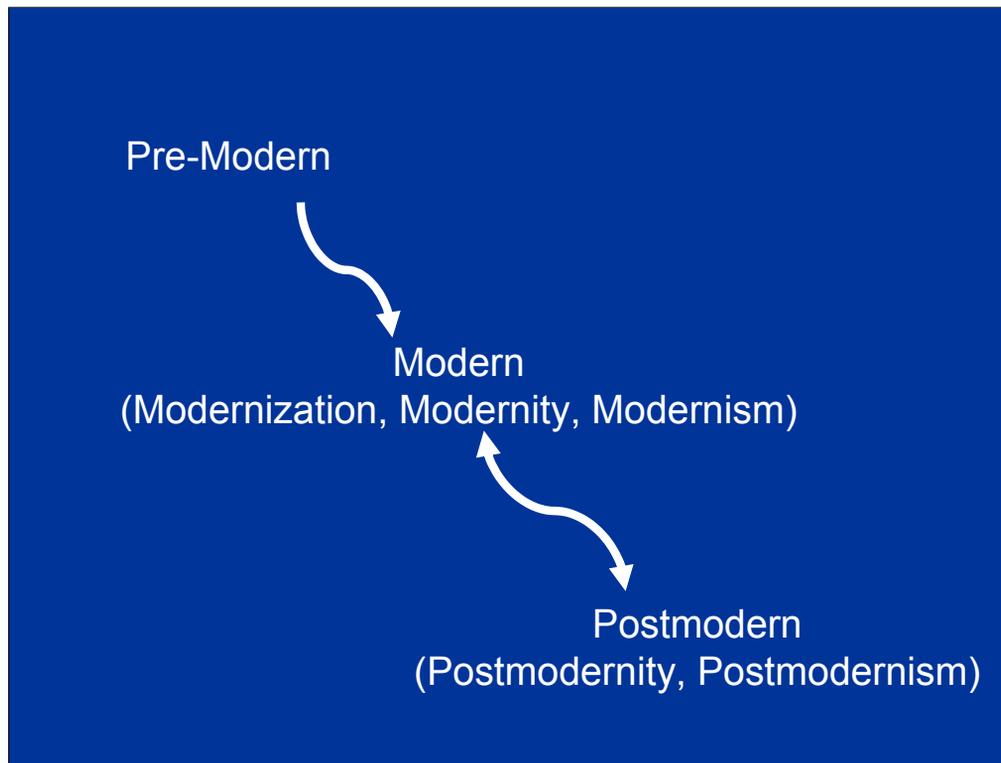


Postmodernism: a concept in flux

An explanation, its influence and implications
Meenakshi Gautam & Kate Niederhoffer
UT Account Planning
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Let me begin by saying that postmodernism is a hard-to-pin down concept, to elaborate and to make understand in the course of half an hour but what can be promised is that you'll have a notion that postmodernism exists and where it exists, but what it is, I think everyone will have their own version of it. The fundamental principle of postmodernism is indeterminacy.



It is very important to understand modern to understand postmodern. To understand the term postmodern and postmodernism, it is equally important to understand the term modern and modernism.

Simplistically defined modern is something new, something that is a break from the old. It is something that has not been taken for granted. It's a perception and a creation. For the sake of understanding, let us say that the history of the West can be divided into three different periods .. Premodern, Modern and Post-modern.

(isms) Basic focus is on the relationship of the individual to the external world.

Premodern

We are talking about really early or say feudal times, no exchange economy, you eat what you grow. The concept of urbanization was not yet prevalent. The philosophical focus was on the concept of 'being' that is on human existence and the relationship of 'being to god'. All actions were to please god and avoid his wrath and a better after life.

Modern

The focus shifted from 'being' to 'knowing' or from existence to cognition. The individual as a knowing or cognitive person and the external world as a rational social order—it is so to say 'the age of reason' where you no more do something because the bible says so or the tribe says so. The individual decides what is good or bad for him.

The progress of knowledge becomes linear, futuristic or goal oriented-teleological.

Before we go further, it is important to understand the differences between modernization, modernity, modernism.

