

Modes of relating to meaningfulness (three page PDF)

Mode	Era (<i>all dates approximate</i>)	Problem the mode addresses	Attempted solution
Pre-systematic	Mostly over by 1700 in the West	[None]	[None needed]
Systems	1450-1900 in the West	Challenge of alternatives. How do we know our way is right and all others are wrong?	Supposed foundations for certainty: religious revelation, scripture, rationality, science
Breakdown of systems	1900-1980; native for pre-WWII generation	Failure of all foundations. Nihilism: meaninglessness, materialism, disenchantment of the world	Existentialism (attempt to create meaning out of nothing) OR fundamentalism (attempts to return to tradition or earlier modernisms).
Counter-culture (alternative)	1963-1974; native for Baby Boom generation	Rigidity of mainstream culture, society, and construction of self	Alternative (green meme); explicitly anti-nihilist. Draws heavily on Romanticism of pre-Breakdown era (1800s).
Sub-cultures (fragmentation)	1975-2000; native for Generation X	Counter-culture denies diversity, is revealed as idealistically impractical, fails to find new foundations	Subcultures provide tribal (non-universal) meanings, without attempting foundations
Atomization	2000-?; native for Generation Y	Sub-culture does not have enough substance to cover range of meaningfulness; commercial appropriation leads to atomization	Global consumer culture provides conveniently-packaged morsels of meaning to cover all eventualities. <i>De facto</i> acceptance of incoherence
Fluidity	Hypothetical present or near future	Overwhelming ocean of meaning; triviality (distraction from value judgement); perceived tensions between internet and "real life"	Devising watercraft for sailing the sea of meanings. These must be collaborative, creative, improvised, intimate, disposable, beautiful, and spiritual

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Mode	Culture	Society	Self
Pre-systematic	Incoherent traditions, accepted without question	Unquestioned, simple social structure	Self defined by unquestioned social role
Systems	Attempts to formalize/rationalize/systematize culture. Classicism followed by Romanticism.	Complex, rationalized social structure; bureaucracy	Self as unitary, rational, feeling individual, having problematic relationship with society and culture
Breakdown of systems	Development of avant-garde; beginning of the "culture war"	Social structures increasingly diverse and problematic; competing political theories; world wars and clash of civilizations	Age of anxiety: growing awareness of internal incoherence.
Counter-culture (alternative)	Development of youth culture as self-conscious, positive mass alternative. Collapse of high culture/pop culture distinction	Brotherhood of all counter-culture participants	Self defined by membership in counter-culture (or rejection of counter-culture in favor of "traditional values")
Sub-cultures (fragmentation)	Repeated fissioning of subcultures. Genre obsession. Hipsterism. Postmodernism.	Sub-cultural tribalism: communities based on narrow but innovative shared values/interests	Identity derives from subcultural allegiance. Integration of personality a receding ideal.
Atomization	Universal soup of tiny culture-bits. Kaleidoscopic, senseless reconfiguration.	Global society moves into interactive media; virtual communities; social networks enable larger, geographically dispersed communities	Atomization of self due to always-on internet: massively more interruptions, entertainments, relationships, tasks
Fluidity	Groundless creative production; awareness of the intertwining of nebulousity and pattern; synergistic remix	Spontaneously assembled transitory organizations	Self explicitly accepted as fluid, nebulous assembly, inherently in dynamic interaction, with transient characteristics but no essential nature

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Mode	Buddhism	Music	Vampires
Pre-systematic	Miscellaneous practical superstitions; karma, merit, and auspiciousness; monastic economics. Entirely unknown to Consensus Buddhists.	Traditional forms	Considered a realistic physical danger
Systems	Scriptural Buddhist theorizing	Self-conscious art music ("classical" in the broad sense)	Symbolize incoherence as challenge to the system (Church, Nation, and/or rationality) [Bram Stoker's <i>Dracula</i>]
Breakdown of systems	Buddhist modernism: importation of new, rationalizing foundations from West to Asia	Crisis in classical music; nihilistic alternatives such as serialism. Jazz.	Monstrous Other as Romantic anti-hero [Ann Rice; <i>Dark Shadows</i>]
Counter-culture (alternative)	Consensus Buddhism: hybrid of Asian Buddhist modernism with American 1960s counter-culture	Everyone in Boomer generation listens to all counter-cultural music, regardless of genre.	Monstrous Self as Romantic anti-hero [Laurel K. Hamilton's <i>Anita Blake</i> books]
Sub-cultures (fragmentation)	Diverse Western Buddhist sub-cultures, mainly developed by charismatic Asian modernizers. No serious attempt at universality. Spurious rhetoric of traditionalism (actually nationalism).	Punk as first mass subculture. Not intended as a universal alternative; explicitly nihilistic. Repeated fragmentation of genres into sub-sub-genres.	Monstrosity (incoherence) of the self as a practical hassle that can be managed [Kim Harrison]
Atomization	McMahan: "Global folk Buddhism." Dharma burgers. Vapid @DalaiLama tweets. Fake Buddha quotes. McMindfulness. Eckhart Tolle. SBNR.	Ludicrousness of genre leads to mash-ups. Run-DMC/Aerosmith "Walk this way" video collaboration as early explicit example.	Trivialization of no-longer-threatening incoherence [<i>Twilight</i> as attempt]. But fails until we have really eaten shadow
Fluidity	Buddhism as amorphous assemblage of means for transformation of culture, society, and self by uniting spaciousness and passion to unclog energy and empower nobility	Genre as musical element, like melody and rhythm, to use and play with. Democratization of music production and distribution as computer tools (DAWs, Soundcloud) improve.	Nobility of vampires as creative, benevolent appropriation of personal incoherence