

Post-modernism,
Representation and the Cultural
Construction of Identity

What is modernism

- Period marked by industrialization (following the industrial revolution)
- Secularisation (a move away from religious values and institutions to non-religious values and secular institutions)
- Rationality (using reason to provide answers)

What is postmodernism

- Historical – reaction to modernism
- So what is modernism – experimenting with representations of reality, value judgement, norms of society
- Postmodern texts embody scepticism towards the ideas and ideals of the modern era, especially the ideas of progress, objectivity, reason, certainty, personal identity and grand narratives. Everything in nature is constructed.
- Origins – suspicion in the goodness of people post world war II and a suspicion of science and a world of logic and order triggered by the Holocaust (extermination of European Jews during World War II) and the dropping of atomic bombs on Japanese cities (1945)

Central thoughts

- Rejection of grand or meta-narratives (modernity's representation of discourse) – the progress of history, the knowability of everything by science and the possibility of absolute freedom
- These should be viewed with suspicion
- Truth needs to be deconstructed so that we can challenge dominant ideas that people claim as truth
- There is no longer a difference between reality and its representing image
- Cultural recycling – random cannibalization of various past styles – erasing historical depth
- Interpretation is everything, respect for difference (celebration of the local, particular)

Modernism	Post modernism
1890-1945	Post world war II
Based on using rational logical means to gain knowledge	Denies the application of logical thinking
Characterized by a hierarchical, organized and determinate nature of knowledge	Based on an anarchical, non-totalized and indeterminate state of knowledge
Approach is objective, theoretical and analytical	Approach is subjective
Modernist thinking is about a search for an abstract truth about life	There is no universal truth, abstract or otherwise – multiple truths
Attempts to construct a coherent world view and people capable of original thought	Attempts to remove the difference between high and low Reality is mediated through media

Representation

- Rejecting traditional ideas of realism and experimenting with representation
- Meaning found in the messages seen in popular culture rather than through scientific enquiry
- Choice and personalization in everything
- Extreme self-reflexivity, playful and even irrelevant

Cultural construction of identity

- Identity – our sense of self
- The way we see ourselves as individuals
- The way we interact with others
- Within our culture and that of others
- Social dimensions (age, class, religion) operate differently in different culture