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MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM: AN OVERVIEW WITH ART EXAMPLES

Terry Barrett

Modernism and postmodernism in art are best understood in relation to modernity and postmodernity in general cultural history; and modernist and postmodernist art are most easily understood with art examples. The following offers cursory explanations of central themes in modernity and postmodernity, and modernist art and postmodernist art with descriptions of artworks that make the themes more understandable. The art examples are set in italics.

Modernity and Postmodernity

The Age of Modernity is the epoch that began with the Enlightenment (about 1687 to 1789). Isaac Newton championed the belief that through science the world could be saved. René Descartes (1596-1650) and later, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), shaped the age intellectually by their beliefs that through reason they could establish a foundation of universal truths. Political leaders of modernity also championed reason as the source of progress in social change, believing that with reason they could produce a just and egalitarian social order. Such beliefs fed the American and French democratic revolutions, the first and second World Wars, and the thinking of many today. The major movements and events of modernity are democracy, capitalism, industrialization, science, and urbanization. The rallying flags of modernity are freedom and the individual.

There is no unified theory of postmodernity. There are many contenders putting forth contentious ideas. Proponents of postmodernity symbolically date its birth with the riots in Paris in May 1968, when students, with the support of prominent scholars, demanded radical changes in a rigid, closed, and elitist European university system. Postmodernism does not merely chronologically follow modernism, it reacts against modernism, and might better be called anti-modernism.

Postmodernists criticize modernity by citing the suffering and misery of peasants under monarchies, and later the oppression of workers under capitalist industrialization, the exclusion of women from the public sphere, the colonization of other lands by imperialists and, ultimately, the destruction of indigenous peoples. Postmodernists claim that modernity leads to social practices and institutions that legitimate domination and control by a powerful few over the many, even though modernists promise equality and liberation of all people.

Fred Wilson's exhibition "Mining the Museum" at the Maryland Historical Society in 1992, offers several postmodernist artistic strategies that address with critical bite social power in modernity. Among finely crafted and polished silver vessels that one would expect to see in a section of an historical museum labeled "Metalwork 1830-1880," Wilson placed steel shackles crudely forged and hammered for slaves. In a typical display of antique Victorian furniture, including a chair with the logo of the Baltimore Equitable Society, Wilson placed a whipping post. Based on Wilson's exhibition, museum educators prepared materials that asked visitors to consider any object in the museum by asking these questions, none of which would have been asked of an art object during the reign of modernism: For whom was it created? For whom does it exist? Who is represented? Who is doing the telling? The hearing?

Whereas modernity is influenced by the rationalism of Newton, Descartes, Kant, and others, postmodernity is influenced by philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, John Dewey, and more recently, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty, who are skeptical about the modernist belief that theory can mirror reality. Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud also undermined the modernist belief that reason is the source of truth by identifying economic forces above the surface of society and psychological forces below it that are not bound by reason, yet are powerful shapers of society and individuals. Postmodernists embrace a more cautious and limited perspective on truth and knowledge than modernists. Postmodernists stress that facts are simply interpretations, that truth is not absolute but merely the construct of individual groups, and that all knowledge is mediated by culture and language.

In a New York City gallery installation in 1994, postmodern artist Barbara Kruger offered an angry critique of how she understands religions to use cultural practices and language to control the psyche and society. In wall texts, photo graphics on the walls and the skylight and floor, and over loud speakers in the Mary Boone Gallery, Kruger made statements including these: "Think like us." "Believe like us." "Pray like us." "I mutilate you so you won't feel any pleasure. I want you to have my babies, because it shows how powerful and manly I am, and you want to do it because that is all you're good for."

Structuralism and poststructuralism are two competing intellectual movements formative of postmodern thought. Structuralism emerged in France after World War II,

heavily influenced by the earlier semiotic theory of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. De Saussure identified language as a system of signs consisting of signifiers (words) and signified (concepts) that are arbitrarily linked to each other in a way that is designated by a culture.

Claude Lévi-Strauss applied linguistic analysis to anthropology. Postmodernists build on the semiotic projects of Roland Barthes and others undertook semiotic projects studying the systems of signs in societies, believing that language, signs, images, and signifying systems organize the psyche, society, and everyday life.

