POSTMODERNISM AND POSTMODERN THEORY

It is useful to **distinguish between "postmodernism," those cultural and theoretical works that share certain postmodern traits or that examine the postmodern age, and "postmodernity," the historical age in which we live**. See postmodernity for those elements that critical theorists see as characterizing our current postmodern age. Here, I will concentrate first on postmodern cultural works and then postmodern theory.

One of the problems in dealing with postmodernism is in distinguishing it from modernism. In many ways, postmodern artists and theorists continue the sorts of experimentation that we can also find in modernist works, including the use of self-consciousness, parody, irony, fragmentation, generic mixing, ambiguity, and the breakdown between high and low forms of expression. In this way, postmodern artistic forms can be seen as an extension of modernist experimentation; and, indeed, some theorists do not read a break between the two. Jean-François Lyotard goes so far as to argue that "A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant" (1991: 79). However, others prefer to represent the move into postmodernism as a more radical break, one that is a result of new ways of representing the world, including television, film, and the computer. Many date postmodernity from the 1960s when we witnessed the rise of postmodern architecture; some point to the 1950s, as does Lyotard in his Postmodern Condition (1991: 3); still others prefer to see the Second World War as the radical break from modernity that ushers in the postmodern, since the horrors of the Holocaust revealed at this time how "progressive" advancements like democracy, science, higher education, high culture, a modern judicial system, and religion failed to protect Weimar Germany from the events of the 1930s and 40s. The very term "postmodern" was, in fact, first used to describe our current age in the 1940s by the historian, Arnold Toynbee, though he looked backwards to the cusp of what we now term the modern period as the point when we first moved from modernism (which he instead dates 1475–1875) into post- modernism. See my Introduction to this book for the logic of Toynbee's proposed historical trajectory.

Some of the things that distinguish postmodern aesthetic work from modernist work are as follows:

(1) Extreme self-reflexivity. We find this in modernist cultural works, but postmodernists tend to be more playful, even irreverent, which has allowed the technique to enter into mainstream cultural works, for example the way the Scream series of movies has characters debating the generic rules behind the horror film. In modernism, self-reflexivity tended to be used by "high" artists in difficult works; in postmodernism, self-reflexive strategies can be found in both high art and everything from Seinfeld to music videos. In postmodern architecture, this effect is achieved by keeping visible internal structures and engineering elements (pipes, support beams, building materials, etc.).

(2) Irony and parody. Connected to the former point, is the tendency of postmodern artists, theorists, and culture to be playful or parodic. The art works of Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein are good examples. Pop culture and media advertising also abound with

examples; indeed, shows or films will often step outside of mimetic representation altogether in order to parody themselves in mid-stride. See pastiche and parody.

(3) A breakdown between high and low cultural forms. Whereas some modernists experimented with this same breakdown, even the modernists that played with pop forms (e.g., James Joyce and T. S. Eliot) tended to be extremely difficult to follow in their experimentations. Postmodernists, by contrast, often employ pop and mass-produced objects in more immediately understandable ways, even if their goals are still often complex (e.g., Andy Warhol's commentary on mass production and on the commercial aspects of "high" art through his famous, exact reproduction of a set of Cambell's Soup cans). We should, however, keep in mind that Warhol is here clearly following in the modernist tradition of "ready-mades," initiated by Marcel Duchamp, who used every- day objects in his art exhibits (including, for example, a urinal for his work, Fountain).

(4) Retro pastiche. Postmodernists and postmodern culture tend to be especially fascinated with styles and fashions from the past, which they will often use completely out of their original con- text. Postmodern architects for example will juxtapose baroque, medieval, and modern elements in the same room or building. In pop culture, think of the endlessly recycled television shows of the past that are then given new life on the big screen. Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard tend to read this tendency as a symptom of our loss of connection with historical temporality (see pastiche, schizophrenia, simulacra).

(5) A questioning of grand narratives. Lyotard sees the breakdown of the narratives that formerly legitimized the status quo as an important aspect of the postmodern condition; in fact, he defines "postmodern" in the very first pages of his Postmodern Condition "as incredulity toward metanarratives" (1991: xxiv). Of course, modernists also questioned metanarratives, including such tradi- tional concepts as law, religion, subjectivity, and nationhood; what appears to distinguish postmodernism is that such ques- tioning is no longer particularly associated with an avant-garde intelligentsia. Postmodern artists will employ pop and mass culture in their critiques and pop culture itself tends to play with traditional concepts of temporality, religion, and subjectivity. Think of the popularity of queer issues in various media forms or the tendency of, say, Madonna videos to question traditional Christianity ("Like a Prayer"), gender divisions ("What It Feels like for a Girl"), capitalism ("Material Girl"), and so on. Whether such pop deconstructions have any teeth is one of the debates still raging among postmodern theorists.

