



After Postmodernism: Understanding Today's World

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Abstract

Home economists must remain knowledgeable about cultural evolutions and varying interpretation of changes and transitions. This discussion paper elaborates on post-postmodernism assuming that something is happening culturally that takes us beyond postmodernism. After identifying nearly 20 post-postmodern theories, the discussion narrowed to four oft-cited approaches: digimodernism (originally pseudo-modernism) (2006), performatism (2008), altermodernism (2009) and hypermodernity (2015). Each was inspired by the onslaught of sophisticated digital technological advances leading to a cultural profile and attendant cultural logic that differs from previous eras. The profession must follow and engage this discourse because the cultural evolution theories that we embrace will assuredly impact our practice.

KEYWORDS: POSTMODERNISM, POST-POSTMODERNISM, PERFORMATISM, ALTERMODERNITY, DIGIMODERNISM, HYPERMODERNITY, HOME ECONOMICS

Introduction

Historians, theorists, and philosophers use the noun *modern* to anchor their names for three main cultural eras spanning two millennia, 800-2000: Pre-Modern, Modern, and Postmodern. As do other professionals (Nealon, 2012), home economists must remain knowledgeable about cultural evolutions (i.e., the process of change in a culture's information, beliefs, and practices over time) and varying interpretation of changes and transitions (McGregor, 2025).

While acknowledging the ongoing debate about whether postmodernism is dead or alive (McGregor, 2025), this discussion paper elaborates on *post-postmodernism* assuming that something is happening culturally that takes us beyond postmodernism. Discussion papers present the author's balanced coverage of other's opinions about and knowledge of a topic without espousing any particular position. The analysis and synthesis of these exchanges are intended to become part of the larger, discipline-wide or practice-focused conversation (American Academy of Family Physicians, 2019; McGregor 2018).

Postmodernism

Succinctly, the postmodern era (1960-2000) pushed back against the unintended negative side effects of modernism (i.e., the age of reason, empiricism, and science), which coincided with consumerism. People took exception to material progress at the expense of societal progress; the unchecked technological juggernaut; objective, value-free thinking and knowledge; the loss of community resilience; weakened, disconnected families; the psychological toll; and the deep entrenchment of greed, fear, narcissism, irony, competition, and fragmentation (McGregor, 2025; Oord, 2001).

The postmodern era (a) acknowledged popular culture (i.e., shared meanings that have been popularized by the culture industry via mass media, marketing, and capitalism) and (b) advocated for overturning the modernist worldview (deconstructivism). But it also strived for liberation from women's oppression; equity and equality; ecological responsibility and healthy relationships with nature; many ways of knowing beyond empiricism (i.e., respect for narratives, stories, the Scared, wisdom, the Unknown, and the Unknowable); and holism and interdependency (Oord, 2001).

Post-Postmodernism

Peters et al. (2022) observed that postmodernism “has been succeeded by a new sensibility and configuration. We are not sure what it is exactly, but we know an era has ended, and another has begun” (p. 175). Once discourse began in the early 1990s about postmodernism's demise, many names were posited for what comes next: post-postmodern, metamodern, hypermodern, amodern, digimodern, and cybermodern (Peters et al., 2020). Rudrum and Stavris (2015) added performatism, remodernism, automodernism, and renewalism. Bonfiglioli (2013) contributed altermodernism, critical realism, and supermodernity. Peters et al. (2022) added trans-postmodernism, and post-millennialism. And Babii (2020) named transmodern, and renovalism.

This amounts to nearly 20 new theories of what comes after postmodernism. Half of these labels drew on different prefixes other than *post-* (e.g., *meta*, *hyper*, *a*, *digi*, *cyber*, *auto*, *alter*, *super*, and *trans*). When it comes to epochal changes in culture, “each time we use a new prefix, we agree ... that society, along with the idea of modernity, has changed” (Babii, 2020, p. 23). Culture has indeed changed or is in the process of changing—the conundrum is what name and conceptualization best captures recent cultural shifts and new realities. What is the best way to understand our present world?

