*Under the post-modern onslaught, all boundaries and distinctions rapidly fall. Some of the losses associated with the collapse of traditional distinctions have been trivial, but others have been earthshaking, and there seems to be no way to distinguish between the two in a post-modern context. People no longer know where the lines fall.*

Some sociologists believe we are now moving into a new and very different type of society. The social change, that began to accelerate 300 years ago, has continued at such a pace that the theories and assumptions we had about modern society no longer explain the society we find around us.

The main characteristic of **postmodernism** seems to be a loss of faith in the ideas of the Enlightenment. It is argued by postmodernists that people have become disillusioned with the idea that we can use science and rational thought to make the world a better place. People have become disillusioned with the idea of progress. There is greater understanding of negative effects of so-called ‘progress’, such as pollution, environmental damage and damage to human populations.

We are also seeing the **disappearance of old certainties**. In the past gender roles, ethnic differences, social class differences were all clear cut and people generally conformed to societal expectations. Today the old distinctions are blurring and people choose who they want to be, and how they want to behave.

Postmodernists also argue that other **characteristics of modern societies** are disappearing.

* The big **production companies** making vast quantities of the same product are becoming more diversified and there has been a growth of small companies producing goods for very specialized markets.
* New **social movements** are connecting people across traditional class and ethnic boundaries; movements such as gay rights, environmentalism, feminism, and new religious movements.
* The significance of **nation states** is in decline. Today many multi-national companies are larger and have more power than most countries, and within countries more provision is being privatized and less is provided by the state.
* Employees are less likely to have long-term careers and jobs for life, **employment** is more uncertain and there has been a big increase in part-time, temporary and agency employment.

Despite all this evidence, the concept of a postmodern society is a very controversial one. Many sociologists accept that society is changing a great deal but do not accept the term postmodern. Some sociologists, including **Anthony Giddens**, prefer to describe society as in a stage of ‘**late-modernity**’.

Modernism always celebrated the new and considered ideas from the past to be ‘old-fashioned’. Postmodernism borrows from the past and combines a wide range of styles together - a ‘pick and mix’ approach. A good example of a postmodern building is a shopping centre called the Trafford Centre, in Manchester. This looks like St Paul's Cathedral from the front, a Norman castle from the back, inside one section is the deck of an ocean liner, and in another is a Victorian palm house.

Distinctions between the cultures of the different social classes have been blurred, for example by the use of opera as a theme tune for the football world cup. The process of globalisation has also meant the blurring of traditional cultural boundaries. Today Coca-Cola can be found in the remotest regions of the world.

Contemporary, or postmodern, society is characterized by a newfound ability to control the world of nature and worlds of illusion. It immerses people in a virtual environment of images and simulations, and encourages the acting out of desires, including desires that once seemed off-limits to action and experience. Ultimately, it seeks to turn reality into a simulation and make simulations seem real, so humanity will have the ability to control and create its surroundings at will.

How does postmodern society use this newfound power? It certainly has used it to enormous good. But it has also used it to create an emerging worldwide culture in which images, simulations, story lines, performances and rhetoric are employed to manipulate the public and sell it products, phony candidates and false ideas. Thus postmodern society turns out to be a realm of illusion in more than one sense.

Stephen Connor says that the "concept of postmodernism cannot be said to have crystallized until about the mid-1970's…”. Modernity had received some strong criticism, and it was becoming more and more tenable to assert that the postmodern had come to stay, but it took some time before scholarship really jumped on the bandwagon. At this point it is important to distinguish between *postmodern* and *postmodernism*. *Postmodern* refers to a period of time, whereas *postmodernism* refers to a distinct ideology. As Veith points out, "If the *modern* era is over, we are all postmodern, even though we reject the tenets of postmodern*ism*.

So exactly what is postmodernism? The situation is profoundly complex and ambiguous. But basically speaking, postmodernism is *anti-foundationalism*, or *anti-worldview*. It denies the existence of any universal truth or standards. Jean-Francois Lyotard, perhaps the most influential writer in postmodern thought, defines *postmodernism* as "incredulity towards metannarratives." For all intents and purposes, a *metanarrative* is a worldview: a network of elementary assumptions. . . in terms of which every aspect of our experience and knowledge is interrelated and interpreted. Metanarratives are, according to postmodernist scholar Patricia Waugh, "Large-scale theoretical interpretations purportedly of universal application." The postmodernist's, it would seem, would tolerate having a coherent worldview so long as it is kept from being asserted as universal in its application. This is not the case though. The goal, so to speak, of postmodernism is to not only reject metanarratives, but also the belief in coherence. Not only is any worldview which sees itself as foundational for all others oppressive, belief that one may even *have* a coherent worldview is rejected as well. Nevertheless, there are many worldviews around today, and the postmodernist finds it to be his responsibility to critique, or "deconstruct" as they call it, such worldviews and "flatten them out," so to speak, so that no one particular approach or belief is more "true" than any other. What constitutes truth, then, is relative to the individual or community holding the belief.