Structuralists in various disciplines, including literature, attempted to explain phenomena by identifying hidden systems. They sought to discover unconscious codes or rules that underlie phenomena and to make visible systems that were previously invisible They especially differed from previous scholars who explained things through historical sequences of events rather than the structuralist method of explaining phenomena in relation to other synchronous phenomena. Structuralists, like modernists, believed they could with rigor attain coherence and objectivity, and they claimed scientific status for their theories, which they believed purged mere subjective understandings.

Poststructuralists, most influentially Jacques Derrida, criticize structuralists for their scientific pretensions, their search for universal truth, and their belief in an unchanging human nature. Both structuralists and poststructuralists reject the idea of the autonomous subject, insisting that no one can live outside of history, and poststructuralists especially emphasize the arbitrariness of signs. Postmodernists stress that language, culture, and society are arbitrary and conventionally agreed upon and should not be considered natural. Whereas modernists believe they can discover unified and coherent foundations of truth that are universally true and applicable, postmodernists accept the limitations of multiple views, fragmentation, and indeterminacy.

Postmodern painter David Salle challenges closed meaning systems to expose their arbitrary construction by juxtaposing many diverse subjects on single canvases—for example, matadors, pop-culture images of Santa Claus and Donald Duck, iconic profiles of Abraham Lincoln and Christopher Columbus, with portions of nude and partially clothed female bodies. Some art critics decry Salle's pastiched paintings as sexist because of "their trademark girlie pinup images" (Rimanelli, 1991, p. 111) and his "crotch intensive perspective" (Cottingham, 1988, p. 104). However, with a postmodernist perspective that depends on the distinction between sign and meaning, Robert Storr (1988) denies that Salle's paintings represent women even though they depict them. Storr asserts contempt "for anyone who would insist that the subject represented might in some way have a proprietary interest in their representation" (p. 24).

Postmodernist psychology also rejects the modernist notion that the individual is a unified rational being. Descartes's dictum, "I think, therefore I am," and Jean-Paul Sartre's dictum that "existence precedes essence" which defines the individual as free and undetermined, place the individual at the center of the universe. Postmodernists instead decenter the individual and claim that the self is merely an effect of language, social relations, and the unconscious; they downplay the ability of the individual to effect change or to be creative.

Much of Cindy Sherman's art is photographs of herself which undermine notions of individuality. In "Untitled Film Stills," 1977-1980, she pictures herself, but as a woman in a wide variety of guises from hitchhiker to housewife. These pictures look like stills from old movies. They are pictures of Cindy Sherman, and pictures of Cindy Sherman disguised as others, and they are also pictures of women as women are represented in cultural artifacts such as movies and magazines and paintings, and especially as pictured by male producers, directors, editors, painters, and photographers. They are about "the cultural construction of femininity" (Heartney, 1987, p. 18).

Modernist Aesthetics and Criticism

Artistic modernism is more recent than philosophical modernity. Art critic Robert Atkins (1993) dates modernism "roughly from the 1860s through the 1970s" and writes that the term is used to identify both the styles and the ideologies of the art produced during those years (p. 139). Although modernism is now old, and some think finished, it was once very progressive, bringing a new art for a new age.

Modernism emerged amidst the social and political revolution sweeping Europe. Western European culture was becoming more urban and less rural, industrial rather than agrarian. The importance of organized religion in the daily lives of people was diminishing while secularism was expanding. Because the old system of artistic patronage had ended, artists were free to choose their own content. Their art no longer needed to glorify the wealthy individuals and powerful institutions of church and state that had previously commissioned their paintings and sculptures. Because it was not likely that their art would flourish in the new capitalist art market, artists felt free to experiment and made highly personal art. The slogan of the era, "Art for the sake of art," is apt.

Modernists signified their allegiance to the new by referring to themselves as "avant-garde," thinking they were ahead of their time and beyond historical limitations. Modern artists were especially rebellious against restrictions put on previous artists by the art academies of the 1700s, and later artists rebelled against the dominance of the art salons and their conservative juries in the late 1800s. Modern artists were often critical of the status quo and frequently challenged middle class values.