Modernization: It is the process whereby an old order can be changed into modernity using the tools of modernization: technology, industrial mass production, bureaucracy to achieve progress. So what some of the poorer countries are going through today (and they blindly believe it is right for them) is the process of modernization.

Modernity: Modernity on the other hand is that 'which makes modern principles acceptable'. According to Habermas (1981), the beginnings of modernity can be traced with the enlightenment philosophers of the 18th century who believed in developing objective science, universal morality and law. It intended to release the cognitive potential of people for enrichment of everyday life.

There are some metanarratives or universalistic principles associated with modernity.—Marxism, Science, nation state, religion, . *Similarly, the grand narrative of psychoanalysis lies in the premise that the Oedipus Complex, and its related phenomena, are universal, and can explain all human behavior at all times everywhere; the grand narrative of marxism lies in the premise that material conditions create relations of production, which then determine human behavior at all times everywhere.*

Modernism: The culture of the modern age. e.g. abstract expressionism in painting. Existentialism in philosophy, etc. **Humanists, Structuralists** trying to find a unity in the knowledge, finding similarities between human being, celebrating similarities rather than differences.

Postmodern

From a knowing subject to a 'communicative' subject and from a rational order to a symbolic one. From a cognitive world to a semiotic world.

Postmodernity...a period that is believed to mark the end of modernity...how do we know that modernity has ended and we are living in postmodernity...we don't...but what we do know is that the world has changed, the old rational world-view has been challenged.

Three of the most essential characteristics of the global modern system have collapsed:

Collapse of the colonial world between the 1940-60s. Disintegration of a center to the world, opposition to the idea of unified and universal world-culture based on euro-american values.

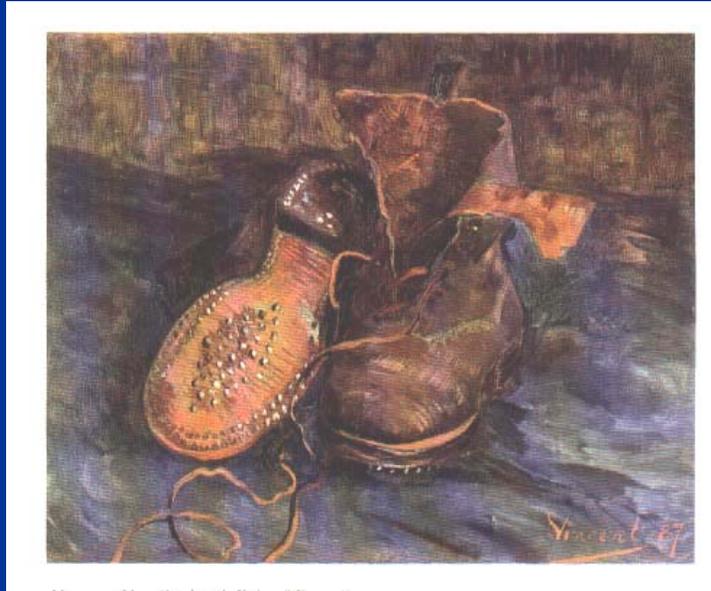
-Apprx. Started in the 60s..but continues even today, feminism, student revolts, race-based or gay rights movements.

-Emergence of ethnicities rather than nationalities as primary basis of social identification.

-Reappearance of traditionalist cultures and religious fundamentalism (Islamic, hindu or theocracies like Iran) (even the direction of change from modern is not consistent)

Combined with some other macro environment changes: emergence of a global economy, new class formations, increasing rate of technological change.

What we are saying is that a linear, well-defined world has given way to a poorly organized chaotic, unpredictable world that is fragmented, de-centered, playful, anarchical, ironic and indeterminate.



Vincent Van Gogh's "A pair of Boots"-A typical modernist piece

-Reconstruction of some initial situation, recreate the missing object, there is a space in the painting for you and your thoughts....it encourages you to build a narrative.