As we have seen, for the postmodern thinker, there are no absolute truths or foundations to work from. Properly speaking, then, postmodernism is not a worldview *per se*; it does not attempt to *construct* a model or paradigm that orders reality; reality alludes attempts at conformity for the postmodernist, and so he *deconstructs* all attempts at creating such absolute foundations. Modernity and Christianity debated as to which view was true; postmodernism attacks both Christianity and modernity because they claim to be "true." Christianity affirms certain necessary beliefs that must be assumed in order to make sense out of the world (e.g., that the triune God exists, that he is both transcendent and immanent, that the Bible is his Word). Postmodernism rejects the idea that reality makes sense in any absolute fashion, and reduces any construction to personal or cultural bias. Truth is a social construct, pragmatically justified, so as to make it one of many culturally conditioned approaches to the world. Postmodernism, then, is not so much an *orthodoxy* (a positive belief system or worldview), as it is an *orthopraxy* (a series of methods for analysis).

In continuing to remove the possibility of any ultimate knowledge, postmodernism confuses the traditional distinction between the subject of knowledge (the knower) and the object of knowledge (the thing being known). Man does not sit back and passively receive knowledge about the world; rather, man's interpretation is, ultimately, the way the world actually is, as it is revealed to *him*, or to a culture. This confusion of subject and object has earned postmodernism the labels of nihilism and relativism. Logic, science, history, and morality are not universal and absolute; they are the constructs of our own experience and interpretations of that experience.

Why do the postmodernists draw these conclusions? As we saw above the idea that reality was orderly and that man was simply a passive observer was called into question. Kant's "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy argued that the mind "brings something to the objects it experiences . . . The mind imposes its way of knowing upon its objects.” It is the object that conforms to the mind, not the mind to the object. It would seem then that reality is what we perceive it to be. Charles Mackenzie observes:

If in knowing an object the human mind virtually creates knowledge, the question has been raised then, What is the external world when it is not being perceived? Kant replied that we cannot know a thing-in-itself (*ding an sich*). The world, as it exists apart from our experience, *is unknowable*.

As such reality, as it really is, is unknowable. The "thing in itself," cannot be known. The only thing that can be known is our personal experience and our interpretation of that experience. Since each person's experience is all that can be known, it cannot be concluded that man can know anything in any absolute sense. All one has is his own finite, limited experience. Logic, science, history, and ethics are human disciplines that must, and do, reflect human insufficiency and subjectivity.

Another reason the postmodernists draw these conclusions comes from the fact that the existentialists, with their rejection of rationalism and empiricism, focused philosophy on the human experience, especially as it is communicated through language. Language is the way man expresses these experiences of the world, therefore to understand the world, as best we can, we must look to what is said about reality. But subjectivism is all we can have since the best we can do is experience and interpret what others have experienced and interpreted reality to be, and so the spiral continues downward. Thus, for the postmodernists, any assertion of absolute knowledge is seriously questioned and ultimately rejected. Therefore history is seen as a series of metaphors rather than an account of events as they *actually* happened. After all, the one recording the events was writing and recording the events *as he saw them*. Someone else may have seen it differently had they been there. In issues of morality no one particular view is seen as foundational. Rather, each culture's, and ultimately each individual's, view on ethics is just as valid as the next. This view is the basis for the assumptions of "Multiculturalism," and the "Political Correctness" movement in today's society. Rather than affirming any one morality as absolute, every person's moral persuasion is to be respected no matter what it is, and language must be revised so as to not favor any one outlook and thus offend another.

Irving Kristol, a fellow at the American Enterprize Institute, describes the current time as "a shaking of the foundations of the modern world."

Allen says: A massive intellectual revolution is taking place that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages . . . The principles forged during the Enlightenment … which formed the foundations of the modernmentality, are crumbling.

