

Here is a snippet from Terry Heaton's book "The Gospel of Self- How Jesus Joined The GOP" where he describes three Modern Eras. He believes the third Era started post WWII, but I believe the genesis was in the 1920's with the inception of electronic media. Suddenly the time/distance signature all society lived under was shattered with "instant" communications. And the differential has been growing ever since, causing more and more disruption.

– Dennis Sutton

[...] One of the most baffling questions I have ever been asked came from my then seven-year old daughter Jenny on the way home from school one day in 1978. Texas Instruments had introduced the handheld calculator ten years earlier, and America was in the midst of an argument over whether these things were food for culture or not. One side argued that students should never be permitted to bring one to class, because it would "destroy" one of the sacred "three Rs" — 'rithmetic. This was not an unfounded criticism. Holding her own calculator, my little daughter asked me, "Why do I have to learn math if I have one of these?"

The question is profound, and I have been trying to answer it for over forty years. At issue isn't the matter of learning adding, subtracting, multiplication tables, and such; it's about learning to apply mathematics, to participate in math instead of simply studying it. Technology had disrupted arithmetic in such a way as to render learning it basically unnecessary. We used to get questions back then about how on earth a store clerk who didn't know math could ever make change properly in the event of a cash register failure. That's been proven to be a fearful and specious view of tomorrow

This question was my first exposure to the mysteries of postmodernism and its emphasis on participation over observation. Postmodernism will impact every nook and cranny of what we've known and trusted in the modern era, and much of it is taking place outside the view of the institutions of the West. It is a confusing and chaotic philosophy that results in the dismantling of reliability in the study of how things work culturally and philosophically.

However, to people such as Leonard Sweet, Brian McLaren, and myself, postmodernism isn't so much a philosophy as it is an era in Western Civilization.

Using a cultural mantra as a divider, here' how I view "common era" history and the future:

Pre-modernism, from the creation of the church at Rome to the printing press: “I believe, therefore I understand.” One’s professed faith, and the protected knowledge that undergirded that faith was the operating mantra of this era. Even governments of the West feared the power of Rome and gladly paid tribute in order to have the serfs kept in line by the church.

Modernism, from the printing press to the network: “I think and reason, therefore I understand.” During this time, the Academy was resurrected and the power of Rome was gutted by not only the printing press but the printing of the first common language English Bible. “The jewel of the elites is in the hands of the laity,” was the lament of priests, which eventually led to the reformation and the birth of Protestantism. It also witnessed the rise of atheism and beliefs flowing from it, such as evolution and a dependence on science and the sciences. Perhaps its greatest contribution to the West is the concept of colonialism, where Christianity was used in many places to separate indigenous people from their land in the name of God.

Postmodernism, which began with the counterculture movements of the 1960s and the invention of the personal computer and the Internet. “I participate, therefore I understand.” This era has just begun, and its study has been my life’s work for the past fifteen years and the subject of my long-running glob, *The Pomo Blog*. Postmodernism will impact every facet of life in the West, and just as the printing press was disruptive in the fifteenth century, so will the Internet be in the twenty-first century.

There’s really no such thing as a pure modernist or pure postmodernist, because each inherits the foundation of its predecessor. Reason didn’t replace faith, but their coexistence influenced each other. Participation won’t replace reason or faith, but it will certainly alter their cultural influences, and that will mean a future that’s chaotic, exciting, challenging, and uncertain.

I do not believe there is a single, universally accepted definition of the term postmodernism. As a movement, it essentially points to the end of modernism, a cultural era that touted science, logic, and the mind of man over traditions, especially religious ones. I also doubt that there is such a thing as a pure postmodernist, for that would mean somebody completely anti-intellectual and entirely relativistic. In fact, it’s very difficult for a logical modernist to accept or even understand concepts so contrary to his or her own core perspective.

Therefore, rather than taking a standard definition from a philosophy text, it's more useful to compare postmodernism with modernism on a few important levels:

- Modernists share a universal faith in logic and science. Postmodernists (“pomos”) see the realism of limitations.
- Words like purpose, design, and hierarchy are modernist, while postmodernists would rather use play, chance and anarchy. Pomos don't completely reject logic, but their own experiences tell them that order isn't overall, and they passionately despise what they see as the inherent elitism of hierarchy.
- Modernists view much of life at arm's length. Postmodernists experience it as participatory. Life is not “out there” to pomos; rather, it is all around us—something that we can have as little or as much of as we choose.

One of the most defining differences is with Christian concepts of God. The modernist sees God, the Father. The postmodernist sees God, the Holy Spirit. God, the Father, represents distant authority, which pomos reject, while God, the Holy Spirit is among us, something we can experience for ourselves. For the modernist, the parts logically make up the whole, but the pomos view the whole as greater than the parts.

The beatniks of the 1950s were the precursors of the pomos, but the counterculture movement of the 1960s—and the dawn of yet another war—combined with many other events to put in place a general disillusionment with all that modernism's logic and reason had built. Hierarchies were the new overlords, and we had evolved once again into a culture of the haves with almost absolute control over the have-nots.

A part of the disillusionment was a growing and deep distrust of the institutions that govern us, both private and public. Understanding became less about learning from experts—who were increasingly seen as self-serving—and more about self-experiencing or getting close to those who had such experience. Because experts cannot be entirely trusted, participation equals understanding. Media was the first institution disrupted, but others are coming. One that intrigues me is medicine, for many reasons. When the advent of the Web, the American Medical Association—the group assigned to protect the medical status quo—created a special lobbying arm to ensure that anything regarding medicine online would be under its authority. We don't need everyday people practicing medicine, right? [...]