Premodernists Jacques Louis David painted scenes from the French Revolution, and Francisco de Goya depicted Napoleon's invasion of Spain. Modernists Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet turned their easels away from nobility and wealth to paint ordinary life around them. The impressionists and postimpressionists abandoned historical subject matter, and also turned away from the realism and illusionism artists had been refining in the West since the Renaissance. Some modernists, such as the futurists in Italy during the 1920s, celebrated in their work new technology, especially speed, while others, such as the constructivists in the Soviet Union, embraced scientific models of thinking. Abstractionists Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian embraced spiritualism to offset the secularism of modern society. Paul Gaugin, and later Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse sought solace and inspiration in non-Western cultures, while Paul Klee and Joan Miró "employed childlike imagery that embodies the yearning to escape adulthood and all its responsibility" (Atkins, 1993, p. 176).

In 1770, Immanuel Kant laid the philosophic foundation for artistic modernism. Kant developed a theory of aesthetic response which held that viewers could and should arrive at similar interpretations and judgments of an artwork if they experienced the work in and of itself. When viewing art, according to Kant, people should put themselves in a supra state of sensory awareness, give up their personal interests and associational responses, and consider art independently of any purpose or utility other than the aesthetic. An aesthetic judgment should be neither personal nor relative. The viewer should rise above the time, place, and personal idiosyncrasies, reaching aesthetic judgments of art with which all reasonable people would agree. In 1913, Edward Bullough, an aesthetician, added the concept of "psychic distancing," reinforcing Kant's idea that the viewer should contemplate a work of art with detachment.

In the 1920s, modernist art theory received a big boost from two British critics, Clive Bell and Roger Fry, who introduced what is now known as formalism. Formalism and modernism are inextricably linked, although the former is an outgrowth of the latter. Bell and Fry sought to ignore as irrelevant the artist's intent in making a work of art and any social or ideological function the artist may have wanted the work to have. Instead, the "significant form" of the artwork was what was to be exclusively attended to. Atkins (1990) credits Bell and Fry's critical purpose as being responsible in part for the early 20th century interest in Japanese prints and Oceanic and African artifacts. Their critical method of attending to art was meant to allow a cross-cultural interpretation and evaluation of any art from any place or any time. Form was paramount, and attention to the other aspects of the work—such as its subject matter or narrative content or uses in rituals or references to the ordinary world—were considered distractions and, worse, detriments to a proper consideration of art.

During the 1930s, in the area of literary criticism, T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, and other writers developed "New Criticism," a formalist approach to literature that paralleled formalism in art. These literature critics wanted more interpretive emphasis on

the work itself—on the poem rather than the poet, for instance—and they wanted the work to be analyzed according to its use of language, imagery, and metaphor. They were attempting to correct the then-current practice of critics placing too much emphasis on information outside of a literary work—for example, on a poet's biography and particular psychology, rather than on the actual text. After World War II, formalist art criticism became extremely important in the United States because of the work of Clement Greenberg, the most influential American art critic of this century.

With formalist principles, Greenberg championed the Abstract Expressionism of Mark Rothko, Willem De Kooning, and Jackson Pollock in the mid-1940s through the 1950s. Greenberg particularly championed the work of Pollock, and the artist and critic in tandem are generally credited with moving the center of the high art world from Paris to New York. While regionalist painters such as Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood were painting the American scene, and while Social Realists depicted class struggles, the Abstract Expressionists championed the existential ideal of individual freedom, and committed themselves to psychic self-expression through abstraction.

Shape, size, structure, scale, and composition were of utmost importance, and styles evolved out of enthusiasm for particular properties of paint. Abstract Expressionism gets much of its effect "from how paint in various thicknesses, applied by a variety of means, behaves differently and affects the finished work in different ways. Blobs of paint mean something different from drips or thin veils" (Yenawine, 1991, p. 20).

