

SECTION ONE
A REVISED SURVEY OF WESTERN
CIVILIZATIONCHAPTER 4
POSTMODERNISM

Imagine there's no heaven. And no hell below.

—John Lennon

Historians inform us that we have entered a new historical period, although no one seems to agree on what the period means. At first no one even knew what to call it. While historians were trying to come up with a real name for it, people started calling it postmodernism just to call it something. (I understand that since then, post-postmodernism has emerged from what surely are the dankest and most sulfurous dens of academe.) In any event, the name seems to have inserted itself into current discourse. In showing how it compares to modernism, it reveals the relational quality that defines it. The label 'paradigm shift' is loosely bandied about these days, but I use it accurately here. Flax (1990), while employing a different phrase, makes this clear: "It seems increasingly probable that Western culture is in the middle of a fundamental transformation In retrospect, this transformation may be as radical (but as gradual) as the shift from a medieval to a modern society."

The first use of the term 'postmodernism' occurred in the 1950s in literary criticism; however, in the arts it first referred only to architecture. Whereas the International style of Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and the rest of the Bauhaus coterie epitomized modern rationality, the random historical borrowings of postmodern architects such as Philip Johnson and Michael Graves represent the new paradigm's penchant for blurring boundaries. "The deliberate conglomerizing of purposes characterize[s] postmodern art and architectural styles" (Lather, 1991). This seems equally appropriate in describing postmodern philosophy, literature, and criticism. The fact that there is today postmodern philosophy, literature, criticism, architecture, dance, theater, painting, film, and music points out its umbrella-like nature. Likewise found beneath this umbrella are the vortices of feminism, post-industrialism, deconstructivism, multiculturalism, and the host of other '-isms' that bridge the moat around the once-isolated art world.

The only certainty of postmodernism is its ambivalence, which is found among young artists in their attitudes toward materialism. Artists today are often skilled at media manipulation, at being celebrities as well as artists. Julian Schnabel, a

Houston painter who transformed into a gallery idol of the 1980s, boasted that he wanted to be "the greatest artist in the world" (Gablik, 1987). Some postmodernists have surrendered to the ruling class. Failing to find meaning in their work, they seek it in the lesser satisfaction of material success. They too wish to play the game of upward mobility, and are willing to compromise their work according to the whimsy of the moment. Others, however, continue to prod society's fat belly over its complacency toward marginalized groups, its violence epidemic, its now-fatal fear of sex, its neurotic need to worship, and its capitalist fetishism. When the wicked queen of modernism coyly murmurs, "Mirror, mirror, on the wall . . ." she is dumfounded to discover that the image sometimes is Snow Black, Brown, Red or Yellow.

A paradox of postmodernism—and perhaps its primary virtue—is that its definition of truth is expanded to include deliberate uncertainty and a self-aware incompleteness. We at last are realizing that everything is complicated. Rorty (1979) claims that the modern concept of Philosophy is no longer credible. We are witnessing the 'de-proper-nouning' of categories. Postmodern social criticism floats free of a universal anchor. It is local, contextual, and *ad hoc*. Huyssen (1990) describes the postmodern deconstruction of binaries:

. . . my main point about contemporary postmodernism is that it operates in a field of tension between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are no longer automatically privileged over the first; a field of tension which can no longer be grasped in categories such as progress vs. reaction, Left vs. Right, present vs. past, modernism vs. realism, abstraction vs. representation, avantgarde vs. Kitsch . . .

The postmodern artwork walks a tightrope between crystal clarity and thorough ambiguity. Duchamp's Readymades made clear, in the early years of modernism, that art is whatever we say it is, but it took decades for the rest of us to catch on. The postmodern notion of art as 'text' signifies the instability of an artwork's meaning—the artist's explanation is just one more explanation and not the final word. The work of artists such as Jenny Holzer, Mary Kelly, and Barbara Kruger exposes the power of words to shape cultural values. Sticks and stones may break our bones, and words can really hurt us. On the other hand, they are equally able to help. Unlike the artistic ayatollahs of modernism, who tended to tell us what the answers were, some artists today prefer asking the right questions over answering the wrong ones. Modern art, on the few occasions when it ventured beyond art for art's sake, quickly tucked its head back in. Postmodern art, on the other hand, finds eager invitations everywhere it looks. Through 1) their appropriation of others' images, 2) the site specificity of their work and 3) its impermanence, not to mention 4) the blurring of boundaries between the work and the media coverage of it (all of these ideas having

emerged in the 1960s, the decade of postmodernism's emergence in visual art), such artists have defined the art of the Communication Age. And it ain't oil on canvas, pal, although that will never go away, nor should it. A new syntax is in the making. Nicholson (1990) nicely frames the situation:

Postmodernists describe modern ideals of science, justice, and art as merely modern ideals [rather than] universals. Thus, postmodernists urge us to recognize the highest ideals of modernity in the West as [particular] to a specific historical time and geographical region and also associated with certain political baggage. Such baggage includes [the notion that the West is supreme and that there is a quantitative difference] between art and mass culture.