(6) Visuality and the simulacrum working against temporality. Given the predominance of visual media (TV, film, media advertising, the computer), both postmodern art and postmodern culture gravitate towards visual (often even two-dimensional) forms, as in the "cartoons" of Roy Lichtenstein. A good example of this, and of the breakdown between "high" and "low" forms, is Art Spiegelman's Maus, a Pulitzer-prize-winning rendition of Vladek Spiegelman's experiences in the Holocaust, which Art (his son) chooses to present through the medium of comics or what is now commonly referred to as the "graphic novel." Another symptom of this tendency is a general breakdown in narrative linearity and temporality. Many point to the style of MTV videos as a good example. As a result, Baudrillard and others have argued (for example, through the notion of the simulacrum) that we have lost all connection to reality or history. This diagnosis may help to explain why we are so fascinated with reality tele- vision. Pop culture also keeps coming back to the idea that the line separating reality and representation

or the real world and the dream world has broken down (Wag the Dog, Dark City, the Matrix, the Truman Show, Inception, etc.).

(7) Late capitalism. There is also a general sense that the world has been so taken over by the values of capitalist acquisition that alternatives no longer exist. One symptom of this fear is the predominance of paranoia narratives in pop culture (Blade Runner, X-Files, The Matrix, Minority Report). This fear is, of course, aided by advancements in technology, especially surveillance technology, which creates the sense that we are always being watched. The global nature of multinational capitalism (see Global Studies) also contributes to the sense that there is no clear adversary that one can combat (hence Jameson's insistence on the importance of cognitive maps and utopic thinking).

(8) Disorientation. MTV culture is sometimes cited as an example as is postmodern architecture, which attempts to disorient the subject entering its space. Another example may be the popularity of films that seek to disorient the viewer completely through the revelation of a truth that changes everything that came before (The Sixth Sense, The Others, Unbreakable, Memento, The Matrix, even The Lego Movie).

Theorists of postmodernism tend to respond to postmodern aesthetic work and to the postmodern age more generally in two opposing ways: one camp tends to paint the current situation as dystopic; another camp is celebratory of postmodern aesthetic work and theory, arguing that they succeed in safeguarding us from the darker elements of the postmodern condition.

On the dystopic side, Jameson, in his magisterial work, **Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991**), has offered us a particularly influential analysis of our current postmodern condition. Like Baudrillard, whose concept of the simulacrum he adopts**, Jameson is highly critical of our current historical situation; indeed, he paints a rather dystopic picture of the present, which he associates, in particular, with a loss of our connection to history**. What we are left with is a fascination with the present that approximates schizo- phrenia. **According to Jameson, postmodernity has transformed the historical past into a series of emptied-out stylizations (what Jameson terms pastiche)** that can then be commodified and consumed. The result is the threatened victory of capitalist thinking over all other forms of thought.

Jameson contrasts this postmodern situation with the modernist situation that has been superseded. Whereas modernism still believed in "some residual zones of 'nature' or 'being,' of the old, the older, the archaic" and still believed that one could "do something to that nature and work at transforming that 'referent'" (1991: ix), postmodernity has lost a sense of any distinction between the Real and Culture. For Jameson, postmodernity amounts to "an immense dilation of [culture's] sphere (the sphere of commodities), an immense and historically original acculturation of the Real" (x). Whereas "modernism was still minimally and tendentially the critique of the commodity and the effort to make it transcend itself," postmodernity "is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process" (x). That apparent victory of commodification over all spheres of life marks postmodernity's reliance on the "cultural logic of late capitalism."

