



AMERICAN POSTMODERNISM

Central Concepts

- An assault upon traditional definitions of narrative, particularly those that created coherence or closure
- The theme of the suburbanization of America, the decline of the city, and apocalyptic visions of the devastated city
- Fascination about how the public life of the nation intersects with the private lives of its citizens

Central Concepts

- Questioning of any belief system that claims universality or transcendence
- The ability to surpass the boundaries of human comprehension
- The proliferation of the nonfiction novel:
 - Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968)
 - Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971)

Central Concepts

- A genre that "extends the experiments of the New Journalism and further undermines the distinctions between journalism and literature, fact and fiction"
- The creation of "ruptures, gaps, and ironies that continually remind the reader that an author is present" and which demonstrate "how individuals use fictional constructions to make order of real-life events"

Modernism/Postmodernism

- Continued the fundamental philosophical assumptions of modernism, its tendency toward historical discontinuity, alienation, asocial individualism
- Tendency to use solipsism, a philosophical perspective that holds that one can only truly know oneself and that all other experiences are potentially false since they are filtered through the senses

Modernism/postmodernism

- Relied on existentialism -a philosophy that claims that the individual must make decisions concerning right and wrong, or the self without access to universal truths
- The tendency of the modernist to construct intricate forms, to interweave symbols elaborately, to create works of art that, however much they oppose some established present order, create within themselves an ordered universe, have given way since the 1960s

Philosophy of Postmodernism

- Denial of order, to the presentation of highly fragmented universes in the created world of art, and to critical theories that are a form of phenomenology
 - a highly subjective contemporary philosophy which argues that the meaning of an object, a concept separate from its existence, is inherently related to the consciousness of the person perceiving it

Philosophical Roots

- These philosophies are rarely the explicit subject matter of either modernist or postmodernist literature
- Many prominent works by authors from both periods engage in themes that relate to these philosophies indirectly

Postmodernist Critics

- Jacques Lacan
- The members of the Frankfurt School,
- Michel Foucault
- Roland Barthes
- Jacques Derrida
- Academically trained in philosophy, used substantially the works of philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Карл Маркс, Martin Heidegger, or G.W.F. Hegel

Philosophical Roots

- Although the application of philosophical ideas by the critics is often radically different from that of the writers producing postmodern literature, postmodernism's inherent philosophical foundation is almost undisputed

The Frankfurt School

- One of the most explicit linkages between philosophy and postmodernism
- The Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt in Germany beginning in 1924
- Worked in art history, linguistics, philosophy, economics, psychology, and theology to interpret art.

The Frankfurt School

- Established a radically new method of analyzing literature:
- Moved away from aesthetics (the study of beauty)
- Towards explanations that took social, psychological, and especially economic factors into consideration

Jean-Francois Lyotard

- The death of the ‘grand narratives’ of Enlightenment
- Preoccupation with *petit histoire*
- The new computerized order
- Schizophrenic reality:
- Deleuze and Guattari

Name

- Used in architecture in the 1960s, Frederic Jameson
- In literature began to be used instead of less satisfactory labels such as "black *humor*" or "fabulism"
- Barth's essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967) on Borges' works
- Viewed either as a *statement* of purpose or as a defense of the principles of that very same order they tried to overturn

Members

- Theodor W. Adorno
- Georg Lukacs
- Max Horkheimer
- Herbert Marcuse
- Walter Benjamin
- Erich Fromm
- Became known as the first "critical theorists"

Primary Concern

- To find answers to the crisis of the spirit that modernist artists revealed in their work
- The guiding thread of all of their analyses was the diagnosis of the ruined, pathological world of the early 20th century
- Analyzed under the triumphant twin shadows of full-blown industrial capitalism and National socialism

Postmodernist Writers

- John Barth
- Thomas Pynchon
- Kurt Vonnegut Jr.
- Joseph Heller
- Norman Mailor
- Don DeLillo
- Donald Barthelme
- John Ashberry
- Paul Auster

Ethnicity and Postmodernism

- African American:
 - Toni Morrison
 - Toni Cade Bambara
 - Alice Walker
- Native American
 - Louis Erdrich
 - Sherman Alexie

Ethnicity and Postmodernism

- Hispanic
- Sandra Cisneros
- Gloria Anzaldua
- Asian American
- Amy Tan
- David Hwang

Influences

- Influenced by Joyce and Faulkner, both of whom have, at times, been labeled with the awkward *term* "prepostmodernists" to emphasize their direct influence on postmodernism
- Also less traditionally acclaimed sources such as Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges, Irish novelist Flann O'Brien, Russian emigre Vladimir Nabokov, and Irish/French playwright Samuel Beckett