Interpreting postmodernism as “anything goes” is one pitfall that can undo its promise. Hartsock (1990) criticizes postmodernism for criticizing modernism and then offering no replacement for it. This often-heard complaint is invalid. The call of postmodernism for contextual analysis of phenomena is by design; it is theory. Postmodern theory is not as tidy as modern theory. Hartsock suspects that postmodernism is just another tool of dominance engineered by the same old powerbrokers, noting that, as the armies of the marginalized circle modern citadels of power, these citadels evanesce into the postmodern mist to reappear later when it's safe. Hartsock's point is well taken, I must say, but more is at work here than modernist sleight-of-hand. The impresarios who attempt to stuff our oppressive institutions up their sleeves and make us believe they have disappeared are caught *in flagrante delicto*. Oops, oppression is way too big to fit up a sleeve. Yet, healthy suspicion well serves the postmodern mind. The magician's hat may hide not a fluffy bunny, but rather the attack rabbit of Monty Python. Those of us who work to undermine modernism's errancies find ourselves at the fork in Robert Frost's road. One path is more traveled on. Is that because those who choose it can see better, or simply that they are less brave?

Postmodern ways of knowing emphasize the construction more than the acceptance of knowledge. Cultural knowledge is often constructed by our art. An example of how we shape place-dependent meaning is found in “The Wizard of Oz.” In Kansas, witches are ugly. In Oz, witches can be ugly or beautiful. So we can choose our witches. Give me Oz. In the broader societal morality play, one notes that the West's theo-cultural knowledge seems incomplete. Historical criticism of the Bible did not develop until the nineteenth century. Prior to this, biblical theology consisted of whatever dogmatic concerns the various denominations addressed. The conflict between the scholarly canon of the university and the concerns of the confessing community—both of which range from the ridiculous to the sublime—remain unresolved.

I propose a postmodern psychological model that I call *locus of control* to explain contemporary behavior. At the locus of *external authority/external knowledge* are those who feel that they lack control of their destinies. Thus their behavior often disregards the future. Such people are vulnerable to a variety of oppressive forms, ranging from materialistic obsessions to drug abuse, acts of violence, and religious fundamentalism. They feel not only that authority lies with others, but that knowledge does as well. They feel that they are able to receive knowledge, but not generate it, or in some cases, even pass it on to others.

At the locus of *external authority/internal knowledge* are those who believe that ultimate authority resides in supernatural entities, but that behavioral decisions lie with themselves. Thus their behavior may affect future events. Many at this level feel that individual circumstances impact little on the general 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of human behaviors; they feel that all are subject to the same standards. The criminal who grew up impoverished with a crack addict mother and absent or abusive father is to be subjected to the same punishment as the criminal who was born to every advantage. Generally such people avoid behaviors destructive to themselves and others, partly out of concern that such behavior would displease the deity. They seek to please their deity because they feel that he (*sic*) can affect their circumstances. These individuals hold that authority is external, but that knowledge can be imparted from the authority to themselves. These people tend to be moderately but not passionately concerned about correcting social ills, since their focus is on life after death and 'God has everything under control'.

Those who exist at the locus of *internal authority/internal knowledge* feel that they control their own destinies as much as the vicissitudes of life will allow. They can conceive of themselves as authorities, and they understand not only that they can receive and disseminate knowledge, but create it as well. They tend to be social activists, believing that people, not deities, bear primary responsibility for attending to social ills. They may be people of faith, but they can imagine there's no heaven.

Since humanity at its deepest level responds not to ideas but to images, the role of visual art in healing, whether personal or social, becomes central. For example, as marginalized groups gain access to the mainstream, their new visions, their new images, penetrate social consciousness. Art educators are in a powerful position to disseminate this new kind of equality.

Postmodernism brings with it a reemergence of pre-renaissance values, fueled in part by the activism of feminist and minority artists, both male and female. These values include the dismantling of the hierarchical demarcation between 'art' and 'craft'. Nontraditional media—including those associ-

ated with the crafts, such as fiber materials—are acquiring legitimacy. Women and minorities in the art world have progressed toward the attainment of status equal to that of White males, although that status has not been achieved. Postmodern thought is turning to once-begged questions about commodified art and its ugly cousin, the heroic artistic genius.