Baudrillard has proven to be an important influence on post- modern theorists and artists, making his presence felt from Jameson's Postmodernism to the Wachowskis' The Matrix. Like

Jameson, Baudrillard paints a rather bleak picture of our current postmodern condition, arguing that we have lost contact with the "real" in various ways, that we have nothing left but a continuing fascination with its disappearance. His vision is highly dystopic. In Baudrillard's version of postmodernity, there is hardly any space for opposition or resistance because of the supreme hegemony of the controlling system: "Everywhere, always, the system is too strong: hegemonic" (1994: 163). Baudrillard's vision, then, is one of supreme nihilism and melancholia: "Melancholia is the inherent quality of the mode of the disappearance of meaning. ... And we are all melancholic" (162). The problem is that "The system is itself also nihilistic, in the sense that it has the power to pour everything, including what denies it, into indifference" (163). When reading Baudrillard on postmodernity, one sometimes gets the sense that we have already lost, that Baudrillard is merely pointing out the various ways that consumer society and the simulacrum have won in their colonization of all "reality." The only way out is radical violence and revolution.

In contrast to this dystopic strain, other postmodern theorists see postmodern strategies as valuable, even liberatory. Lyotard argues that what distinguishes the postmodern world is that people have "lost the nostalgia" for grand narratives and, so, are willing to test the boundaries of all existing language games. "Postmodern science," for example, "by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, 'fracta,' cata- strophes, and pragmatic paradoxes—is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable, and paradoxical," thus "changing the meaning of the word knowledge" (1991: 60).

Linda Hutcheon does not deny that postmodernity and post- modernism are "inextricably related" (1989: 26); however, she wants to maintain the possibility that postmodernism's cultural works could be successful in achieving a critical distance from the problems of our contemporary age. Where Hutcheon departs from critics of post- modernity is by underscoring the ways that postmodern cultural works engage in effective political critiques of the postmodern world around us: "critique is as important as complicity in the response of cultural postmodernism to the philosophical and socio-economic realities of postmodernity: postmodernism here is not so much what Jameson sees as a systemic form of capitalism as the name given to cultural practices which acknowledge their inevitable implication in capitalism, without relinquishing the power or will to intervene critically in it" (26). Hutcheon therefore explores a wide variety of works from various genres and media to illustrate how the cultural works of postmodernism effect their critique of the present.

Although Hutcheon acknowledges that postmodernism borrows some strategies from modernism (e.g., self-consciousness and self- reflexivity), she argues that postmodernism does differ from modernism in important ways and that it is this difference from the modernist project that exemplifies the critical potential of postmodern cultural work. For one, Hutcheon points out that postmodern works tend to be critical of "modernism's elitist and sometimes almost totalitarian modes of effecting ... 'radical change'—from those of Mies van der Rohe to those of Pound and Eliot, not to mention Céline" (1989: 26–27). Hutcheon points out how modernists pursued radical change without acknowledging the price that must be paid for the more extremist positions assumed by modernist authors (e.g., fascism, futurism, primitivism, anarchism, etc.). She also questions how effective elitist modernist projects could ever be as political critique.

If there is one thing that especially distinguishes postmodernism from modernism, according to Hutcheon, it is postmodernism's relation to mass culture. Whereas modernism "defined itself through the exclusion of mass culture and was driven, by its fear of contamination by the consumer culture burgeoning around it, into an elitist and exclusive view of aesthetic formalism and the autonomy of art" (1989: 28), postmodern works are not afraid to renegotiate "the different possible relations (of complicity and critique) between high and popular forms of culture" (28). In The Politics of Postmodernism (1989), she gives postmodern photography as a perfect example, since it "moves out of the hermeticism and narcissism that is always possible in self- referentiality and into the cultural and social world, a world bombarded daily with photographic images" (29). Those contemporary works that are particularly autonomous and auto-referential Hutcheon tends to call "late modernist" (27) rather than postmodernist because, as she argues, "These formalist extremes are precisely what are called into question by the historical and social grounding of postmodern fiction and photography" (27). The other techniques that Hutcheon associates with postmodern cultural works include: the de-naturalization of the natural (i.e., a refusal to present "what is really constructed meaning as something inherent in that which is being represented" [1989: 49]); the questioning of the distinction between fiction and history (thus subscribing to the poststructuralist contention that so-called "objective," empiricist, positivist history is, in fact, just as affected by generic and ideological constructs or the artificial structures of narrative form as is fiction—Hutcheon coins the term historio- graphic metafiction for postmodern works that mix history and fiction); a rejection of grand narratives (in favor of what Lyotard terms petits récits or little stories— multiple and even contradictory histories rather than "History"); an acknowledgement of the present's influence on our knowledge of the past; a recognition of our reliance on textuality (documents, written histories, etc.) and on the limited perspectives of individuals in understanding the past or even any event in the present; and the de-naturalization of gender and sex. Along with the breakdown between high and low cultural forms, the most important strategy that for Hutcheon distinguishes postmodern aesthetic works from modernist works is parody. According to Hutcheon, such strategies allow postmodern works to maintain a continual and effective critique of postmodernity without, at the same time, ever falling prey to the belief that one can ever completely escape complicity with the ideologies that determine our sense of reality in the postmodern condition.

