

Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh,
Truth is Stranger Than It Used To Be
Chapter Two: "Reality Isn't What It Used to Be"

Introduction:

Where are we?

- Modernity: confident, yet naive answer that the world is knowable, manageable.
- Postmodernity: relativism and deconstructionism plus a visceral recognition that reality isn't what it used to be (Walter Truett Anderson)

1. What is the nature of the discovery made by the journey from the rural backwaters of modernity to other lands of postmodernity?

All customs, ideas taken for granted as real and right were only local conventions, assumed to be natural, universal by force of habit. Reification.

2. In what other ways has the mask of modernity been ripped off?

- Modern absolutist claims are historically conditioned conventions similar to those and no better than non western conventions.
- Awareness of violence inflicted by the West on colonialized, marginalized, women, and the earth.
- Our high moral status is unmasked as an ideological, self justifying claim that blinded us to the true nature modern project.

3. What is the significance of the cameo scene from Lily's Tomlin's play, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*?

- Reality has intimidated us.
- Reality is just a collective hunch about the nature of things.
- Reality is a primitive method of crowd control.
- Reality is absurdity dress up in a three piece suit.
- Reality is the cause of stress among those in touch with it.
- Reality can be taken in small doses
- Reality as a lifestyle is too confining.

T. S. Eliot, people can stand only so much reality.

4. What is the significance of the dinner party story about the question about those who have never heard? Do they go to hell?

If all knowledge is perspectival, and we can't get outside our collective hunch to see if its true or not (no God's eye view), then how can we be so sure we know others are going to hell?

How can we presume that the world view we believe is so in touch with reality that we can make evaluations and truth claims about other world views and their truths?

THE ISSUE IS EPISTEMOLOGICAL! (and in a sense psychological--the nerve of someone in a world view to tell another in another world view that the other world view is wrong).

5. Detail the epistemological symbolism of the three empires and the calling of balls and strikes.

Umpire #1: I call them the way they are: naive realist (correspondence)—modernity

Umpire #2: I call them the way I see 'em: perspectival or critical realist—

Umpire #3: They ain't nothing till I calls 'em: radical perspectivalism (mediation of the world via language and conceptual constructions; pragmatist/coherence)—postmodernist

The postmodern view is not just perspectival, but denies reality in the sense that there are no independent world view free criteria to validate one world view over another. The result is the hermeneutic circle and it means THAT RATIONALITY CEASES TO BE A MATTER OF OBJECTIVE TRUTH.

Also reality is not just a human construct, but also a social construct. Hence, the question is WHOSE REALITY? WHOSE COLLECTIVE HUNCH SHOULD RULE? In modernity, it has been the western modern wv that is normative and rational, and all other marginalized. But why? On pomo grounds, there is no epistemologically successful way to defend one world view over another. Why should it have privileged status?

6. What is deconstructionism? 33

It has to do with the relation of representation and reality, of marginalization and oppression.

METAPHYSICS OF PRESENCE: the modernist outlook which suggests that what is present in our conceptions of truth is a real given existing prior to language and thought and which we have accurately grasped, cognized, and communicated by language and thought. Language and thought mirrors reality as it is; it is mimetic (imitation) of truth, a correspondence between reality and our description of it.

This is what deconstructionists attack, for there is no prelinguistic, preconceptual, preworldview reality or given. What is said to be present is really absent, **METAPHYSICS OF ABSENCE.** The given is a social, linguistic construction of reality. We are disabused of our reifications.

7. What is reification? 33f

To treat something as if it were external to us, as if things were objective, something other than human products, forgetting that man is the author of the world.

Deconstructionism destroys our reification of things and forces us to recognize our creation of them.

8. How is a metaphysics of presence also a metaphysics of violence?

The real motivation, so say postmodernists, of the modernist claim to objectivity, truth, universal maxims, etc., is to **master the world** within an absolute system. **INTELLECTUAL MASTERY AND CONTROL**, "the masters and possessors of nature." R. Descartes.

Also, the **mastery over human beings** and to legitimate Western conquest, colonialization, exploitation, political superiority, oppression for the sake of Western progress. **IT'S A FORM OF CROWD CONTROL.** It makes common cause with oppression. It is aggressive realism.

It seeks to grasp the complexities of the world as a unified totality, and to repress or eliminate what doesn't fit and erasing the memory of those who create a view that doesn't fit. **HERE IS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOTIF AGAIN**-comparable to the response of the cave dwellers to kill their potential liberator (Plato).

TOTALIZING ASPIRATIONS LEADS TO A VIOLENCE THAT DENIES DIFFERENCE OR DISSOLVES IT INTO A HOMOGENEOUS UNITY; IT THUS COOPTS, DOMINATES, OR ELIMINATES THE OTHER.

