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Abstract

Modernism and postmodernism may be thought of as either moments or movements. We argue for thinking of them as moments, essentially related to each other, rather than movements that literally have historical specificity. From this perspective what is modern and what is postmodern is always shifting, such that their nature is problematic, essentially contested and shifting. Rather than use contemporary examples to make these points, we prefer to refer to quite historical examples, because the modalities become much sharper and can be seen in clearer focus. Hence, we discuss Machiavelli and Caravaggio as precursors of the postmodern and Hobbes and Boyle as precursors of the modern. Obviously, there is an irony in our intent: given the claims to currency of the debates with which we frame the paper then reference to some classical sources serves to hose down debate and fix it in a sharper, cleaner form. While it will become evident that our sympathies are not with ‘modernism’, it should become equally clear that we hold much of the representation of ‘postmodernism’ to be as much at error as we do the fixing of the modern in the frame of the empiricist, the positivist, and the scientific. For us, all these terms are equally problematic, and have been so ever since we began to first think we might be modern – whether in art, social science or science. We conclude by addressing why, in the present, these classical debates should have migrated to the study of organizations.

Citation


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