

Postmodernism

PPT BY WASHIM AKRAM, ASST PROF, NAKSHALBARI COLLEGE

Postmodernism Defined



The rejection of the scientific canon, of the idea there can be a single coherent rationality or that reality has a unitary nature that can be definitively observed or understood

- Postmodernity as a phase of knowing and practice, abandoning the assumptions, prejudices, and constraints of modernism to embrace the contradictions, irony, and profusion of pop and mass culture. "High" and "low" culture/art categories made useless and irrelevant, art from outsider and non-Western cultures embraced, consumer society turned inside out. The grand linear narrative of art history and Western cultural history is exposed as ideological and constructed for class interests.

□ **Uses of the term "postmodern"**

□ ***after* modernism**

subsumes, assumes, extends the modern or tendencies already present in modernism, not necessarily in strict chronological succession, or working out questions and problems implicit in modernism without a break from core assumptions

□ ***contra* modernism**

subverting, resisting, opposing, or countering features of modernism

□ **equivalent to "late capitalism"**

culture dominated by post-industrial, consumerist, multi- and trans-national capitalism, beginnings of globalizaton

- **the historical era following the modern**
an historical time-period marker, recognizing cultural, ideological, and economic shifts without a new trajectory (triumphalism) or privileging of values
- **artistic and stylistic eclecticism (aesthetic postmodernism)**
hybridization of forms and genres, combining "high" and "low" cultural forms and sources, mixing styles of different cultures or time periods, dehistoricizing and re-contextualizing styles in architecture, visual arts, literature, film, photography
- **"global village" phenomena: globalization of cultures, races, images, capital, products**"information age" redefinition of nation-state identities, which were the foundation of the modern era; dissemination of images and information across national boundaries, a sense of erosion or breakdown of national, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural identities; a sense of a global mixing of cultures on a scale unknown to pre-information era societies

□ **Crises in the Representation of History**

- Postmodern historians and philosophers question the representation of history and cultural identities: history as "what 'really' happened" (external to representation or mediation) vs. history as a "narrative of what happened" a "mediated representation" with cultural/ideological interests.
- Art works are likewise caught up in the problem of representation and mediation--of what, for whom, from what ideological point of view?

□ **Jameson:**

"history is only accessible to us in narrative form". History requires representation, mediation, in narrative, a story-form encoded as historical.

- Dissolution of the transparency of history and tradition: Can we get to the (unmediated) referents of history?
- Multiculturalism, competing views of history and tradition.
- Shift from universal histories, from the *long durée* (long time-span of historical periods), to local and explicitly contingent histories. History and identity politics: who can write or make art? for whom? from what standpoint?

Logocentrism

- Logocentrism: modes of thinking that apply truth claims to universal propositions
 - Our knowledge of the social world is grounded in a belief that we can make sense of our ever-changing and highly complex societies by referring to certain unchanging principles or foundations
 - ^ Derrida rejected this definition (what postmodernists call an anti-foundational stance)

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998)

- Born in Versailles, France
- One of the world's foremost philosophers and a noted postmodernist
- Taught at many universities
- Covered a variety of topics such as postmodern conditions, modernist and post modernist art, knowledge and communication, language metanarratives, and legitimization.



Art, Architecture, and Postmodernism

- Believed that the postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher because the text she or he creates is not governed by pre-established rules and cannot be judged according to the applications of given categories
- Defined postmodernity as a product, or an effect, of the development of modernity itself

Postmodernism and Knowledge

- Societies that have computer knowledge are at the forefront in the transformation process to postmodernity
- Advancing technology has a direct effect on knowledge (economically powerful nations have exerted their will on less-developed nations)
- Knowledge and power are two sides of the same question: Who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-o308cW0hKI>

Lyotard

- The postmodern as a historical/cultural "condition" based on a dissolution of master narratives or metanarratives (totalizing narrative paradigms like progress and national histories), a crisis in ideology when ideology no longer seems transparent but contingent and constructed (see *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*).

Legitimation, Language, Narratives

- Believed that grand narratives of knowledge had lost their credibility in the postmodern society and their claims of legitimacy
- Believed narratives are an integral aspect of culture and directly affect the language of any given society
- Used language games to contrast narrative and scientific knowledge
- Defines modernism as the attempt to legitimate science by appeal to 'metanarratives', or philosophical accounts of the progress of history in which the hero or knowledge struggles toward a great goal

Language Games

- Rules do not carry within themselves their own legitimation, but are object of a contract between players
- If there are no rules, there is no game, so even one modification of one rule alters the nature of the game
- Every utterance should be thought of as a 'move' in a game

Language Games

- Language shows an example of the first efforts of legitimacy
- Each human born into the world is born into a place that has already been labeled or constructed by past events and/or by those in power
- It is an infants responsibility to emancipate themselves (become an owner of themselves)
- Language is that tool of emancipation

