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## **Words without Meanings**

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*All direct meanings and direct expressions are false, and this is especially true of emotional meanings and expressions*

M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 401

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# Words without Meanings

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Revelation is the foundation of all knowledge. Inward authority is the basis for its formation. No external authority can form knowledge within another person. Heteroglossia rules. Yet western culture has successfully emphasized the importance of knowledge that can be verified rationally by others. This led to the understanding that knowledge was objective and that subjectively known knowledge was not important. Western culture is in the process of discovering that knowledge is always subjective and tentative and probably never objective.

I often find that I intuitively forge links between seemingly disparate pieces of knowledge and then look for a rationale to justify the links. My personal experience would seem to suggest that new knowledge is formed subjectively. I often present new knowledge to others before I've analyzed it; I find that sharing new knowledge with others helps me form the rationale for its existence. When knowledge is presented to others, if enough people agree that the knowledge is useful to them then a discourse community is formed and the knowledge becomes commonly accepted within the community. Within that community, the knowledge is often accorded the attribute of objectivity and communal language develops to reflect a specific selection and deflection of physical reality. A language genre is established.

According to Bakhtin “When we seek to understand a word, what matters is not the direct meaning the word gives to objects and emotions—this is the false front of the word; what matters is rather the actual and always self-interested use to which this meaning is put and the way it is expressed by the speaker, a use determined by the speaker’s position (profession, social class, etc.) and by the concrete situation. Who speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the word’s actual meaning. All direct meanings and direct expressions are false, and this is especially true of emotional meanings and expressions.” (*Dialogic Imagination* 401).

So how do we discover actual meanings? How do we get at intended meanings? We must go beyond the surface meanings of words. We must go beyond dictionary definitions. We must go beyond communally assigned meanings. We must look at the socio-historical events in the lives of individual people and their current concrete situations. This essay explores a method of doing this and is illustrated by way of a personal example.

This essay has the following structure. I will present an argument to support the contention that knowledge is always subjective followed by an outline of the subjective criticism method advocated by David Bleich. The method is then applied to critique the native Canadian MicMac Indian legend *Medoonak the Stormmaker*.

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## Objective and Subjective Knowledge

The selection of which authors to use to bolster my point of view and my method of writing are the direct result of my own subjective experience and the knowledge formed thereby. Before presenting other people's point of view, I shall present my own experience in an attempt to show you the basis for my selection of authors and mode of expression.

We are all individuals with different intelligences, experiences, interests, values, and from different cultures. Ultimately we each form our own unique discourse community. Part of that discourse community involves a relationship with, and is affected by, other discourse communities. In the final analysis, however, there are as many discourse communities as there are people. It seems to me then that all interpretation can only be subjective. That part of our discourse that is shared with others has, traditionally, been termed objective. Its basis is always subjective, which, when made public, is shared, maintained, and changed by a collection of other people. What are the commonly shared discourse practices? Many practices seem to be based on ideologically shared values. Are there other constructs?

If the purpose of writing is to involve the reader in knowledge formation, it seems important to let the reader see how the knowledge was formed in the writer rather than just presenting fully-formed ideas. To me, the process of how those ideas were constructed seems to be very important. According to the Japanese, the practice of asking questions is central to forming knowledge. If you know which questions have been asked then you have formed half of the final knowledge. The practice of presenting rhetorical questions seems to be an important practice for reader involvement in knowledge formation. Providing questions is then important for providing the basis for tentative and possible alternative answers to an issue under consideration. This is verified from my personal experience. I tend to ask myself questions and then look at possible answers and select one that I favour. Providing an answer without knowing which question it is a response to can only lead to confusion. If a reader knows the question being asked, different answers may suggest themselves. The current practice of avoiding rhetorical questions seems rather restrictive and, in my opinion, tends to lead to a very closed type of writing and to the exclusion of readers in the formation of knowledge.

