical to ask, does language *always* mean much more than it seems to say? Could it be that in attempting to outline the excesses of language postmodern theorists have minimised the value of lived experience: after all, practice *shows* us--rather than

tells us--that in most circumstances language actually manages to do an adequate job. The charge against the postmodernists, then, is that their arguments bear out in theory but remain at odds with quotidian experience.

Answering--or, perhaps, anticipating--this charge, some postmodernists have conceded that language does indeed acquire *relative* stability and words do assume *seeming* fixity in practical circumstances on account of the tacitly shared assumptions that define a given culture. To this end, Fish has set forth his theory of *interpretive communities*. According to him, an interpretive community is "not so much a group of individuals who share a point of view, but a point of view or way of organizing experience that shared individuals in the sense that its assumed distinctions, categories of understanding, and stipulations of relevance and irrelevance were the content of consciousness of community members who were therefore no longer individuals, but, insofar as they were embedded in the community's enterprise, community property" (141). For him, "such community-constituted interpreters, in their own turn, constitute more or less in agreement, the same text, although the sameness [is] not attributed to the self-identity of the text but to the communal nature of the interpretive act" (141).

This concession acknowledges the experience of those within a culture for whom language appears to function in a stable manner. In doing so, however, it changes the nature of the substantive issue being addressed in this paper. The dilemma now is not simply that textual meaning is in a constant state of freeplay so that the significance of all public policies is ultimately indeterminate. And the question is *not* whether decisions made in Ottawa can have any significance in Clayoquot Sound. The dilemma is that, based on the (covert) parameters set by interpretive communities, some interpretations of the text/policy become more "correct" than others do. The challenge is to define ways in which interpreters can "correctly" approximate the

intentions behind the public policy as defined by the decision-makers. And the real question then becomes, *how* can decisions made in Ottawa *be made* to have the same significance in Clayoquot Sound?

Implicit in this question, of course, is the assumption that interpretive challenges result from the disparate locations of decision-making/textual creation and implementation/performance based on textual interpretation. In other words, if the location of thought/decision-making and action/implementation were one and the same, the question of approximating the "correct" authorial intention would not arise as a serious challenge in the first place. This is because both would occur within the confines of the same interpretive community. The question as it is posed above, then, is predicated on the tacit understanding that public sector organisations represent either hierarchical interpretive communities (where the seat of policy formulation/decision-making is at the top of the structure and the location of policy interpretation/implementation is at its bottom), or polycentric matrices that function as horizontal networks of interpretive communities, not hierarchical ones, but where the same dichotomy between decision-making and administration exists for different reasons.

In large and complex organisational structures, written policies and procedures serve not only as guides to aid administrative staff but also as performance measurement tools that set standards for both the process and the people. Consequently, the act of interpreting these texts "correctly" becomes critical not only to avoid management errors stemming from inconsistencies in performance but also to provide the right benchmarks for auditing and accountability purposes in order to ensure equity, justice/fairness in Human Resource Management.

The dilemma, however, arises from the fact that statements of policy are written within the cultural context of a particular interpretive community, but to readers from other interpretive

communities that do not possess the critical framework necessary to decode the hermeneutic culture of the original community, the words that constitute these texts seem to signal some meaning, but not necessarily that which was intended by its authors. The readers of policy, nonetheless, are not always cognizant of this cultural and epistemological ambivalence and perform the deed based on their own understanding of the text. Problems of implementation arise, therefore, when implementers in Clayoquot Sound misread texts written in Ottawa because they locate the meaning of the text in their own cultural and epistemological assumptions instead of those in which the text was created. (As a corollary, challenges related to the first phase of the policy cycle, Problem Definition and Agenda Setting, arise when the reverse is true--when the authors of policy locate the meaning of the issue in their own cultural and epistemological assumptions instead of those in which the problem is identified and the resulting policy is meant to be implemented. But this paper does not explore that problem.)

In light of these complexities, it appears that texts/policies written in Ottawa exist in a critical and cultural chaos, if not a critical and cultural vacuum. And, in doing so, they refer only to themselves and, therefore, become their own con-text. Put another way, the texts' self-referentiality leads to a freeplay of textual interpretations that, in turn, warrants any number of textual performances. The challenge for the interpreter of policies in Clayoquot Sound, nonetheless, remains constant: s/he has to approximate the original intention of the policies in a critical and cultural milieu that is many times removed from the original context in which the policy was written.

