



Postmodernism: Theory and Praxis

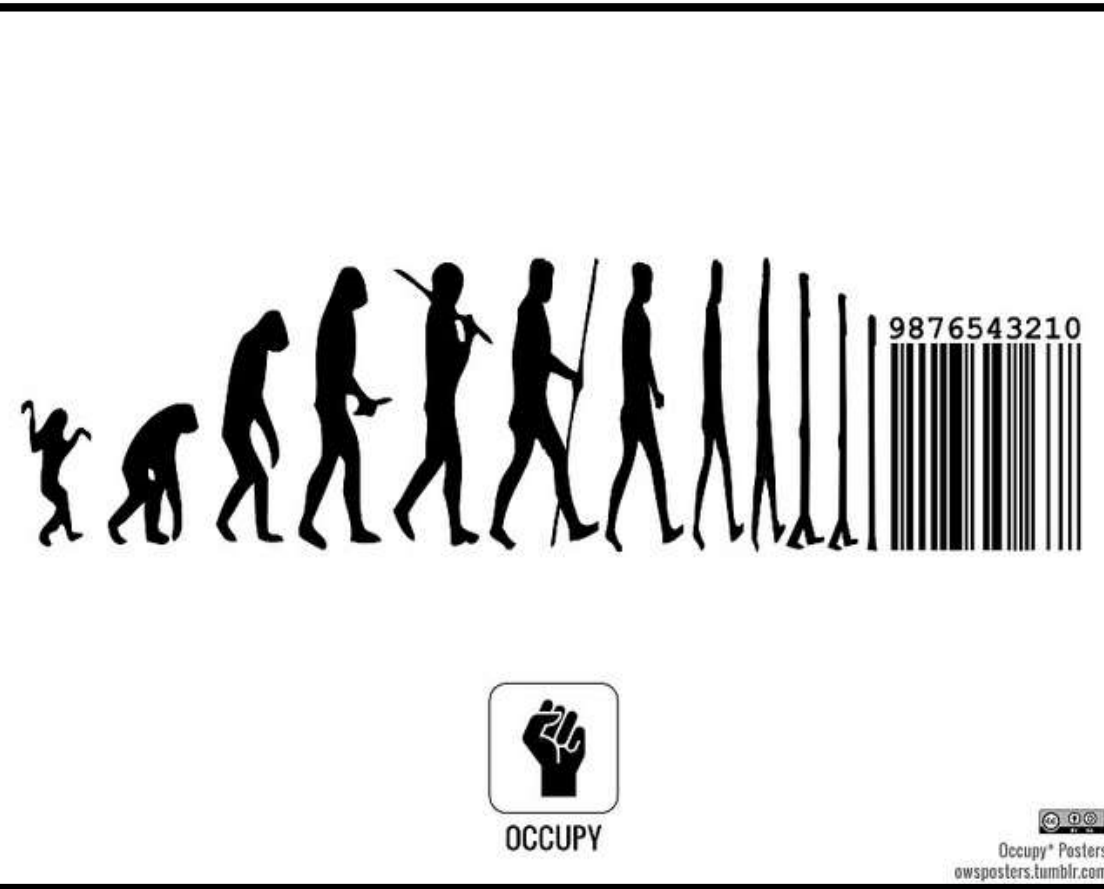
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The Postmodernist World



• Consumerism: “The things you own end up owning you”.

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- Commodification

Lorne Daniel, “I wonder if, one of these days when I wake up, someone is going to try to sell me sunshine.”

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- Cybernetics:
The way people control
and communicate
information

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- Eclecticism:
“You listen to reggae, watch a western, eat Mc Donald’s at midday, local cuisine at night, wear Paris perfume in Tokyo, dress retro in Hong Kong. Together artist, gallery owner, critic and public indulge one another in the *Anything Goes* – it’s time to relax”.

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- Mass Media:
The news which sells more is the truth now.