Aldous Huxley stressed that “our system of upbringing is based upon *what* to think, not on *how* to think” (Krishnamurti, *The First and Last Freedom* 13). We are taught to worship words and to pay little attention to what they represent, words are real objects (Davies, *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 162); we are even taught to question if there is anything to represent! Our culture seems to emphasize and authorize the acquisition of knowledge from an external authoritative source. This is evidenced by the predominance within our culture of the reactive-responsive orientation which conditions us to take action based on external circumstance (Fritz, *The Path of Least Resistance* 14-

30). Our education system enforces this system with its method of conferring approval—grades based on reproducing externally authorized knowledge. I think it is also significant to note, in the current context, the assertion that we are totally formed by our culture (Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*) and that this is achieved by language—by the power of words (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*). Impersonal words and culture have become our Gods; they form and shape us and control our destiny; we seem to exist to serve them.

A still small voice (*1 Kings 19:12*) asserts itself from within and quietly asks—but where did words and culture come from? It seems to me that they can only have come from within us, we created them out of a psychological need to talk to ourselves and to each other. Failure to recognize the interpersonal origin of words and culture leads to a reliance on an external authorization of knowledge and to a culture that de-emphasizes individuality and creativity.

From gestation to maturity we rely on people with power and authority over us for knowledge. This observation would seem to lead to Alfred Adler's assertion that all behavior stems from a sense of inferiority. Is there an alternative? Yes! Find your own voice. Become your own authority. Lose your sense of inferiority by recognizing the power structures in play within your culture.

How? Krishnamurti suggests that we need to “follow, not my words, but the thought which is active in you...the response of our own feelings...find out what your response is...not what somebody else's words are, but how you yourself respond” (*The First and Last Freedom* 22). He also states that it is “...essential that we begin to understand ourselves first...without knowing your own way of thinking and why you think certain things, without knowing the background of your conditioning and why you have certain beliefs about art and religion, about your country and your neighbor and about yourself, how can you think truly about anything?” (*The First and Last Freedom* 31-32). Krishnamurti also states that “there is an inward authority; the inward authority of one's own experience, of one's own accumulated knowledge, of opinions, ideas, ideals which guide one's life” (*Talks and Dialogues* 15). He suggests that true knowledge can only be generated from within and that this is only possible when we understand our own subjective response to language. We need to listen to and observe ourselves.

Stephen Greenblatt argues in *Resonance and Wonder* that things which are resonant with culture are assigned value whilst other things, usually more original, are not valued and cause the shock of wonder. Something within my being resonates with what Krishnamurti has said and this resonance has led directly to my choice of a critical method—that of David Bleich as outlined in his book *Subjective Criticism*.

## Subjective Criticism Method

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn states that a belief that knowledge is objective and is developed by the accumulation of individual discoveries and inventions leads to certain types of questions being asked. The answers to these questions indicate that knowledge is not formed by accretion. It is now recognized that knowledge formation is a discontinuous process and different questions are being posed. The answers to these new questions indicate that knowledge is always formed intuitively and subjectively. Thomas Kuhn uses the term paradigm to mean a set of practices to present and evaluate the shared experience of a discourse community. He defines two paradigms—objective and subjective. The objective paradigm is dominant within western culture; it is based on the assumption that individual events can be observed in isolation and evaluated without personal interpretation. The subjective paradigm is slowly gaining acceptance; it is based on the assumption that events can never be isolated and observations always involve personal interpretation.

The practice of continually quoting others within current critical theory texts seems to me to be an attempt to build knowledge by accretion; to establish an objective knowledge base. It seems that the literary community is trying to use the objective paradigm that has been used very successfully by the scientific community. David Bleich presents in *Subjective Criticism* a reader-response literary critical theory based on psychology. He argues for a shift from an objective to a subjective paradigm in critical theory. He uses the ideas of Thomas Kuhn to support his argument for such a shift. The use of a subjective paradigm for critiquing text implies that knowledge is invented and not observed or discovered.

Michael Polanyi states that “Scientific discovery reveals new knowledge, but the new vision which accompanies it is not knowledge. It is less than knowledge, for it is a guess; but it is more than knowledge, for it is a foreknowledge of things yet unknown and at present perhaps inconceivable. Our vision of the general nature of things is our guide for the interpretation of all future experience...Our vision of reality...must suggest to us the kind of questions that it should be reasonable and interesting to explore...” (*Personal Knowledge* 135). It is our vision, our overall picture of things, not our language, that moves us forward into the unknown. We seem to start with a vision of what we want to know and then invent the knowledge required to support the vision. This implies that all knowledge is subjective.