Deconstructivism—the process of looking beyond intended meanings to find unintended meanings—is the Humpty Dumpty of contemporary philosophy. If the wall of culture beneath it is as shaky as some insist, and Humpty should fall, the re-deconstructing (or is it the de-reconstructing?) of deconstructivism may be too much for all the king's horses and all the king's—well, persons to put back together again. The postmodern teacher is ever watchful.

It is not selling out to the modernist cant of the 'transcendental artwork,' the 'sacred creation' housed in the church-like museum, to acknowledge that works of art can be records of artists' prescience, of their sensitivity to cultural change. It's just that art removed from daily life in such ways is partly wasted, no matter how good it is. Art can be a social bellwether only if somebody sees it. An important example of this is the new iconography of empowerment being evolved by women artists. Their creations at last are emerging in the mainstream art world. Social attitudes are changing.

This journey calls for new iconography for the male artist as well. The traditional male 'hero' has served neither male nor female well. This hero's journey has taken him away from his emotions, away from the earth, away from gender harmony, but this 'new-millennium' male artist and his newly 'sensitive and understanding' work is only beginning to appear. The forms it will take is one of art's big question marks as we enter the twenty-first century.

How valid is the assumption that artists are the authorities in determining the meanings of their works? If it were discovered that someone other than Shakespeare had written the Shakespearean *corpus*, the work would remain the same. This is not to suggest that the artist can be replaced with a vacuum, but simply to adjust the role of artist to one of less importance. Before as well as after a work is finished, the artist is less central to its production than the Western, humanistic concept of the artist implies, even (perhaps especially) as bearer of the artwork's meaning. Artists are like critics in that only a handful can interpret art verbally with any intelligence. Read the artist's statement in almost any exhibition catalog. Rarely is it coherent. The artist as Bearer of Meaning exemplifies Althusser's (1976) idea of the "fetishism of man." The work of art is better considered a catalyst for debate (a 'beginning') than a monument (an 'ending').

Likewise marxism—as opposed to capitalism with its embracing of the humanist notion of 'man' as ontologically primary—starts its analysis not with man, but rather with socio-economic circumstances. It examines modes of production, how these modes affect different economic classes, and the nature of the inevitable inter-class struggle. People form the point of arrival, rather than departure, of such analysis. Wolff (1981) resurrects a medieval definition of art as simple cultural product:

Replacing the vocabulary of 'creation', 'artist' and 'work of art' with that of 'cultural or artistic production' . . . 'cultural producer' . . . and 'artistic product' is no sacrilegious demotion of the aesthetic to the mundane. It is a way of ensuring that the way in which we talk about art and culture does not allow or encourage us to entertain mystical, idealised and totally unrealistic notions about the nature of this sphere, which the sociology of art has shown to be unacceptable.

In 1977, Barthes, referring to writers, snapped the petrified view of the artist as bearer of meaning. An image is not a bundle of shapes releasing a single 'theological' meaning—the message of the Artist-God—but an arena in which a variety of meanings, almost never original, blend and clash. The artwork is a conglomerate of quotations cobbled together from countless corners of culture. The awareness that we, not Leonardo, decide what *Mona Lisa* means, is revolutionary.

Garber (1992) summarizes an account by bell hooks which deconstructs the myth of the universal viewpoint—a favorite modern legend. hooks refers to the differing criteria with which she and her grandmother evaluated the quilts her grandmother made. Her grandmother preferred the fancy quilts made later in her life, when she was free of the need for a more utilitarian product. hooks preferred the quilts made for everyday use because to her they represented the story of the daily life of the African American woman. In 1991 Alice Walker, in the short story *Everyday Use*, dealt with the identical issue and poignantly iterated the same message. Faith Ringgold, raised in Harlem, began as a painter but turned to the fabrics she had watched her mother use as a dressmaker. She, like hooks, felt that quilts better expressed the seldom-voiced experience borne by Black women in America (Henry, 1992). Her elaborate creations, known as 'story quilts', combine painting and storytelling.

Another example of referential bias occurs in the play, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*. Lily Tomlin's character, Trudy the Bag Lady, explains to outer space aliens the subtle difference between art and soup as they peruse the contents of her cart. She indicates a can of Campbell's tomato soup and declares, "This is soup." Then she shows an Andy Warhol image of a can of Campbell's tomato

soup and states, "This is art." She repeats, "This is soup . . . and this is art."

She conceals the two items behind her back, then shows one. "Now, what is this? No, *this* is soup and *this* is art!"

