

Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions

Monday, 05 December 2005

TOPIC: Post-Modernism, Postmodernity and Power continued.

From last time: understand post-modernism in *architecture*

Today: in *painting* and what it means for social relations and the exercise of power

Image of Medieval illuminated removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: An example of a Medieval illuminated manuscript in which the person is stylized, not individualized, **only a role**, surrounded by various saints and icons of the Medieval world.

To the right: The Limbourg Brothers (1413) had paintings similar to early modern architecture. People were represented only in their social roles. The peasant has a position in relationship to the castle of the noble; the peasant lives outside and provides food for himself **and** the castle. The celestial representation in the upper portion of the painting signifies how all is governed by the gods.

Image of The celestial representation removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

Individual identity is dependent on one's role in the social world.

Image of Dutch still life paintings removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: Dutch still life paintings depict the riches of the Dutch—e.g. the lemon/nut/oysters/wine in the painting are available together in Amsterdam because of Dutch empire, international trade. We have the depiction of world, state, and community which together produces these riches.

To the right: “The Women Regents of the Old Mens Home at Haarlem” (1660) – they wear the uniform of Dutch society, are not individuals, great deal of conformity, world of **ascribed positions**, one doesn't vary/display individuality, remains humble.

Image of The Women Regents of the Old Mens Home at Haarlem removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

Image of The Calling of St. Matthew removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: People are always in groups, e.g. “The Calling of St. Matthew” by Caravaggio.

To the right: Flemish. “The Moneychanger and His Wife” illustrates the **community with roles**. This theme continues in “The Love Letter” (1666) by Vermeer with the roles of the maid and the lady.

Image of The Moneychanger and His Wife removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

Image of The Love Letter removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

But now comes a change...

Starting in the 18th century and early 19th century, we begin to see pictures that **glorify an individual**, a unique person.

Image of Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: "Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi" by Delacroix

To the right: "La Grande Odalisque" by Ingres (representational)

Image of La Grande Odalisque removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

Aside: Below, on the left, is Manet's "Olympia" in impressionist form. Then there is the post-modern form, on the right, in which the nude is a man. The **post-modern style** makes a joke; it is a self-conscious commentary on what has gone before, trying to disturb that which was regarded as beautiful – a criticism.

Image of Olympia removed due to copyright reasons.
<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/manet/olympia/>

Image of Post-modern style removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the right: The **individual portrait**. The subject's position in society is not represented by surrounding individuals, social roles, rather it is represented by

Image of Individual portrait removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

clothes, consumption (as was apparent in Dutch paintings as well). She is an individual not bounded by social relations that place her in a position as such. Portraits were even done of children.

Image of Salome removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: "Salome" by Beardsley (1892) in which lyrical designs start to **deliberately abstract** that which was earlier represented

To the right: Matisse **flattens out three dimensionality**

Image of Matisse removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

Even the individual person is starting to be depicted as flattened/abstracted:

Images of The Dream removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

The last example above is Henri Rousseau's "The Dream" (1910) – notice how it appears almost comic book like.

Image of Brooklyn Bridge removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: Joseph Stella's "Brooklyn Bridge" (1917) is an example of cubism, painting takes the **perspective of experience of the phenomenon not simply representation**. It is not only the structure, but the *experience* of the structure!

Image of Pablo Picasso removed due to copyright considerations.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the right: Pablo Picasso –meant to **convey a sensation from the experience**

Image of The Quintessentially modern painting removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: The **quintessentially modern** painting is epitomized by Mondrian in his "Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow" (1930). This is strong, involves no representation, no narrative, no persons, no social roles, is pure color. The painting conveys emotion as the onlooker experiences movement between the colors but nothing is being re-presented. The pure sensation of the experience is created without layers of narrative, human meanings, stories, underlying reality to be re-presented. Just like Philip Johnson's Glass House – which embodies only the **essential elements** of 'the house' to keep it protected from the environment –

Image of Glass House removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

Mondrian is saying "I'm going to give you **experience without representation!**"

To the right: Rothko conveys the human experience without a message about human beings. He has **abstracted the aesthetic out of the story of social life**. The aesthetic/emotional experience is extracted out of the raw materials of the paintings – there's no extraneous information to generate that feeling.