From a linguistic perspective, the ideas of Benjamin Whorf seem particularly relevant. Whorf maintained that “We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar or can in some way be calibrated” (*Language, Thought, and Reality* 214). He also maintained that there was no one

metaphysical pool of universal human thought and that language always reflected a vision of reality and constrained how one could view reality and how one acted. Is this why observations of the same physical phenomenon by different people often leads to the discovery or invention of different facts? This is just another way of saying that all knowledge is subjective.

Whilst watching the film *Return of the Jedi*, I noticed the relevance of something said by Ben Kenobi “Many of the truths we cling to depend upon our point of view.” This is yet another way of saying that all knowledge is subjective.

People perceive a connection between words and the source of them. Lewis Carroll has Humpty Dumpty say “meanings are utterly subjective, and what counts is who is master.” Use of language depends on a belief in meanings and those beliefs are based on social usage. A study of language and literature demands personal self-exploration. Whilst discussing this with my wife, Marnie, close to our bedtime one evening, she remarked that “a study of literature is a study of humanity.” One can't study language and literature without learning something about oneself. This implies that all interpretation is motivated by the need for self-understanding.

David Bleich argues that language forms the basis for our thought processes and defines them as a subjective dialectic (*Subjective Criticism* 54). Hence language, whether written or read, is always subjective and personal. Language is used to describe and subjectively manipulate personal experience. David Bleich also supports the idea that language is acquired by interpersonal interaction; that is, it is grounded in social interaction (*Subjective Criticism* 60).

An analysis of the words we use, the way we express ourselves, and the patterns within our prose reveal our inner being to ourselves and others. Writing is generally perceived as being motivated by the need to communicate with others. In another light, writing can be perceived as being motivated by the need to communicate with ourselves. Reading can also be perceived in the same light. What we choose to read and our response to what we read is motivated by our need to communicate with ourselves, to discover meaning within. An attempt to discover ourselves.

The personal response to the text, as opposed to the text itself, is what is analyzed. A response statement aims to record the perception of the reading experience and its spontaneous consequences such as feelings, memories, thoughts, and associations. A response statement involves recording our affective evaluation; producing a record of our affective-perceptual experience rather than the story told by the text. Recording response in this way leads to using language denotatively usually without awareness of its evaluative or affective cast (*Subjective Criticism* 147).

The development of knowledge from the response statement involves making a decision on an analysis or interpretive strategy (Fish, *Is there a Text in The Class* 171). David Bleich views knowledge as a negotiated judgement which facilitates personal involvement in the development of knowledge. Since knowledge is founded on a conscious motivated search for judgements, this implies that one must first ask what one wants to know or explain (*Subjective Criticism* 152). The context for analysis is the motivation present—as signaled by the question to be answered. Approaching the analysis of a response with a specific purpose is a form of dialectic. The judgements formulated from this dialectic between the reading experience and one's life experience represents usable consequential knowledge (*Subjective Criticism* 158).

David Bleich identifies four types of judgements. **Judgements of taste and changes in taste** that are motivated by the need for self-enlightenment; these judgements reflect values which are usually revealed by personal and interpersonal historical references (*Subjective Criticism* 153-156, 190-212). **Judgements of meaning or significance** that are motivated by social and learning needs; they usually assume a moral character (*Subjective Criticism* 156-159, 213-237). **Judgements of real and symbolized authors** that are motivated by the need to know the intentions of others and what they profess to know (*Subjective Criticism* 159-162, 238-263). **Judgements of common interests and the classification of authors and texts** that are motivated by the need for identification with a community (*Subjective Criticism* 162-166, 264-293). An analysis, or interpretive, strategy involves using all four types of judgements but two or more are usually dominant.