Some theorists go even further in celebrating aspects of post- modernism. Donna Harraway for example adopts irony as a "rhetorical strategy and a political method" (1991: 149) in her turn to the cyborg as a postmodern strategy and a model for the program of "socialist- feminism." Whereas "[f]rom one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet," Harraway posits another perspective from which "a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of per- manently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (1991: 154). For her, the cyborg exemplifies a laudatory postmodern self that breaks boundaries and no longer believes in traditional binary oppositions.

Further reading: Baudrillard 1988, 1994, 1998; Caˇlinescu 1987; Harraway 1991; Harvey 1989; Hassan 1987; Hutcheon 1988, 1989; Jameson 1991; Jenks 1991; Lyotard 1991, 1993; Mandel 1978; Rosenau 1992; H. J. Silverman, 1990; B. S. Turner 1994; Vattimo 1988.

POSTMODERNITY

Linda Hutcheon is very careful to distinguish between "postmodernity" and "postmodernism." The former she understands to mean "the designation of a social and philosophical period or 'condition'" (1989: 23), specifically the period or "condition" in which we now live. The latter she associates with cultural expressions of various sorts, including "architecture, literature, photography, film, painting, video, dance, music" (1) and so on (see postmodernism). Indeed, Hutcheon argues that the reason why critics have been led to such disparate opinions about the "postmodern" is because of the conflation of these two disparate if associated domains (socio-historical on the one hand, aesthetic on the other hand). By distinguishing between the two domains, Hutcheon offers a critique of Fredric Jameson's influential attack against the postmodern: "The slippage from postmodernity to postmodernism is constant and deliberate in Jameson's work: for him postmodernism is the 'cultural logic of late capitalism'" (25). Jameson tends to see postmodern art and theory as merely reinforcing the many things he finds distressing in postmodern culture, particularly the conditions of multinational late capitalism. I should add that Hutcheon does in fact agree with other critics about many of the elements that char- acterize our current moment in time or postmodernity.

See postmodernism for an articulation of the differences between some theorists of postmodern culture. In this section, I will lay out some of the elements that, according to postmodern critical theorists, characterize postmodernity:

(1) A world dominated by the logic of capitalism and consumerism, which has no regard for the rights of oppressed laborers or the ravagement of the natural world. A culture of consumption has so much taken over our ways of thinking that all reality is filtered through the logic of exchange value and advertising. As Jean Baudrillard writes, "Our society thinks itself and speaks itself as a consumer society. As much as it consumes anything, it consumes itself as consumer society, as idea. Advertising is the triumphal paean to that idea" (1998: 193).

(2) The proliferation of trashy, kitsch, mass-market products, which, according to Baudrillard, contribute to our society of simulation and consumerism.

(3) A society increasingly under the scrutiny of government agencies that insist on casting their disciplining gaze ever deeper into our private lives.

(4) An increasing reliance on technologies that separate us from other people and the natural world, thus feeding into our sense of atomism and unease.

(5) An emphasis on flat, spatial representations (screens, statistics, ads) that serve to sever us from our former sense of temporality and history. The media are an important part of this characteristic of postmodernity. The fact that movies and television (the media) keep turning to history and to various "retro" recreations of the past is merely a symptom (a reaction formation, Sigmund Freud would say) for the loss of history. Indeed, such media works continue the process of forgetting history; as Baudrillard writes of the NBC miniseries Holocaust, "One no longer makes the Jews pass through the crematorium or the gas chamber, but through the sound track and image track, through the universal screen and the microprocessor. Forgetting, annihilation, finally achieves its aesthetic dimension in this way— it is achieved in retro, finally elevated here to a mass level" (1994: 49). Television, film, and the Internet separate us from the real even as they seek to reproduce it more fully or faithfully:

"The hyperreality of com- munication and of meaning. More real than real, that is how the real is abolished" (Baudrillard 1994: 81).