To reiterate, “various ‘post-postmodern’ theories have emerged, none of which have been as influential or enduring as the Twentieth Century's philosophical offspring [postmodernism]. Yet they continue to proliferate in various manifestations” (Lyons, 2015, p. 19; see Babii, 2020). Lyons (2015) queried “out of all the theories floating around, can we truly tell which ones will solidify long enough to define the current and upcoming era?” (p. 21). This quandary is important because home economists need “an updated conceptual vocabulary for diagnosing and responding to our changed situation” (Nealon, 2012, Marketing Flyer).

Despite nearly 25 years elapsing, none of these theories have gained widespread acceptance (Babii, 2020; Peters et al., 2020) perhaps because people are trying to name a culture “that is still liquid” (Lyons, 2015, p. 21)—still evolving. “We are not that far from postmodernism, and perhaps the new cultural era is still about to come, showing new symptoms, or new signs, but without being born yet, still germinating in its mother's womb” (Hogan, 2022, last para).

This discussion paper focuses on four oft-cited approaches (chronologically): digimodernism (originally pseudo-modernism) (2006), performatism (2008), altermodernism (2009) and hypermodernity (2015). Each was inspired by the onslaught of sophisticated digital technological advances leading to a cultural profile and attendant cultural logic that differs from previous eras (Lyons, 2015; Nealon, 2012).

Digimodernism (Originally Pseudo-Modernism)

In his seminal article about the death of postmodernism and beyond, Alan Kirby (2006) (British cultural critic) coined the term *pseudo-modernism*, which he later changed to *digimodernism* (Kirby, 2009). In a compelling, oft-cited exposé, Kirby (2006) articulated his thoughts on the essence of what followed postmodernism. When used as a prefix, *pseudo-* means resembling or imitating (Harper, 2025). Pseudo-modernism was so named because Kirby felt pseudo- captured the triteness and shallowness (disingenuity) of the culture that evolved after postmodernism, perpetuated by new digital technology-based cultural products.

Cultural products are “goods and services that include the arts (performing arts, visual arts, architecture), heritage conservation (museums, galleries, libraries), the cultural industries (written media, broadcasting, film, recording), and festivals” (Aiello & Cacia, 2014, p. 8). Pseudo-modern cultural products include reality TV, news programs and outlets that accept and report readers’ comments, computer games, the Internet, Wikipedia and similar multiauthor edited sites, docu-soaps, and computer-generated imagery (CGI) cinema. People actively help create content for these cultural products (rather than passively receive cultural content), but their participation is often superficial and trivial (of little value or importance) (Kirby, 2006).

Kirby (2006) claimed that creating and using these new cultural products, which are shaped and proliferated by digital technological advances, has led to a debilitating (a) intellectual framework and (b) philosophical cultural environment that he dubbed pseudo-modernism. Regarding the latter, he said that philosophers are too overwhelmed (and perhaps coopted) (debilitated) by the globalized market economy and consumerism juggernaut to posit theoretical and philosophical stances that accurately describe post-postmodernism.

Regarding the debilitating intellectual framework, Kirby (2006) described today’s culture as banal (unoriginal) and vacuous (lacking in thought and intelligence). This characterization arises from the nature of pseudo-modern cultural products that stemmed from digital advances in information and communication technology: computers; laptops; iPads and tablets; smart phones and similar technological means; interactive technologies; and social media platforms that enable emails, texting, private messaging, YouTube videos, blogs, chatrooms, message boards, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), wikis, music sharing (Spotify) and so on.