Intermeshed with this, however, is another dilemma. Even if writers of policies in Ottawa succeed in adopting the cultural and critical framework necessary to anticipate the voluminous variety of unique circumstances in which the policy might be invoked, due to the limits imposed

by practical necessities, it would be impossible to set out explicit details to deal with each and every case. In these circumstances, texts written in Ottawa appear abstract and meaningless to their readers in Clayoquot Sound because they're too general and, therefore, don't relay enough information. Problems of implementation arise, once again, when readers feel the need for adequate and unambiguous directions or the need for greater leeway to exercise their own discretion.

Given these overriding challenges, how indeed can texts written in Ottawa be made to have approximately the same significance in Clayoquot Sound? Clearly, there are no easy answers. Both dilemmas, moreover, stem from different causes and therefore necessitate different solutions. The first dilemma results from the reader's ignorance about her/his own ignorance. (Put simply, the reader doesn't know what s/he doesn't know.) The second dilemma, however, doesn't arise from a lack of cultural and/or epistemological awareness. In fact, it is entirely possible that both participants in this dyad are fully aware of not only each other's cultural context but also the breakdown in communication. The second dilemma, actually, arises partly from the practical impossibility of documenting every case, or from the writer's inability to communicate clearly, and/or the reader's inability to explicate appropriately or, more importantly, from the necessity of leaving adequate scope for discretion and variety in performance.

While most literature in public administration doesn't deal directly with problems of textual interpretation at all, traditional implementation theory has indirectly remained focussed on the second dilemma outlined above: problems stemming from authorial ambiguities and explicatory inconsistencies. The causes of these communication problems and the subsequent failure in policy implementation, according to some classical theorists in public administration,

include poor writing and/or reading skills, poor planning skills, lack of authority to act, lack of resources, etc. For others, such as Eugene Bardach, however, the source of the problem is complex management systems, large organisations and the necessity for lots of clearances (referred to in Pal 183). Bardach suggests implementing policies through the market. If his rationale is torqued to suit the argument in this paper, it appears that implicit in his analysis is the assumption that smaller organisations and less-complex management systems have fewer communication breakdowns and, therefore, fewer problems related to textual explication and policy implementation.

Without getting into too many details, then, it appears that according to traditional implementation theory, the solution necessary to resolve the second dilemma must be remedial: it must reverse the effect of the above causes. If this theory is extended to its logical conclusion, it seems that successful implementation depends on effective communication supported by an appropriate organisational framework. This argument offers a wide variety of solutions necessary to achieve desired results, such as improving reading and writing skills across the public service (including the use of tools such as checklists), training staff for improved planning and management, and designing and managing organisations in such a way that communication breakdowns are minimised.

Nonetheless, apart from being too mechanical, these solutions address only one of the two dilemmas outlined above. Moreover, in ordinary, everyday circumstances, the two dilemmas are not as clearly demarcated and complex ideas are not as easily disentangled. Put simply, when a failure in policy implementation occurs in the real world, it is hard to know whether the first or the second dilemma or some combination of the two caused it. The fundamental step in

addressing the policy implementation problem, then, is to accurately identify the real source of implementation failure.

On a slightly different note, Sabatier and Mazmanian point out that the sources of implementation failure are a) the intractability of the policy issue itself, b) legislative and institutional variables, and c) socioeconomic and political variables (referred to in Pal 183). Their argument is certainly more complex than that offered by other traditional theorists, for implicit in their analysis is the assumption that communication/implementation is a political process that entails bargaining and negotiating among all the interlocutors/stakeholders. In spite of that, however, both Sabatier and Mazmanian overlook the cultural and epistemological differences at the root of the first dilemma outlined above.

Based on a recognition of these differences, then, it appears that perhaps one way of minimising gaps in understanding is to ensure that the hermeneutic culture of the communities where policy formulation occurs has some overlap with that of the communities where these policies are interpreted and implemented. Put simply, both sets of interpretive communities should share at least some of the same "points of view, or ways of organizing experience". Or, put another way, the challenge is to create some shared systems of beliefs so that policy makers in one location--geographic or intellectual--and policy implementers in another location internalise adequate respect for, and influence of, the other voices from other cultures.

Any strategy that aims to achieve this overlap in varied--sometimes conflicting--systems of values calls for some measure of resocialisation so that actors from diverse organisations/interpretive communities can adopt new ways of thinking and believing in order to arrive at agreement of acceptable next steps, if not a consensus for policy implementation. (Any such strategy for resocialisation, however, has to be adopted with the greatest care for, if the

process isn't monitored by a pre-determined set of values that emphasises fairness--and obviously "fairness" is itself a contested term--it runs the risk of being misused for unethical purposes or deteriorating into a power play that, among other things, results in a complete loss of ideological diversity.)