(6) A culture increasingly dominated by simulacra (computer images, commercial advertising, Hollywood idealizations, commercial mass reproduction, televisuality, and technological replications of all stripes), thus contributing to our sense of separation from the real.

(7) The loss of history. As Baudrillard puts it, "History is our lost referential, that is to say our myth." He goes on to say that "The great event of this period, the great trauma, is this decline of strong referentials, these death pangs of the real and of the rational that open onto an age of simulation" (1994: 43).

(8) Ironic distance from the real world. Although Hutcheon believes this distance can be positive when turned into parody, Jameson and Baudrillard see it as a symptom of the postmodern condition. Like Jameson, Baudrillard argues that the parodic, self-conscious, self-reflexive elements of pop-cultural forms only aid in their capitalist complicity:

This false distance is present everywhere: in spy films, in Godard, in modern advertising, which uses it continually as a cultural allusion. It is not really clear in the end whether this "cool" smile is the smile of humour or that of commercial complicity. This is also the case with pop, and its smile ultimately encapsulates all its ambiguity: it is not the smile of critical distance, but the smile of collusion. (1998: 121)

(9) Secondary orality. Whereas literacy rates had been rising steadily from the introduction of print through the modern period, postmodern society has seen a reversal in this trend as more and more people are now functionally illiterate, relying instead on an influx of oral media sources: television, film, radio, etc. The culture still very much relies on print to create these media outlets (hence the term secondary orality); however, it is increasingly only a professional, well-educated class that has access to full print and computer literacy. An ever-larger percentage of the population merely ingests orally the media that is being produced.

Further reading: Baudrillard 1988, 1994, 1998; Caˇlinescu 1987; Harvey 1989; Hassan 1987; Hutcheon 1988, 1989; Jameson 1991; Lyotard 1991, 1993; Mandel 1978; Rosenau 1992; Turner 1994; Vattimo 1988.

INTERTEXTUALITY

"Intertextuality" was coined by Julia Kristeva in her effort to understand Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and to reconcile it with semiotics. As she explains in Desire in Language (1980), "By introducing the status of the word as a minimal structural unit, Bakhtin situates the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them" (65). By this formulation, Kristeva explains, any text— including subjectivity itself— "is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another." Kristeva therefore posits the "notion of intertextuality," which "replaces that of intersubjectivity" (66). The term was subsequently used widely by critical theorists to understand the "textuality" that wove together discourses from across periods and media. Michael Riffaterre in Semiotics of Poetry (1978) and Fictional Truth (1990) influentially reworks the concept in making sense of a given work's "subtext," which, he argues, functions like a work's unconscious: "This unconscious of the text is represented by

the symbolism of the subtext and by the intertext this symbolism mobilizes" (1990: xvii). A few early theorists of the World Wide Web adopted the concept of intertextuality to make sense of hypertextual links (e.g., Landow 1997); see Digital Humanities.

Further reading: G. Allen 2000; Clayton and Rothstein 1991; Landow 1997; Orr 2003; Riffaterre 1978, 1990.

HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

Linda Hutcheon uses this term in her work to distinguish a particular kind of postmodern work. As she explains in A Poetics of Postmodernism (1988), by historiographic metafiction "I mean those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages: The French Lieutenant's Woman, Midnight's Children, Ragtime, Legs, G., Famous Last Words" (5). In such work, a "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (5). In what Hutcheon sees as prototypical postmodern fashion, historigraphic metafiction does not outright reject the elements it critiques (e.g., referentiality, the subject, grand narratives, ideo- logy) but rather "always works within conventions in order to subvert them" (5). For example, such work does not "deny the existence of the past" but rather questions "whether we can ever know that past other than through its textualized remains" (20), thus questioning the very distinction between fiction and history: "The problematizing of the nature of historical knowledge, in novels like this, points both to the need to separate and to the danger of separating fiction and history as narrative genres" (111). Such work is historical but also political and often employs the strategy of parody to achieve its effects. Historiographic metafiction also tends to "bridge the gap between élite and popular art" (20), often by ironically parodying both high and low art forms: "as typically postmodernist contradictory texts, novels like these parodically use and abuse the conventions of both popular and élite literature, and do so in such a way that they can actually use the invasive culture industry to challenge its own commodification processes from within" (20). Through such maneuvers and contradictions, such postmodern fiction "disturbs readers, forcing them to scrutinize their own values and beliefs, rather than pandering to or satisfying them" (45).

Further reading: Hutcheon 1988, 1989.