Kirby (2006) argued that when people express culture using these technologies and cultural products, they perpetuate illusions of reality, participation, and power, hence the adjective pseudo (resembling or imitating but not real). People are placed in a trance-like state, where power brokers in the monopolizing, globalized market economy can deceptively manipulate and control them. He also referred to consumer fanaticism, fatalistic anxiety, technologized cluelessness, the cultural desert, and ephemeral reality. “A tiredness, a shallowness dominates all” (p. 36). He lamented “the storm of human activity producing almost nothing of any lasting or even reproducible cultural value” (p. 36). How then can culture be perpetuated and inculcated?

He surmised that the hegemony of a globalized market economy has narrowed our intellectual world through the spread of digital technological innovations that are “all-engulfing, all-explaining, all-structuring” (Kirby, 2006, p. 37). Postmodernism’s original intent to deregulate all spheres except the economy was outstripped by the current trend toward deregulating and liberalizing just the economic sphere (e.g., neoliberalism; capitalism; and top-down globalization) (Lipovetsky, 2015). The resultant technology-enabled economic monopolization makes people’s intellectual state one of banality, vacuity, ignorance, anxiety, and fanaticism. “In place of the neurosis of modernism and the narcissism of postmodernism, pseudo-modernism *takes the world away* [via] the *trance*—the state of being swallowed up” (Kirby, 2006, p. 37).

Digimodernism

After much contemplation, Kirby (2009) coined the term *digimodernism* to replace pseudo-modernism. He felt that “digi” better reflected his concern for how *digital* technology (versus analog) dismantled postmodernism, impacted cultural products, and reconfigured our culture and explanatory logic—how we understand and make sense of the world (Kirby, 2015). Digital technology relies on microprocessors or integrated circuits (called chips), which are present in (a) personal computers (e.g., desktop, laptop, notebook, tablet, and smartphones); (b) computerized devices (e.g., mobile devices, digital cameras, and cloud platforms); and (c) electronic systems and resources. These technologies are the new face of contemporary culture (Digital Adoption Team, 2025).

Kirby (2009) was interested in how these digital technologies impact the creation and use of cultural products to represent and express cultural evolution beyond postmodernism. For him, the digimodernism era is characterized by (a) multiple authorship of cultural artifacts (e.g., wikis, moderated chat rooms, and blogs); (b) transience and evanescence (quickly fading from memory or existence) (e.g., ever-changing wiki entries, disappearing chats and blogs); (c) onwardness and endlessness (cultural works remain in progress—always open to a sequel like TV series); (d) haphazardness (no order; aimless); and (e) the perpetuation of false earnestness and sincerity via fictional sages (e.g., the wizards Gandalf, and Dumbledore) and suspect expertise (e.g., reality TV shows).

Kirby (2009) accused digital technology of normalizing these damning traits and desocializing culture, which involves removing people from their customary social environment thus destabilizing and disorienting everyone (Whitaker, 2020). Such is the nature of culture following postmodernism.

Performatism

Performatism was purposively named without using a new prefix for the noun *modernism*. Its creator, Raoul Eshelman (2008) (Germany-based academic), explained that performatism is an epochal concept (i.e., the beginning of a totally new period in history) completely different from postmodernism. He presumed that insights gained from interpreting performances in art (representing life) and literature and film (representing fiction) as well as insights from philosophy and architectural creations could spillover to help us understand society and the human condition (Eshelman, 2020).

He especially desired an approach that offered a better understanding of today's irony-laden culture—an approach that would counter its associated jadedness with an abundance of positivity (Eshelman, 2020). Postmodern irony has worn people down and left them struggling with an ache for positivity, which can only be achieved by believing in something not choked off by (a) irony (i.e., perversely contrary to expectations), (b) skepticism (doubt) and (c) cynicism (negative outlook due to distrust and disillusion) (Eshelman, 2015, 2020).

He berated postmodernism for its “endless irony and metaphysical skepticism [calling instead for] unity, beauty, and closure” (Eshelman, 2015, p. 115). Excessive, relentless irony can lead to apathy, anger, melancholia, detachment, and the slacker archetype (e.g., unambitious, and resistant to societal expectations) (Fitzgerald, 2012). Such is the nature of our current cultural evolution. Performatism's positivity arose to squelch these negative emotions and values.

