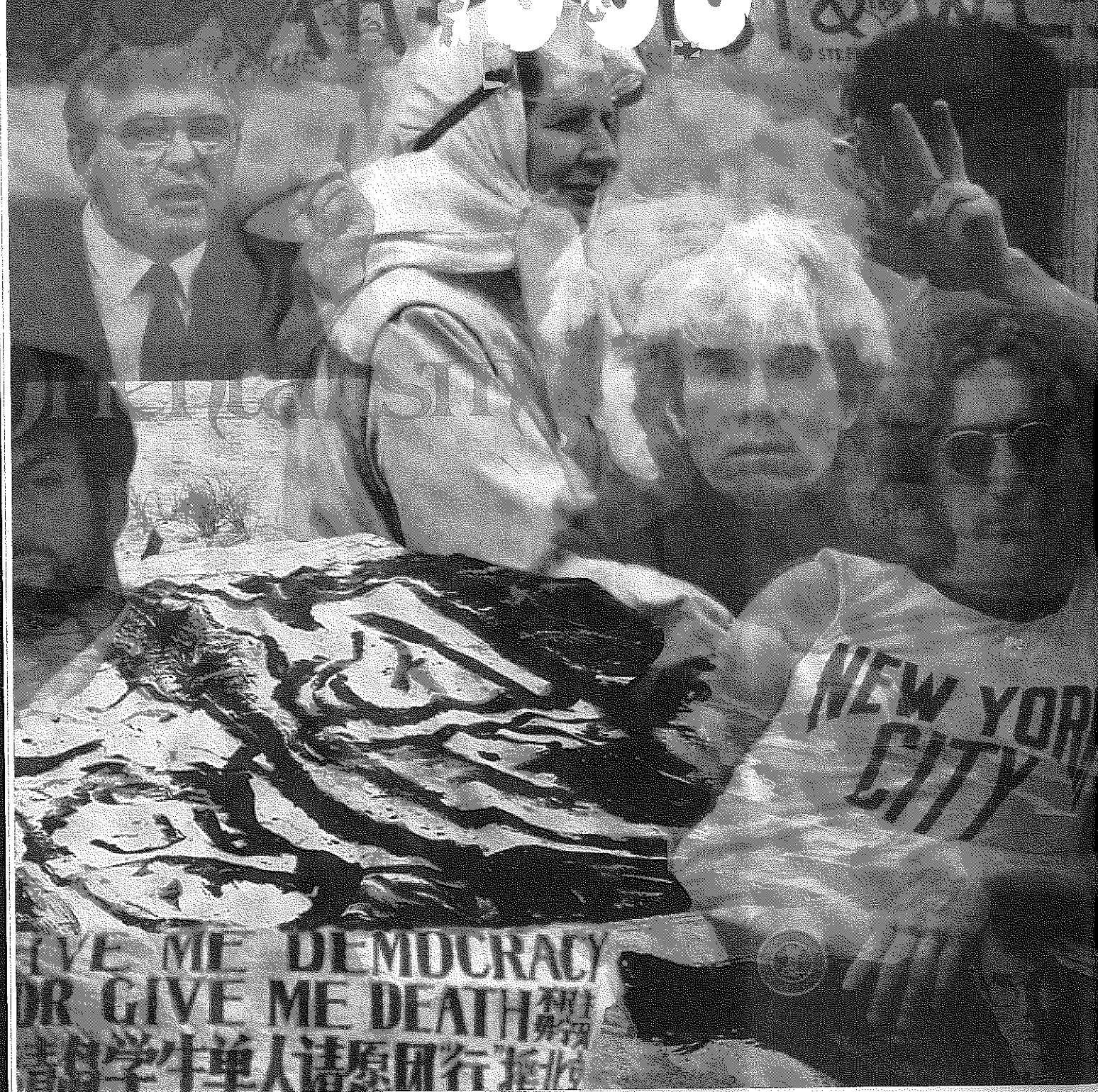


# 1978-1989



# WHEN DOES POST-POSTMODERNISM BEGIN?

by  
Dennis  
Sexsmith

**A.** 1983/84, plus-or-minus five years. From Proposition 13 (1978) to the Fall of the Wall (1989). The following is a list of One-Hundred Starting Points of the Era of the Generation that Comes of Age after the Baby Boom Generation (with a postscript on the end of the post-postmodern generation in A.D. 2000).

"We are, certainly since Nietzsche and Spengler, 'terminalists.'"  
—George Steiner

100. California's Proposition 13 cuts property taxes by up to 57% (1978). Middle-class tax revolt signals the end of the New Deal and the dawn of Reaganomics.

