

Literary Theory


Session 7 – Monday 2 February
POST-MODERNISM

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Today's discussion


1. Read *Beginning Theory*. Part 4: "Postmodernism" (pp. 81-86).
2. I hope you have read *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys for a better understanding of Wednesday's presentation.




Major figures of Postmodernism



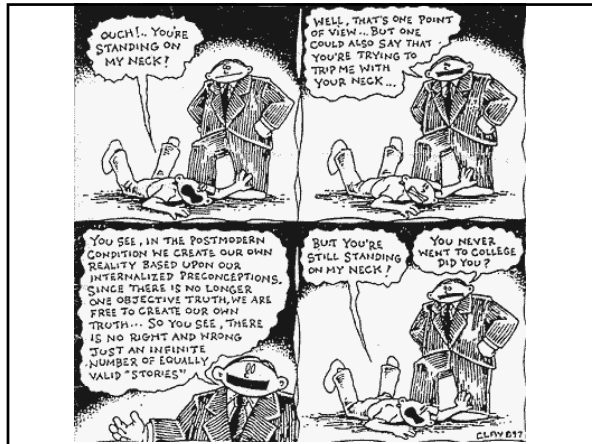
Jürgen Habermas

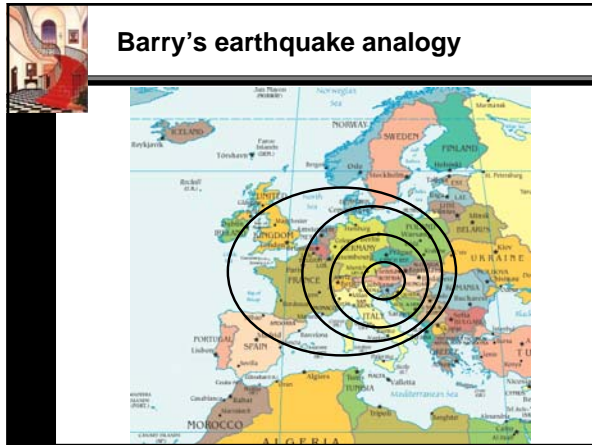


Jean Baudrillard




Jean-Francois Lyotard





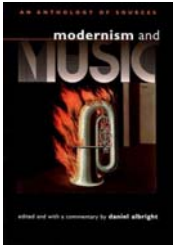
The main features of modernism

- Barry is correct in pointing to the innovatory, experimental nature of modernist art, its relationship to the avant-garde — a sense that new forms and new modes of expression had to be found (p. 81).
- Most of us will have some understanding of or familiarity with these features through early twentieth century literature, but it is important to remember that modernism went further afield than literature.
- For example, architecture, painting, music and other arts also underwent a modernist stage.



Modernism touched every art form

- **Music:** ~~Melody & harmony~~
- **Modernism in music** is characterized by a desire for or belief in progress and science, surrealism, anti-romanticism, political advocacy, general intellectualism, and/or a breaking with tradition or common practice.
- Schönberg, Mahler, Stravinsky, Sibelius
- Progress, science, surrealism



Modernism touched every art form

- **Painting:** ~~Perspective~~ (replaced by abstraction)

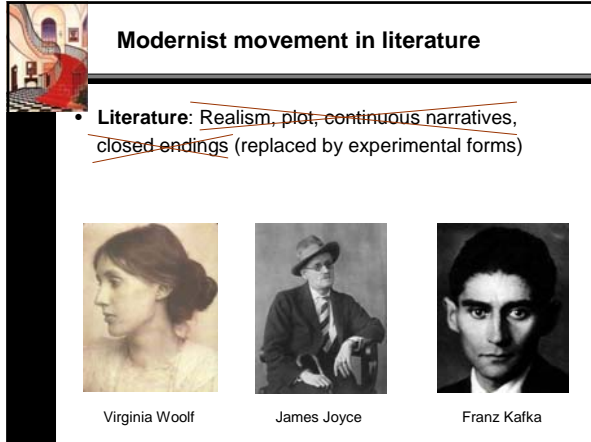
Klimt – Van Gogh – Picasso - Manet



Modernism touched every art form


- **Architecture:** ~~Domes, columns, bricks~~ (replaced by glass and concrete)