These ideas form the basis of the subjective criticism method advocated by David Bleich. The method involves recording the reader's spontaneous response to a text followed by an analysis, or interpretation, of the response to form new knowledge. According to David Bleich, a valid response is a description of psychological issues involving the expression of needs, feelings, emotions, associations, values, and beliefs of real and symbolic objects and people. The response analysis is initiated by determining what one is motivated by; that is, by answering the question of what one wants to know or explain; this forms the interpretive context. This then leads to the selection of an interpretive, or judgmental, strategy. The response analysis is often facilitated by placing an emphasis on looking for connotative meanings (semantics), the relationship between words in specific social situations (semiotics), and how metaphor has been employed.

## Medoonak the Stormmaker Critique

I shall critique the native Canadian MicMac Indian legend *Medoonak the Stormmaker* using the reader-response subjective criticism method of David Bleich. I shall present my response to the legend when I first viewed it on video over thirteen years ago and then analyze my response in the light of my present knowledge.

I first watched a video of *Medoonak the Stormmaker* on September 22, 1984 at the Museum of Man in Ottawa. What follows are the notes I made in my journal at the time. These notes represent what I remembered of the legend and my immediate response to what I remembered. Other than correcting spelling and grammatical errors, I haven't added to or subtracted from them.

### My Subjective Response to Medoonak the Stormmaker

The film starts with actors on a stage. Everyone is wearing masks and ritualistic costumes. They are fishing, not very successfully because of stormy weather. One of the men tried to convince the Stormmaker to make the waters less stormy. The Stormmaker gave a lot of reasons for having stormy weather. Eventually the man convinced the Stormmaker that he should rest his wings for awhile—indeed he convinced the Stormmaker that his wings were hurt and in need of healing. The Stormmaker agreed to have his wings bound.

The storms ceased. Fishing was great. Over time the fish became less numerous and harder to catch. A scum began to form on the water and it became murkier. So the fish had to swim deeper to have clear water. Fishing was bad, worse than it had been before the Stormmaker was bound. The Stormmaker was unbound and things returned to what they were before.

The parallel in modern life of this legend?

We are going through life thinking that we are not doing well. We have lots of problems that we have difficulty in overcoming or solving. We try to catch happiness, money, success, education, love. If only life's problems were fewer, if only I had more money, education, a more loving wife, more friends. If only I had more time I could achieve more. We look for pastures greener and don't see that our pasture is greener than others, or that we have caught more happiness than most of humanity. We think that less problems, more money, more sex (or less), would make us happier. When we get more of what we want we find ourselves bored and can't understand why. We recall happier times, times when we had struggles, problems, but we seemed to survive.

Each of the actors wore a mask and ritualistic costume. In times past, Indians used to dress up, wear masks for special occasions, to welcome spring, summer, winter, autumn. To solicit rain, sun, success. The rest of the time they were themselves. Today we seem to wear masks most of the time; we seem to be acting out a part, performing a ritual. Only occasionally do our real selves

show. Perhaps we need to perform publicly more often, to act out our frustrations and angers in a ritualistic manner. Instead most of us act for most of our lives, indeed it seems we are acting according to what society expects as normal and acceptable. So we build up a image that is presented to society and act accordingly. Our real self lives privately, hidden away inside, behind the mask. Our ritualistic costumes are manners, a smile, a groan, a sigh. Even the clothes themselves that we wear have importance within our society. The end result of acting all the time? We feel we have lost something but we know not what. Is it simply life? We are not living for ourselves but for society. The remedy? Find out what masks we are wearing and discard them.

Masks are outward actions. Pay tithe, attend meetings, fulfil calling, hold family home evening, go home and visit teaching. Why do we do these things? Is it because we really want to and understand why we are doing them or are we just wearing a mask? A mask of righteousness or seeming to be that which we are not. If so, we will feel we are losing out; feel that the unrighteous have all the fun. For example, we must understand why paying tithing is important to us and must do it because we really feel deep within that we would be losing out if we didn't pay.

Thoughts are the seeds of action, or so I've been told. What are feelings the seed of? We humans are emotional beings, not rational; which is not to say that we can't be both. A correct mixture results in balance, a sense of well-being, of happiness, of joy, of feeling complete.

Another viewpoint on the masks we wear. If we put on a mask of perfection and strive to become what the mask represents then, perhaps, we can make the mask become ourselves and remove it and still be the same.