99. Chaos theory launched at a physics conference by a group of self-trained Santa Cruz grad students (1978). Apparent randomness is, in fact, complex order.

# PROS

**98.** Amoco Cadiz runs aground off Brittany (Mar. 16, 1978): The first major spill by the super-tankers built after the 7 Days War.

**97.** U.S. Supreme Court requires UC Davis medical school to admit white student Allan Bakke (1978): "Reverse discrimination" succeeds as a strategy. "The civil rights movement is over and conservative backlash has begun."—Nelson George, writing in 1992.

**96.** Manhattan's East Village emerges—Club 57 opens, "screening favourite B-movies and high kitsch television, ridiculing them, and reenacting the roles" (1978): A new generational style.

**95.** Rough Trade Records, London (1978): The punk/independent music scene takes off.

**94.** Kailash Sankhala's *Tiger! The Story of the Indian Tiger* (1978): The tiger is an endangered species.

**93.** Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978): The misrepresented now lead the critique of distorted views of non-western peoples.

**92.** Gloria Steinem's "Erotica and Pornography" (1978): Representational practices around pornography are transformed.

**91.** Kitty Kelley's *Jackie Oh!* (1978): The "no-holds-barred" celebrity biography begins.

**90.** Love Canal, N.Y., evacuated (Aug. 1978): "Toxic waste" now a household term.

**89.** Murder of San Francisco city supervisor Harvey Milk and mayor George Moscone (1978): Backlash against the first prominent gay politician.

**88.** The "November Revolution," at a conference (1978): A new standard model in physics is based on the "weak interaction" and the "strong interaction."

**87.** Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford 1978 and Princeton 1979): Objective philosophy is a myth.

**86.** Pauline Kael spends half a year in Hollywood (1978): She decides that a golden age of American movies is over, reflected in her 1980 piece "Why Are Movies So Bad? Or, The Numbers."

**85.** "Postmodernism was a middlebrow phenomenon. Its champion practitioners were Warhol, Mailer, and Tom Wolfe. Its 'theoreticians' were Susan Sontag, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Pauline Kael."—Louis Menand reviewing Pauline Kael in 1995.

**84.** Deng Xiaoping speech, "Liberate your thinking, seek truth from facts" (Dec. 13, 1978): China is launched on the road to capitalism.

**83.** One-child-per-family policy invoked by China due to severe food shortages (1979): A return to pre-Communist patterns of marital and reproductive restraint.

**82.** Britain (1979): "Winter of Discontent" culminates in a four-party race that elects Margaret Thatcher in May.

**81.** Three-Mile Island, Pennsylvania (Mar. 28, 1979): The first nuclear accident to be widely publicized begins to erode public acceptance of nuclear power.

**80.** Islamic Revolution (Iran, 1979): "The first major twentieth-century social upheaval rejecting both the traditions of 1789 and 1917."—Eric Hobsbawm, writing in 1994.

**79.** Sony invents the Walkman (1979): The listener is present yet absent.

**78.** Eric Fischl paints *Sleepwalker* (1979): The rebirth of painting begins.

**77.** The Fatback Band's *King Tim III (The Personality Jock)* (1979): The first rap record.

**76.** Pierre Bourdieu's *La distinction: critique social du jugement* (1979): Taste is a function of class.

**75.** Julian Schnabel's second exhibition at Mary Boone Gallery, New York, has leading dealers and collectors fighting to buy his works (1979): The kick-off of the '80s art boom.

**74.** The revival of sculpture first heralded at British pavilion, Venice Biennale (1980): The return of mass, representation, and soma, signals the rejection of minimal and conceptual art.

**73.** Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (translated into English, 1980): The new history turns 180° to examine particular strata in detail, rather than speculate about the big picture.

**72.** Unprecedented numbers force subsequent blockbuster exhibitions to ration attendance after *Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective*, MOMA (summer 1980): Art becomes a mass spectacle.

**71.** Jacques Derrida's *La carte postale* (1980): Why does Socrates always have to come before Plato? Why chronology?

**70.** MTV begins (1980): Pop music as TV ads.

**69.** Luis Alvarez's hypothesis is published in *Science*, that the great Cretaceous extinction was caused by an impacting asteroid (June 6, 1980): He "fractured the reigning tradition of Lyellian gradualism during the 1980s."

**68.** Computer sales surpass automaking as number one U.S. industry (1980): The information age supplants the industrial age.

**67.** Polish authorities permit a tenth-anniversary memorial in Gdansk to the shipyard strikers killed (Dec. 1970): The tide turns in Solidarity's favour; state communism begins to falter.

