

Determining Reality and Meaning in a Post-Modern Era

Andrew J. Marsiglia, PhD, CCP

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Introduction

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The postmodern era, however, should produce a reality based on traditional values and a return to civility and urbanity. As we became less of a commodious individual we should regain some of our power to recognize the truths of the pre-modern era, which are honoring our cultural traditions, maintaining well-grounded moral beliefs, and communal interactions with other people. The result should be a more realistic objective picture of ourselves and the world in which we live.

Reality and Meaning in Our World

“For centuries the human species has been discovering that it is the creator of its own reality; making the discovery and retreating from it in disappointment” (Anderson, 1992, p. 29). This appears to be particularly evident as society moves from the modern era to the postmodern era. In fact, Anderson (1992) mentions that the characteristics of transcending to the postmodern world include the decomposition of our old ways of belief, a noticeable conflict regarding the nature of societal truth, and recognition that a global culture definitely exists.

I believe Anderson's (1992) observations represent the common theme of the reading assignment thus far. Albert Borgmann (1997) adds detail to this theme in his comparison of the pre-modern, modern, and postmodern eras. In the pre-modern era, society had communal characteristics, a closeness of humanity that stemmed from the fact that more of the population lived outside of major urban centers. Consequently, people tended to congregate more at civic events, religious events, central market areas, and group activities composed of neighbors, friends and family. In this cultural setting, people tended to depend more on each other to satisfy their life's requirements and as a result, they had intimate knowledge of their neighbors and fellow citizens that produced a form of societal security that manifested itself in civility and urbanity.

The modern era, however, placed less emphasis on community relationships and more emphasis on individual performance the result of which was the phenomenon of rugged individualism. Borgmann (1993) suggests that this focus on solitary individual performance was probably necessary in order to settle the vast North American continent but the price we paid was destruction of our traditional structures and civility. These were replaced with the products of modernism, which is devoted to a reality based on technology, industrial prowess and individualism.

Population began to be concentrated in large urban centers. As the population increased, however, people congregated less and began to experience hyperactivity. Borgmann (1993, p.14) states that "hyperactivity is a state of mobilization when the richness and variety of social and cultural pursuits and the structured pace of everyday life have been suspended to serve a higher, urgent cause." The result is a counterfeit sense of vigor and joy that manifests itself as cultural sullenness. In order to overcome sullenness,

people have focused on commodity consumption with vigor similar to rugged individualism. Borgmann (1992) calls this phenomenon commodious consumption but it is not curing our cultural sullenness. Rather, the result is a false reality and a lack of individual and societal satisfaction.

Borgmann (1992, p.6) declares that the postmodern era, of which we are entering, will produce a reality based on traditional values and a “recovery of elegant things, fiscal realism, and patient vigor.” Furthermore, he declares, “we need more communal celebration so that we can attain through citizenship what is unattainable through consummership” (Borgmann, 1992, p. 141).

Whereas Borgmann described how hypermodernism and commodious consumption can produce a false reality and with the assistance of high technology, a virtual reality. Winnograd and Flores (1995) refer to Humberto Maturana’s neurophysiological work with frog brain cells and raise another question of reality relative to physiological perception. Maturana determined that what a frog sees when it visually perceives a fly was a neurophysiological phenomenon that manifested itself as a moving dark spot on the frog’s retina. It does not know that the dot is a fly. In its domain of interaction, however, the frog does know the dot represents food and it targets it. The frog did not have knowledge that the dot was a fly but only that it meant food. It was structurally coupled with the fly and their encounter elicited a reaction from the frog; no thought or creativity was required.

Heidegger (Krell, 1993, p.59) states, “By looking at the fundamental constitution of the everydayness of Dasein we shall bring out in a preparatory way the Being of beings.” The *everydayness* includes our language, culture, everyday values, attitudes and feelings

that make up our existence (Oliver, 1997). The everydayness seems to have a profound effect on what we regard as meaning. Dasein, according to Heidegger (Krell, 1993, p.65) is inclined to be ensnared in the world in which it is in and to interpret itself in terms of that world.” Relating this to Borgmann (1993), he mentions that modern society has reduced its communal interaction and societal values by focusing on commodious consumption. This phenomenon may be what Heidegger calls our presence in the world (Krell, 1993) and consequently affects a being’s sense of *Being*.

Heidegger (Krell, 1993, p.74) also states, “. . .appearing is not showing itself. Like symptoms reveal the unseen presence of something else at hand.” What we actually see in our presence in the world may not convey true meaning; it may not be justifiable true belief. Heidegger (Krell, 1993, p. 75) says “Appearing is a making itself known through something that shows itself.” This is analogous to wearing a mask or disguise and can mislead us to derive an inaccurate concept of meaning and reality.

Hypermodernism may be a mask of truth on which we have frequently based our reality. If we refuse to act on the truth we know, we may lose the knowledge of truth and the ability to recognize it as truth. In the modern era, we have known the truth but slowly and seductively, we were lured into a short-term focus by the power of technology and hypermodernism. As we became more of a commodious, individual we appear to have lost some of our power to recognize the truths of the pre-modern era, which are honoring our cultural traditions, maintaining well-grounded moral beliefs, and communal interactions with other people.

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