Altermodernism

Nicolas Bourriaud (2008) (French curator and theorist) posited that although postmodernism is over, we do not know what is coming next. He observed a new kind of modern emerging—*altermodern*. Alter is Latin, *alterare*, ‘other’ (Harper, 2025). For Bourriaud (2008), *alter* meant otherness as well as differences (e.g., multiplicity and possibilities). He chose alter because *post* conveys linearity (riding on an arrow), but we are actually crawling through a maze (i.e., a globalized, fragmented, and complex world) where we must find meaning (Seph, 2021).

Also, while postmodernity was Western-based, whatever comes next must be “global from scratch” (Bourriaud, 2008, 2:24) (i.e., radical diversity accommodating exile, migrations, and global interactions). This approach to understanding the world can better overcome displacement and fragmentation and embrace networks of relationships amongst otherness and differences (Bourriaud, 2008). He further asserted that whatever comes after postmodernity should be based on translation (i.e., interpreting the essence of a something then recreating it in a new language or form) within the context of the *creolization* of cultures (Bourriaud, 2005).

To unpack this idea, creole is Latin, *creare*, ‘to create.’ A Creole is born in a country of parents not from that country (Harper, 2025). The creolization of cultures occurs when “participants select particular elements from incoming or inherited cultures, endow these with meanings different from those they possessed in the original cultures, and then creatively merge these to create new varieties that supersede the prior forms” (Cohen, 2007, p. 369). A creolized culture is a hybrid culture involving new, composite identities and cultural practices that are recognizably distinct from their original sources because different groups have merged their cultural identities into new social and political contexts (Brathwaite, 1974). Bourriaud (2005, Abstract) said that

what matters today is to translate the cultural values of cultural groups [i.e., others] and to connect them to the world network. This ... could be called altermodernism, a movement connected to the creolisation of cultures and the fight for autonomy, but also the possibility of producing singularities in a more and more standardized world.

Indeed, Bourriaud's (2009b) approach to what comes after postmodernism was influenced by cultural changes arising from increased globalization, mobility, migration, diaspora, travel, and communication. Today's world is teeming (i.e., crowded, and full of people) and chaotic; worse, creolization is taking over everyone's identity and daily life. People thus struggle as

they both “traverse cultural landscapes saturated with signs and create new pathways between multiple formats of expression and communication” (Bourriaud, 2015, p. 253). The emergent culture is “stripped of a center [and based instead on translation, creolization], planetary negotiations, and discussions between agents from different cultures” (Bourriaud, 2009a, para. 5).

He asserted that any new approach to understanding our emerging culture should be configured to accommodate both metaphorical and literal travelling in the form of trajectories (journeys) instead of destinations. People are wandering through a polyglot (i.e., myriad signs, formats, languages, and communication modes) that cannot be understood unless translated and then dubbed so others can understand (recounted in something other than the original). Our nomadic, creolized culture is further marked by deterritorialism (i.e., disconnecting something from its original place or territory) leading to a transformation or mutation in its new context. People (creoles) are held together by a new language that goes beyond nations and regions to articulate narratives reflecting multiple meanings of the present (Bourriaud, 2009b, 2015).

In effect, altermodernism assumes that the process of producing a new culture after postmodernism cannot be interpreted and understood without acknowledging the impact of the interconnections and interweavings amongst people jointly producing narratives via a chain of translated and dubbed dialogue. These narratives are constellations of ideas linked by the will to understand each other (Menéndez-Conde, 2009).