PARODY (PARODIC)

According to Linda Hutcheon, one of the main features distinguishing postmodernism from modernism is the fact that it "takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement" (1989: 1). One way of creating this double or contradictory stance on any statement is the use of parody, for example, citing a convention only to make fun of it. As Hutcheon explains, "**Parody—often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality—is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders" (93).** Unlike Fredric Jameson, who considers such postmodern parody as a symptom of the age, one way in which we have lost our connection to the past and to effective political critique, Hutcheon argues that "through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both con- tinuity and difference" (93). Hutcheon thus sets herself against the prevailing view among many postmodern theorists: "The prevailing interpretation

is that postmodernism offers a value-free, decorative, de-historicized quotation of past forms and that this is a most apt mode for a culture like our own that is oversaturated with images" (94). Hutcheon insists, instead, that such an ironic stance on representation, genre, and ideology serves to politicize representation, illustrating the ways that interpretation is ultimately ideological. Parody de-doxifies, to use a favorite term of Hutcheon's; it unsettles all doxa, all accepted beliefs and ideologies. Rather than see this ironic stance as "some infinite regress into textuality" (95), Hutcheon values the resistance in such postmodern works to totalizing solutions for society's con- traditions; she values postmodernism's willingness to question all ideological positions, all claims to ultimate truth.

Such a willingness to play with society's contradictions means that "parody is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies" (1989: 101); however, this position does not mean that the critique is not effective: postmodern parody "may indeed be complicitous with the values it inscribes as well as subverts, but the subversion is still there" (106). **Hutcheon at one point likens such an ironic position to the convention of the inverted comma:**

It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or "highlight," and to subvert, or "subvert," and the mode is therefore a "knowing" and an ironic—or even "ironic"— one. Postmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale "nudging" commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern's initial concern is to denaturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as "natural" (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact "cultural"; made by us, not given to us. (1989: 1–2)

Through such an ironic play with society's contradictions, post- modern parody forces us to question a number of other traditional assumptions about the aesthetic product: (1) the notion of artistic originality and the cult of personality that surrounds the artist; (2) the assumption that subjectivity is stable, coherent, or self-determining; (3) the capitalist principles of ownership and property; (4) all contentions that meaning or identity is natural rather than artificial; (5) the belief that one can know history the way it really was (to echo a famous empiricist formulation of the German historian, Leopold von Ranke); (6) the belief that there is such a thing as a neutral or non- ideological position; and (7) the claim that one can secure an autonomous yet still effective realm for the aesthetic product, sepa- rate from either a mass audience or the mass market.

In such critiques, postmodern parody resembles modernist parody, which, Hutcheon acknowledges, can be found "in the writing of T. S. Eliot, Thomas Mann, and James Joyce and the painting of Picasso, Manet, and Magritte" (1989: 99). What postmodernist parody ques- tions, however, is the "Unacknowledged modernist assumptions about closure, distance, artistic autonomy, and the apolitical nature of repre- sentation" (99). It is more willing to break down distinctions between "reality" and "fiction," as in such disparate works as Christa Wolf's No Place on Earth, E. L. Doctorow's Ragtime, Timothy Findlay's Famous Last Words, and Woody Allen's Zelig (a postmodern generic trait that Hutcheon terms "historiographic metafiction"). It is also more willing to incorporate mass-market forms in its critique, with

photo- graphy and film serving as two especially noteworthy examples. As Hutcheon puts it, "Postmodernism is both academic and popular, élitist and accessible" (44). It is thanks to such contradictions that postmodernism can mount a successful critique. Whereas Jameson condemns all Hollywood film as contributing to the problems of late capitalism, Hutcheon offers another way of valuing such work: "Postmodern film does not deny that it is implicated in capitalist modes of production, because it knows it cannot. Instead it exploits its 'insider' position in order to begin a subversion from within, to talk to consumers in a capitalist society in a way that will get us where we live, so to speak" (1989: 114).

Parody is also an important concept in Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the carnivalesque tradition and on the dialogic and polyphonic novel: "Parody ... is an integral element in Menippean satire and in all carniva- lized genres in general. To the pure genres (epic, tragedy) parody is orga- nically alien; to the carnivalized genres it is, on the contrary, organically inherent" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 127). Bakhtin provides a particularly helpful chart of the various levels of dialogization in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (1984a), ranging from the most monologic discourse ("Direct, unme- diated discourse") through "discourse of a represented person" to various forms of what Bakhtin terms "double-voiced discourse": stylization, narration, parody, and "discourse with a sideward glance" (199).

