

English 216: notes for Chapter 9

The Postmodern Condition

Modernism: two phases

High Modernism: utopian drive to fix everything using metanarratives

- **features:** allusion, reflexivity, minimalism, formalism, shock
- **metanarratives:** stories/theories that explain everything (grand narratives, *grand récits*)
- **avant garde:** artistic experiments from outside of and in opposition to the mainstream
- **anti-authoritarian:** rebel against old regimes of art/thought; retain high/low split

Late Modernism: demoralized, metanarratives failed to prevent WWI

- **features:** narcissism, bleakness, absurdism

Postmodernism: arguably a third phase of Modernism

- a highly contested term, it means radically different things to different people...

Postmodernism in the 1960s

- **collapse of high/low:** reject Modernism as high culture
- **culture:** redefined as anything social (i.e., what we read in Ch 1)
- **pop art** (Andy Warhol): “art” is redefined by looking at something as if it were art
 - collapses “high” art and commercial/industrial art
- **counterculture:** a different expression of avantgardism

Jean François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition

- pomo rejects *metanarratives* (e.g., science, education) as producers of homogeneity
- critique: Lyotard is merely lamenting the intellectual élite's loss of privilege

Jean Baudrillard and the Simulacra

- **semiurgic**: Western society processes information instead of making things
- **simulacrum**: copies without originals, process of making simulacra is called simulation
- **hyperreal**: when simulacra and the real are equally significant

Frederic Jameson and Late Capitalism (strictly Marxist/neo-Marxist analysis)

- **periodizing concept**: PM's function is to define a period in history
- **cultural dominant** (McHale): every period has big ideas that dominate most thought
 - but old/marginal/rebellious ideas are still present
- **pastiche**: empty mockery, lacks a thesis or "ulterior motive"
- **culture of quotations**: all culture is imitative, all quotations & no content
- **nostalgia films**: reassure audiences of "narrative certainties of the past"
- **false realism**: historical styles stand in for actual history; style becomes the substance
- **cultural schizophrenia**: perpetual present; past hard to remember, future hard to imagine
- **collapses cultural & commercial**: nothing is not commercial; culture is an economic activity
- **genericity** (Collins): films that quote other films in order to say something
- **array** (Collins): PM media has no dominant(s), just collages the past

- **operates on two levels:** characters' adventures & the text's adventure
- **affirmative culture** (Marcuse): just enough pleasure to make life bearable
- **cultural democratization** (Laclau/Mouffe): plurality of PM media allows for resistance

Postmodern Pop Music (i.e., in rap)

- **sampling:** essentially, one practice of genericity (see above)
- constitutes a critique, highly aware of history, relies on audience knowledge

Postmodern Television (i.e., “prestige TV”)

- **oscillation:** shifting on the fly between styles, tone, modes, and genres
 - marketed to audiences that contain multiple subject positions, not just a “mass”
- **old distinctions** are no longer significant: high/low, fiction/reality, history/nostalgia

Postmodernism and the Pluralism of Value (i.e., what's valuable within culture)

- **canonization:** how texts are authorized and legitimized
- **selective tradition:** texts are approved by dominant group bc they reflect their values
- **Bordieu:** they naturalizes the texts, then hold them up as proof of superiority
 - pomo means we have to evaluate “quality” without just appealing to authority

The Global Postmodern (Marxist economic critique)

- PM is defined by ubiquitousness of American products: McDonalds, Coca-Cola, etc.
- critiques:
 - commodities \neq culture, modes of production don't determine meaning,
 - it presumes a limited notion of the "foreign": national only, not class/gender/race/etc.
 - assumes America is a cultural monolith rather than a pluralistic society
 - hegemony better explains globalization/globalism as we know it

Convergence Culture

- **the flow**: media companies use tech to increase it, consumers use tech to control it
 - technology has created many new platforms for the flow
 - concentration of media ownership allows for "cross-platform" flow
 - participation is not required from consumers, can't just turn it on and see what's there

Afterword: Who Determines Meaning?

- **pessimist/rationalist**: capitalist corporations
- **pessimist/irrationalist**: nobody, there is none
- **optimist**: consumers make meaning using what's on offer, corporate products