With the backing of Greenberg and, later, fellow critic Harold Rosenberg, Abstract Expressionists and Color Field Painters and Hard-Edged Abstractionists flattened their paintings under the formalist principle that painting is two-dimensional by nature and that it ought not attempt three-dimensional illusions. Rosenberg declared that "a painting is not a picture of a thing; it's the thing itself" (Singerman, 1989, p. 156). He wanted artists "just TO PAINT." *Barnett Newman, who painted huge minimally abstract paintings in the 1950s, wrote that the canvas should not be a "space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyze or express," and he rejected "props and crutches that evoke associations, and resisted the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth" (p. 156). Frank Stella wrote, "My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there is there" (p. 157). Minimalists, with their emphasis on reducing painting and sculpture to its bare essentials, were heavily influenced by the work of Newman, Ad Reinhardt, and David Smith.* During the 1960s, critic Michael Fried wrote extensively on formalism, concentrating especially on minimalist sculpture.

However, as social forces in the 1960s sought to obliterate social boundaries, so art movements erased aesthetic boundaries. Joseph Beuys, the German Process Artist, was claiming that everyone was an artist, while Andy Warhol was claiming that everything was art. Movements such as Pop Art eventually rendered formalism ineffective.

Warhol's renditions of Brillo boxes and Campbell's soup cans demanded social and cultural interpretations rather than meditations on the significance of their form. Pop Art also relied on everyday life, a subject that was anathema to formalists, and Pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein used comic book imagery to make art with narrative content, content that formalists wanted banished from painting. Pop artists erased the boundaries between high art and low art, and between an elite and a popular audience, by placing their versions of comic strips, soup cans, and cheeseburgers in galleries and art museums.

Negative criticism of modernism, its slogan of "art for art's sake," and its push toward minimal abstraction was growing. Tom Wolfe attempted to discredit Greenberg and Rosenberg and their abstract and minimalist movements with sarcastic wit in *The Painted Word* (1975). Wolfe mocked as a trivial idea the formalists' insistence on the "flatness" of a canvas. In 1982, Wolfe wrote *From Bauhaus to Our House*, concentrating on the glass box architectural principles and buildings of Mies Van Der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and the Bauhaus school. Wolfe's book on architecture followed another influential critique of modernist architecture by Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* (1977). Jencks pointed out that the utopian dreams of modernist architects like Le Corbusier resulted in sterile skyscrapers and condemned public housing projects. Jencks called for a new architectural style based on eclecticism and popular appeal.

Arthur Danto (1992) credits Warhol with bringing about "the end of art," by which phrase he refers to the logical end of a certain strain of art, namely, modernism. Danto describes modernism as an internally driven sequence of "erasures" that took place over the course of decades and ended in 1964 with the exhibition of Warhol's *Brillo Box*. According to Danto, the history of modernism since 1900 is "a history of the dismantling of a concept of art which had been evolving for over half of a millennium. Art did not have to be beautiful; it need make no effort to furnish the eye with an array of sensations equivalent to what the real world would furnish it with; need not be the magical product of the artist's touch" (p. 4).

Modernists abandoned beauty as the ideal of art—Picasso's Cubist rendering of women in Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, *1907. They dropped subject matter as essential—Jackson Pollock's "drip paintings." They stopped rendering three-dimensional forms on two-dimensional surfaces—Franz Kline's* Mahoning, *1956, an approximately 6' x 8' oil on canvas, black-on-white linear abstraction. They eliminated the artist's touch—Don Judd's* Untitled, *1967, consisting of eight cubes, made by commercial fabricators, of steel and car paint. They eliminated the need to have an art object itself. For conceptual artists of the mid-1960s and 1970s, the idea was more important than the finished work. John Baldessari, for example, exhibited only the documentation of a piece he made by placing the letters C-A-L-I-F-0-R-N-I-A in the actual landscape according to where these letters appeared on a map of California (Atkins, 1990, p. 56). They eliminated the need to have*

an artwork be different from ordinary objects—soft sculptures of hamburgers and fries by Claes Oldenburg, and Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes, *1964.*