Parody has also been an important genre and concept in the exami- nation of African-American and postcolonial literature, appearing for example in Mary Louise Pratt's notions of the contact zone and transculturation and in Homi Bhabha's theorization of hybridity, liminality, and mimicry, for which Bakhtin's work serves as touchstone. Also building on Bakhtin's work, Henry Louis Gates sees parody and pastiche as central elements of the African-American tradition of literature. As he explains in The Signifying Monkey (1988),

Black texts Signify upon other black texts in the tradition by engaging in what Ellison has defined as implicit formal critiques of language use, of rhetorical strategy. Literary Signification, then, is similar to parody and pastiche, wherein parody corresponds to what I am calling motivated Signification while pastiche would correspond roughly to unmotivated Signification. By motivation I do not mean to suggest the lack of intention, for parody and pastiche imply intention, ranging from severe critique to acknowl- edgment and placement within a literary tradition. Pastiche can imply either homage to an antecedent text or futility in the face of a seemingly indomitable mode of representation. Black writers Signify on each other's texts for all of these reasons, and the relations of Signification that obtain between and among black texts serve as a basis for a theory of formal revision in the Afro-American tradition. (xxvii)

In his concept of "Signifyin(g)," Gates seeks to establish an alternative relation to signification in the African-American tradition, one that always troubles the simple relation of signifier to signified by offering always a double-voiced, often parodic relation to monologic significa- tion: "Signifyin(g)," he writes, "is black double-voicedness" (51). Gates also illustrates that this tradition of parody and double-voicedness has existed in the non-European African and Caribbean tradition for centuries, thus completely separate from Bakhtin's exclusively Eurocentric understanding of the carnivalesque.

Further reading: Bakhtin 1981, 1984a, 1984b; Gates 1988; Hutcheon 1988, 1989.

PASTICHE

Fredric Jameson's concept of "pastiche" is usefully contrasted with Linda Hutcheon's understanding of postmodern parody. Whereas Hutcheon sees much to value in postmodern literature's stance of parodic self-reflexivity, seeing an implicit political critique and historical awareness in such parodic works, **Jameson characterizes postmodern parody as "blank parody" without any political bite.** According to Jameson, parody has, in the postmodern age, been replaced by pas- tiche: "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter" (1991: 17). Jameson sees this turn to "blank parody" as a falling off from modernism, where individual authors were particularly characterized by their individual, "inimitable" styles: "the Faulknerian long sentence, for example, with its breathless gerundives; Lawrentian nature imagery punctuated by testy colloquialism; Wallace Stevens's inveterate hypostasis of nonsubstantive parts of speech ('the intricate evasions of as')"; etc. (16). In postmodern pastiche, by contrast, "Modernist styles ... become postmodernist codes" (17), leaving us with nothing but "a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm" (17). Postmodern cultural productions therefore amount to "the cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and in general what Henri Lefebvre has called the increasing primacy of the 'neo'" (18).

In such a world of pastiche, we lose our connection to history, which gets turned into a series of styles and superseded genres, or simulacra: "The new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time" (1991: 18). In such a situation, "the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts" (18). We can no longer understand the past except as a repository of genres, styles, and codes ready for commodification.

Jameson points to a number of examples:

1. (1) **The way that postmodern architecture "randomly and without principle but with gusto cannibalizes all the architectural styles of the past and combines them in overstimulating ensembles"** (1991: 19).
2. (2) **The way nostalgia film or la mode rétro represents the past for us in hyperstylized ways** (the 1950s in George Lucas's American Graffiti; the Italian 1930s in Roman Polanski's Chinatown); in such works we approach "the 'past' through stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image, and '1930s-ness' or '1950s-ness' by the attributes of fashion" (1991: 19). **The "history of aesthetic styles" thus "displaces 'real' history" (20). Jameson sees this situation as a "symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way"** (21).

(3) **The way that postmodern historical novels (those works Hutcheon characterizes as "historiographic metafiction") represent the past through pop images of the past. Jameson gives E. L. Doctorow's Ragtime as a perfect example: "This historical novel can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only 'represent' our ideas and stereotypes about that past (which thereby at once becomes 'pop history')"** (1991: 25). In such works, according to Jameson, "we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach" (25).