Modernism created a **visual experience** (maybe even physical one) through **pure abstraction**

Image of emotion and sensation removed due to copyright reasons.
Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

To the left: Jackson Pollock isn't about representation but *emotion and sensation*; he conveys the feeling of painting, the energy/passion. He used to paint with brush, but then innovated by 'dropping' paint on canvas on the floor. Artists like Pollock were engaged with each other in a **theoretical exercise/ discourse about**

the meaning of art, painting.

To the right: “Elegy to the Spanish Republic” by Motherwell (1957-61). Motherwell **gives the painting a story**, as the Spanish Republic was overthrown by Franco in his Fascist revolution. The painting is the death/destruction of Spanish democracy, as for 40-50 years, Spain was outside the development of modern Europe. Motherwell was well-educated and wrote all sorts of commentaries and theories of this kind of art. The onlooker is meant to feel anger, energy, destruction.

Image of “Elegy to the Spanish Republic” removed due to copyright considerations. Image from Professor Silbey’s slideshow presentation.

Image of Charpente De Fer removed due to copyright reasons.

Image of The Great Sail removed due to copyright reasons.

To the left: Calder’s work. The second is “Charpente De Fer” (1969), which is abstract and playful. Calder also worked on mobiles. He is also the designer of “The Great Sail” on MIT’s campus.

Images from Professor Silbey’s slideshow presentation.

Then came **pop art**, continuing in the post-structural style and offering social commentaries. The canvas (like buildings) doesn’t have to be solid, nor does it have to be one image! Take, for instance, three of Jasper John’s works:

Image of Three Flags removed due to copyright reasons.

Image of Target with Plaster Casts removed due to copyright reasons.

Image of Painting with Two Balls removed due to copyright reasons.

From left to right: “Three Flags” (1958), “Target with Plaster Casts” (1955), and “Painting with Two Balls” (1960)

Images from Professor Silbey’s slideshow presentation.

To the right: Taking photos and blowing them up, conveying the message that **nothing is original**, that the artist is no more unique than anyone else. This is similar to Philip Johnson’s AT&T building, illustrating the **collapse of time and space**. There is no unique art, since everyone is in **dialogue** with each other.

Image of Collapse of Time and space removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey’s slideshow presentation.

Image of serious critique of art/text removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey’s slideshow presentation.

To the left: A manuscript is scribbled over with crayon. The artist is offering a **serious critique of art/text**.

Art has become what the artist *does*; it is his/her **personal production, contribution**. What was produced by the elites before is no longer restricted to that strata.

PERSPECTIVES AND CONCEPTIONS ON IDENTITY

Traditional conceptions:

During ancient and medieval times, the person was thought of as a vessel for the soul which would eventually belong to God. A person was inevitably a **member of the clan**/tribe/manor and was thus defined by **social role**. Marcel Mauss said: “The clan is made up for a certain number of personages...the role of all of them is really to act out...the prefigured totality of the life of the clan”

Emergence of **individualism** and the **modern self**:

The notion of the individual emerged during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, but is now taken for granted as something natural inevitable, how could it be otherwise, Here I am! I am me, a person. Individualism was the product of the Protestant Reformation which challenged the Catholic Church’s hegemony. We began to see the **decline of church and rise of states** (recall the Palace of Versailles replacing the grandeur of gothic cathedrals). So, if we think about how conceptions of individual change, take the example of deviance and criminality; responsibility was no longer attributed to bad blood or to sin, but to bad *choices*, rooted in the individual’s exercise of his/her own faculties. From the 18th century forward [after Hobbes], we see the crystallization of the concept of the individual.

Jeremy Bentham was a calculator of **utility** and theorized that people should **maximize pleasure** and **minimize pain**, like Adam Smith had argued. Both are considered the gurus of classical economics.