Danto specifically credits *Brillo Boxes* with the end of modernism because with it Warhol made the philosophical statement that one could no longer tell the difference between an ordinary object and an art object just by looking at it. To know that Warhol's *Brillo Box* was art and a Brillo box in the grocery store was not, one had to know something of the history of art, the history of the erasures that lead to Warhol's ultimate erasure (or "death of art"). One had to participate in a *conceptual atmosphere* and be familiar with some of the *discourse of reasons* afloat in *an art world.*

Despite Danto's proclamation of the end of art, there obviously were and are many artists, with much energy, still making art, but it is the art of a new pluralism rather than art made under the dictates of mainstream modernism. Danto sees the "end of art" as a liberation: "Once art ended, you could be an abstractionist, a realist, an allegorist, a metaphysical painter, a surrealist, a landscapist, or a painter of still lifes and nudes. You could be a decorative artist, a literary artist, an anecdotalist, a religious painter, a pornographer. Everything was permitted since nothing was historically mandated" (1992, p. 9).

This is roughly the way that Danto and other mainstream critics and aestheticians write the history of modern art. One art scholar may judge some artists to be major influences; another may see these same artists as less important. Fried, for instance, stresses the importance of minimalist sculptors such as Judd and Robert Morris, while Danto finds the Pop artists, especially Warhol, to be most influential.

Others, notably Douglas Crimp (1990), write a different history of modernism, arguing that its demise was brought about by the invention of photography. Photography allowed the mechanical reproduction of images, including art images, thus eventually stripping away from the work of art its properties of uniqueness, originality, and location or place of origin. In reproduction, the artwork can be enlarged, cropped, and recombined with other artworks and images. That the artwork once was "original and authentic" is considered much less important. What is considered important by Crimp and others is that any artwork made in any place in the world at any time can now be seen over and over again in a myriad of contexts.

The significance of the reproducibility of artworks by photographic means was noted by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s. Benjamin was a member of the Frankfurt School, which included Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and other European scholars fleeing Hitler. These scholars, and more recently, Jurgen Habermas, developed critical theory, a form of neo-Marxism challenging dominant capitalist ideology, practice, and culture. Habermas particularly supports art that contributes to critical social discourse. Marxists accept modernists' search for foundational truths, but are

hostile to artistic modernists' separation of art from life. The "neo" in neo-Marxism is a rejection of strict and unwavering historical determinism and belief in the collapse of capitalism that Marxists once held, and a new acceptance that culture influences history and that people can affect the future.

In postmodernist terms, Danto's and other writers' renditions of modernism are thought of as "stories." According to Derrida, all explanations of the world, including scientific explanations, are merely stories or "discourses" fabricated by people. Derrida holds that we never get to reality, only to what we say about reality; there is no truth, there is only discourse. Nevertheless, Danto's theory is compelling. It makes sense of a myriad of stylistic changes that have taken place in art over the past 100 years, making these changes seem logical and linear in order. Like all stories, however, it draws our attention to certain characters and events and ignores thousands of other people who could have been written as major or minor characters. Danto's story of recent art is set in Paris and New York. The rest of the world would be distracting. Danto's story ignores all aesthetic traditions except those of Western Europe and the United States. It is a story about modern Western culture, and it overlooks artists and artworks that do not fit its plot. Frida Kahlo is not a character for his story, nor is Romare Bearden. The art of most women is omitted, as is the work of artists of color, and indeed anyone who was making art with different intentions from those recognized by mainstream critics and aestheticians.

We might have inherited a very different history of recent art than modernism and others are now being written. We inherited modernism as an influential but limited explanation of art of the past century. The predominant characteristics of modernism are an optimism regarding technology; belief in the uniqueness of the individual, creativity, originality, and artistic genius; a respect for the original and authentic work of art and the masterpiece; a favoring of abstract modes of expression over narrative, historical, or political content in art; a disdain for kitsch in culture and a general disdain for middle-class sensibilities and values; and an awareness of the art market.

