

A simple guide to Post Modernism

Post means 'after'. Post-modernism means 'after modernism'.

Modernism

This is a belief in science, rationality, industrialisation and bureaucracy.

Post-modernism

This is a set of theories which suggests that society is undergoing a radical series of changes where modernism is either:

- coming to an end or,
- being rejected by people or,
- changing into a new order.

What is happening to our society?

It is becoming a global society

There is a decline in the belief in science as a force for good.

There is a questioning and a rejection of old moral values.

People are more interested in their personal concerns than those of state or politics.

Post modern ideas about society tend to be:

- There is a rejection of science evident in concerns about the environment and the damage causes by industrialisation.
- People tend to look at the negative side of progress rather than see the positive benefits which can be seen by the rising tide of criticism of cars and transport policies.
- We are more influenced by other cultures and belief systems so that we use goods produced in a variety of countries, we eat foods from a variety of sources.
- We are more aware of popular cultures and they assume greater significance in our lives than ever before. The media control our perspectives and create our realities.
- Consumption and lifestyle define our status rather than work and income.
- We tend to reject politics in the traditional sense of world views and take on personal perspective politics such as feminism, pacifism, environmentalism or fundamentalism.
- We are less likely to view things as a traditional dichotomy (e.g. male vs. female) but to see things as places on a continuum (gender as a number of possibilities)
- Much of what we do and see is referential, for instance the media often need a previous knowledge of other, similar media forms to be understood. Media cultures are complex and difficult to assimilate. (*Independence Day* draws on a long tradition of 'B' movies)

Sociologists in this tradition will tend to suggest that:

Sociology should focus on cultural understandings rather than traditional theories.

Sociology should avoid moral conclusions.

Sociologists should be more aware of the environment.

Sociologists should focus on social movements rather than societal structures.

Writers to mention:

Anthony Giddens - modern society is more aware of the negative aspects of life. There is dissolution of certain social beliefs and a feeling of reflection, scepticism and re-construction.

Zygmunt Bauman - Modernity has died and a new reality is being constructed.

Jean Baudrillard - We live in a media dominated world and meanings are mediated for us.

Lives gain meaning through consumption and we 'become' products

Gellner - fundamentalism in Islam reflects a rejection of Western modernity. Islam itself is not incompatible with Western economic traditions.

Foucault - Truth is relative and gained through a societal process known as a discourse (e.g. the nature of femininity has been a social discourse of the late C20th and the view has shifted)