Hypermodernism

“Hypercapitalism, hyperclass, hyperpower, hyperterrorism, hyperindividualism, hypermarket, hypertext—is there anything that isn’t ‘hyper?’” (Lipovetsky, 2015, p. 157). Gilles Lipovetsky (French philosopher and essayist) posited *hypermodernism* as a way to interpret and understand how culture is being produced after postmodernism. This label was “founded on painstaking analysis of the phases, contexts, and reasons that prompted our societies to evolve from modern to postmodern, and finally to hypermodern” (Roult et al., 2022, p. 169). As a caveat, as Lipovetsky’s work is mainly in French, my brief overview depends on Lipovetsky’s (2015) translated book chapter and Roult et al.’s (2022) interpretation of his approach.

Hyper is Greek, *huper*, ‘excessive, above normal, beyond, over’ (Harper, 2025). What does a hypermodern culture look like? Why would Lipovetsky choose the *hyper-* prefix to replace *post-*? The hypermodernization of the world happened very quickly, arising from both the consumerism juggernaut and the liberalization and deregulation of global markets (Lipovetsky, 2015). These phenomena led to an “explosion of technology undermining humanity through [both] hyper-individualism and acceleration. [We now live] in a culture of excess and crisis of hyper-individualism, ... narcissism, and megalomania [obsessed with power and dominating others]” (Cooper, 2020, “Black Mirror of Hypermodernism” section).

The process of undermining humanity ultimately erodes its base or foundation, which in turn leads to potential collapse (like coastal erosion) (Cooper, 2020). A hypermodern culture “generates insecurity, the loss of fixed guide-lines [sic], the disappearance of secular utopias, and an individualist disintegration of the social bond” (Lipovetsky, 2015, p. 167). The words insecure, loss, disappearance, and disintegration definitely imply a gradual undermining and erosion process. Not surprisingly, in addition to being a “societal phase where everything moves much faster via dizzying global connections, [hypermodernity] now influences, if not transforms, the sense of Being and the sense of Existence” (Roult et al., 2022, p. 170).

The self-centered human (for good or bad) is at the heart of hypermodernism and “inseparable from self-expression, self-consciousness and consciousness raising among individuals, paradoxically accentuated by the ephemeral action of the media” (Lipovetsky, 2015, p. 162). He further characterized our culture as empty. People thus try to find “ways to console themselves for the miseries of existence, of filling in the emptiness of their present and future” (Lipovetsky, 2015, p. 164). Paradoxically, the main mechanism is hyper-consumption.

A hypermodern culture is deeply paradoxical in other ways as well. It is technologically hyperconnected while relationally hyperdisconnected. It is hyperfast while hypercompressed (both space and time). It inculcates hyperconsumption while espousing hyperminimalism. It is hypertransient while being hyperinnovative. Hyper-secularity resides alongside hyper-religiosity (Lipovetsky, 2015; Roullet et al., 2022).

In Lipovetsky’s (2015) opinion, our hyped-up culture is further destabilized by violence, war, fear, suffering, oppression, consumerism, and nihilism leading to a profound threat to democracy when it is most needed. If hypermodernism truly undermines humanity (Cooper, 2020), this spells dire consequences if Lipovetsky’s (2015) observations about the character of our current culture hold true.

Summary and Conclusion

Falconer (2008) astutely observed “the unevenness of any cultural evolution (it certainly seems that traditional forms are thriving alongside these other forms)” (p. 7). This characterization seems apropos given the existence of more than 20 labels for what comes after postmodernism with each label vying for attention without notable headway. We do not yet have “a qualitatively different cultural stage” (Menéndez-Conde, 2009, para. 11). “There is no consensus” (Peters et al., 2022, p. 176) on a label, theory, or philosophy that best “expresses the world now coming into being” (Lipovetsky, 2015, p. 157).

This lack of consensus likely reflects the divergent conceptualizations underpinning each approach that explains our evolving culture (see Table 1). Each author had a different take on what our evolving culture looks like after postmodernism. Kirby faulted culture’s trance-like, vacuous, and empty state. Bourriaud took issue with the creolization of cultures requiring constant navigation and translation. Lipovetsky was concerned about our hyped-up culture (especially rampant consumerism) and its threat to democracy. And Eshelman worried about our culture’s struggle with oppressive irony and bone-deep jadedness (weary and dulled by excessive negativity) and its longing for positivity.