Postmodernist Aesthetics and Criticism

Postmodernists set themselves apart from all or most modernist beliefs, attitudes, and commitments. *Postmodern artists present the art world with diverse aesthetic forms that break with modernism like the architecture of Robert Venturi and Philip Johnson; the radical musical practices of John Cage; the novels of Thomas Pynchon; films like* Blue Velvet; *performances like Laurie Anderson's; and the use of electronic signage by Jenny Holzer to make socially oppositional art in popular culture.*

Postmodernists flout the modernists' reverence for originality. A central postmodernist strategy is known by the term "appropriation." By appropriating or borrowing or plagiarizing or stealing, postmodernists remind us that the notion of originality is

absent in most traditions of art, in the West and throughout the world. Throughout time most cultures felt no need to identify artists personally, even if they were especially gifted.

Sherrie Levine is most famous for appropriating artworks from the past, most often so-called masterpieces by such white male modern painters as Piet Mondrian and photographers Walker Evans and Edward Weston, two of the most influential mentors of modernist art photography. Levine copied (appropriated) an Evans's photograph and exhibited it as her own under the title After Walker Evans #7, *1981.*

Levine's *After Walker Evans #7* also reinforces Crimp's point, and Benjamin's before him, that the invention of photography has created havoc for modernism. The original photograph, or any artwork, is not important. The reproduction brings the image to millions who otherwise would not see it at all because they would not travel to wherever Evans's photograph might hang. By using a camera to rephotograph a photograph, Levine is also eschewing the reverence previously given to painting, always considered the essential medium of modernism, even though minimalist sculptors attempted to challenge the primacy of paint on canvas. By selecting the work of male artists, Levine questions the place of women in the history of art. By copying certain subjects of male artists, such as a photograph by Edward Weston of his son Brett Weston as a nude young boy, she also questions the role of the artist's gender when the audience views the work: If the nude torso of a young boy had originally been made by a woman artist, the implications would have been different than they are.

As should be expected, not everyone is enamored with postmodernists' appropriations such as those by Levine. In one biting rejection, Mario Cutajar (1992) dismisses the practices of Levine and fellow postmodernists like Jeff Koons, who appropriates crass three-dimensional commercial artifacts such as bunnies, has them made into stainless-steel replicas, and exhibits them as high art sculptures. Cutajar writes: "The typical product of envy and resentment, postmodernism has extracted its vitality from parasitic critiques of far greater achievement, rationalizing the shabbiness of its own product by devaluing (deconstructing) the greatness of what is beyond the reach of its own adherents" (p. 61). He interprets the strategy of appropriation to be the strategy of adolescents trying to emerge from under the shadow of their formidable parents.

Summary Distinctions Between Modernist and Postmodernist Art

Postmodernists do not merely follow modernists chronologically, they critique them. Modernists throw off the past and strive for individual innovations in their art making: Postmodernists are generally content to borrow from the past and are challenged by putting old information into new contexts creating new meaning. Critics

and theorists who support modernism ignore the art of artists who are not working within the sanctioned theory of modernism. Postmodernist critics and artists embrace a much wider array of art-making activities and projects. Modernists attempt to be pure in their use of a medium; postmodernists tend to be eclectic regarding media, and freely gather imagery, techniques, and inspiration from a wide variety of sources. Although modernists are often enthusiastic about the times during which they work, they think themselves and their art apart from and above the ordinary events of the day. Postmodernists are skeptical and critical of their times, and some postmodernist artists are socially and politically active by means of their art. Modernists believe in the possibility of universal communication; postmodernists do not.

Whereas modernists search for universals, postmodernists identify differences. Difference, according to Cornel West (in Golden, 1993), is concerned with issues of "exterminism, empire, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nation, nature, region" (p. 27). West writes that a new cultural politics of difference is determined to "trash the monolithic and homogenous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting, and changing" (p. 27).

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds uses some postmodernist strategies to show historical information that the dominant culture would like to suppress. In a 1990 piece on government property along the Mississippi River in downtown Minneapolis, Heap of Birds erected 40 white aluminum signs with the names in blood red of 40 Dakota Indians—first in Dakota, then in English—who were hanged after the 1862 United States-Dakota war. Thirty-eight of the execution orders were signed by President Abraham Lincoln, two by President Andrew Jackson. With his use of traditional media—oil, pastels, and ink—for pieces that hang on gallery walls, he "subverts any attempt to characterize the Native American artist as noble spirit, dangerous savage, or ravaged victim. Instead, Heap of Birds represents himself as a complex and fully dimensional individual working as an artist within a tribal community" (Lydia Matthews,1990, p. 1).