The collapse of Enlightenment Humanism is imminent, and the attacks on it are from all angles. From religious conservatives to scientific liberals, the desire to overhaul the presuppositions of modernity is a shared goal, although the motives differ greatly. Christians welcome the opportunity for credible public discourse concerning their faith, and many scientists are eager to see a shift in scientific outlook that will account for the anomalies that modern science has avoided. These are exciting times, times when the church should be alert.

In a postmodern world Christianity is intellectually relevant. With the demise of the absoluteness of human reason and science, the super-natural, that which is not empirical, is once again open to consideration. The marketplace of ideas is wide open, and opportunities abound. It is important that the church understand these important times in which it finds itself. But in addition to opening the door once again to the Christian faith, postmodernism, with its critical apparatus, has a few lessons for the church to learn.

What is interesting is that postmodernism strikes at the very same thing God did: language. Without language, logic and science are meaningless; they have no application. As we have seen, its each man for himself in his own private world. The arrogant, pseudo-unity that man had claimed to find was now just one of the many ways of looking at things. Logic and science were now relative to cultural interpretation. Like the people at the Tower of Babel, modern man has been fragmented and scattered. There is no center of discourse any longer.

In this light perhaps the most significant contribution of postmodernism is that it reminds us of our finitude. It reminds us that God is creator and we are his creation. It tells us that he must be the beginning of all of our thinking, that apart from him we could know nothing.

For our personal life, postmodernism shows us the futility of autonomy. It forces those of us who know Christ back to the basics of depending on Christ for everything, whether it is salvation or standards. That in him we have meaning and purpose for our lives; he is the vine, we are the branches, and apart from him we can do nothing.

To sum it up, postmodernism need not be seen as a mortal enemy. In many ways it drives us back to complete and total dependence on God. It reminds us that he is the foundation for every area of life, whether it is logic or law. It shows us that there exist no neutral, impartial domains that we can lean on in addition to him. Postmodernism points out that we all have presuppositions, and that no one is unbiased. We all bring our assumptions to our experience; each fact about the world is theory-laden. The question then becomes, "Which presuppositions are true?" The answer is clear: the Christian worldview is true. It alone is the only escape from subjective nihilism, for it alone provides the necessary foundations to make the facts intelligible. This being the case, the Christian is able to glean what is good from postmodernism, and reject the extremes.

Individual identity is fundamentally dependent on the mediation of the others. The self appears to be dependent on the other in its being. It is through intercourse with others that one finds one’s self. I am, says Hegel, a being in myself, but only by myself through another. The individual perceives himself, in an inseparable way, in relation to the others and in relations to himself, but without the intervention of the others he would not be able to perceive himself.

Apart from being dependent on the intervention of the others in producing his own understanding of himself, the individual is dependent on creating a positive image of himself in order to endure himself and his surroundings. First and foremost, the positive image of self-esteem should be brought about by and in the individual himself, but it is dependent on the others’ gaze. Self-esteem is created through action and negotiation with others, by committing oneself, by playing a role for the others and for oneself. In other words, built in to the identity as a process is a striving for self-esteem, and this self-esteem is shaped by doing. Thus, identity is not only a matter of evoking an image of oneself. One seeks other people’s respect and confidence. In order to become something in one’s own eyes one must feel appreciated by others for what one is and what one does. It is not only a matter of just being there, but of being of importance, of making a difference.

As a result of these ingredients - technology, human ingenuity and our own needs and desires - we have created a society in which much of the culture and politics, as well as the economy, is geared toward mass producing, and consuming, simulations. It is a society in which many simulations are intended to be mistaken for the real thing. But it is also a society in which simulations that were never meant to be misleading often end up being mistaken for what they resemble, by accident, thus making simulation confusion, like pollution and traffic jams, another unintended, and toxic, byproduct of technology.

Fortunately, as simulations extend their reach, we are developing new survival skills that help us to unmask illusions.

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles.* Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.

The images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream in which the unity of this life can no longer be reestablished. Reality considered partially unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world apart, an object of mere contemplation. The specialization of images of the world is completed in the world of the autonomous image, where the liar has lied to himself. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.

The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as *instrument of unification.* As a part of society it is specifically the sector which concentrates all gazing and all consciousness. Due to the very fact that this sector is *separate,* it is the common ground of the deceived gaze and of false consciousness, and the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of generalized separation.

The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.

The spectacle cannot be understood as an abuse of the world of vision, as a product of the techniques of mass dissemination of images. It is, rather, a *Weltanschauung* which has become actual, materially translated. It is a world vision which has become objectified.