9. How do racism and U.S. immigration policies reflect this, and how is modernity an example? 35f

Racism: white is normal, black abnormal and regarded as inferior, slavery, quiet oppression.

Immigration: treats as aliens, must be naturalized, united into melting pot.

Western modernity has treated non western cultures as minorities, and has sought to naturalize the globe. Totalitarian control, or the annihilation of the other is the only two choices available. Modernity has given us as much terror as we can take (Lyotard).

Deconstructions want to denaturalize modernity in order to stop the violence or at least lighten it. This allows for the free play of difference. To do justice for the marginal, liberation of the excluded, freedom of the oppressed under modernity.

10. How is deconstructive therapy a disorienting experience? 36f

Two reasons:

1. It rips off the "sacred canopy" that shielded us from meaningless and exposes us to the terror of the abyss of meaningless and a sense of vertigo, and unprotection. It is the loss of any secure order; anomie (without law and order). Also, realizing that all world views are human constructions and chosen is a terrifying experience; it is best to remain naive about world views and one's thinking that reality is really what we think it is (naive realist).
2. We are part of the construction of the western world view and are equally guilty of its effects in the world. Our complicity in evil perpetrated by the world view which we have embraced.

11. What is hyperreality?

The social construction of reality by imposing our vision on it, by making it, with the help of technology, better than the real thing. It is the heightening of our experience of reality. Virtual reality. Like Jurassic Park, Cool Whip, Disney Land, autoerotic telephone sex, simulated lakes at water parks, climate controlled malls.

12. Why is hyperreality ultimately unsatisfying?

Distances us from reality, desensitizes, numbs. Hence, we go for real life shows, real emergencies, ER, real tragedies, etc.

13. What is the effect of hyperreality on politics, and how was Ronald Reagan the first postmodern president? 39f

Elections into sporting events, candidates sold for consumption; pseudo events, photo opportunities, sound bites, image production designed to sell us, and market a candidate or issue.

RR was the first to use the image, media, theatre, style, etc. for his politics of nothingness. In him the triumph of style over principle, rhetoric over argument,, image over substance. He had a modernist agenda in a postmodern package.

All the world's a stage: battle fields, Berlin Wall, Tianamen Square, Iraq, South Africa, Bosnia, Somalia.

14. Are we in the late modern or early postmodern period? What is the nature of the cultural transition going on before us?

Modernity is bankrupt; postmodernity on horizon; yet continuing commitment to human autonomy.

15. What respective contributions to Bacon and Descartes make to the modern project?

Descartes: absolutely certain foundation for science, a total system of truth; intellectual submission to reality as an external, inflexible given.

Bacon: populizer of science, valued knowledge as a tool for controlling nature and improving human condition. transformation of the world in accord with utopian values; values human autonomy above all.

Postmodernism is a rejection of the Cartesian and the radicalization of the Baconian. Pomo intensifies the baconian vision of modernity, esp. via technology.

16. In what ways do Woody Allen's film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, and the metaphor of the carnival illustrate postmodern culture? 42

From the purple rose, which offers a movie within a movie, while the escape to hyperreality can be disorienting, the return to reality is also a let down.

Yet in our culture, there is not just one movie going, but many; not just a 3 ring circus, but a never ending array of side shows hawking for temporary attention; its like channel surfing, or surfing the net, realities there to entertain momentarily.

The heavy handedness and seriousness of modernity is replaced by the unbearable lightness of postmodern being. As Marx said, "all that is solid melts into the air."

17. How is that beliefs systems now are commodities that must be marketed? 43

Break down of the old modern system, and the realization that all systems are social constructions lead to the creation of many belief systems which must like products be marketed, bought and sold. THE PLURALIST SITUATION IS A MARKET SITUATION.

18. What is the difference between the kind of pluralism allowed by modernity and postmodern pluralism? 43

Modernity tolerates many private pluralistic beliefs as long as they don't endanger or seek to replace the main, modernist paradigm. There is one "really big show," and all else are tolerated, but insignificant side shows.

In postmodernity, there is nothing but side shows, only a plurality of private worlds, with no confidence in or acceptance of one mega public world and public truths with compelling cultural power or authority.

19. How might this situation today be compared to the Babel story? Is its collapse positive or negative 44

Building the tower was like building modernity; private worlds were like mud huts around it. Now the building of the tower has ceased (HAS IT?), and is in process of deconstruction.

All we have are the confusion of tongues, private languages and tribal agendas; cultural unity is replaced by cultural wars.

This is not bemoaned but celebrated: HERE'S TO HETEROGENEITY! A liberating chaos.

Negative, in the sense its God's judgment; positive in the sense that it opens up new possibilities for the future that modernity would have repressed.

Yet it is also real judgment on man's arrogance and rebellion. The great city has fallen. We must mourn the collapse of modernity and its many advancements.

Now we must ask afresh: WHERE ARE WE? If its our own construction, then what?