Adam Smith posited a society/market for the **coordination of desires** (utilities). In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), he said the good of society would be achieved by each individual pursuing his own **self-interest** (this underlies notions of capitalism). Smith assumed what we no longer take for granted that for this society to function, for each to pursue her self-interest, there had to be a shared moral context. Before *The Wealth of Nations*, he wrote the **theory of the moral sentiments**. How do we know what it is to be good? The only way is to care about what our neighbors think is good and how they will respond to us and our actions. Only by taking into account the responses of others to our behavior will we achieve goodness. The conception was that the individual was **always in transactions with the community**, couldn’t be separate. The pursuit of self-interest was assumed by Adams to be interests generated in a community of moral sentiments, not amoral transactions. Smith argued for societal goodness from individual interest which is shaped by anticipation of living among others. Nowadays, we no longer talk about others but only talk about pursuing self-interest as if they’re solely one’s own.

Similarly, there is the verbal glorification that individual has rights/needs/personality that should be protected. In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson envisioned a state that guaranteed each individual certain inalienable rights – he assumed a certain social order. *What happens when we make assumptions about the individual without encompassing the social order?*

Alongside the development of a popular culturally dominant notion of a **society made up of individual selves**, there was a **decline in the belief in God** as origin/manager/judge of human affairs. (This is a rehearsal of arguments we have heard over and over again this semester.) But since the 1970s, we’ve experienced a **resurgence of religiosity** – up until then it was in decline (there was a small resurgent moment in the 1840s, but a very secular religiosity).

With the emergence of the science of society and nature, there was an unmasking of the hidden, the subsurface, the forces that actually produce and manage natural and human affairs. Science aims to unmask the surface to reveal the underlying causes of things. We have Darwin, Marx, Freud, Einstein – all of whom offered structural, causal theories in their respective fields. The message of these great thinkers of late 19th and early 20th centuries was that **things are not what they appear to be**. There are causes that lie beneath the surface. The surface of what we see/experience is produced by what is not immediately obvious.

Modern architecture reveals the subsurface phenomena that supposedly produced what we observe. For example, the design of skyscrapers show how there are structures holding up the building. The **structure eventually becomes the surface**. In later works, it is not simply an echo on the surface, but an attempt to strip the surface and use/reveal only the essential elements.

Modern art/architecture aimed to find the essential elements of the aesthetic experience, creating the experience without representing the world.

To the right: Ellsworth Kelly's work. Notice how the edge starts to move, vibrate. An instability/vibrancy is created, based on Kelly's science/ knowledge of color and eyes.

Image of Ellsworth Kelly's work removed due to copyright reasons.

<http://www.artnet.com/magazine/news/artnetnews2/artnetnews8-14-1.asp>

Post-modern art creates **emotion without relationships**, feelings without meaning (e.g. Rothko, Mondrian), proffering a **critique of structuralism** in social theory.

Why did things change? Did we find structural sources of social action, or the essential elements of aesthetic experience?

What we get now in response to structuralism is a critique by post-modern art. It argues that efforts to identify the essential elements were marred by [**false**] **generality**, by the practice of universalizing from limited examples.

- 20th century Europe has shown that a state could have capitalism without declining profit, could alleviate the condition of the industrial worker without tearing down capital (e.g. modern welfare states) - showing you can't necessarily apply a universal general thesis/model (e.g. Marx).
- Structuralists ignored **structural variation** (e.g. gender and race differences). They were unable to resolve disputes among competing general theories, of fundamental structures and causes (psychological, emotional, cultural). They took what can be known and measured it as the entirety, yielding **positivist** and essentialized behaviorism. Post-modernists argue that maybe there are lots of things that we know about human life that cannot not be measured!

The post-modern critique of structuralism argues that it [structuralism] was partial and claimed to know everything.

It is a theoretical critique but was also shaped by events and social conditions.