**66.** "Having created the Swinging Sixties, Lennon became a hold-all for the thronging credulities of the next decade, a decade whose demise coincided with his own."—Martin Amis, writing the obituary of John Lennon, 40, killed on Dec. 8, 1980.

**65.** Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting," *October* (spring 1981): Critics welcome the so-called death of painting, leading to a decade of critical intolerance for paint on canvas.

**64.** The IBM PC appears (1981): Big business adopts what had till then appeared to be a toy.

**63.** Space Shuttle programme begins with launch of *Columbia* (Apr. 12, 1981): The shift from the exploration to exploitation of space.

**62.** Ronald Reagan fires striking federal air traffic controllers (1981): The signal of open season on unions.

**61.** Frequent-flyer programmes begun by American Airlines (1981): A spectacularly successful marketing innovation.

**60.** The Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, identifies AIDS (spring 1981).

**59.** The first recombinant DNA company, Genentech of San Francisco (1981): Genetic engineering for sale.

**58.** The first American test-tube baby (in-vitro fertilization) is born (1981): A new ambiguity invests the nuclear family, identity, morality.

**57.** Kim Chernin, *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness* (1981): Eating disorders are social, not individual.

**56.** Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman* (1981): The serious questioning of radical feminism by serious feminists.

**55.** Florida environmentalist Hazel Henderson, *Politics of the Solar Age* (1981): The phrase "think globally, act locally" is coined.

**54.** Riace bronzes: two ancient Greek bronzes found in soft sand in eight metres of water off Riace remain at National Museum in Reggio di Calabria (1981): The new power of local activism.

**53.** Picasso's *Guernica* is surrendered to Madrid (1981): The decline of New York, the resurgence of Europe.

**52.** Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* wins Booker Prize (1981): British culture is now global.

**51.** Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* fascinates with its androids (1982): Are we "hollow men"? How do we treat humanoids?

**50.** "The thirty-year trend of expanded opportunity, inaugurated by the G.I. Bill after World War II, began to reverse itself" (1982): The percentage of American private college and university students from less affluent families began to fall.

**49.** The Dow jumped forty points and a five-year bull market began (Aug. 13, 1982): The contemporary art market overheated, among other things.

**48.** *USA Today* appears, without a geographical base (Sept. 15, 1982): News-from-nowhere as an infotainment paper.

**47.** Volume of American goods crossing the Pacific exceeds that crossing the Atlantic (1982).

**46.** Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* becomes an intellectual bestseller (English trans. 1983): The birth of mass intelligentsia.

**45.** Madonna's first album, *Madonna* (1983): The Bay City, Michigan, goddess begins to rise.

**44.** Carl Sagan, "The Nuclear Winter" (1983): More bad news about nuclear war.

**43.** William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984): Cypberpunk is invented.

**42.** Number of planes crossing the Pacific surpasses the number crossing the Atlantic (May 1984).

**41.** The Arno Peters projection becomes the first widely utilized "equal area" world map (1984): The Third World begins to look much more significant.

**40.** United States withdraws from UNESCO (1984): The U.S. takes its ball and goes home.

**39.** Gunman kills 21 in San Ysidro, Calif., McDonald's (July 19, 1984): The new anger of unemployment.

**38.** Crack cocaine begins to spread (1984): "After its introduction, black youth culture becomes increasingly nihilistic and materialistic."—Nelson George.

# PROS

**28.** First hypertext novel, Rob Swigert's *Portal* designed to be read on the Apple Macintosh, allows the reader to take different paths through the story (1986): The reader as author.

**27.** Rafael Moneo, *Museo Nacional de Arte Romano*, Merida, Spain (1986): The return of beauty in architecture.

**26.** The last contemporary art exhibition before the National Gallery of Canada's move to a new building, *Image-Object-Text* in the planning stages, changes names to *Songs of Experience* when the exhibition opens (1986): The same work, redaemonized.

**25.** Paul Simon collaborates with Ladysmith Black Mombazo on *Graceland* (1986): The mainstreaming of South African pop music.

**24.** Jürgen Habermas's article in *Die Zeit* (July 11, 1986) opens the "Historiker-Streit," or Historians' Controversy, by attacking conservative German historians who are beginning to say that Hitler's crimes were no worse than Stalin's.

**23.** A Long Beach, California, rap concert headlined by Run-D.M.C. is halted by a riot as gangs crash the show (1986): "This incident incites 'RAP CAUSES VIOLENCE' rhetoric and is the first national inkling that Southern California's gang problem is out of control."—Nelson George.