Modernist movement in literature


- **Literature:** ~~Realism, plot, continuous narratives, closed endings~~ (replaced by experimental forms)



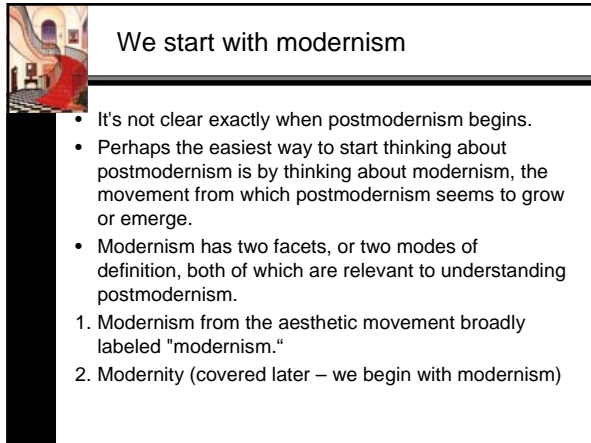
Virginia Woolf



James Joyce

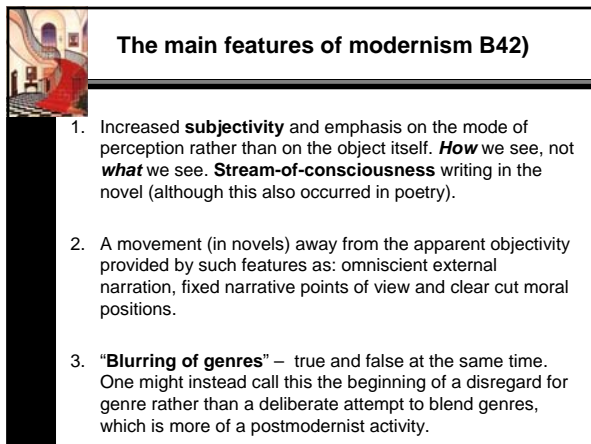


Franz Kafka



We start with modernism

- It's not clear exactly when postmodernism begins.
- Perhaps the easiest way to start thinking about postmodernism is by thinking about modernism, the movement from which postmodernism seems to grow or emerge.
- Modernism has two facets, or two modes of definition, both of which are relevant to understanding postmodernism.
 1. Modernism from the aesthetic movement broadly labeled "modernism."
 2. Modernity (covered later – we begin with modernism)



The main features of modernism B42)

1. Increased **subjectivity** and emphasis on the mode of perception rather than on the object itself. **How** we see, not **what** we see. **Stream-of-consciousness** writing in the novel (although this also occurred in poetry).
2. A movement (in novels) away from the apparent objectivity provided by such features as: omniscient external narration, fixed narrative points of view and clear cut moral positions.
3. "**Blurring of genres**" – true and false at the same time. One might instead call this the beginning of a disregard for genre rather than a deliberate attempt to blend genres, which is more of a postmodernist activity.



The main features of MODERNISM

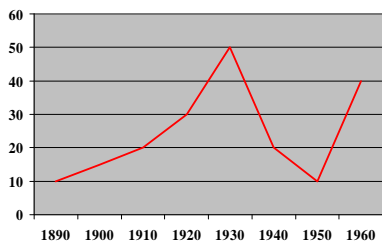
- 4. The **collage**, fragmented forms, discontinuous narratives etc. A basic modernist technique of which T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land* is a central example. This is related, at one level, to the subjectivity of #1. (and a new emphasis on the subconscious) but also to a certain nostalgia for past forms.
- 5. Poems, plays and novels raise issues concerning their own nature, status, and role. This indicates the way in which modernist works tended to be self-referential.

The Burial of the Dead (ll. 1-11)

April is the cruelest month, breeding
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
 Memory and desire, stirring
 Dull roots with spring rain.
 Winter kept us warm, covering
 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
 A little life with dried tubers.
 Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
 With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
 And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
 And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.