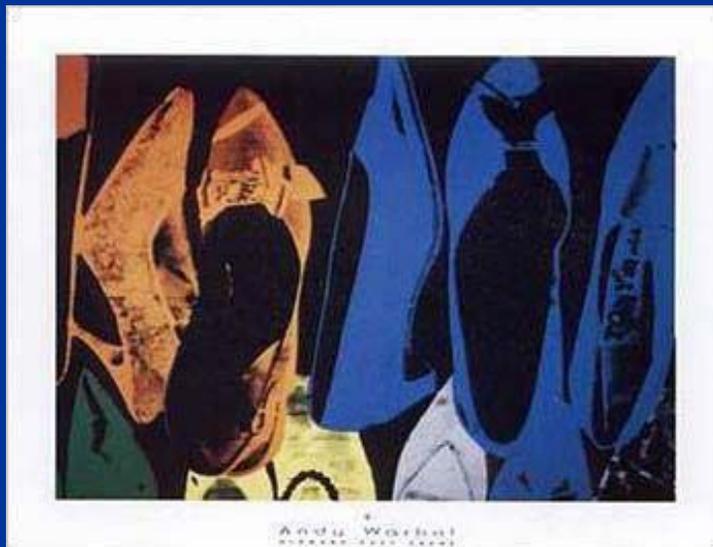
Object is a clue or symptom of a vaster reality which is the ultimate truth.

-It is not just a decorative inert object, work of art filling the gap between earth and world

-Painting peasant shoes in color, some sort of a utopian compensation for the suffering of some

-heterosexual pair of shoes,

-Does the picture make some statement to you???



Andy Warhol “Diamond Dust Shoes”-Does this feel postmodern??

Cannot restore the whole larger lived context,

Random collection of objects shorn of their earlier lives

Imagery, lack of reality, new depthlessness.

Use of technology as a technique (the photographic negative in contemporary style)

Simulacra....are these shoes disturbing in any way...dark emotions anyone??

Perversion or fetishization

Frivolity, not making a utopian statement

Postmodernism: Some Concepts

- Loss of commitment to meta-narratives /Anti-foundationalism
- Acceptance of disorder/ Chaos
- Hyper reality
- Openness/ Tolerance
- Perpetual Present
- Fragmentation

Postmodernism: Some Concepts

•**Loss of commitment to meta-narratives /Anti-foundationalism:** Growing cultural unwillingness to commit to any single idea or project. The establishment of totalizing narratives. Belief in micro-narratives. Postmodern micro-narratives thus are multiple—there is one for every situation, rather than one narrative covering all situations— and they are necessarily different and largely incompatible; there's no way to put all the micro-narratives together to form one unified coherent idea of how the world or human beings operate.

•**Acceptance of disorder/ Chaos:** no emerging pattern, its what's called pastiche: a seemingly random collection of events, actions, signifiers, or ideas which do not coalesce

•**Hyper reality:** Social life is a spectacle that simulates reality, than reality itself. Hyper-reality in which simulation of reality is more real than the real thing itself. Images more important than the content.

•**Openness/ Tolerance:** Acceptance of differences without prejudice or evaluation of superiority.

•**Perpetual Present:** Cultural propensity to experience everything (including the past and the future) in present 'here and now'.

•**Fragmentation:** Disintegration and demise of political stability, social organizations, of the unified self, the nature of knowledge.

Some Traits

- Juxtaposition of opposites
- Plurivalence
- Retrospections
- Interactivity
- Polymorphous sexuality
- Play/Irony
- Self-referentiality/ Intertextuality

• **Juxtaposition of opposites-** Genre combinations and mixing of codes: Fusion of music styles etc.

• **Plurivalence-** No dominant overarching style. Distinct between high and low is diminished . Postmodernism itself is plurivalent. It is discussed with as much passion by the intellectuals as by the popular culture magazines.

• **Retrospections-** An inclination to recycle past styles, often in an ironic and anarchic style. Pop renditions of old songs, recycled fashion, art out of recycled material.

• **Interactivity-** The distinction between audience and the performer is dissolved. The DJ is more important than the original recording music, distinction between marketer and customer.

• **Polymorphous sexuality-** androgyny, queer sexual identities, mass marketing of pornography.