Within the public organisation, resocialisation of staff is a concept that seeks to recreate culture, but to do so it requires a prior organisational culture that values the concept of resocialisation: one that is marked by an intellectual and attitudinal openness to shifting values and beliefs (regardless of whether this shift trickles down to the bottom from the top, climbs to the top from the bottom, or travels sideways in the organisation). While attitudes and beliefs towards organisational change are constructed by very complex social, cultural and natural phenomena, one site where they are constantly shaped and moulded is academic institutions that impart skills and knowledge to the labour force. It is necessary, therefore, that schools specialising in professional training not only socialise their students appropriately but also provide them with the skills necessary to remain self-reflexive.

Another site where attitudes and beliefs are shaped are human resource development departments within organisations. Resocialisation of staff in these organisations calls for appropriate training and development so that ultimately the staff are capable of recognising more than merely the dominant view of the world in a given situation.

Resocialising staff in order to broaden their cultural horizons, moreover, can address even the second dilemma outlined above. If policy makers are encouraged to exercise their own discretion in situations where the text appears too general and abstract, those with the ability to recognise more than just the dominant world view will perhaps be in a better position to adapt their decisions to the circumstances of a particular situation. And, in the long-run, such decisions

will be less likely to result in failed policy implementation due to problems of textual interpretation.

Paper IV

Textual Interpretation and Problems of Evaluation and Accountability in the Policy Cycle

As Wayne Parsons notes in *Public Policy*, "the ultimate test of a delivery system [such as the policy cycle] is whether citizens are satisfied with the goods and services which it provided" (525). The notion of policy evaluation and accountability, therefore, rests on the principle that within a democratic state there exists an ethical obligation on the part of service providers to remain open and answerable to not only their funders/taxpayers but also their clients/service seekers. Moreover, invoking the democratic value of equality, both traditional and new public management holds that accountability necessitates consistent delivery and, therefore, alignment in performance across the board. Increasingly, therefore, the public sector in Canada and other democratic nations has hailed accountability as a fundamental professional value and emphasised uniform performance and delivery across time and space by developing and implementing best practices and benchmarks for public service.

This paper, however, seeks to problematise this notion of consistency, especially in light of the postmodern argument that achieving uniformity in performance and service delivery is more complex than previously understood because the respective processes of decision making and implementing occur in disparate locations, and often the differences in cultures and epistemologies of the two locations are irreconcilable.

Implicit in the rationale behind the traditional notion of accountability is the assumption that consistency in outcomes/service delivery can be achieved by homogenising performance. This homogeneity, it is assumed, can be achieved by cultivating shared values and beliefs so that even if public servants exercise their own discretion to act they're all acculturised to think in certain pre-determined ways. This homogeneity in thought, it is held, will yield homogeneity in deed. The values, policies and procedures that make up a given task, therefore, are recorded in a written text. This is done with the view that the text will serve as a tool not only to ensure homogeneity/consistency in performance but also to provide benchmarks and standards against which performance can be measured for the sake of accountability.

Also implicit in this rationale is the assumption that adherence to the values recorded in the text is simply a matter of the public servant's (a) explicating the authorial intention correctly, and (b) obeying the command embodied in that intention.

As noted in the second paper in this series of three, however, both these assumptions are somewhat simplistic, if not naïve. This is so for two reasons. First, statements of policy are written within the cultural context of a particular interpretive community, but to readers from other interpretive communities that do not possess the critical framework necessary to decode the hermeneutic culture of the original community, the words that constitute these texts seem to signal some meaning, but not necessarily that which was intended by its authors. The readers of policy, however, are not always cognizant of this cultural and epistemological ambivalence and perform the deed based on their own understanding of the text. Problems of interpretation, therefore, when readers in one geographic/epistemological/cultural misread texts written in another because they locate the meaning of the text in their own cultural and epistemological assumptions instead of those in which the text was created. Second, even if writers of policies in

Ottawa were to succeed in adopting the cultural and critical framework necessary to predict the variety of unique circumstances in which the policy might be invoked, due to the limits imposed by practical necessities, it would be impossible to set out explicit details to deal with each and every case. In these circumstances, texts written in one place would appear abstract and meaningless to their readers in another because they wouldn't relay enough information. Problems of interpretation would arise, once again, when readers would feel the need for adequate and unambiguous directions or the need for more leeway in order to arrive at their own conclusions about the text. This second dilemma, then, would stem partly from the practical impossibility of documenting every case but, more importantly, from the writer's inability to exercise his/her own discretion in decision-making.