JEAN BAUDRILLARD (1929~2006)

- • He was born in 1929, in the northern French town of Reims.
- • He was the first member of his family to attend university.
- • 1966: became a professor of Nanterre University of Paris.
- • 1968: started publishing: *System of Objects*; *Consumer society*, *Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, *The Mirror Production*, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, *America*, *On the Beach*, and *Cool Memories*.
- • His work changed: 1960's modernist and Marxist
1980's postmodernist and critic of Marxism



Postmodernism

- **Baudrillard was a part of the French tradition challenging traditional sociological thought.**
- **He refers to France as a “consumer society” (A culture of consumption has so much taken over our ways of thinking that all reality is filtered through the logic of exchange value and advertising. As Baudrillard writes, "Our society thinks itself and speaks itself as a consumer society. As much as it consumes anything, it consumes itself as consumer society, as idea. Advertising is the triumphal paean to that idea".)**

Postmodernism (Cont.)

- **Dedifferentiation**: “If modern societies, for classical social theory, were characterized by differentiation, postmodern societies are characterized by dedifferentiation, the “collapse” of (the power of) distinctions, or implosion).”
- **Simulacra and simulation**. Above all else, Baudrillard keeps returning to his concepts, simulacra and simulation, to explain how our models for the real have taken over the place of the real in postmodern society.
- He argued that society in the postmodern era is dominated by simulacra and simulation and falls into the domain of a hyperreal sociality (hyperreal world signs have acquired a life to their own and serve no other purpose than symbolic exchange. This exchange involves the continuous cycle of taking and returning, giving and receiving.)

Contemporary Society

- **Baudrillard argues in his book *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (1983) that contemporary society has entered into a phase of implosion.**
- **He believed that our society is no longer dominated by production, but by developments of consumerism, the media, entertainment, and information technologies.**
- **Mass media and entertainment led our society undergone a “catastrophic” revolution that has led to the death of “social” society. The postmodern society is bombard by too many massages and means and so on.**

Mass Media & Entertainment

- • He believed that mass media are so powerful that they have created a culture characterized by hyperreality. (they are no longer mirror reality. Disagree with)
- • The over simplification of events by the media are packaged as to appeal to the largest audience of consumers.
- • Mass media are not the only social institution responsible for hyperreality, so as all aspects of postmodern culture and entertainment.
- • New technologies have replaced industrial production and political economy as the organizing principle of society.

Fredric Jameson

- • Fredric Jameson was born in April 14, 1934 Born in Cleveland, Ohio. He is generally considered to be one of the foremost contemporary English-language Marxist literary and cultural critics.
- • After intense study of Marxian literary theory in the 1960s, when he was influenced by the New Left and antiwar movement, Jameson published *Marxism and Form*, which introduced a tradition of dialectical neo-Marxist literary theory to the English-speaking world (1970). Since articulating and critiquing the structuralist project in *The Prison-House of Language* (1972), Jameson has concentrated on developing his own literary and cultural theory in works such as *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (1979), *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), and *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). He has also published several volumes of essays--*The Ideologies of Theory* (vol. 1, *Situations of Theory*, and vol. 2, *Syntax of History*, both 1988). Two other books, *Signatures of the Visible* (1991) and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992) collect studies of film and visual culture, while *The Cultural Turn* (1998) presents *Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*. . *Studies of Theodor W. Adorno, Late Marxism* (1990) and *Brecht and Method* (2000) continue his intensive work in Marxist theory and aesthetics.

Postmodernism

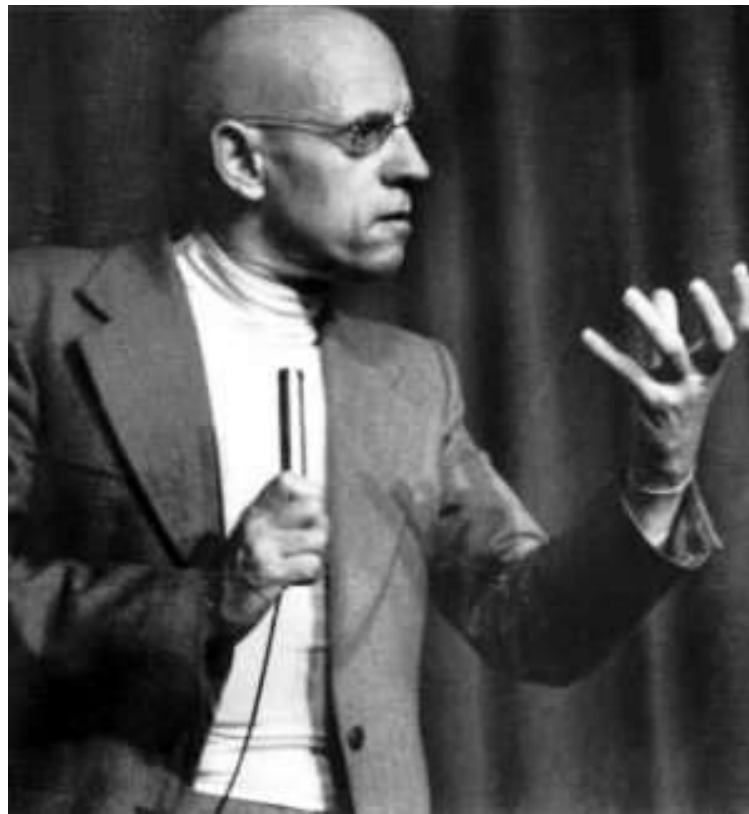
- • Like Jean Baudrillard, Jameson believed that culture dominants are a pattern of representation that appears across different media and art forms.
- • In late capitalism, culture is dominated by consumerism and mass media.
- • He used the example of Las Vegas to explain that with late capitalism, aesthetic production has become integrated into commodity production, and it spilled over into architecture as well.
- • Hyperspace: an area where modern conceptions of space are useless in helping us to orient ourselves. People develop cognitive maps in order to maneuver in the complexity of society (cannot find the exit in casino/hotel). And hyperspace is not just exists in postmodern society, it also can be find in history.