• **Play/Irony-** Challenge to official seriousness, subversion of earnestness

• **Self-referentiality/ Intertextuality-** Narcisstic tendency to talk about itself, intertextuality between popular cultural forms.

An intellectual Quagmire

- Radical Postmodernism (Baudrillard, Debord)
- Radical Modernism (Frankfurt School, Marcuse, Habermas)
- Strategic Postmodernism (Foucault, Derrida, Lacan)

Much has been written about postmodernism and different schools of thought exist.

-Radical Postmodernism (Baudrillard, Debord, Lyotard): Considers modernity a thing of the past because it believes that the present situation is hyper-real. Part of the 60s student movement. mediaized 'sense of the world' rather than the real experience.

-Radical Modernism (Frankfurt School, Marcuse, Habermas): Against totalization, differences are not just variances to essential human nature (essentialism). But totalization as a failure of certain historical conditions and not of modernity itself. Rethinking the classical texts of Marx, Weber. Problem with mass culture—hitler as a manipulator of masses—profoundly suspicious of culture with mass appeal. Marcuse's one-dimensional man lacking the critical ability to stand outside the culture shaping them. Habermas (not as cynical as Adorno) radically rethinking modernity to serve the ideal of freedom and community. Sober regard for human values of the modern age. *Redefining modernist ideal.*

-Strategic Postmodernism (Foucault, Derrida, Lacan): a group of social theorists that seek to reconstruct the cultural, social and political history of modernity to expose the flaws of modernity. Deconstruction (not ism) is more of an attitude, a way of working with the culture to reconstrue it (Derrida). African-american studies, feminism, queer studies rewriting history and critiquing it with their perspective. Foucault's 'history of sexuality' challenging the fact that Victorians were prudish about sex. Lacan rewrote Freudian psychoanalysis with his own mirror-stage in a child's development. A child develops the necessary illusion of completeness and coherence.

*Frankfurt School-Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Horkheim, Pollock.

Manifestations



Postmodernism: Where can you find it?

- Art & Architecture
- Cuisine
- Fashion
- Literature
- Philosophy
- Cinema & Television
- Internet
- Music
- Therapy
- Advertisements
- Advertising

We'll elaborate on some of the key areas for our presentation.

Illumination: Exchange of symbols

DATEK- online stock trading

– Logo- symbol of service

• Service- symbol of a stockbroker

– “share”- symbol of commodity/
product offered/ portion of
company

» Credit card- symbol of cash

» Symbol of value

Postmodernism is characterized by exchange of symbols and hyper-reality.

Music: Blurring genres, defying categorization

Beatles

- 1st indicators of modernism's demise

- No singular musical tradition or range of instruments
- Indian sitar music (Norwegian wood)
- Symphonic (Eleanor Rigby)
- Dancehall (When I'm 64)
- Elvis (Oh Darling)
- Reggae (Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da)
- Folk music (Rocky Raccoon)
- Children's songs (Yellow Submarine)
- Psychadelia (Lucy in the Sky w/ Diamonds)



De La Soul

“sampling”: snippets of previously recorded material- Johnny Cash, French lesson, Liberace Live, Otis Redding whistling