- bureaucracies with rigidity rather than efficiency (challenging Weber)
- wars for independence (Europeans were uncertain of their own virtue as nations/cultures with the demise of imperialism)
- upheavals challenge claims to generality (civil rights, peace, women's movements in US)

- what was clear: there was limited class mobility within the homogenizing popular culture despite its claims of democracy
- loss of confidence in any notion of systems, structures
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- **Post-modernity** is a *social formation*, a condition of society. It was brought about by technological changes and changes in social relations. There is a collapse of distances of time and space, There is a flexible accumulation and mobility of capital removed from geographical location and national boundaries.
- **Post-modernism** is a *style* in architecture/art/pop culture that comments upon and tries to reflect/represent these conditions of what we call the post-modern, challenging any uniform explanation. It offers a quotation and references to the past that are playful. Time and space are eroded and written simultaneously on the same pieces of work. The past/present/future are layered on the self.

Post-modernism refers to **self-conscious reflection**, observing of the self, commenting on what is taken for granted (e.g. the cycle of production and reproduction). This post-modern commentary is itself a production (n.b. work to the right).

Image of self-conscious reflection removed due to copyright reasons. Image from Professor Silbey's slideshow presentation.

The taken for granted world of art/individualism/invention is revealed – from the post-modern perspective, we are *watching ourselves watching ourselves producing an account of ourselves watching ourselves*. Here is the notion of **social life as flux**, composed of fragments rather than being a system coordinated as a whole (e.g. bureaucracy).

Today there's skepticism about systems and causes. There's a recognition that there are **multiple interpretations**. Events are **probabilistic** rather than determined or structured. There is room for human agency but the individual will not be sufficient to produce social events by him/herself. What appears objective is **subjective**, what is right in one place is wrong in others.

The **postmodern self**: There is a recognition of the self as an **ongoing project**, always in formation (n.b. Erik Erikson in 1960s). The self is seen as a **compilation of multiple influences**, past, present, expectations of future. And there is the notion of the **fragmented, de-centered self** with no single, unwavering inner core of being/identity/soul.

For example, Diane Kondo went to study the place of women in Japanese society, being a Japanese-American herself. By going to Japan she could find her roots, her true self (the old notion!). Kondo then realized that she is a Japanese-American, having internalized many American thoughts – while she goes unnoticed in Japan, she gets upset with Japanese women's submissiveness. Thus, Kondo is not one single thing but instead a **mosaic**, a complex – she has **multiple identities**.

Expressions of postmodernism and post-modernity merge:

- fragmented, decentered self
- instability of meanings, causes, probability rather than fixed
- unmotivated rather than caused signs, symbols
- leads to notion of evacuation, emptying of content (La Defense, the office building with the evacuated, empty center.)

POWER

Post-modern styles and critique focused on the **play of power** in all aspects of human life. They offer commentary on power – it's the power of critique, a **critique of institutions** of what is art/creative/new, with the artist arguing that such institutions don't have all the power.

Post-modern moments are unexpected conjunctions that defy spatial/temporal/cultural differences. Some examples from Professor Silbey's travels: (in reading "Let Them Eat Cake")

- 1996: Bicycle courier along tracks in Milan, wearing a laborer's jacket and pants, overtaking cars while talking on his cell phone. He was delivering as would have been done decades ago. It was **old attire with old and new technology**.
- 1995: A Japanese child was pestering his mother to join him in swimming. Not too far away were German and French scientists in the jacuzzi. Four different languages and an American sociologist observer! *Centuries of animosities now go untroubled in familiarity and pleasure*. And the little boy was also a testament to the **market and media productions**, with his toys and accessories.

Conditions of post-modernity:

- erasures of time/distance/cultural variation – there are neither necessary nor benign developments in social relations
- the recognition that changes do *not* happen by themselves or without the collaboration of law (and legal scholars too)
- **post-modern colonialism** – rather than celebrate globalization, post-modernism, and trans-nationalism, there are many that are skeptical about what is going on under the name of globalization

Traditional colonialism was a form of domination and structured inequalities, perpetrated by those with more resources on those on the peripheries of human life.