Popularity of modernism



High modernism 1920-1930



Postmodernism

Barry (p. 83) quotes J.A. Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*:

- Postmodernism is characterised by “an eclectic approach [by a liking for] aleatory writing, [and for] parody and pastiche.”
- Eclectic = fragmented forms (*The Waste Land*)
- “Aleatory forms” = Dadaists (poems from newspapers)
- “Parody and Pastiche” = e.g. disregard of omniscient narratorial stance.
- Modernism and postmodernism = NOT two successive stages – but opposed attitudes
- Barry suggests to dissolve the sequential link between them.

Modernism / Postmodernism (B, p. 83)

Modernism:	Postmodernism:
Deep nostalgia for an earlier age (Ezra Pound, <i>The Cantos</i> & T.S. Eliot's <i>The Waste Land</i> – lament, pessimism, despair).	Fragmentation is exhilarating, liberating, symptomatic of our escape from fixed systems.
Asceticism, minimalism (13-minute-play, 2-line-poem)	Rejects a distinction between “high” and popular art. Excess, gaudiness, “bad taste” mixture of qualities.
Both give prominence to <u>fragmentation</u>	



Modernism / Postmodernism

Though often used interchangeably with post-structuralism, postmodernism is a much broader term and encompasses theories of art, literature, culture, architecture, and so forth.

- In relation to literary study, the term postmodernism has been articulately defined by Ihab Hassan. In Hassan's formulation postmodernism differs from modernism in several ways:

Modernism	Postmodernism
Purpose	Play
Design	Chance
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Totalization	Deconstruction
Presence	Absence
Depth	Surface
Urbanism	Anarchy and fragmentation
Elitism	Anti-authoritarianism



Modernism, modernity and postmodernism

- There are three terms here that we have to distinguish between before we proceed:
 - **modernism** (we have been discussing - aesthetic)
 - **modernity** (philosophical, political ideas)
 - Postmodernism
 - Postmodernity
- Let's look at the differences before going on to Habermas ...



Modernism & postmodernism: in Art

- **Modernism:** Artistic movements arising in the early twentieth century (Joyce, Lawrence, Woolf; Cubism, Surrealism, etc) that experimented with new ways of narrating & presenting a fuller range of experience.
- **Postmodernism:** Artistic movements, primarily arising post World War II, that outdo the experimentalism of modern art and are playfully subversive of modernism's relative seriousness. Postmodernist art tends to be anti-elitist and to make use of an even wider/eclectic/ironic range of materials and styles than modernism.



Modernity & postmodernity

- **Modernity:** Concerned with progress and change, and tends to produce systems of thought that look for universal answers to human (all) social problems (e.g. as reflected in competing political movements).
- **Postmodernity:** often challenges modern ways of organizing thought, knowledge, and society: for example Baudrillard's critique of the distinction between the key Marxian categories of use value and exchange value.



Barry's "landmarks" in postmodernism (85)

- On pp. 85-90, Barry mentions a number of critics who have contributed to the construction of the postmodernist approach.
- **Jürgen Habermas** was a German theorist (philosopher)
- Habermas' arguments are mainly about the role and purpose of science rather than art.
- "Modernity – An Incomplete Project" (1980)
- Events like French revolution brought us into "modernity".



The Modern Period according to Habermas



Basic ideas of the Enlightenment (humanism)

1. There is a stable, coherent, knowable self. This self is conscious, rational, autonomous, and universal.
2. This self knows itself and the world through reason.
3. The mode of knowing produced by the objective rational self is "science," which can provide universal truths about the world.
4. The knowledge produced by science is "truth," and is eternal.
5. The knowledge/truth produced by science (by the rational objective knowing self) will always lead toward progress and perfection.



Basic ideas of the Enlightenment (humanism)

- 6. Reason is the ultimate judge of what is true..
- 7. In a world governed by reason, the true will always be the same as the good and the right (and the beautiful)
- 8. Science is neutral and objective; scientists, those who produce scientific knowledge through their unbiased rational capacities, must be free to follow the laws of reason, and not be motivated by other concerns (such as money or power).
- 9. Language, or the mode of expression used in producing and disseminating knowledge, must be rational also.



