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## Modernism vs. Postmodernism

The term "Postmodern" begins to make sense if you understand what "Modernism" refers to. In this case, "Modernism" usually refers to Neo-Classical, Enlightenment assumptions concerning the role reason, or rationality, or scientific reasoning, play in guiding our understanding of the human condition and, in extreme cases of Postmodern theory, nature itself. Postmodernism basically challenges those basic assumptions.

<b>Modernism (or Enlightenment Humanism)</b>	<b>Postmodernism</b>
Reason and science provide accurate, objective, reliable foundation of "knowledge"	Reason and science are Ideologies in the Nietzschean or Marxist sense: simply myths created by man.
Reason transcends and exists independently of our existential, historical, cultural contexts; it is universal and "true".	There is no universal, objective means of judging any given concept as "true"; ALL judgments of truth exist within a cultural context (cultural relativism).
Reason and human independence/freedom are inherently linked; just laws conform to the dictates of Reason. <i>We hold these truths to be self evident...</i>	The application of pure Reason (predicated Cartesian Radical Skepticism) disproves the universal nature of <i>a priori</i> human freedom. Independence/Freedom are Western Ideologies (just like reason and science) used to colonize foreign cultures (ie Belgian Congo, Viet Nam, Iraq, Afghanistan) or subjugate women.
Because it is universal, Reason can help us overcome <i>all</i> conflicts.	Nope. Science is no more universal than is any other culture's definition of "truth".
Science is the paradigm of all true knowledge.	Nope.
Language is transparent; a one to one relationship between signifier (word) and signified (thing or concept).	Language is fluid and arbitrary and/or rooted in Power/Knowledge relations. Meaning is fluid and arbitrary. Meaning is "messy".
Reason will lead to universal truths all cultures will embrace.	"...no eternal truths, no universal human experience, no universal human rights, overriding narrative of human progress" (Faigley, 8).

<p>In sum: Truth exists independent of human consciousness and can be known thru the application of Reason.</p> <p>All Enlightenment conclusions lead from this assumption.</p>	<p>In sum: Truth may exist independent of human consciousness but there is no objective means of nailing it down.</p> <p>All Postmodern conclusions lead from this assumption.</p>
<p>Connotations: The application of Reason leads to a <i>progressive</i> movement toward civilization, democracy, freedom, scientific advancement.</p> <p>The Enlightenment is <i>prescriptive</i>: a means of building a better society.</p>	<p>Connotations: There is no objective means upon which to predicate morality and right/just governance.</p> <p>Postmodern theory is <i>descriptive</i> of the human condition; it describes an <i>impasse</i> in philosophy and social relations.</p>
<p>Modernist Feminism: Women are oppressed by patriarchy and can use Reason to achieve both independence <i>and</i> regain their "authentic selves".</p>	<p>Postmodern Feminism: The categories male/female, masculine/feminine are themselves culturally constructed and/or Ideology. Gender roles are culturally relative in <i>all</i> cultures and contexts.</p>
<p>Existence of stable, coherent "self", independent of culture and society.</p>	<p>The "self" is a myth and largely a composite of one's social experiences and cultural contexts. The "self" is an Ideology.</p>

Source: Borrowed heavily from Jane Flax, via Lester Faigley's *Fragments Of Rationality*