Perhaps a solution to the first dilemma is to be found in Carl Friedrich's famous 1941 argument that called for the collective internalisation of shared values and the exercise of self-censorship/"inner checks" by the public servants.

The problem with this solution, however, is that in contexts marked by deep cultural differences, achieving homogeneity remains an almost impossible feat, especially if the process is to be ethical and fair. The difficulty arises from the fact that disparities in culture do not simply stem from differences in means adopted to attain a universal end. As Stanley Fish notes in *Boutique Multiculturalism* disparities in cultures, actually, result from fundamentally opposing notions of reality/truth. An attempt to unify such cultures necessitates either one of the following options: A) differences are dissolved in order to create a single, amalgamated version of the many ("the melting pot"); or B) every culture respects/tolerates the differences embodied by the Other so that everyone "agrees to disagree" ("the mosaic"). The problem with the first option, however, is that there exists the danger of the majority overriding the minority, or the politically

strongly denying rights to the politically weak. The problem with the second option, however, are even more complex. When notions of reality/truth are fundamentally opposed, it leads to two irresolvable dilemmas. First, tolerating the Other remains acceptable only insofar as doing so doesn't interfere/violate a core value of one's own culture. If the Other becomes a significant threat to a core value, this option leads to the same stalemate as Option A and its resolution necessitates the overriding of the weaker culture by the stronger. Second, if one chooses to go beyond the act of tolerating the culture of the Other and seeks instead to embrace it, one voluntarily wipes out one's own culture.

Perhaps a solution to the second dilemma is to be found in Herman Finer's famous 1941 argument that called for external punitive measures to ensure consistency in service in spite of individual exercise of discretion. According to Finer, these measures serve as disincentives/deterrents for poor performance--in the same way as bad grades administered at schools and universities. Finer bases his argument on the assumption that personal values are different from collective values and the way to encourage adherence to shared values is by negative reinforcement.

The problem with this argument, however, is that it may lead to irresolvable ethical dilemmas for the public servant. Besides, when stretched to its conclusion, this strategy will result in the same difficulties as that proposed by Friedrich.

The fundamental lesson to be learnt from the above discussion, then, is that attempting to homogenise culture/epistemologies is a futile endeavour. The conclusion, therefore, is that attempting to homogenise performance is a waste of time. What remains to be determined, nonetheless, is whether consistency in outcomes can be achieved *in spite* of inconsistencies in performance/cultural differences.

W. Ross Ashby's *Law of Requisite Variety* tells us that only variety can destroy variety. If this thesis can be translated to address the relationship between performance and outcome, it can have a significant influence on the current discourse around accountability and the exercise of discretion in the public service. To examine this possibility, then, let's create the following table and suppose that D (numbers 1-9) is the number of circumstances in which a policy can be applied and R is the number of choices in performance available to a public servant. The italicised letter at the intersection of the row and column is the outcome.

R			
	A	B	C
1	<i>f</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>k</i>
2	<i>k</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>f</i>
3	<i>m</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>a</i>
4	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>
5	<i>c</i>	<i>Q</i>	<i>c</i>
6	<i>h</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>m</i>
7	<i>j</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>d</i>
8	<i>a</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>j</i>
9	<i>l</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>h</i>

According to Ashby, if no two elements in the same column of this table are equal (i.e., no two outcomes resulting from a particular performance by the public servant are equal), and if the set of outcomes is selected by R (the public servant), one from each row, and if the table has r rows and c columns, then the variety in the selected set of outcomes cannot be fewer than r/c . In other words, it means that only variety in R can force down variety in outcomes.

Application of Ashby's law to the argument in this paper, however, reveals that it is based on a number of assumptions. First, the argument assumes that the public servant is/should be empowered to make her/his own choices. Second, it assumes that the public servant has an inherent understanding of the desired outcome and the ability/skills to choose the most appropriate strategy/policy/procedure to get there. Third, it assumes that the process is secondary to the product/outcome, i.e., the end justifies the means.

In spite of the complexities presented by these assumptions, if Ashby's thesis were adapted to our argument, it would mean that public servants would have to be empowered to exercise greater discretion in performance so as to minimise inconsistencies in service delivery. This contention, nonetheless, is quite different from that made by those who hold that public servants should be taught to cultivate a collective and homogeneous set of values and assumptions. Such an exercise of discretion, after all, entails no discretion at all. Instead, it requires for the public servant to abandon her/his own ability to think independently and critically and become an automaton controlled by those who establish the collective values and assumptions. The contention held in this paper, actually, is the exact opposite: it points out that **there exists an inverse relationship between the number of performances and the number of outcomes.** This means that diversity--not homogeneity--in cultures/performance will lead to homogeneity of outcomes across the public service. In other words, homogeneity in outcomes can be achieved if public servants are allowed to exercise their own discretion, not suppress it.