### **Analysis of My Response to Medoonak the Stormmaker**

What question am I seeking to answer? I am seeking to answer the question of why the legend had such a profound affect upon me when I first viewed it. It seems appropriate then to use an analysis strategy based mainly upon judgements of taste and judgements of meaning and significance. In other words, I shall focus on the values, feelings, and thoughts expressed in the response and what they reflected of my inner state of being at the time.

The social context in which my response was made seems relevant. At the time I was in a severely unstable emotional state, brought on by a marital breakup and I was trying to understand how I had gotten myself into that state and how I could extricate myself. So I was looking for self enlightenment and I needed to learn what had happened. I am still trying to figure that out!

What I remembered of the legend, as recorded in the first two paragraphs of my response, and the words chosen to express what I remembered are certainly related to my social situation at the time and are laden with metaphor and connotative meaning.

The storm in my life was my marital breakup. The Stormmaker was myself and the man was my wife, Sue. It's interesting that I've equated Sue to the man. I think this reflects my culture where men are usually the ones in authority; in this situation, Sue was the one in control. Sue had just initiated divorce proceedings in an attempt to reach calmer waters. I was giving her lots of reasons why life was full of storms and that we needed to weather them together. Sue convinced me that I was sick and in need of help; I agreed and admitted myself into hospital—the wings represent my ability for movement. The second paragraph represents what I hoped would be the outcome of the situation. The storm would cease and Sue would eventually realize that a divorce was not the answer and that we should resume our marriage. I was wrong.

The third, single sentence, paragraph asks the question why I found the legend so significant. The subsequent response paragraphs gave my answer.

The fourth paragraph reflects my dissatisfaction with my marriage and life in general. It was only when I ended up separated from my wife and found myself in hospital that I had time to reflect on how fortunate I had been. I thought that I didn't have enough money, a good enough education, a loving wife (who I related to not giving me enough sex), or enough friends. These seem to reflect the things that I valued—money, education, sex, and friends. I used the lame excuse that there wasn't enough time to get all these and thereby justified my negligence in some areas, most notably in cultivating friendships both within and outside my family. It's also interesting to see that the idea of struggles being normal resurfaces at the end of the paragraph. This seems to be an attempt to console myself that I would survive my current problems. It might also reflect a justification for being the Stormmaker with a responsibility for creating storms—a form of denial of responsibility for the marital breakup.

The fifth paragraph reflects my annoyance at being a hypocrite; at pretending to be a certain type of person to others and being another type privately. At the time, I wasn't sure what type of person I really was. The boundary between who I was pretending to be and who I had become was obscure and I was involved in a process of self discovery.

Before I married Sue, I was a very quiet type of person; someone who rarely talked; someone who always seemed calm; someone who lived privately—I even lived alone; someone who rarely showed any type of feeling. During the course of marriage, my feelings surfaced and I needed to express them. Often these feelings were expressed inappropriately in an aggressive manner. In order not to hurt my wife, I repressed the expression of my newly discovered feelings. I again donned the mask of inscrutability. There is no going back. This repression led to oppression and eventually to marital breakup.

According to the humanist tradition I'm unique and an individual who has control over my own destiny (Hutchinson, *The Poetics of Postmodernism* 84). According to modern ideas, I'm completely formed by external forces within my culture. In my response to *Medoonak the Stormmaker*, is this what I'm recognizing and reacting to? My culture, which has a dominant humanist tradition, has seemingly, by osmosis, instilled in me the notion of uniqueness and individuality. At the same time I'm recognizing that my culture is making me; that I'm not fully unique and individual and in full control of who I have and shall become.

The sixth paragraph shows that I thought I was wearing a mask of righteousness. I was considering my church membership and the activities associated with it. What is implied, but unsaid, is a fear of being rejected by my church. I also think I was preparing myself to reject my church before they rejected me. I was eventually excommunicated from my church.

The seventh paragraph sought to establish a rationale for my newly rediscovered feelings and how essential their expression was for my future happiness. The eighth, and last, paragraph suggests that consciously wearing a mask, like the MicMac Indians, might serve a useful purpose.