She explains to the audience, "They find it hard to grasp some things that come easy to us, because they simply don't have our frame of reference" (Wagner, 1986).

Part of postmodernism's penetration of what in theater is called the fourth wall—that between actor and audience—is to demand that the viewer, not the artist, finish the image's story. Wagner (1986) gives a reminder of the frailty of the barricade between artist and audience. Trudy the Bag Lady takes her outer-space-alien friends to a Broadway play:

We were at the back of the theater, standing there in the dark, all of a sudden I feel one of 'em tug my sleeve, whispers, "Trudy, look."

I said, "Yeab, goose bumps. You definitely got goose bumps. You really like the play that much?"

They said it wasn't the play gave 'em goose bumps, it was the audience. I forgot to tell 'em to watch the play; they'd been watching the audience. Yeab, to see a group of strangers sitting together in the dark, laughing and crying about the same things . . . that just knocked 'em out. They said, "Trudy, the play was soup . . . the audience . . . art."

And finally there is this:

A couple attending an opening at the National Gallery found themselves viewing a portrait that had them confused. The painting depicted three very black, nude men sitting on a park bench. Two of the figures had black penises, but the one in the middle had a pink penis.

The curator observed their frustration with the work and offered his assessment. For nearly half an hour he explained how it depicted the sexual emasculation of African Americans in a predominantly white, patriarchal society.

"In fact," he pointed out, "some serious critics believe the pink penis also reflects the cultural oppression experienced by gay men even today."

After the curator left, a Scottish man approached the couple and asked, "Would you like to know what the painting is really about?"

"How can you claim to be more of an expert about what this painting means than the curator of the show?" asked the couple.

"Because I'm the person who painted it," he replied. "In fact, there are no African Americans in it at all. They're just three Scottish coal miners. The guy in the middle went home for lunch."

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If there is one thing postmodernists agree on, it may be that modernism's substratum of dominance must be dug up and replaced with the proverbial level playing field. One debate today is whether women and minorities should work for increased recognition within the White male-dominated mainstream—with the risk of being satisfied merely with higher quotas and thereby perpetuating old censorship systems—or continue to develop alternative galleries and educational programs—with the risk of perpetuating the status of 'annex' to the mainstream. Both avenues should be pursued, but directing primary attention to this debate misses a more important point: neither necessarily places women and minorities in the center of the critical dialectic that defines 'important' ideas, 'good' art, and 'major' artists. The highest level of power in today's art world exists no longer in artists' studios, but within this discourse. The power shift is away from the visual image—heretofore the obvious center—toward the once-peripheral commentary of observers of that image—all of which leaves today's art scholar muttering, "I know about art; I just don't know what I like".

Prior to the renaissance, the artisan worked free of the notion of art as a suprahuman activity. Artistic production was typically anonymous, group-based and socialistic. Master builders and painters took novices, but even then, the products were considered communal efforts. Wolff (1981) points out that "although the formal communal organisation of artistic work has disappeared almost entirely, the idea of the artist as sole originator of a work obscures the fact that art has continued to be a collective product." While sometimes described as the director's work, film obviously is a collective effort of director, writers, actors, technicians, producers, financiers, attorneys, marketing specialists, and others.

Comparable lists can be made for music and the stage. Production in the static visual arts is more similar to than different from film, music, or the stage. Someone trains the artist, someone makes the artist's materials, someone sells the work, someone criticizes it, someone places it in its historical context, and someone buys it. The process of artistic production is completed only when consumption has occurred.

The study of the art of the past is called archaeology; the study of the archaeology of the present is called art. This *non sequitur* reveals the misperception underlying the classification of art as a separate category of cultural production. Until postmodernism, the art history field was much too tidy.

Every artist and movement had its own drawer. Now the entire chest of drawers is being called into question. Who made the chest of drawers, and why? Who wanted to make it but could not get a job at the furniture factory? And is it only a chest of drawers? Is it *even* a chest of drawers? Is it furniture at all, or is that just a label imposed by powerbrokers to create an artificial line between furniture and the rest of cultural production? And last, who sells the chest of drawers, who buys it, and how is the money divvied up?

What emerges from this Proustian haze is a scenario in which power lies more and more with the historian, who defines the past; the critic, who establishes the present; and the media, through which both must work. They determine the hierarchies, set the agendas, and make the rules. It is as important for oppressed groups to establish representation in this circle as within the circle of artists themselves. As Wallis (1991) observes, the issue may now be less how critics can serve artists than how artists can serve critics. And none of this matters unless the media sprinkles its holy water over the entire teeming throng.