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- Hyperreality:

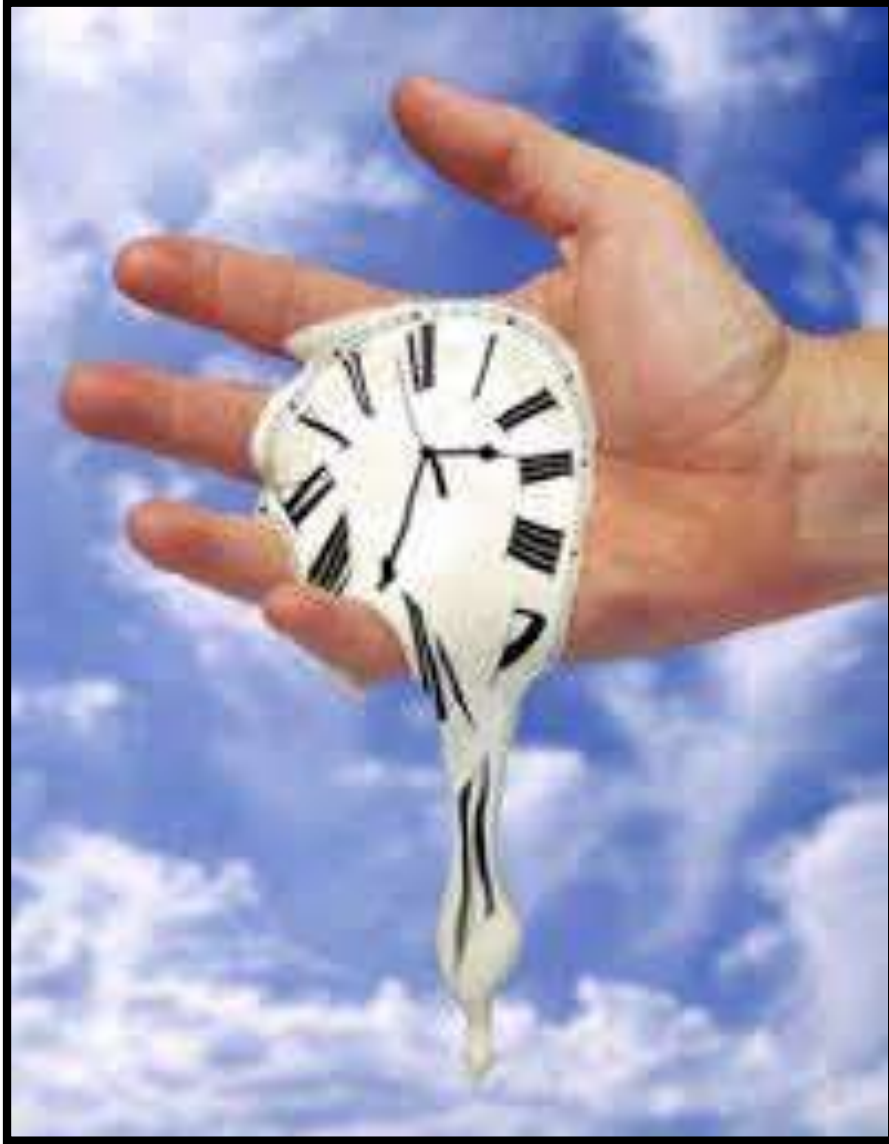


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- Internet Surfers:
Staying in touch



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- Everything changes including time, belief and values.

A Movement in . . .

- Architecture



A Movement in . . .

- Art



A Movement in . . .

- Music



A Movement in . . .

- Cinema



A Movement in . . .

- Cinema



A Movement in . . .

- Cinema



A Movement in . . .

- Literature



Definition

- Cuddon, “Postmodernism is characterised by an eclectic approach, by a liking for aleatory writing and for parody and pastiche”
- Eclectic – use of fragmented forms
- Aleatory – that incorporates randomness or chance
- Pastiche – that imitates the style or work of an artist

Definition

“Postmodern literature is marked both stylistically and ideologically, by a reliance on such literary conventions as fragmentation, paradox, unreliable narrators, often unrealistic and downright impossible plots, games, parody, paranoia, dark humour and authorial self-reference”

Theorists: Jean Francois Lyotard

- Incredulity towards metanarratives.
- Metanarrative – that deals with progress and human perfectability. Try to reassure and explain. Believe in reason and logic.
- Mininarrative – provisional, temporary, contingent and relative.
- Appreciation for diversity, local differences and plurality.