Karen Hamblen (1991) provides an overtview of problems inherent in beliefs in the possibility of universal communication through art. She explains that most scholars no longer believe that art objects can communicate without viewers having access to knowledge about the times in which they were made and the places in which they originated. Most critics no longer believe that they can interpret, let alone judge, art from societies other than their own without considerable anthropological knowledge of those societies. Most critics now believe that artworks possess characteristics and meanings based on their sociocultural contexts, and acknowledge that artworks have been interpreted differently in various times and places. Critics are now likely to consider personality differences, socioeconomic backgrounds, genders, and religious affiliations of artists and their audiences, whereas modernist critics are much more likely to

concentrate solely on the art object itself and believe that they can gain consensual agreement about their individual responses.

With the influence of postmodernism, critics are much more attuned to viewers of art and how they respond to it, and they prize variable understandings of the same work of art. Wanda May (1992) asserts that the postmodernist goal is to "keep things open to demystify the realities we create" (p. 238). Rigid categories of modernists "tend to make us more static than we are or wish to be" (p. 239). May adds that a postmodern work is "evocative rather than didactic, inviting possibilities rather than closure" (p. 239). Postmodernist critics hold that an artwork is "a text that is a permutational field of citations and correspondences in which multiple voices blend and clash" (Owens, 1991, p. 121) written by many people, providing viewers with many possible readings.

Lucy Lippard (1988) gives a clear and strong objection to the tendency of modernists to withdraw from the world and ordinary viewers in their art making: "God forbid, the [modernist] taboo seems to be saying, that the content of art be accessible to its audience. And God forbid that content mean something in social terms. Because if it did, that audience might expand, and art itself might escape from the ivory tower, from the clutches of the ruling/corporate class that releases and interprets it to the rest of the world" (p. 184). She rails against what she calls the still-current modernist taboo against what modernists derogatorily refer to as "literary art," which encompasses virtually all art with political intentions. Critics and artists still influenced by modernism are likely to denigrate social art as too "obvious, heavy handed, crowd pleasing, sloganeering" (p. 184).

Barbara Kruger (1990), who writes criticism as well as makes postmodernist art, rejects modernists' fixations with distinguishing, in a hierarchical manner, high culture from low culture. The title of her article is telling: "What's High, What's Low—and Who Cares?" In the article she denounces such categories in general for their false authority, pat answers, and easy systems. In a related thought about modernists' penchants for dogmatic distinctions, Robert Storr (1989) writes: "Indeed if postmodernism means anything, it is an end to terminal arguments and the historical mystifications and omissions necessary to maintaining millennial beliefs of all kinds" (p. 213).

Harold Pearse (1992) succinctly draws significant summary distinctions among premodern, modern, and postmodern tendencies: "By dispossessing itself of the *premodern* tendency to repress human creativity to avoid usurping the supremacy of a divine creator, and the *modern* tendency to over-emphasize the originative power of the autonomous individual, the *postmodern* imagination can explore alternative modes of inventing alternative modes of existence" (p. 249). Pearse explains that the model of the modernist image of the artist as a productive inventor has been replaced by that of

the bricoleur, or collagist, who finds and arranges fragments of meaning. The postmodern artist is the "postman delivering multiple images and signs which he has not created and over which he has no control" (p. 249).

Concluding Implications for Art Education

Artists and critics are informed by and contribute to the thought of their times. The many examples of uses of postmodernist strategies by theorists and artists are sketchily drawn in this essay to make postmodernist art and criticism, in all its complexity, clearer. No one-to-one correspondence between a theory and an artwork are given, however. That would be a miseducational oversimplification. The more perspectieves we can gain on a work of art, the richer and deeper will be our experience of that work. Thoughts offered here are aimed at helping our students view new art and old art through new intellectual strategies, and read recent criticism with more confidence because of having introductory knowledge of the underpinnings of recent ideas and practices.

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