The following joke reflects the leviathan presence of the media: Someone tells a new mother, "What a beautiful baby." The mother replies, "Oh, that's nothing. You should see her picture." The media creates pseudo-events, celebrities become pseudo-heroes, and the themes touted on TV commercials become pseudo-values. The relations of leaders with their spouses eclipse their relations with their constituents. To become famous replaces doing great deeds. Basketball celebrity Irvin "Magic" Johnson, regarded a hero because he is an athlete, further elevated his heroic status when he announced that he is HIV positive and became an activist for AIDS education. He admitted that he had frequent, unprotected sexual intercourse with numerous sex partners. His confessions have been followed with outpourings of support. Johnson is to be applauded for his activism, and his public support is not begrudged. However, as McPhail (1991) points out, a woman who has unprotected sexual intercourse with numerous sex partners is labeled something less than a hero, whether she confesses to having AIDS or not. Prior to Johnson's announcement, hundreds of thousands of gay men, some of them celebrities, had died from AIDS. It was the infection of one heterosexual sports figure that was hailed as the nation's 'wake up call'. May this call ring not only for AIDS awareness, but for awareness of our culture's misogyny and homophobia as well.

Until now, decisions governing the path of Western art have been made by now-dead European White males (DWEMs). How powerful is this slice of the West's demographic pie? Art majors take what are called art history survey courses, courses that portend to offer an overview of our world's artistic heritage. This claim affronts the dignity of humanity. These surveys begin with prehistoric work, followed by the

work of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, and then ancient Greece, beginning at c. 1000 BCE. (What continent are we on now?) Greece is followed by Rome, the early Christian period, the middle ages (whose 'middle ages?'), the gothic period, the renaissance (whose 'rebirth of learning?'), baroque, neoclassical, and modern. We stay in Europe until World War II, when Adolf Hitler drove Europe's artistic talent to New York. You and I pay for this discrimination in two ways: by being denied access to most of the art made by people other than DWEMs (this of course constitutes the bulk of the world's art); and all of the art that was *never* made because the makers were denied opportunity (which may total an amount greater than all the art that ever *was* made).

We can intellectualize these tragedies, wringing our hands briefly before turning back to our TVs, but perhaps we can understand them in a more concrete way. Picture this: It is a heavy tourist day in Rome. A troubled individual known to us only as Art Ed hovers near the entrance to the Vatican Museum, awaiting the opportune moment. The crowd thins. Art Ed approaches the Swiss Guard. "Look!" he shouts. "There's the Pope! Distributing condoms!"

This clever ruse enables him to slip inside with an electric belt sander, an extension cord, and sixty feet of scaffolding slyly concealed beneath his tanktop. Art Ed makes his way to the Sistine Chapel, where he unobtrusively erects his scaffold, plugs in his sander, and spends the afternoon defacing Michelangelo's masterpiece. He fields inquiries from curious security personnel with the assurance that he is a member of the restoration team.

Scholars would rank the destruction of the Sistine ceiling among the greatest tragedies in the history of art. My question is, how many Sistine ceilings were never painted? If *Michelangelo* had been born *Michelangela*, she would have been lucky to scrub the Sistine floor. How many masterworks never existed because the artist did not belong to the correct group? Thus we see that all classes, including the oppressive one, pay for oppression.

How do these complex issues play themselves out in the institutionalized art setting? How are art masterpieces determined? By a consensus of experts who gauge artists' degrees of influence. The greater the number of artists whose work changes because they have seen your work, the greater artist you are. Until recently, it was LWEMs who judged DWEMs. From the work of this tiny sample was anointed the world's supply of masterpieces. Art is always someone's story. One hears the phrase 'art for art's sake'. Let's look instead for the agenda. Let's deconstruct the message. And let's have our students help us.

On college campuses, the phrase 'political correctness' (pc) is a euphemistic code coined by conservatives to categorize, and thereby control, liberal thought. One notes that conservatives have been calling themselves "Right" for two hundred years. It is not entirely discomfiting to hear them suggest that the Left is "Correct." Opponents of pc (cf. D'Souza, 1992) cite affirmative action policies which at times result in the admission of minorities and women over more qualified White male applicants, while ignoring the widely practiced double standards used to admit athletes, not to mention children of alumni and major donors. Why should leftists give up concepts as dear as 'values', 'family' and 'patriotism'? Why should we give them up to the likes of Pat Robertson, Pat Buchanan, Phyllis Schlafly, David Duke, Jesse Helms and the other frothing ethnophobes floundering in the foggy fringes of the far forest of fanaticism? (I wanted to write, "...and the rest of the rabid reactionaries rooting in the rancid nether-regions of the radical Right?" but there were too many r's.) The fact that postmodernism emerged roughly with Reaganism led some to perceive a kinship, when in fact postmodernism, the roots of which are in 1960s activism, is an antithesis. Note the suspicion with which American conservatives regard it. But then, they regard everything with suspicion.