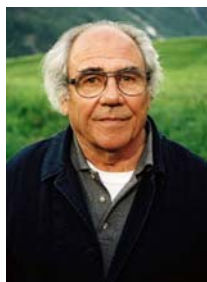
Habermas and the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment "project" is the fostering of this belief that a break with tradition – coupled with reason and logic – can bring about a solution to the problems of society (Barry, 85).

- This outlook is what Habermas means by **modernity**
- Habermas: this faith in reason and the possibility of progress has survived into the 20th century
- Enlightenment thinkers firmly believed in progress through science - it saw the world as a place to be exploited and changed through technology.
- Habermas concentrates more on its successes.
- Habermas: Science has been over-privileged as a source and vehicle for knowledge. In his mind, science has yet to come to terms with the exploitation of nature.

Jean Baudrillard (1929-)

- "Perhaps the world's second worst crime is boredom. The first is being a bore."
- "There is nothing funny about Halloween. This sarcastic festival reflects, rather, an infernal demand for revenge by children on the adult world."
- "What you have to do is enter the fiction of America, enter America as fiction. It is, indeed, on this fictive basis that it dominates the world."

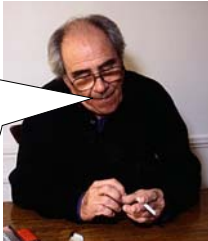




Jean Baudrillard (1929-)

- One of the most interesting of the postmodernist critics is Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard is most known for his theory of “the loss of the real.” Let him explain:

Dear students. Because of TV and all that advertising, we don't know any more what is real and what is imagined. What is reality? What is an illusion? Am I holding a cigarette or a piece of chalk? Because of this, we live in a hyperreality – no distinctions between reality and illusions.





Jean Baudrillard

- Baudrillard is a Social Theorist
- His work is regarded as extreme post-modernist
 - Post-modernism argument runs that economic and technological conditions of our age have given rise to a decentralized, media-dominated society in which ideas are simulacra and only inter-referential representations and copies of each other, with no real original meaning
- His arguments consistently draw on the notion that systems of significance and meaning are only understandable in terms of their interrelation
- What is “real” has therefore been reduced to the self-referential signs of it's existence



Jean Baudrillard (1929-)

- His idea is a kind of matrix without an original.
- Such as Disneyland, where cartoon characters (without any fundamental origin) are presented as real – this he calls the **hyperreal**.
 - Barry's examples give some idea of what this means.
 - He is most interested in the “agenda-setting powers of mass media”, where he claims that the media can create a “reality”, report on it and allow readers and viewers to inhabit it.
 - Disneyland is simply another example of this – by sleight of hand, it thereby privileges the imaginary and helps us to believe that what is outside it is actually real.



Simulacra and Simulation

- Published in 1981, is a philosophical thesis by Jean Baudrillard
- Discussion of images and signs and how they relate to present day
- Claims society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs
 - What we know as “real” is actually a simulation of reality
- Baudrillard describes a world saturated by imagery.
- This simulation of the real surpasses the real world and thus becomes hyperreal
- He substitutes “representation” with “simulation”.



Definitions from Wikipedia

- **Simulacrum** (plural: -crums, -cra), from the Latin *simulacrum* which means "likeness, similarity", is first recorded in the English language in the late 16th century, used to describe a representation of another thing, such as a statue or a painting, especially of a god; by the late 19th century, it had gathered a secondary association of inferiority: an image without the substance or qualities of the original
- A **simulation** is an imitation of some real thing, state of affairs, or process. The act of simulating something generally entails representing certain key characteristics or behaviours of a selected physical or abstract system.

Jean Baudrillard (1929-)

“In the book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981/1995), Baudrillard gave the term a specific meaning in the context of semiotics, extended from its common one: a copy of a copy which has been so dissipated in its relation to the original that it can no longer be said to be a copy. The *simulacrum*, therefore, stands on its own as a copy without a model. For example, the cartoon Betty Boop was based on singer Helen Kane. Kane, however, rose to fame imitating Annette Hanshaw. Hanshaw and Kane have fallen into relative obscurity, while Betty Boop remains an icon of the flapper.”

