

Figure 9: Postmodernism and Postmodernity

Before Modernism

Modernism

The Enlightenment Project: Rationalism, Humanism, Etcism.

“Canonical” Modernist Literature (in depoliticized versions):

- Pound, Eliot, & Lewis (the outright conservatives)
- Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hemingway (skeptical humanists critical of commercial America)
- Conrad, Lawrence, Woolf (British skeptical humanists in Leavis’s Great Tradition)
- Stevens, Williams, et al (aesthetic humanism)
- Late Modernists (Bellow, Percy, Barth, et al)
- but *not* generally the likes of Dadaism, Stein, Dos Passos)

Modernist Painting (the extreme formalism codified by Clement Greenberg: art is about its own formal properties)

Modernist Architecture (the extreme functionalism to which the names of Corbu & Mies are attached)

Political Theory of the three rival strengths

- Fascism (national capital)
- Leninism (ideological elite piloting the revolution)
- Liberalism (state intervention for ethics & equity)

Postmodernism

Crucial differentiation between defining oneself in relation to Modernism (which one? which sample of which slice?) or to Postmodernity (how does one talk back to It), or even to Modernity...

Retro•Neo•Residual returns to assumptions dominant *before* the Modern Era

Late Modernist versions of continuing deep modernist assumptions while differing strategically (if at all) from modernism’s practices

Postmodernist•Emergent efforts to construe thought and practice in relation simultaneously with Modernism and Postmodernity’s economic mechanisms, social forms, and cultural disruptions

Before Modernity

Deep layering of earlier sociocultural formations and their vestigial contemporary forms (tribal—family, feudal—papal, oligarchic—elitist, constitutional monarchist—sovereignty theory)

Modernity

Basic formula: National Capitalism (i.e., a nation is its corporations: “What’s good for GM is good for the country”) + Industrial Technology (Ford’s mass production + mechanization + optimizing labor relations)

Capitalism’s morphological shifts into industrial, commodity, and consumer culture
Capitalism approaching critical mass in decoding social, cultural, and individual forms and spaces and spinning them into relations continuously optimized for economic production and for social reproduction

Colonialism as the arena of competition between national economies for cheap raw materials and dependent markets for manufactured goods: the systematic underdevelopment of colonies and their cultural and economic dependencies on the colonizer

World Wars as apocalypse of the nation states, Cold War as apocalypse of the effort to opt out of capitalism: First World alliances (G7, etc) aggravate Second World pathologies & Third World client-state dependencies

Postmodernity

Basic formula: Multinational Capitalism (state as local administrator of infrastructure; accountability migrates from Liggett-Meyer to Union Carbide model; offshore, outsource, deregulation, termination of state intervention) + Media Culture (electronic speed, form is the image, discourse is soundbite, medium is the message)

Capitalism’s morphological shift into postindustrial, information economy, accelerating penetration into all available space

Capitalism’s decoding and redistributing speeds into increasingly smaller fractions of career-length while all tradition becomes nostalgia product for micro-niche marketing

Colonialism seems now to have been field-testing for internationalization of capital, assimilation of government into corporation, conjunction of war and economic growth

War as political theater, public policy as distraction machine