Examples abound in art of women defined by what men are not; of minorities defined by what Whites are not; of religious nonbelievers defined by what believers are not; of the underclass defined by what the middle class is not; and the middle class defined by what the upper class is not. Henry Giroux (in McLaren, 1990) said, "You can live standing up, or you can live on your knees." Choosing not to choose condemns one to one's knees, a position more appropriate for pleading than for action.

How are today's art students trained? Historically art students studied in studios of established masters willing to take them on. Their work reflected the regional and personal qualities of their mentors' work. Today almost all of our artists are products of university programs, products of the Great Homogenization known as the BFA. Art majors study under a gaggle of professors according to curricula that differ little from institution to institution. The core of these curricula is studio training in rendering the human figure. This approach develops an artist the way David Duke develops a minority constituency. The emphasis—revealing a lack of understanding of how one becomes an artist—is on making art, rather than viewing it. The core of any university visual art curriculum might better emphasize art history and criticism—not life drawing—in the beginning, with a gradual increase in studio classes throughout the four years. Life drawing classes were relevant to only a slice of today's serious artists. As students look at art (presumably with informed guidance from their instructors), they assimilate a visual

database from which to draw when they begin their own work.

To start beginning art majors in a curriculum centered on making art, and focused on the figure, only fills their heads with baggage they must unload later if they are ever to become good artists. It seems reasonable to expect all third year art majors to be able to explain, for example, why conceptualism represents the end of modernism, why pop and minimalism signaled the emergence of a new direction—postmodernism—and why photo-realism represents the beginning of this new direction. It seems reasonable that they be able to explain that photo-realism responded to the near death of imagery by swinging art's pendulum back to pre-modernist stylistic definitions while retaining a content that was of the late twentieth century, and that photo-realism refuted modernism's movement away from photographic imagery by competing with the camera head-on.

It further seems reasonable that they be familiar with the art of women and men throughout Western history and conversant with the art of at least one tribal or Eastern civilization. Only then are they ready to begin serious studio work. It is equally true that small children should begin to acquire a mental library of images as they begin to make their own art at age two or so.

In the 1970s, European critical theorists—the Frankfurt School, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Lacan, Continental feminists, and British film theorists, among others—fueled change in American art and criticism. By ignoring the definitions of art object as Art Object and artist as Artist, they shifted attention to the agendas behind modernism. One effect of this extensive new body of theory was to reintroduce representational imagery to visual art. This development was inevitable: if art was to become politicized, it needed recognizable references to convey its socially critical messages. That familiar ideologeme, the modern artist, dies hard; many young artists regard activist art as beneath 'pure' art, which parallels the claims that 'craft' is beneath 'art' or that 'folk' art is beneath 'fine' art.

Thus far the art of this still-nascent era called the postmodern (despite the premature emergence of the awkward term post-postmodern) has drawn heavily on recognizable imagery, although often presented in abstract visual terms that reflect late twentieth century life (e.g., neoexpressionism, installations, graffiti art, performance art, and computer and video imagery). Sociopolitical subject matter has reappeared, advocating the concerns of ethnic, religious, and other minorities as well as women and environmental groups. The repercussions of this activism have generated developments on the international front. The demise of Soviet communism—and its concomitant lock on artistic expression—has resulted in a renewal of energy among art-

ists of the new Commonwealth, creating both good and bad currents. Akinsha (1992a), writing from Moscow, reports that for the first time in years, a measure of pluralism has entered the scene. Artists outside the charmed Muscovite circle are receiving recognition. The new Russian art is emphatically apolitical. Not surprisingly, this new generation of Russian artists is seeking anchor in an ideology-free artistic bedrock, placing them philosophically at the center of the modernist formalism of fifty years ago. The world awaits the emergence of a new generation of strong Russian artists; it has not seen one since before the Revolution.

The modern version of 'internationalism'—Paris in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Moscow and Berlin in the 1920s, and New York in the 1940s—compares poorly to that of postmodernism. The phrase 'art world' is taking on literal meaning. A welcome emergence onto the scene is being experienced by the nations of the newly-christened 'Pacific Rim', from Australia through Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, China, Japan, Korea, and even the state of Hawaii. Each is at last being recognized for its artistic heritage (Madoff, 1992).