This conclusion throws conventional notions of performance measurement into disarray because it destabilises the concept that standardised procedures and processes lead to consistent service delivery. This conclusion, therefore, diminishes the value of benchmarks and best practices by exposing its inherent conceptual limitations. In doing so, however, it creates the new dilemma of coming to grips with the most appropriate conceptual framework necessary to develop performance-measuring systems that serve as a self-conscious alternative to the traditional.

Conclusion

The papers in this series of four set out to rock the public policy boat under the assumption that the theories underlying the policy cycle were naïve, if not narcissistic. Postmodern literary theory, after all, has muddied the traditional waters by drawing attention to the instability of the written word, the ambiguities of authorial intention, and the futility of ascribing fixed meaning to texts.

The process of writing these papers, nonetheless, has revealed that the task at hand is much more complicated than we'd originally imagined. Through the course of these past few months, we've attempted to develop several solutions to the problems outlined in the papers and rejected just as many in utter frustration. And perhaps the principal heuristic function this exercise has served is that we've discovered that the issue is so complex that we don't even know how to define the problem or frame an arguable thesis.

Put another way, perhaps we've discovered that the issue around writing these papers is the same as the one identified in the third and fourth paper, namely, the two critical frameworks jostling for recognition in these arguments are based on two opposing truths and, therefore, can not serve to complete each other. In other words, either can win only by oppressing/suppressing the other because together they do not form the means to a universal end.

On the other hand, however, perhaps we've learned that it is our postmodern critical framework itself that is inherently flawed. Because in attempting to highlight the futility of self-referential critical frameworks, it perpetuates the same dilemma and refers only to its own nihilistic tendencies and, therefore, its own invalidity.

Regardless of the intellectual googly inherent in these discoveries, however, it should be pointed out that the purpose of this conclusion is to do anything but conclude the discourse on postmodern interpretations of the policy cycle. The hope is that these papers will serve as a basis for a more self-conscious examination of the dilemma in future.

References

- Ashby, W. Ross. An Introduction to Cybernetics. Chapman and Hall Ltd: London, 1964.
- Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text". The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends. Ed. David H. Richter. St. Martin's Press: New York, 1989.
- Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner. Postmodern Theory: critical interrogations. MacMillan Press: London, 1991.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences". The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends. Ed. David H. Richter. St. Martin's Press: New York, 1989.
- Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory: an introduction. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Fox, Charles and Hugh Miller. Postmodern Public Administration: toward discourse. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, 1995.
- Farmer, David (Ed.). Papers on the Art of Anti-Administration. Chatelaine Press: Virginia, 1998.
- Fish, Stanley. "Critical Self-Consciousness, Or Can We Know What We're Doing?" Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies. Duke University Press: Durham, 1989.
- Foucault's "Truth and Power." Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977 by Michel Foucault. Ed. Colin Gordon. Harvester Press, 1980.
- "The Subject and Power." Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics. Ed. H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow. Harvester Press: Brighton, 1982.
- Fredric Jameson. The Prison-House of Language. Princeton: 1972.
- French, Richard. "Postmodern government." Optimum: the journal of public sector management. Volume 23. No.1
- Hoy, David Couzens (Ed). Foucault: a critical reader. Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1986.
- Kernaghan Kenneth, Brian Marson and Sandford Borins. The New Public Organization. The Institute of Public Administration of Canada: Ontario, 2000.
- Liotard, Jean-Francois. The Postmodern Condition. Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1984.
- Morgan, Gareth. Images of Organization. Sage Publications: London, 1997.
- Rorty, Richard. Contingency, Irony and Solidarity. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1989
- Pal, Leslie A. Beyond Policy Analysis: public issue management in turbulent times. Nelson Thomson Learning: Australia, 2001.
- Parson, Wayne. Public Policy: an introduction to the theory and practice of policy analysis. Edward Elgar: Aldershot: 1995.
- Richter, David. H. (Ed.) The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends. St. Martin's Press: New York, 1989.
- Sabatier, Paul and Daniel Mazmanian. "A Conceptual Framework of the Implementation Process." Policy Studies Journal. 8 (1995): 538-560.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. Course in General Linguistics. Tr. by W. Baskin. McGraw-Hill: New York, 1966.
- Simon Herbert A. The Sciences of the Artificial. The MIT Press: Massachusetts, 1969
- Wildavsky, Aaron. Speaking Truth to Power: the art and craft of policy analysis. Little Brown: Boston, 1979.