**22.** Margaret Thatcher's "Big Bang," the dramatic deregulation of British banking, strongly felt in Canada and the Far East (1986): Global banking comes into effect.

**21.** Unexpected death of Andy Warhol at age 59 (Feb. 22, 1987): He becomes a ghost twin, with Joseph Beuys (d. Jan. 23, 1986), of late twentieth-century art.

**20.** Starbucks Corp., buys out Starbucks, an older and smaller company (founded 1971), to launch Italian-style coffee bars beyond Seattle (1987): The 9-to-5 style of work declines.

**37.** Michel Foucault dies, of complications from AIDS (1984): "You used to have to read Marx. Now you have to read Foucault."—Peter Reill, speaking in 1992.

**36.** Debut exhibition of twin 24-year-old photographers, Doug and Mike Starn (Boston 1985): The return of beauty in art.

**35.** West Edmonton Mall expands, infantilizing adulthood in Disneyfied fashion (1985): Shopping as play.

**34.** British Antarctic Survey team announces the hole in the ozone layer, in *Nature* (May 16, 1985): Apparently another man-made disaster.

**33.** Mikhail Gorbachov comes to power (1985): "The man who ended the Cold War"—Eric Hobsbawm.

**32.** The peak of American Cold War rearmament "was reached in 1985, the last year the U.S. defense budget grew in absolute figures."

**31.** The Commerce department announces that the United States has become a debtor-nation (Sept. 16, 1985): "The Day the American Empire Ran Out of Gas"—Gore Vidal, writing in 1986.

**30.** Plaza agreement allows dollar to fall, yen to rise (1985): Global markets erasing national monetary policies.

**29.** Reactor No. 4 at Chernobyl near Kiev melts down (Apr. 26, 1986): *The Nation* (Mar. 15, 1993) puts the number of volunteer clean-up worker deaths at over 7,000.

19. CNN "World Report" (1987): Global satellite newscasts begin.
18. Palestinian Intifada (1987): War by children and bare hands.
17. "The '80s Are Over; Greed Goes Out of Style." *Newsweek* (Jan. 4, 1988): Citing "signs of increased altruism," the decade is declared dead over two years early.
16. Ellen Bass and Laura Davis's *The Courage to Heal*, (1988): The recovered-memory movement rekindles the child sexual abuse issue.
15. Japanese purchases alarm Americans (e.g., Westin Hotel Co. by Aoki Corp., 1988; Columbia Pictures Entertainment by Sony Corp., 1989; Rockefeller Center by Mitsubishi Group, 1989).
14. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Canada and the United States (1988): Corporations abhor a boundary.
13. Seattle University sociologist David McCloskey publishes his map of "Cascadia," made of Western Canada and the Pacific Northwest (1988): FTA and Quebec separatism generate other ideas about redrawing borders.
12. "The postwar-era is over."—Cold warrior Franz-Josef Strauss, in 1988.
11. Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie for *The Satanic Verses* (Feb. 14, 1989): If he'd known what would happen, Rushdie later says, he'd have written a more critical book.
10. "Virtual reality" coined by Jaron Lanier (1989): A growing desire for simulated experience.
9. Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* is blow-torched and removed from Federal Plaza, New York (Mar. 15, 1989): The day Modern Art officially ended.
8. Beverly Hills bond broker Michael Milken indicted (Mar. 29, 1989): The feeding frenzy of junk bonds, hostile takeovers, and insider trading begins to wind down.
7. American Savings & Loans scandal (1989): It caps unprecedented graft of the '80s.

6. Carol J. Adams's 1989 paper eventually published as *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990): It calls for all feminists to become vegetarians.
5. Student occupation of Tiananmen Square, Beijing, violently suppressed by Peoples' Liberation Army (June 4, 1989): China is changing, but slowly and reluctantly.
4. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* (summer 1989): "We are, certainly since Nietzsche and Spengler, 'terminalists.'"—George Steiner, writing in 1972.
3. Terror spreads from Reston, Virginia, near Washington, D.C., when Ebola Zaire begins to kill monkeys in a lab (1989): It presages an era of mounting fear over uncontrollable viruses.

2. Accepting defeat, the Red Army retreats from Afghanistan (1989); The Soviet empire starts to unravel.

1. State Communism in most of Eastern Europe begins to disintegrate, symbolized by the opening of the Berlin Wall (Nov. 9, 1989).

P.S. When will the Post-Postmodern era end? Presumably when the generation after the so-called "generation X" comes of age: those born between 1980 and 2000 will turn twenty from 2000 onward.

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**CULTURE SLASH NATION**