

What's Next?: On the End of Modernity

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Modernity and the appearance of the consumption society

Modernity is a style of social life and social organization. The Enlightenment is understood to be a major cause of the advent of modernity.

According to Ellen Meiksins Wood, “the characteristic features of the Enlightenment are supposed to be associated with the development of capitalism.”(p.106), because of the advancement of ‘rationalization’ that produced the Enlightenment, Capitalism also appeared.

The mass production of goods needed to be established for the recovery from poverty. However, the mass production of goods formed through industrialization made two social organizations: capitalism and socialism. These systems of organization made society divided. Consequently, the principles of modernism, which composed the system of capitalism and socialism in the 20th century, were the autonomy of subjects, such as a citizen, class, an individual, and a statement which is the unified framework of society.

The old mass production and consumption was called ‘Fordism’. ‘Fordism’ is an idea that the profits from a company were not produced by ‘exploiting’ laborers as Marx thought, but rather through laborers as consumers simultaneously. Then the company made wages higher and mass consumption was formed so that the laborers could spend their money. The laborers with purchasing power changed into the ‘middle class’, and then turned into the ‘consumer’.

It can be said that modernity formed 'mass society' through consumption. The value supporting mass society is 'equality'. This 'equality' materialized by everyone having the same level of lifestyle. People consume in order to maintain the level of their life.

Postmodernity

According to Wood, postmodernity generally represents a phase of capitalism marked by certain distinctive economic and technological characteristics for example the 'information age', 'lean production', 'flexible accumulation', 'disorganized capitalism', 'consumerism'.(p.113)

The basis of the modernity was set in the West after the eighteenth century. It was the total opposite of Enlightenment.

In the postmodern world, progress of such technologies as information technology, and the structural changes of industry, have altered the world view, including political philosophies and economic policies.

Lyotard defines postmodernity as incredulity towards metanarratives, stating, "this incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it."(p.xxxiv)(The Postmodern Condition of 1979)

It can be said that the collapse of metanarratives was the collapse of Marxism for Lyotard, who was a Marxist. In capitalist thinking, "desire" and "consumption" is opposite to Marxist "labor" and "production".

According to Stuart Sim, postmodernity refers to the state in which we are thought to be after modernity collapses.

'Flexible accumulation' brakes and unifies the clear boundary of modern

society, such as ones between culture and economy, production and consumption, public and private. Therefore, the autonomy of subjects is shaken and becomes indefinite the framework of society or a group.

Stratification and movement

Capitalism is the movement which releases desires of an individual. However, collective desires of family and the state are not included, because those units bind individual desires and individual freedoms to a fixed frame. Every individual has a desire and they act on this desire to realize the desire. However, the resources for realizing this desire are hard to get, which makes distribution unequal. Such inequality tends to be fixed to particular social groups, and social resources are distributed unequally. A society is formed several social stratification. Social stratification is an idea that shows the state the sources divided unequally.

In "Post-modernity and its Discontents"(1997) Bauman describes the post-modern phenomenon of 'high up' and 'low down' in a social mobility through the use of metaphors, 'tourists' and 'vagabonds'. Bauman divided people who live in the global world by their degree of mobility their freedom to choose where to be. (86) 'Tourists' move a lot whereas 'vagabonds' do not.

In postmodernity, people do not stay in one place like 'fordism'. Microsoft is an example of 'tourists'. Microsoft crosses the borders of many countries which helps economic activity.

According to Bauman, in modern society, those who have the capability to live aiming at realization of self-desire can be compared to Tourists, and those who do not, Vagabonds

The dimension along which those 'high up' and 'low down' are plotted in a society of consumers,

At present several problems have arisen in current economic activity. They are the income gap between the poor and the rich, the increase of the destruction of the environment and the changing of morals in human beings. Contemporary anxieties are made to be suffered alone. The old charmed circle of the poor getting richer as the rich get richer is being superseded by the trend of poorer poor and richer rich.

Bauman calls what other authors call modernity as 'solid modernity' and postmodernity as 'fluid modernity'. Bauman interprets the shift from modernity to post modernity as the composition of changes in industrial structure from 'heavy' hardware capitalism to 'light' software capitalism. (Liquid Modernity, p.25)

Bauman insists that human's happiness does not exist in 'fluid modernity', and exists in 'solid modernity'.

“'Solid' modernity was an era of mutual engagement. 'Fluid' modernity is the epoch of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape and hopeless chase.”(Liquid p.120)

Bauman thinks that happy society is the society based on the spirit of modernity. That is, it is the industrial society formed on reasonable management and a detailed plan. The spirit of modernity comes from the Enlightenment, and is inherited through capitalism to socialism. The socialism, which was released from the spell of Soviet-type socialism, which

refers to the problem generated by capitalism, is reorganized in the contemporary society from the standpoint of social theory.

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