

INTRODUCTION TO POSTMODERNISM

Lesson Objective:

- to understand the 3 approaches to postmodernism
- to know the basic theories of Postmodernism

What is postmodernism?

Postmodernism is a notoriously difficult concept to define. There are 3 approaches:

- Historical
- Stylistic
- Theoretical

HISTORICAL POSTMODERNISM is a **reaction to modernism**. Therefore to understand postmodernism from a historical point of view, we need to first understand modernism.

What is modernism? Experimenting with representations of reality

- **Early part of the 20th century**
- **Value judgments**(e.g. **high culture= good**, low culture = bad)
- A lot of what is generally accepted as **'the norm'**

In architecture: the simplification of form and the elimination of ornament

Art= experimenting in form and technique

Nuclear family: A **nuclear family**, **elementary family** or **conjugal family** is a family group consisting of two parents and their children (one or more). It is in contrast to a single-parent family, to the larger extended family, and to a family with more than two parents. **Nuclear families typically center on a married couple; the nuclear family may have any number of children.** There are differences in definition among observers; some definitions allow only biological children that are full-blood siblings, but others allow for a stepparent and any mix of dependent children including stepchildren and adopted children.

What is postmodernism?

In architecture: playing with the idea of conventions of buildings – **making us think about how it is constructed**

Art... What is art?

Alternative models in society e.g. family

How can we define postmodernism? Subject of postmodern media texts:

Postmodern texts embody skepticism towards the ideas and ideals of the modernist era, especially the ideas of **progress, objectivity, reason, certainty, personal identity and grand narratives**

Style of postmodern media texts: Postmodernism takes **pleasure in playing with convention, pointing out nature of how everything is a construction.**

Where did it develop?

Modernism believed that the lives of people would improve thanks to science and a world based on logic. It was a time of optimism and carried over from Victorian Era, through the Edwardian and right up to 1914.

The turning point... The terrible carnage of the First World War sowed (seminò) seeds of doubt as to whether the world was becoming a better one. ⇨ The fact: **science was turned to creating weapons of mass destruction and killing on an industrial scale** as a trademark of the war, **a wave of pessimism swept across Europe.**

The birth of post-modernism

The **idea of a loss in the goodness of people** and a **SUSPICION of science and a world of logic and order** was compounded by **two main events** of the Second World War

- 1) **The Holocaust**
- 2) **The dropping of Atomic bombs on Japanese cities**

The birth of post-modernism

The **events brought about the movement and theories which are loosely titled post-modernism and post-modernist.** By 1968 these ideas reached fruition.

Some distinctions...

Modernists believe that people were capable of original thought

Post-modernists thought that **the majority of the world basis**(its views on what is presented to them through the media) is called **"HYPER-REALITY" – a reality mediated through media.**

Modernists believed that a work of art **bears a universal truth or meaning.**

Postmodernists believe that **works of art are open to many different interpretations.**

Theoretical Approach

Main theorists:

- Lyotard
- Baudrillard
- Jameson

These 3 theorists offer interpretations of postmodernism which will help us in considering postmodern

Theorists:

Jean- François Lyotard (1924-1998)

Rejection of 'grand or meta-narratives': large-scale theories and philosophies of the world, such as **the progress of history, the know ability of everything by science, and the possibility of absolute freedom.** Therefore, all 'grand narratives' **should be viewed with suspicion.** Therefore **TRUTH needs to be 'deconstructed'** so that one can **challenge dominant ideas that people claim as truth.**

Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007)

There is **no longer a distinction between reality and its representing image, or simulacrum.**

Hyperreality – there is only surface meaning; there is no longer any original thing for the sign to represent; **the sign is the meaning.**

Frederic Jameson (b. 1934)

Historical viewpoint – postmodernism is a development of modernism.

Postmodernist works are often characterized by **lack of depth,** which has been replaced by a **surfeit (eccesso) of surface.**

Jameson lists **key features** of **postmodern culture**, as **self-referentiality**, **irony**, **pastiche**, and **parody**.

Jameson refers to this **cultural recycling as historicism** —the random cannibalization of various **past styles** — erasing historical depth.

3. Stylistic Approach

POSTMODERNISM comprises of a set of **core ideas** and key concepts that **work collaboratively to shape it**. The more of these ideas and key concepts it embellishes, the more of a post-modern text it becomes; these are largely derived from the above theorists.

4. Key concepts

- generic blurring
- intertextuality and bricolage
- playfulness e.g. parody and pastiche
- hyperreality
- hyperconsciousness
- eclecticism
- death of representation
- **uncertainty and the loss of context**

5. Some definitions

Hyper reality - a hypothetical **inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from fantasy** , especially in technologically advanced postmodern cultures.

A parody ; also called **send-up** , **spoof** or **lampoon** , in contemporary usage, is **a work created to mock, comment on, or make fun at an original work**.

A pastiche is a **literary or other artistic genre that is a " hodge-podge "** or an **imitation**.

So why

To consider whether a text is 'postmodern' or not we will largely **rely on a stylistic approach, which themselves are a product of historical and theoretical approaches**.

We will also keep the other approaches in mind and look at **how a postmodern viewpoint, from either a historical or theoretical point of view affects the way in which the audience and the industry produce and consume the media**