The spectacle grasped in its totality is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice *already made* in production and its corollary consumption. The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals. The spectacle is also the *permanent presence* of this justification, since it occupies the main part of the time lived outside of modern production.

Separation is itself part of the unity of the world, of the global social praxis split up into reality and image. The social practice which the autonomous spectacle confronts is also the real totality which contains the spectacle. But the split within this totality mutilates it to the point of making the spectacle appear as its goal. The language of the spectacle consists of *signs* of the ruling production, which at the same time are the ultimate goal of this production.

One cannot abstractly contrast the spectacle to actual social activity: such a division is itself divided. The spectacle which inverts the real is in fact produced. Lived reality is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle while simultaneously absorbing the spectacular order, giving it positive cohesiveness. Objective reality is present on both sides. Every notion fixed this way has no other basis than its passage into the opposite: reality rises up within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and the support of the existing society.

The concept of spectacle unifies and explains a great diversity of apparent phenomena. The diversity and the contrasts are appearances of a socially organized appearance, the general truth of which must itself be recognized. Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is *affirmation* of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance. But the critique which reaches the truth of the spectacle exposes it as the visible *negation* of life, as a negation of life which *has become visible.*

To describe the spectacle, its formation, its functions and the forces which tend to dissolve it, one must artificially distinguish certain inseparable elements. When *analyzing* the spectacle one speaks, to some extent, the language of the spectacular itself in the sense that one moves through the methodological terrain of the very society which expresses itself in the spectacle. But the spectacle is nothing other than the *sense* of the total practice of a social-economic formation, its *use of time.* It is the historical movement in which we are caught.

The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible. It says nothing more than "that which appears is good, that which is good appears. The attitude which it demands in principle is passive acceptance which in fact it already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance.

The basically tautological character of the spectacle flows from the simple fact that its means are simultaneously its ends. It is the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.

The society which rests on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally *spectaclist.* In the spectacle, which is the image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself.

As the indispensable decoration of the objects produced today, as the general exposé of the rationality of the system, as the advanced economic sector which directly shapes a growing multitude of image-objects, the spectacle is the *main production* of present-day society.

The spectacle subjugates living men to itself to the extent that the economy has totally subjugated them. It is no more than the economy developing for itself. It is the true reflection of the production of things, and the false objectification of the producers.

The first phase of the domination of the economy over social life brought into the definition of all human realization the obvious degradation of *being* into *having.* The present phase of total occupation of social life by the accumulated results of the economy leads to a generalized sliding of *having* into *appearing,* from which all actual "having" must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function. At the same time all individual reality has become social reality directly dependent on social power and shaped by it. It is allowed to appear only to the extent that it is *not.*

Where the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behavior. The spectacle, as a tendency *to make one see* the world by means of various specialized mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly), naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs; the most abstract, the most mystifiable sense corresponds to the generalized abstraction of present-day society. But the spectacle is not identifiable with mere gazing, even combined with hearing. It is that which escapes the activity of men, that which escapes reconsideration and correction by their work. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever there is independent *representation,* the spectacle reconstitutes itself.

The spectacle inherits all the *weaknesses* of the Western philosophical project which undertook to comprehend activity in terms of the categories of *seeing;* furthermore, it is based on the incessant spread of the precise technical rationality which grew out of this thought. The spectacle does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality. The concrete life of everyone has been degraded into a *speculative* universe.

Philosophy, the power of separate thought and the thought of separate power, could never by itself supersede theology. The spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology has not dispelled the religious clouds where men had placed their own powers detached from themselves; it has only tied them to an earthly base. The most earthly life thus becomes opaque and unbreathable. It no longer projects into the sky but shelters within itself its absolute denial, its fallacious paradise. The spectacle is the technical realization of the exile of human powers into a beyond; it is separation perfected within the interior of man.

To the extent that necessity is socially dreamed, the dream becomes necessary. The spectacle is the nightmare of imprisoned modern society which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of sleep.

The fact that the practical power of modern society detached itself and built an independent empire in the spectacle can be explained only by the fact that this practical power continued to lack cohesion and remained in contradiction with itself.

The oldest social specialization, the specialization of power, is at the root of the spectacle. The spectacle is thus a specialized activity which speaks for all the others. It is the diplomatic representation of hierarchic society to itself, where all other expression is banned. Here the most modern is also the most archaic.