This postmodern acknowledgement of Non-western images signifies a welcome break with the modern past. Modernism likewise defined itself as a rupture with the past. One finds the rhetoric of the avant garde in the manifestos of both. The term *avant garde*, today pejoratively linked with the modernist 'Artist as Hero' idea, was defined by filmmaker Germain Dulac in 1932 as "...a renewed expressiveness of image and sound, [a] break with established traditions to search out, in the...visual and auditory realm, new emotional chords...detached from motives of profit, march[ing] boldly on towards the conquest of the new modes of expression..." (in Wallis, 1991). This sounds eerily like the rhetoric of postmodernism. It can talk the walk, but can it walk the talk?

Perhaps. The postmodern awareness that visual images form as well as reflect reality signals a redrawing of the boundaries that define Western civilization. One could liken today's artist to Samson who, gripping the pillars of his captors' temple with regained strength, stands ready to collapse it. Unlike the blinded Samson, however, today's artist—as with artists throughout the ages—possesses heightened keenness of vision. This vision produces images which shake the belief—heretofore held by the oppressed as well as the oppressor—that the oppressed are inferior. Art since the renaissance has been little more than a Richter scale sending its skittering lines across a canvas that measured society's tremors. Art today is the earthquake itself. Art since the renaissance has at times possessed the substance of wallpaper with a frame around it, a diversion that attracted comments such as, "Isn't that interesting?" Art today is becoming politicized—and this time not only by powerbrokers. Its disquieting messages are entering everyday life. Such art will come to be respected

by society as a social force if art educators in our public schools and universities push for these conditions, beginning in preschool programs. Such programs can encourage oppressed groups to disclaim their unworthy inheritance by making truthful images—no matter how painful—that educate society, and by generating positive images of themselves. Until these images are globally internalized, the groups that make them will at times fall prey to their own self doubts. If they succumb to the cultural amnesia that anaesthetizes the middle class, their struggle will possess the poignance and permanence of hearts scratched in sand. So far, however, they continue to sow the seeds of enfranchisement, and the first harvest has already begun.

Attempting to insert minority and women artists retrospectively into a visual art canon constructed by White males is not enough. Such approaches miss the point. Time shrouds the gender definitions, political structures, economic constraints, religious currents, and racial prejudices under which such artists worked. Scholars must assign significance by reading between lines that are suspect. A new canon must be constructed, but this canon must be more fluid than canons have been defined in the past. Postmodernism must be more than a chronological term; it must possess an ideology informed by the past. Modernism viewed media purity as an end. Historicism was the function of the museum; commodification the function of the gallery. The artist was visionary; the artwork unique. Oppression made the world go 'round. Postmodernism seeks to dismantle these constructs. Foster (1982) submits that postmodernist art exists:

... between, across, or outside [reified modernist conventions] or in new or neglected mediums (like video or photography) Postmodernist art occurs in alternative spaces and in many forms, often dispersed, textual, or ephemeral. As the place of art is re-formed, so too is the role of the artist, and the values that heretofore authenticated art are questioned.

The modern artist ignored society and consequently had precious little impact on it. Postmodernism must learn from this lesson. It must honor the power of art to create an egalitarian world.

The mindset that accepts oppression of 'wrong' groups as an appropriate means for resolving social ills is the enemy. Advancement will occur when *all* groups become as well educated in the 'why' as they are in the 'how'. After all—let it be said—the sword cuts both ways. Some minorities are guilty of racism, some women of sexism, and some religious believers of bigotry, in prejudging Whites for their race, men for their sex, and nonbelievers for their skepticism. Feminist men, on the other hand, are viewed by male chauvinists as traitors. Anita Hill (1992), who nearly derailed Clarence Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court in 1991,

observes that speaking out rarely pays dividends for the victim, but may for those who come after. "Speaking out is not easy," she comments. "To speak out is to look into the face of power . . ." But, she adds, "silence is betrayal."

Western culture is good at recouping radicalism. It has had a lot of practice. Postmodern philosophy has been accused of yielding to efforts to recast it in the modernist mold. Establishment co-optive efforts are inevitable—if the anger of marginalized artists cannot be bought out, perhaps it can be stomped out—but counter-efforts have been adamant. As long as artists and teachers lie down and beg for cultural crumbs, powerbrokers will be happy to pat their heads and keep the little treats coming. Again, when artists and teachers get angry, they change the world. They need only reject the lie that they cannot. A degree of cooptation is certain, but marginalized groups of today have drop-kicked a space for themselves that will not be easily reclaimed. Huyssen (1990) observes that ". . . the landscape of the postmodern surrounds us . . . It's our problem and our hope." Panegyrics to the promise of postmodernism are premature.