Advertisements: Hidden meanings to be unveiled



- Advertiser banks on viewer to make connections

- 4 P's of Postmodern Advertising

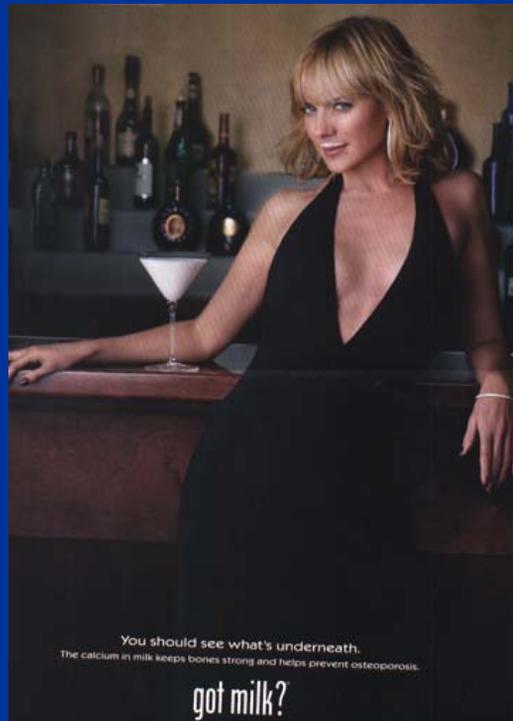
Playful
Parody
Pastiche
Popular Culture

- Ad as **TEXT**: divide the signifier from the signified

- Blurring of distinction btw. real & unreal



- Synthesis of references resonating w/ cultural repertoire of target
 - Different icons, same style
- Viewers call on familiarity w/ contemporary cultural texts
- Reuse of images- visual allusions
 - Replication creates reality



Madonna: The Quintessential Postmodern Icon



Questioning Grand Narratives

- Like A Prayer
- Material Girl
- What it Feels Like for a Girl

Like a Prayer: Questioning religion

Material Girl: Questioning capitalism

What it feels like for a Girl: Questioning Gender

Social Reality

- Constituted through language;
organized through narratives
- Multiple constructions of reality;
NO Single truth

Narrative Therapy: *Deconstructing the self*

- Meaning as intersubjective: created and experienced by individuals in conversations & action with selves and others
- Lives & identities shaped by:
 - Meaning given to experiences: stories tell self about self & interactions w/ others
 - Language practices recruited into- words used “to story” one’s life
 - Situation occupied in social structure; power relations

Therapeutic implications...

- Client internalizes ludicrous societal standards
- Problems arise from oppressive stories; stories don't fit lived experience
- Client & Therapist create meaning w/ each other in language
- Deconstruct the sense people make of their lives, language used and power relationships– story w/self as powerful
- Problems not solved; Dissolved- co-develop altered narratives about multiple realities

Focus Groups: Language of possibilities, not predefined certainties...

- If I were watching you earlier in your life, what do you think I would have seen that would have helped me to understand how you were able to recently...
- If you found yourself taking new steps towards your preferred view of yourself as a person, what would you see...

What it means to be a consumer now

In the postmodern world, the product is never done- constantly creating, modifying & re-modifying.

There is a constant interaction whereby consumer = part of manufacturing the product

Implications

- Case study: St. Luke's
- Mass marketing is dead
- Consumers as 'Moving Targets'
- Managing complex identity matrices
 - Cognitive Mapping
- Post Postmodernism branding paradigm

Postmodernism carries implications for Advertising at three levels:

For the Agency, Consumer Research and Branding.

-St. Luke's in London is an agency with a postmodern attitude. A non-conformist agency it's an agency with no departmental boundaries, predetermined roles in the organization or for that matter even pre-designated seats. The results for the agency have been phenomenal. They have been awarded every possible creative award and have refused to accept any of them in their own non-conformist style. They make ads to get consumers to understand their client's products and not to win awards. Fragmented roles, targeting niche audience and openness to new cultures and a new way of working is what a postmodernist attitude at the agency level is about.

-Much like colonization of cultures by imperialist powers, market segmentation and mass marketing are forms of neo-colonization created by market forces. Erasing the differences, these techniques categorize, organize and label consumers and produce a conformity of style. Mass marketing has tried to channelize consumer desires through brands. Consumers are being able to see through and understand their real motives.

-Consumers are resisting being labeled as their tastes are evolving constantly. What does this imply for consumer research? Does it mean we need to do real-time research or does it mean the product has to evolve and become moldable in a way that the consumers can interact with it, customize it and create something new.

-As consumers shirk away from being labeled and increasingly have multiple identities, they do not identify with each other on the basis of geographical or ethnic boundaries. But they 'cognitively map' themselves in a global world on the basis of cultural heterogeneity and creative ideals.

-What does all this mean for branding? For starters, Consumers are able to see the profit motives behind brands more easily. Brands that will truly be able to connect with the consumers would be the ones that truly care about them, their environment and the very principles that they stand for. Also Brands will have to become culture creators much like movies, music and allow consumers to interact with them and create new meanings.