So what new knowledge has been generated? Viewing *Medoonak the Stormmaker* served as a catalyst to help me understand myself better in the ways indicated in my response and subsequent analysis. It wasn't the words of the legend that were important. The words stimulated thought and the meanings attached to the words were the result of what was important to me at that specific moment in my life. My experience with *Medoonak the Stormmaker* would seem to support the contention that the motivation for interpreting what we see or read is always self-interest.

I am led to conclude that the significance of what we read, and our subsequent actions, is directly related to our life experiences and what is most prominent in our life at the time we read. Actual words don't seem to matter. What does matter are the thoughts active within us and the way they ascribe meanings to words. Any meaning can be ascribed to any word. Words are tools and like a hammer they are used to nail down meanings within us; they make meaning less fleeting and more concrete. The hammer can be yielded by either society or by ourselves. A hammer does nothing on its own, why do we assume that words mean anything? Words do not have any fixed meanings, they can be used for any meaning. People invent meanings. Words do not carry meaning; they have no meaning; they are without meaning.

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## Annotated Bibliography

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Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

This book includes four of Bakhtin's essays: *Epic and the Novel* which strives to establish the distinctiveness of the novel; *From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse* which outlines how disparate texts from the past were the precursors of the modern novel; *Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel* uses differing time-space projections to establish the distinctiveness of the novel; *Discourse in the Novel* contains a comprehensive statement on the philosophy of language.

Bleich, David. *Subjective Criticism*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978.

David Bleich argues that language forms the basis for our thought processes and defines them as a subjective dialectic (54). Hence language, whether written or read, is always subjective and personal. Language is used to describe and subjectively manipulate personal experience. David Bleich also supports the idea that language is acquired by interpersonal interaction; that is, it is grounded in social interaction (60).

An analysis of the words we use, the way we express ourselves, and the patterns within our prose reveal our inner being to ourselves and others. The personal response to the text, as opposed to the text itself, is what is analyzed. The development of knowledge from a response statement involves making a decision on an analysis or interpretive strategy. David Bleich views knowledge as a negotiated judgement which facilitates personal involvement in the development of knowledge. Since knowledge is founded on a conscious motivated search for judgements, this implies that one must first ask what one wants to know or explain (152). The context for analysis is the motivation present—as signaled by the question to be answered. Approaching the analysis of a response with a specific purpose is a form of dialectic. The judgements formulated from this dialectic between the reading experience and one's life experience represents usable consequential knowledge (158).

Davies, Robert Con, Ronald Schleifer, eds. *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*. New York: Longman Inc., 1989.

This book presents an introduction to literary criticism from the eight major paradigms: modernist, formalist, rhetorical, structuralist, poststructuralist, psychological, historical, and gender-based.

Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980.

The answer to the question is there is and there isn't! The answer depends on how one defines what a text is. There is a text if it is defined as an entity wherein the structure of meaning is obvious and inescapable from the perspective of whatever interpretative assumptions have been agreed upon. There isn't if a text is defined as an entity which always remains the same.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1972.

Foucault's aim is to uncover the principles and consequences of an autochthonous transformation that is taking place in the field of historical knowledge. He adopts a method of historical analysis freed from an anthropological theme and focuses on the points where human consciousness and subject emerge, intersect, mingle, and separate off.

Fritz, Robert. *The Path of Least Resistance: Learning to Become the Creative Force in Your Own Life*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1989.

This book presents Robert Fritz's ideas on how to develop creativity. He stresses the importance of recognizing the structures by which our thoughts are constrained and on how to create new structures to foster the development of creativity.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

The majority of the essays are empirical studies on the concept of culture. Presents an interpretive theory of culture, the impact of culture on other concepts, the growth of culture and the evolution of mind, religion and ideologies as cultures. Argues that there is no human nature independent of culture and that cultural patterns are a set of control mechanisms used to inscribe individual personalities and postures.

Greenblatt, Stephen. "Resonance and Wonder." *Literary Theory Today*. Ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Suggests that things which are resonant with culture are assigned value whilst other things, usually more original, are not valued and cause the shock of wonder and their automatic cultural rejection.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1988.