(From Wikipedia)



Jean Baudrillard (1929-)

- For Baudrillard, the problem is that people go on speaking as if there is a real, or an illusion, or opposites. So when something is spoken about that seems real it is a "simulacrum", that is a fake of the real that isn't there.
- **Simulacrum** from the Latin *simulare*, "to make like, to put on an appearance of"





Hyperreality and simulation

Baudrillard's philosophy centers on the concepts of "hyperreality" and "simulation." These terms refer to the virtual or unreal nature of contemporary culture in an age of mass communication and mass consumption.

- We live in a world dominated by simulated experience and feelings. We only experience prepared realities – edited war footage, meaningless acts of terrorism, the destruction of cultural values and the substitution of "referendum."
- "The very definition of the real has become: that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction. . . The real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced: that is the hyperreal... which is entirely in simulation."

Baudrillard's four stages for the sign

Where Plato saw two steps of reproduction — faithful and intentionally distorted (simulacrum) — Baudrillard sees four:

1. Image is the reflection of a basic reality (original)
2. Image masks and perverts a basic reality (evil)
3. Image masks the absence of a basic reality (plays at being an appearance)
4. Image bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum



Baudrillard's four stages - 1

- FIRST, the sign represents a basic reality (Barry, 87)
- Monotony, repetitiveness, factory-like buildings.
- "As signs, then, Lowry's paintings seem to represent the basic reality of the place they depict."





Stage 1 images




- The above image is the front cover of Centrica's 2005 Annual Report
- It is accompanied by a description stating it is a company farm (wind) in Aberdeenshire and the words: "Investing in our customers' future"
- It is a stage 1 image – unaltered and a reflection of reality. However, if it was not the case that Centrica was using wind-power it could become a stage 2 image!




Baudrillard's four stages - 2

- SECOND stage for the sign: it misrepresents or distorts the reality behind it,
- "Glamourised representations Wet pavements reflecting the bright lights of dockside shops ..."
- A "romantic and glamourised image, so the sign can be said to misrepresent what it shows."






Images in Annual Reports



- A typical image of Directors in the Annual Reports – all smiling
- Perhaps a stage 2 image?




Baudrillard's four stages - 3

- **THIRD stage** for the sign, disguises the fact that there is no corresponding reality underneath.
- René Magritte's surrealist painting (see next slide)
- Barry: "What is shown beyond the window is not reality, against which the painting within the painting can be judged, but simply another sign, another depiction, which has no more authority or reality than the painting within the painting (which is actually a representation of a representation)" (Barry, 88).
- (Remember Betty Boop)
- Remember Disneyland (Barry, p. 89)

René Magritte (1935):

"This is how we see the world. We see it as being outside ourselves even though it is only a mental representation of what we experience on the inside."



Stage 3: Baudrillard's example



- "Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America, which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real."



Baudrillard's four stages - 4

- FOURTH stage for the sign: it bears no relation to any reality at all.
- A completely abstract painting (Rothko) can illustrate it (Barry, 88).
- This is **the level of the clone**, not equivalent to man, but rather a hyperreal variant.





Baudrillard - Simulation

Examples of Simulacra:

- Theme Parks
- Fake "Irish Pubs"
- American Coffee-houses
- Media Examples of Simulacra
 - Viewers are becoming "armchair travellers"
 - Knowledge of the world comes through the screen
 - Travel Programmes
 - Nature Documentaries
 - Confessional TV – Jerry Springer
 - Soap Operas – characters come to represent real people to the viewers



Baudrillard

- NB: Baudrillard's announcement that the Gulf War never happened – "televisual virtual reality."
- What about the Holocaust (recent discussions)?
- **The third sign is most important:** conceals an "absence" (there may be copies of an original that does not exist)
- **Important:**
- "Within postmodernism, the distinction between what is real and what is simulated collapses: **everything is a model or an image**, all is **surface without depth**; this is the *hyperreal*, as Baudrillard calls it" (Barry, 89).



For Wednesday

1. Read *Beginning Theory*. Part 4: "Postmodernism" (pp. 87-95).
2. Read the extract from *Waiting for Godot*
3. Read *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys.