

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
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English 216: notes for Chapter 3 and 4

Chapter 3: Culturalism

- various breaks from previous Marxist & Leavisite ideas

Breaking from Classical Marxism

- **E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class***
 - the working class created itself as a reaction to its context
 - an example of **culturalism**: shift towards agency rather than determinism

Breaking from Leavisism (i.e., creating left-Leavisism)

- **Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy***
 - working-class culture is realistic/active; mass culture is fanciful/passive
 - looks at history from working-class point of view, inverts class perspective\
- **Raymond Williams, “The Analysis of Culture”**
 - pop culture works out problems in culture
 - i.e., “magical” solutions to real problems
 - **structures of feeling**: what it would be like to be in a time/place
 - doesn't define people by just documents or just consumption patterns
 - **selective tradition**: representing a time/place via our preferred examples
- **Stuart Hall & Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts***

- **popular art**: product of culture industry, but can still be enlightening
- **mass culture**: industrial/degrading; **high culture**: individual/enlightening
- youth culture & music:
 - must the study whole of cultural activity (not just the “text”)
 - audience appears to get something out of it (not just top-down)

Chapter 4: Marxisms

Classical Marxism

- **base**: material surroundings and ability to work with them
 - creates the terrain for the superstructure to happen
- **superstructure**: politics, economy, society that results from activity at the base
 - not determined by the base, contains lots of internal activity
- **class**: a group’s social position relative to activity at the base
- popular culture is a product of base and of interactions w/in superstructure

William Morris

- expands Marxist idea of **alienation**:
 - i.e., if you only ever sell your labour for money,
 - you’ll never develop a relationship with that labour
- **creative labour**: when labour and art are same thing (i.e., making something)
 - class distinctions would collapse into each other

The Frankfurt School

- ***culture industry***: for-profit entertainment (capitalist); i.e., popular culture
- conforms to industry needs and also promotes conformity
- ***mass culture***: standardized content, pseudo-individualizes audience
 - claims we're in the ideal world, thus negates need for rebellion
- ***art***: by definition, resists or critiques the culture industry (i.e., capitalism)
- problem: the culture industry not this effective or monolithic

- **Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"**
 - ***aura***: the specific, contextualized meaning of a signifying object
 - mechanical reproduction obliterates the aura: new contexts, new meanings
 - so meaning is made in the act of consumption, not determined by production

- **Althusser**
 - ***ideology***: practiced; reality is what you do, ideology is how you represent it
 - these representations perpetuate class domination
 - dominant classes are also convinced; they see their domination as natural
 - ***ISA (ideological state apparatus)***: institutions that perpetuate ideology
 - ***RSA (repressive state apparatus)***: institutions that enforce ideology
 - ***problematic***: when ideology tries to represent something outside of itself
 - ***symptomatic***: looking for the traces that (futile) effort leaves behind
 - ***interpellation***: when you subject yourself to ideology via discourse
 - problem: it's presumed to always be successful & never conflict

- **Antonio Gramsci**
 - ***hegemony***: dominant group tries to naturalize its own ideology

- **compromise equilibrium:** subordinated groups agree with hegemonic values (against their interests)
 - RSAs held in reserve in case of actual rebellion
- **organic intellectuals:** represent hegemonic values; can be ISAs
- **bricolage:** youths use hegemonic culture for resistance,
 - but resistance gets incorporated into the power structure

Post-Marxism and Cultural Studies

- **articulation:** making meaning in the contextual connection of text & reader¹
- **culture:** is when groups of people tend to articulate in the same ways
 - culture defines what is “common sense” or “natural”
 - i.e., what the physical world is made to mean by ideology
- **mass culture:** not always convincing, the people are not always duped

NB: these notes are compiled from John Storey's *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 7th Edition. They are for studying purposes only.