Theorists: Jean Baudrillard

- The obliteration of the real by signs caused by images from TV, cinema, ads.
- Sign not an index of underlying reality but merely of other signs: Simulacrum
- More attached to images than the real. Real replaced by false
- Cartographers drawing a map of a ruined place: Hyperreality
- Leads to more simulations

Theorists: Deleuze and Guattari

- Rhizome: The book as the root
- Captures multiple meanings but comprehension is never complete
- Indefinite multiplicities: Heterogeneity
- Rhizome branched into fragments

Modernism

- Emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity
- Movement away from omniscient narration, fixed points of view and clear-cut moral positions
- Blurring of distinctions between genres
- Liking for fragmented forms, collages
- Tendency towards reflexivity
- Literature of experimentation and innovation

Modernism vs. Postmodernism

- Nostalgic and yearning for utopia
- Strives for truth, meaning and history
- Laments fragmentation
- Distinction between good and bad
- Distinction between high and low
- Parodying the yearning for utopia
- Truth is provisional
- Celebrates fragmentation
- Bad is good: “Fair is foul and foul is fair”
- Distinction disappears: Believes in excess and gaudiness, cross the border and close the gap

Inferences about Postmodernism

- Art used against art
- Cherishes autonomy
- Hates interpretation
- No clear perception of world and man
- Assigns priority to the performative as against meaning and content
- Creates a new dimension and develops a new sensibility

Inferences about Postmodernism

- Traditional logic and subjectivity rejected
- Traditional authority considered false and corrupt
- Deal with unfulfilled promises of science, technology, government and religion
- National boundaries a hindrance
- Morality a personal value

More Concepts

- Alterity : exchanging one's own perspective for that of the other—lack of personal identity
- Aporia: a puzzle or paradox used in conjunction with deconstruction—an internal contradiction in a statement or theory
- Bricolage: traditional objects or language given a new subversive meaning—a mash-up
- Carnavalesque: mocking or satirical challenge of authority or traditional hierarchy
- Dystopia: societies characterized by decay/oppressed governments

Techniques

- Magic realism: real coupled with the fantastic
- Polyphony: two or more patterns of narration/mixing of several voices
- Use of Myth: transposing and transplanting in narratives
- Blurring of genres: defies categorization
- Narration: non-linear, open-ended
- Cryptography: hiding information

What do Postmodern Critics Do?

- Discover postmodernist themes, tendencies and attitudes in literary works.
- Foreground fiction which exemplify the notion of disappearance of the real.
- Highlight intertextual elements
- Bring focus on the element of narcissism
- Critique texts that are a hybrid blend of the high and low culture.

English, August: An Indian Story

- Lyotard's mini narrative
 - lack of purpose and meaning in life
 - life boring colleagues dull, work mechanical
 - laughs at those serious about work
 - “having a job and having to work is sickness”
 - sick at immensity of human ambition, nobility, virtue
 - eager to see “how far he could extend his ignorance”

English, August: An Indian Story

- Postmodern Angst
 - absurd human condition
 - emptiness and loneliness
 - ambition in life
 - pleasure in secret life
 - insomnia : symbol of his fragmented state of mind
 - suicide: wishing to explode into twitching bits of blood and bone. “looking for that kind of cessation was also too much effort”.

English, August: An Indian Story

- Baudrillard's Simulation and Simulacra
 - burdened with freedom and responsibility to make himself
 - creates images about himself by telling lies
 - nullifies the original
- Meaningless activities
- Carnavalesque elements
- Satire and irony: Agastya=August

English, August: An Indian Story

- Bricolage: appearance and language: rootlessness and cultural dislocation
- Repulsive narrative: nauseating sights and smells
- Negation of conventional canons of fiction
- Everything authoritative, rigid or serious is subverted, questioned or mocked at
- Postmodern framework of ontological uncertainty and cynicism: novel a critique on order, unity and reality.