Postmodern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. It knows that there is no outside. There is no other. All it can do is question from within. This book explores what happens when culture is challenged or questioned from within rather than from without.

Krishnamurti, J. *The First and Last Freedom*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954.

Krishnamurti looks beyond the symbols and associations we use in search of true freedom—the breaking of the debilitating, consuming concern of the self. He argues against taking symbols too seriously and to pay more attention to the realities that they reflect—realities that our society deny. He suggests that we tend to rely on others for validation of our experiences and that this fosters a people who don't know themselves and who are continually looking for themselves. His remedy is that we should rely on our own thoughts and our own internal direct experiences of love and insight. Paradoxically this reliance on one's own experience will lead to a greater unity because of the decline of internal strive which will manifest itself externally in society.

Krishnamurti, J. *Talks and Dialogues*. New York: Avon Books, 1970.

Explores the effects of seeing things in fragments and thinking in fragments and what it means to see totally or holistically. There are more dimensions to thinking than just rational thought, exclusion of these other dimensions results in a partial, and thus necessarily incomplete, view of reality. He argues for a consciousness that transcends rational thought.

Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

A paradigm is a model that describes a shared mental structure or a set of beliefs about the nature of reality. It is a world view. Perception takes place through a paradigm. The paradigmatic perception of reality at any moment in history is the reality of the time. The implication of this thought is that for practical purposes, reality is invented and not observed or discovered by human beings. A change in paradigm does not occur as a continuous historical progress towards anything. New paradigms are invented during our attempts to explain what we want to know; they are historically discontinuous; they arise to meet the needs of the moment.

National Film Board of Canada, "Medoonak the Stormmaker." *Native Indian Folklore*.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee. *Language, Thought, and Reality*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1956.

This book contains a selection of the writings of social scientist Benjamin Lee Whorf. Whorf maintained that "We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar or can in some way be calibrated." He maintained that there was no one metaphysical pool of universal human thought and that language always reflected a vision of reality and constrained how one could view reality and how one acted. Whorf was interested in semantics and he used linguistics as a tool for the analysis of meaning.

# Appendix 1

## Communicating Technical Information

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Whilst preparing this critique I have been asking myself if subjective criticism or the ideas upon which it is based could be used to help improve the communication of technical information. Some ideas have surfaced.

When writing technical documents, we don't want our readers to be creative because we assume that they will do things their way and not the way we want them to. We are constantly surprised to learn that people are indeed very creative in doing things their own way! Often, perhaps always, we are trying to impart to them new knowledge which I contend necessitates that they be creative in order to assimilate it! Subjective criticism implies that all knowledge is subjective and of an interpersonal origin.

Years ago I remember watching a video of a speech by Leo Buscaglia, in which he listed the results of a survey on the characteristics of effective relationships. The most important characteristic for both primary and secondary relationships was communication.

Communication involves more than words, it involves a sharing of oneself. Such sharing involves the expression of feelings; it involves letting people know you. We are reluctant to do this because of personal insecurities or vulnerabilities; I would contend not, as I've often heard expressed, because it's unprofessional.

If reading and writing are indeed motivated by the need to understand oneself, this has implications as to how we can communicate more effectively. If a sharing of one's subjective feelings improves communication, this has implications for the development of knowledge.

If knowledge is always acquired subjectively and formed as the result of interpersonal relationships, shouldn't we establish a personal relationship before trying to communicate?

Personal elements within technical documents are rigorously purged and sanitized to become impersonal; although there has been some change in recent years in that readers are now often addressed as "you." The common face or image is that of an impersonal organization. It's interesting to note the success of organizations that have made themselves appear more human by adding a personal element to their image; I'm thinking specifically of the personal appearance of past Loblaw's manager Dave Nichols in Loblaw advertisements.

Documents are written by people for people. Their depersonalization may be inhibiting their intended purpose. Subjective criticism suggests to me that it might be useful to include more personalized language, the expression of feelings and personal examples, within technical documents. This might improve the communication of the information that they contain, and thus improve their effectiveness in the development of performance-based knowledge within those that read them.