Table 1 Conceptualizations of the World's Evolving Culture

Post-postmodern Theory	Conceptualization of Evolving Culture
Pseudo modernism (Kirby)	Culture and society have become trite, shallow, and superficial. Cultural products perpetuate illusions of an ephemeral reality as well as consumer fanaticism. We live in a cultural desert; fatalistically anxious people harbour a banal and vacuous intellect. Their preferred cultural products put them in a trance that removes them from the real world.
Digimodernism (Kirby)	Digital technologies exacerbated <i>pseudo modernism</i> by creating and perpetuating a culture further characterized by transience and evanescence (quickly fading from memory or existence), onwardness and endlessness (no closure), haphazardness (no order; aimless) and false earnestness and sincerity. Technologies removed people from their customary social environment causing destabilization and disorientation.
Performatism (Eshelman)	Postmodernism perpetuated irony (perversely contrary to expectations), skepticism (doubt), and cynicism (negative outlook due to distrust and disillusionment). These negative emotions wore people down leading to bone-deep jadedness (weary and dulled by excessive negativity), apathy, anger, and melancholia and a deep craving for positivity.
Altermodernism (Bourriaud)	Our creolized, hybrid culture is characterized by fragmentation, displacement, exile, diaspora, and teeming complexity—culture has been stripped of its center. People are struggling to deal with nomadism and deterritorialism (disconnection from familiar territories or places). New interconnections and interweavings are involved as divergent people jointly create narratives linked by a will to understand each other.
Hypermodernism (Lipovetsky)	The consumerism juggernaut and the liberalization and deregulation of global markets have sped everything up and undermined humanity. Our culture is one of excess, relentless acceleration, hyper-individualism, narcissism, and megalomania (obsessed with power and domination). This empty culture has created loss, disintegration, insecurity, oppression, fear, violence, nihilism (life has no purpose) and a frightening threat to democracy.

Source Author's Summary

Home economists must follow and engage this discourse because any new theories about culture that we embrace will assuredly impact how our practice transforms. They are also encouraged to delve into contemporary theories of cultural evolution and be mindful of future initiatives that emerge as theorists, philosophers, and historians grapple with what comes after postmodernism. Aided by artificial intelligence, a pervasive culprit is digital technologies, which are a growing concern within the profession (Athanas, 2023; Hustvedt, 2023).

Can one conceptualization of post-postmodernism fully explain today's reality? This is a valid question because, combined, we can say that we live in a culture where weary and jaded people are engaging with many different cultures in an atmosphere of deep emptiness at an untenable hyper-pace. The well-being, sustainability, even desirableness of this cultural evolution is problematic. Can we change the direction of this cultural evolution, which is so steeped in ubiquitous digital technologies? How can we best understand and make sense of our rapidly changing world? With an abiding concern for human well-being and the human condition, home economists are encouraged to actively participate in the global conversation about our evolving cultural milieu.

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Biography

Professor Emerita (MSVU) and proprietor of McGregor Consulting Group (www.consultmcgregor.com), Dr. Sue L. T. McGregor has 50 years experience as an educator, researcher, and policy analyst. She specializes in home economics education, philosophy, and leadership; consumer education, studies, finances, and policy; research education and methodologies; and transdisciplinary education, methodology, and scholarship. With nearly 200 peer-reviewed papers, 36 book chapters, and 50 home economics-related keynotes/invited talks in 20 countries, she has published *Understanding and Evaluating Research* (SAGE, 2018), *The Thinking Professional* (Emerald, 2025), *Learning to Teach* (Emerald, 2023) and *Consumer Moral Leadership* (De Gruyter Brill, 2010). She is the Marjorie M. Brown Distinguished Professor. Email: sue.mcgregor@msvu.ca

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