The spectacle is the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence. The fetishistic, purely objective appearance of spectacular relations conceals the fact that they are relations among men and classes: a second nature with its fatal laws seems to dominate our environment. But the spectacle is not the necessary product of technical development seen as a *natural* development. The society of the spectacle is on the contrary the form which chooses its own technical content. If the spectacle, taken in the limited sense of "mass media" which are its most glaring superficial manifestation, seems to invade society as mere equipment, this equipment is in no way neutral but is the very means suited to its total self-movement. If the social needs of the epoch in which such techniques are developed can only be satisfied through their mediation, if the administration of this society and all contact among men can no longer take place except through the intermediary of this power of instantaneous communication, it is because this "communication" is essentially *unilateral.* The concentration of "communication" is thus an accumulation, in the hands of the existing system s administration, of the means which allow it to carry on this particular administration. The generalized cleavage of the spectacle is inseparable from the modern *State,* namely from the general form of cleavage within society, the product of the division of social labor and the organ of class domination.

*Separation* is the alpha and omega of the spectacle. The institutionalization of the social division of labor, the formation of classes, had given rise to a first sacred contemplation, the mythical order with which every power shrouds itself from the beginning. The sacred has justified the cosmic and ontological order which corresponded to the interests of the masters; it has explained and embellished that which society *could not do.* Thus all separate power has been spectacular, but the adherence of all to an immobile image only signified the common acceptance of an imaginary prolongation of the poverty of real social activity, still largely felt as a unitary condition. The modern spectacle, on the contrary, expresses what society can do, but in this expression the *permitted* is absolutely opposed to the *possible.* The spectacle is the preservation of unconsciousness within the practical change of the conditions of existence. It is its own product, and it has made its own rules: it is a pseudo-sacred entity. It shows what it *is:* separate power developing in itself, in the growth of productivity by means of the incessant refinement of the division of labor into a parcellization of gestures which are then dominated by the independent movement of machines; and working for an ever-expanding market. All community and all critical sense are dissolved during this movement in which the forces that could grow by separating are not yet *reunited.*

With the generalized separation of the worker and his products, every unitary view of accomplished activity and all direct personal communication among producers are lost. Accompanying the progress of accumulation of separate products and the concentration of the productive process, unity and communication become the exclusive attribute of the system's management. The success of the economic system of separation is the *proletarianization* of the world.

Due to the success of separate production as production of the separate, the fundamental experience which in primitive societies is attached to a central task is in the process of being displaced, at the crest of the system's development. by non-work, by inactivity. But this inactivity is in no way liberated from productive activity: it depends on productive activity and is an uneasy and admiring submission to the necessities and results of production; it is itself a product of its rationality. There can be no freedom outside of activity, and in the context of the spectacle all activity is negated. just as real activity has been captured in its entirety for the global construction of this result. Thus the present "liberation from labor," the increase of leisure, is in no way a liberation within labor, nor a liberation from the world shaped by this labor. None of the activity lost in labor can be regained in the submission to its result.

The economic system founded on isolation is a *circular production of isolation.* The technology is based on isolation, and the technical process isolates in turn. From the automobile to television, all the *goods selected* by the spectacular system are also its weapons for a constant reinforcement of the conditions of isolation of "lonely crowds." The spectacle constantly rediscovers its own assumptions more concretely.

The spectacle originates in the loss of the unity of the world, and the gigantic expansion of the modern spectacle expresses the totality of this loss: the abstraction of all specific labor and the general abstraction of the entirety of production are perfectly rendered in the spectacle, whose *mode of being concrete* is precisely abstraction. In the spectacle, one part of the world *represents itself* to the world and is superior to it. The spectacle is nothing more than the common language of this separation. What binds the spectators together is no more than an irreversible relation at the very center which maintains their isolation. The spectacle reunites the separate, but reunites it *as separate.*

The alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity) is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The externality of the spectacle in relation to the active man appears in the fact that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him. This is why the spectator feels at home nowhere, because the spectacle is everywhere.

The worker does not produce himself; he produces an independent power. The *success* of this production, its abundance, returns to the producer as an *abundance of dispossession.* All the time and space of his world become *foreign* to him with the accumulation of his alienated products. The spectacle is the map of this new world, a map which exactly covers its territory. The very powers which escaped us *show themselves* to us in all their force.

The spectacle within society corresponds to a concrete manufacture of alienation. Economic expansion is mainly the expansion of this specific industrial production. What grows with the economy in motion for itself can only be the very alienation which was at its origin.

Separated from his product, man himself produces all the details of his world with ever increasing power, and thus finds himself ever more separated from his world. The more his life is now his product, the more lie is separated from his life.

The spectacle is *capital* to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image.