

Post Modernism: some explanations and definitions

From:

J. L. Lemke, *Semiotics and the Deconstruction of Conceptual Learning*, originally published in *J. Soc. for Accelerative Learning and Teaching* (1994)

“From the postmodern point-of-view, modernism is defined by its belief in objective knowledge, or at least in the possibility of objective knowledge, and by its assumption that such knowledge refers directly to an objective reality which would appear in the same way to any observer. A further characteristic modernist assumption is that knowledge is a product of the activity of the individual mind, fashioning its ideas or mental schemas to correspond with this objective reality. Postmodernism, on the other hand, argues that what we call knowledge is a special kind of story, a text or discourse that puts together words and images in ways that seem pleasing or useful to a particular culture, or even just to some relatively powerful members of that culture. It denies that we can have objective knowledge, because what we call knowledge has to be made with the linguistic and other meaning-making resources of a particular culture, and different cultures can see the world in very different ways, all of which "work" in their own terms. It argues that the belief that one particular culture's view of the world is also universally "true" was a politically convenient assumption for Europe's imperial ambitions of the past, but has no firm intellectual basis.”

From the Public Broadcasting Station (PBS)

<http://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/gengloss/postm-body.html>

A general and wide-ranging term which is applied to literature, art, philosophy, architecture, fiction, and cultural and literary criticism, among others. Postmodernism is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of scientific, or objective, efforts to explain reality. In essence,

it stems from a recognition that reality is not simply mirrored in human understanding of it, but rather, is constructed as the mind tries to understand its own particular and personal reality. For this reason, postmodernism is highly skeptical of explanations which claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races, and instead focuses on the relative truths of each person. In the postmodern understanding, interpretation is everything; reality only comes into being through our interpretations of what the world means to us individually.

Postmodernism relies on concrete experience over abstract principles, knowing always that the outcome of one's own experience will necessarily be fallible and relative, rather than certain and universal.

Postmodernism is "post" because it denies the existence of any ultimate principles, and it lacks the optimism of there being a scientific, philosophical, or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody - a characteristic of the so-called "modern" mind. The paradox of the postmodern position is that, in placing all principles under the scrutiny of its skepticism, it must realize that even its own principles are not beyond questioning. As the philosopher Richard Tarnas states, postmodernism "cannot on its own principles ultimately justify itself any more than can the various metaphysical overviews against which the postmodern mind has defined itself."

T-Chart

Modernism	Post Modernism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --knowledge is objective and universal --it is possible to attain objective reality --objective reality = truth to all --objective reality is the "truth" to a universal audience -- universal and certain truths are attainable via application of logic and reason and science -- these knowable truths are the same for a broad audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --denies universal and uniformity of objective knowledge -- all knowledge is subjective depending on the individual viewer -- interpretation is everything -- reality = your interpretation -- cultural bias and cultural conformity denies individual interpretation