

AFFEERCE and Post-Modernism

By Jeff Graubart

...from Christian redemption to Marxist Utopia – and that of the triumph of science. Lyotard considers that such doctrines have 'lost their credibility' since the Second World War: 'Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives...The narrative function is losing... its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language...Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?' ^{FN7.31, FN7.32}

The essence of post-modernism is deconstruction. Deconstruction is the process of tearing down metanarratives by pointing out their internal contradictions. ^{FN7.33} A metanarrative is a story about a story. It is a narrative of who people are, what they believe, or the way things should be. According to Wikipedia, a metanarrative is “a grand narrative common to all...a comprehensive explanation, a narrative about narratives of historical meaning, experience or knowledge, which offers a society legitimacy through the anticipated completion of a (as yet unrealized) master idea (i.e. return of Christ, withering away of the state, etc.)” ^{FN7.32}.” The more detailed the metanarrative, generally the easier it is to find contradiction. The Judeo-Christian Bible, or any other religion’s text, is not only good at deconstructing itself, but can also serve to deconstruct any jointly held narrative. For instance, God says “Thou shalt not kill,” yet many religious individuals adhere to a metanarrative that supports war. The Bible itself describes many wars supported by God. Narratives of our forebears, for or against slavery, for or against abortion, or for or against civil rights and civil liberties, are tools of deconstructionism.

The Bill of Rights “pursuit of happiness” clause can be used to deconstruct the argument that “a woman’s place is in the home.” Some say that Betty Friedan started the postmodern era in 1963, with her book *The Feminine Mystique* whose purpose was to deconstruct the then metanarrative concerning a woman’s place in society. Or perhaps it began with rock and roll. In any case, as the 1960s progressed, it was obvious that the post-war era was ending and postmodernism and its attendant deconstruction, was taking hold.

When WWII ended, there was a movement to create and restore metanarratives. The confusing and terrifying nature of the new science, two world wars and a great depression, left an anchorless people desperate for stories that would give meaning to their lives. Women were pushed out of the workforce, and back into the role of mother and housekeeper. Those not of the white race were expected to know their place and achieve happiness through that complacency. Suburban conformity was a mythological Eden, sheltered from the evils: atom bombs, communists, and homosexuals. Morality was found in the horse operas on the new medium of television; Gunsmoke, Maverick, Have Gun Will Travel. The more sensitive viewers found a moral compass in Ozzie and Harriet and Father Knows Best.

The narratives were all inventions people needed to feel connected and whole. However, the post-war baby boom generation, never knowing firsthand the evils of the past, saw the narratives only as foolish inventions; first as racism, then sexism and finally homophobia. Metanarratives of how the United States went to war to protect freedom and defend the “ignorant” third world populations from the evils of communism came up against Vietnam.

Prior to the post-modern era, it was considered impolite to discuss politics or religion with friends. With postmodernism, it became common. As deconstruction spread, no metanarrative was safe (i.e. family, state, religion).

However, by 1972, postmodernism seemed to have reached its peak and was now in decline. Certainly, some of the worst narratives of racism and sexism had been deconstructed, and the country was moving to the right again. But in fact, the postmodern era was still in its infancy.

The two themes of the 1970s that would keep postmodernism alive were Watergate and the gay liberation movement. Watergate revived the deconstruction of the government, and began the deconstruction of the presidency. The gay liberation movement accelerated the deconstruction of religion, psychiatry, marriage, and gender roles.

Derrida, an influential postmodern philosopher, felt that all narratives could be deconstructed simply by virtue of being expressed in a language. Since every word in a language is defined in terms of other words in the language, there could be no absolute truth about anything that could be spoken or written. Gödel, a mid-twentieth century mathematician, showed that no system was both consistent and complete. It is therefore possible to deconstruct every system of thought.

Since there could be no absolute truth in historical accounts or spoken language, it was deemed equally valid to rewrite history to favor the narratives of the oppressed and rewrite speech, to do the same. Such political correctness is distinctly postmodern.

As the 1980s progressed, postmodernism, or at least deconstruction, spread to the radical right. The leftist narratives were ridiculed in a much cruder form of deconstruction, but deconstruction nonetheless.

The metanarrative of science that life was a random accident, that there is no free will, and that we are simply biological machines, was not only fodder for the deconstructionists on the right, but also for those on the spiritual left and center.