European imperialism has given way to liberation movements all over the world. We may, however, be experiencing a new form of domination that is more insidious, more difficult to dislodge because it is difficult to identify the sources. They are not necessarily/ always supported by guns.

Habermas talked about the elements of this post-modern domination/colonialism – **colonization of the life world**. There has been a proliferation of media produced/marketed/disseminated images that become symbolic resources for ordinary people, although independent of and at odds with their daily lived experiences. People live in worlds where emotions/desires/rationalities are produced *independently* of their experiences, thus **ideas and experience are disconnected**.

There is an active, ongoing struggle to retain access to and hold on to locally produced and experienced interactions. We need to pay attention to what we're *doing* instead of what we're *told* we are doing, to our transactions and what we can actually mobilize with our resources. We have a society that takes its cues from **what is socially, if not geographically, distant more important than what is local, part of our daily activities and spaces**. What is remote/mediated/made into a product is more important than what we can do ourselves.

What distinguishes post-modern colonialism from traditional forms of colonialism/capitalism?

The production and distribution of goods and signs is driven almost entirely about signs and symbols more than it is about things. It's **commodity fetishism!** What's important is the sign/message rather than the use/functionality. **Signs/messages circulate independently of what they represent**, and thus they have an independent effect. It's like the Nike logo, "Just do it" – *how* you get to be *able to do* something is not explained. There is a system, resources, opportunities that are needed but those details aren't communicated.

Perhaps the internet will produce a real challenge to concentrated power. There is the belief that **technology creates access**, but there are back-door legal machinations to it, too. None of this can happen without the **law** (which is the *legitimate coercion* of the state). The **media** which colonizes our consciousness is saturated with **legal messages** – *it is not only created by law but is giving us messages about law.*

Law has become entertainment (e.g. shows like "Law and Order" or "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation"). And American TV shows broadcast all over world! Here's an example of a **globalization moment**: a man was arrested in Paris and made a request that his Miranda rights be read to him. The problem is that France doesn't *have* Miranda rights, the US does but the French citizen watches American TV and movies.

Notice what gets distributed around the world. Consider the different images/issues that are given importance in the US versus in France in regards to WTO trade: France discusses the impact on the cheese industry, while the US has an interest in movies and wants to push for copyright. (This push for copyright harkens back to the modern/post-modern discussion about the **dialogue among artists**. Why should one entity get all the profit when everything is a **collaborative production**? It's never an individual production – how about the people who make the paints or produce the canvases – but only the artist gets named in the end while the distributor gets the profits. - exception in interesting law about sale of paintings.)

What images circulate globally? The US distributes violence and crime, not comedies and drama. Those other forms of entertainment require **local forms of knowledge** – comedy is culturally informed. What is being inverted, what taken for granted quality is being twisted? Answers to these questions are understandable with local knowledge.

The second aspect besides colonization of life world is that we are **spreading American law**. Law has become the **infrastructure for capitalism**. Consider Eastern Europe that wanted capitalism but didn't have the legal foundation (e.g. law of contract), so scholars transplanted American law. The uniform commercial code incorporated traditional norms of the market for fair business practices. But how do you take American law and put it in Eastern Europe, talking about "traditional norms" (as the laws said), when they didn't have a traditional market? All we did was copy and transplant!

Now there is the spread of law globally and the notion that democratic law will make us more secure... No evidence that democratic rule is friendlier, safer, with long perspective on environment etc.

Illustrative story from Professor Silbey's travels: American charitable foundations were running a training session. All the guests at the conference were from the developing world, many from Africa and were being trained to create foundations. What for? Is there capital, are there millionaires to give away money to save taxes? These organizations were training people in the

developing world so they would **not** come to rely on the state but would create the **habit of public charity**. They were philanthropic heirs of American capital trying to prevent the emergence of welfare capital in other societies, thus reproducing the American model of welfare through philanthropy (charity). But there is *no capital* to endow! We're stuck with **the notion of private action without the resources to support it**.