Many who staff our museums, our galleries, our universities, and most of all our public school art classrooms, are poised and eager to expand their understanding. As things are, the well-intended but damnable naiveté of many of them does not impede their efficiency in perpetuating that which they think they despise. They applaud fairness as they acknowledge only European models. Unlike Orpheus, these players do not turn and face Eurydice, the object of their affection—gender-inclusive, multicultural, politically-empowering art education. Eurydice is not compelled to return to Hades; hell, she never left in the first place.

Whether one identifies postmodernism with the emergence of electronic capitalism, or the multinational corporation, or political activism in the arts, or the communications explosion, or the bristling militancy of marginalized groups, or the demise of the Communist World, or the imperializing of unindustrialized nations, such global changes in how we all live demarcate a new agenda with its own critical features. The question is this: after scratching away the hoo-ha, do we find anything new under the sun? One notes points of progress across the expanse of human experience, for example, democracy and socialism, both of which emerged from the radicalism of their day. But what developments within postmodernism occasion reason for hope? Which of today's radical rubrics is tomorrow's quotidian commonplace?

The redefining of religious faith that has been ongoing in the West since the Renaissance shows promise. The kind of worship which forbids the worshipper to question is, regardless of periodic fundamentalist revivals, much less widespread than it was even a century ago. Likewise a growing awareness is spreading that we need not discard our ethics as

we jettison our superstitions. Acts of 'charity' done under empyrean fiat—"Every buck you put into the Sunday school collection plate buys another golden doorknob for your mansion in the sky"—are not charity, but a cosmic real estate investment. We might contribute instead to this world's global collection plate in the faith that the next world can surely take care of itself. As Thoreau said, "One world at a time, one world at a time."

But how close are we to throwing away those approaches to religion that serve only as crutches? In a 1991 Gallup poll (Associated Press) that asked Americans how people were created, 87 percent stated that people were created by God, either according to the Creation story or by God controlling evolution. Nine percent stated that people evolved without God. Educational level impacted on the survey: 65 percent of respondents who did not finish high school, compared to 25 percent of college graduates, stated that God created people according to the Creation story. Among respondents who professed no religion—a comparatively well educated demographic group—10 percent expressed belief in the Creation story, whereas among people who described themselves as born-again Protestants—a comparatively poorly educated group—70 percent expressed this belief. Differences in access to education may explain the sex differences that emerged in the survey. Fifty-three percent of women chose the Creation story, while 39 percent of men did. Still, the numbers of respondents that embrace Creationism is surprising.

Two hundred years after Thomas Jefferson predicted that everyone then living would die a Unitarian (Ross, 1992), the religious Right is experiencing a resurgence. The U. S. version of fundamentalism reaches back into the nineteenth century. Threatened by higher education and the proliferation of print media, fundamentalists began to fight back, clipping their efforts to a clothesline of issues that included abolition (on which they were divided), prohibition (which they supported), and women's suffrage (which they opposed). Their battles of course continues, but today it is even more difficult because the populace is becoming more educated and the media more pervasive. Attempts to adapt economically—from local Christian Yellow Pages to the investment portfolio of the Southern Baptists, one of the largest in the country—are often effective. Despite certain awkward attempts to adapt culturally—Christian rock music, football for Jesus, Miss Texas witnessing her faith on television—the religious Right is emerging into the middle class. Note their mall-sized suburban churches.

The trope that politics makes strange bedfellows is never more true than with fundamentalists. Socially they prefer to be insular, associating only with each other. However, their activism forces them to ally with Catholics over abortion, although they seem to disagree on every other issue. They

must ally with Jews since Israel, after all, is where Jesus will return. To maintain such alliances, they must not speak ill of *any* of their allies' beliefs. As Ross (1992) puts it, the born again "have to start liking other people." Given how this shatters their insularity, it is conceivable that political alliances will be the undoing of the religious Right.

The cyclical nature of fundamentalist resurgences provides a measure by which they can be gauged. Following the Scopes trial in the 1920s, fundamentalism revived, subsided, and lay dormant for fifty years. The 1970s saw a resurgence that peaked during Ronald Reagan's first term at about 20% of the U. S. population. Despite the perceptions of some, this percentage has remained roughly the same since then.

In one interesting sense, fundamentalism coalesces with postmodernism: both question Western reason. Ross (1992) comments, ". . . we have found [that reason is] not enough because it doesn't give us a holistic sense, so we are learning to surround it with intuition and memory and hope and affection." The response of poorly educated people is to turn to fundamentalism. A penchant for confusing technological advancement with wisdom leads some to conclude that ours is the most informed of periods. Let us rather hope that a millennium from now, the twentieth century is considered the end of the dark ages.