As deconstructionism spread throughout the population, conspiracy theorists abounded. Everything the government said was assumed to be a lie. Recently we have seen “truthers” and “birthers,” metanarratives that deconstruct metanarratives that have themselves been deconstructed. Postmodernism takes no prisoners. Every metanarrative must be deconstructed. Big science – all lies. Big business – all lies. Big government – all lies. Big religion – all lies. Postmodernism naturally led us into the culture wars.

The internet has fast-forwarded the postmodern age, although ironically, it is the one metanarrative that has remained somewhat intact despite such wacky notions as a global brain^{FN7.34}. Within social networking sites, the deconstructionists cling tightly to their personal metanarratives and seek to destroy all others. As every pillar of society is deconstructed, we are left with no truths. Moral relativism replaces moral absolutes. When deconstruction is complete, all we are left with is the apocalypse.

When I was a militant fighter for gay liberation, I used to curse the Christians on the other side of the barricades. Ironically, there was a second reason for that anger, not likely shared by many of my fellow revolutionaries. I was angry that the Christians would place their biblical narrative up against our narratives rooted in the United States Constitution. If they claimed that homosexuality was a sin, it became our moral duty to deconstruct that notion. We were fighting for our very lives. If our deconstruction unraveled their religion like a ball of yarn, so be it. The tragedy for me was that the Christians were like children off to a slaughter. They thought they had God's protection, and that their narratives would keep them strong. But they were placing their millennia old narratives against freedom and equality. There was no question that we would ultimately emerge victorious. There was also no question that their beliefs could never recover from the self-inflicted damage they themselves had wrought. It was my job as a fighter for gay liberation to deconstruct every narrative that stood in the way of freedom and equality for gays and lesbians. Even then I knew those narratives I was set to destroy were mythical and could never recover. I also knew that the country would be poorer because of the loss of the more positive aspects of those narratives. So I was very angry at my opponents for not surrendering, and instead allowing themselves, and the nation to suffer from their intransigence.

It was a historical necessity that the narratives supporting racism, sexism, homophobia, and imperialist war, be deconstructed. The more narratives that were used to defend these practices, the greater the deconstruction required. But deconstruction knows no bounds, and our own beliefs are pulled down with the rest. Like many of us, I am a reluctant postmodernist. We see the contradictions in other narratives and we tear them down, not so much because we enjoy deconstruction, but because, what we perceive as our very survival depends on it. We don't like deconstruction, but we can't help doing it. The folly or threat of everyone else's beliefs is just too obvious. Postmodernism is the antithesis of "judge not, lest you be judged." In a postmodern world, we all live in glass houses and we all throw stones.

As we witness the inevitable and unstoppable deconstruction of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, big business, big government, big science, and big religion, we are left rudderless in a miasma of moral relativism. Where is truth? We ask.

All is not lost. For it is Mother Nature, from which we came, who shows us truth. We find truth in a baby's smile, or the wagging tail of a happy dog. We find truth in honesty, doing a kind deed, love, compassion, tears, and sadness. We find truth in the beauty of a sunset or the majestic awe of the nighttime sky. We find truth in a nature that recycles life and does not abide senseless killing. We find truth in the thrill of discovery, in art, music, books, sports, travel, debate, and relaxation. To paraphrase Thomas Paine in the Age of Reason, there is but one Ultimate Truth, "Behold, the Creation!"

Truth in nature is the essence of the AFFEERCE enlightenment. AFFEERCE, the synthesis of objectivism and subjectivism will mark the end of postmodernism. With AFFEERCE, we begin the process of construction, writing our own narratives from the truths that nature has left behind in the wake of the deconstruction, and other truths born from our own imagination. Postmodernism, through its indiscriminant destruction has forced us to accept the vulnerability of our own truths and accept that our truths will only be safe from the scythe in an absolutely free society that allows others to live their truths in harmony with our own. The AFFEERCE alternative family, and to a lesser extent, the community, are designed around this principle.

Diverse views about the cosmos and the soul can flourish in AFFEERCE, precisely because they have no influence on the state. Those who wish to have their freedom curtailed in any way can live in families whose charter so ordains. Narratives give meaning to our lives. Wonderfully inventive families and communities will grow around those narratives. Lyotard, who coined the term metanarrative, argued that small local metanarratives were consistent with communal lifestyles ^{FN7.32}.

FN7.31 Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction, Christopher Butler, 16%

FN7.32 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metanarrative>

FN7.33 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deconstruction>