- "the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents"
- "the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture" (Jameson).
- Pastiche and parody of multiple styles: old forms of "content" become mere "styles"
- stylistic masks, image styles, without present content: the meaning is in the mimicry
- "in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to

Modernism and Capitalistic Imperialism (book 1990)

- • He focuses on imperialism not as the relationship between metropolis and colony, but as the competition of the various imperial and metropolitan nation-states.
- • Imperialism has always been about expanding markets and spreading culture. The terrorist attack on 911 is an alarm to wake-up the world that the danger of late-capitalistic imperialism is expanding military modes of destruction.

Michel Foucault (1926~1984)



Michel Foucault

- • Foucault was born on Oct. 15, 1926, in Poitiers, France and named after his father. He died of AIDS in 1984.
- • He became academically established during the 1960s, when he held a series of positions at French universities
- • His most famous work, *Discipline and Punish* 1975 describe a new way to see the prison system. In this book, Foucault explained the history and purpose of prison. His other major works include: *Madness and Civilization*; *the Birth of the Clinic*; *Death and the Labyrinth*; *the Order of Things*; *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; and *The History of Sexuality*.

Methodology

- • **He insisted that human sciences can be treated as autonomous systems of discourse.**
- • **In methodological approaches, researcher must remain neutral as to the truth and meaning of the discursive system studies.**
- • **All human sciences should be “discourse-object”.**
- • **He did not value the hermeneutic approach because he did not attempt to uncover any hidden meanings behind written words.**

Discipline & Punishment

- • His most famous work, *Discipline and Punish* 1975 describe a new way to see the prison system. In this book, Foucault explained the history and purpose of prison.
- • There were three primary techniques of control: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination. The “power”, in which means the “control” of people can be achieved by observing them.
- • His structural analysis of total institutions led him to conclude that modern prisons reflect modern views of appropriate forms of discipline, especially as determined by those who possess power.

Sexuality

- **In the book the history of sexuality (1978) “Foucault challenges the hermeneutic belief in deep meaning by tracing the emergence of sexual confession and relating it to practices of social domination” (Dreyfus and Rebinow)**
- **What is “normal” and how one “should” feel.**
- **“Technologies of all kind are designed to control the freethinking behavior of individuals.”**
- **Education system is controlled and people be taught to self-control.**
- **“in short, the modern worlf attempts to suppress impulses of al kinds, especially sexual, violent, and unruly ones” (Garner, 2000)**

Power

- **When he talked about power, he mentioned the intransigence of freedom and control (disciplinary power and punishment). There are many visible and invisible powers in our society to control people. “In contrast to monarchical power, there is disciplinary power, a system of surveillance which is interiorized to the point that each person is his or her overseer.”**
- **Modern power (disciplinary control) only focuses on the nonobservance and to correct the deviant behaviors (crime).**
- **For his ideas about power, he argued that people do not “have” power implicitly. People only can engage with “power” because power is a technique or action. Furthermore, resistance will always exist with power (Power Theory is based on Marxism ideas but focuses on a new direction as he rejects Marx’s ideas).**

Relevancy

- **Modernism: 1890s~about 1945**
- **Postmodernism: after WWII, after 1968**
- **Modern and postmodern are vague and have been applied to different aspects.**
- **Modernism and postmodernism are usually used to refer the technological advancements and new modes of thinking. (Is a theory or not)**
- **“Modernist thinking is about search of an abstract truth of life; postmodernist thinkers believe that there is no universal truth, abstract or otherwise.”
Postmodernist believe the power from hyper-reality and they get highly influenced by mass media.**

Your Turn!



QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

THANK YOU!