

Dr. Alex E. Blazer
English 6685 The Postmodern Film
Winter Storm Make Up

In an effort to make up for the class cancelled due to the winter storm, please read all six of today's articles on postmodernism, and focus on the one article assigned to you below. By the start of class, share two significant quotes and five brief, bullet point main ideas or notes in the following table; and in class we will use your notes to collaboratively establish the key tenets of postmodernism.

Article/ Student	Quotes/ Notes
Storey/ Preston Brewer	• Quote 1: “ Postmodernism was thus born out of a generational refusal of the categorical certainties of high modernism. The insistence on a categorical distinction between high and popular culture came to be regarded as the 'un-hip' assumptions of an older generation,” (158). • Quote 2: “Our awareness of the play of stylistic allusion 'is now a constitutive and essential part' of our experience of postmodern film,” (170). • Note 1: Positive and negative views of postmodernism • Note 2: Postmodernism makes no distinction between high and pop culture • Note 3: Postmodernism can be seen as a form of commercial culture • Note 4: Objective “truth” is questioned • Note 5: Cultural knowledge is crucial to understanding a postmodern text?
Hassan/ Luke Circle	• Quote 1: “[Through indeterminacy] In literature alone our ideas of author, audience, reading, writing, book, genre, critical theory, and of literature itself, have all suddenly become questionable.” p 282 • Quote 2: “One may well wonder: is some decisive historical mutation... active in our midst? Or does the dismemberment of Orpheus prove no more than the mind's need to make but one more construction of life's mutabilities and human mortality? And what construction lies beyond, behind, within, that construction?” p 283 • Note 1: Postmodernism contains the thing it wishes to surpass in its name • Note 2: There is no clear meaning for postmodernism • Note 3: It is historically unstable; as literature changes what happens with postmodernism?

	• Note 4: Postmodernism is always changing; “we have... reinvented our ancestors, and always shall” • Note 5: A definition of postmodernism would be antithetical to postmodernism
Sim/ Ash Earnhardt	• Quote 1: “Poststructuralism called into question the cultural certainties that structuralism had been felt to embody: certainties such as the belief that the world was intrinsically knowable, and that structuralism gave us a methodological key to unlock the various systems that made up that world (4).” • Quote 2: “Postmodern philosophy is to be defined as an updated version of scepticism, more concerned with destabilizing other theories and their pretensions to truth than with setting up a positive theory of its own; although of course to be sceptical of the theoretical claims of others is to have a definite programme of one's own, if only by default (12),” • Note 1: Connection to a lot of other “post” theories: poststructuralism, post-Marxism, post-philosophy • Note 2: As much as theorists try to assign patterns to society and human behavior, postmodernist philosophers and poststructuralists argue that the world is inherently unstable, unpredictable, and unexplainable • Note 3: Focus on the “little narrative” over the metanarrative: instead of focusing on broad patterns, there’s an effort to focus on little movements that deal with specific problems and disappear when that problem is solved • Note 4: All concepts, even Marxism, fail to change with the times and become over-fixated on the patterns in their ideology and vision for the future, which postmodernists believe is an inherent flaw since the universe is constantly fluctuating • Note 5: Since postmodernism, and many of these other “post” theories, are really a reaction to established theories, they often don’t hold substance on their own, focusing on criticism rather than construction (connected to Nietzsche and skepticism when it comes to human control and understanding)
Palmer/ Kay Hammond	• Quote 1: “Clearly, then, it is one thing to call modernism into question and quite another to try to venture beyond modernity itself. To be a "postmodern literary theorist" may not change anything about the way one is doing business as a liberal, urban, academic intellectual. To take the turn toward postmodernity, on the other hand, calls the benefits of <i>modernization</i> itself into question.⁹ It calls the academic system, with all its sophisticated testing, into question.¹⁰ It

calls the liberal solutions to social problems into question. The "postmodern literary theorist" may be ready for sophisticated talk about language, philosophy, and social evils, but not for a real revolution—in either academia or society at large.” (pg 365-66)

- Quote 2: “ Hermeneutics as philosophical reflection about interpretation takes as its subject the conditions under which understanding takes place. It studies misunderstanding and breakdowns of interpretation because they reveal the absence of conditions necessary for understanding. The focus of Hermeneutical reflection is not methodology but the hermeneutical situation. Hermeneutical reflection asks: What happens when one operates on the basis of one view of language rather than another, one view of history rather than another, one view of truth rather than another, one view of art rather than another? It asks what modernity has done to these views and what would be the effect of a quite different set of views.” (pg 387)
- Note 1: Hermeneutics goes beyond simply interpreting texts—it’s a way of understanding all human experiences and historical contexts, and considering myriad different perspectives.
- Note 2: The transition from modernity to postmodernity changes how we view knowledge, truth, and interpretation. Modernity is now seen as ‘mainstream’ and postmodernity is viewed as an ‘alternative’ movement. Postmodernity includes “the rejection of tradition, of coherence and rationality, of nameability” (pg 363) and “efforts to move beyond formalism and merely rhetorical criticism—speech act theory as the basis for a new criticism, new literary history, and more recently "deconstructionist" theories of language and text.” (pg 364)
- Note 3: Language is not just a medium for communication but shapes and limits our understanding of reality, concepts, and texts. Interpretation is influenced by language's structures and historical use.
- Note 4: Postmodern thought recognizes the influence of tradition on interpretation but also sees the need for innovation and questioning established norms and perspectives.
- Note 5: Postmodernity focuses on the idea that all

	interpretations are relative, with no single grand narrative that can claim universal validity or truth.
Gregson/ Haley James	• Quote 1: “The most important postmodernist take on identity questions arises from the deconstruction of concepts of inner or underlying essence. What is being deconstructed, therefore, is the idea of a stable core of self [...] which is present throughout an individual’s life and which constitutes their true being. It is the assumption of such a self that underlies Romantic concepts of ‘self-expression,’ but ‘common sense’ attitudes also tend to assume that everyone is blessed with this essential core” (1) • Quote 2: “In that image, too, death and life are anxiously conflated so that what is conspicuously natural– a leaf, a bird– is transformed into something unnatural. This represents how natural processes are felt by the overwhelmed self to be unsettlingly unnatural because they place the self uncannily at odds with itself. Identity, when it is subjected to biology’s purposes, becomes unrecognizable to itself” (3). • Note 1: Questions of self/fractured identity began with the Modernist movement, during the genesis of Freudian psychoanalysis. Postmodernism pushed these notions further, “persistently undermin[ing]” them. This is also linked to deconstructionist ideals in which ideological views regarding dominant gender, race, etc. are challenged. This has, according to Gregson, been a cause for major social change. • Note 2: Postmodernism was likewise influenced by Existentialism. While Existentialists attempted to fill the “void” left by “post-Christian loss of transcendent meaning,” postmodernists rejected the idea of a new identity being found or formed, “representing a much more extreme scepticism that follows the exhaustion of existentialism” (2). • Note 3: Sylvia Plath is notable for her representation of the “fissured” self with “memorable vividness” (2). She not only deconstructs the idea that the poet is a “madly inspired and self-consumingly driven” figure, namely through her portrayal of the poet as mentally ill/fractured, but also deconstructs Romantic notions of nature as “benevolent and nurturing,” instead portraying it as cruel and indifferent, operating out of new Darwinian ideals. This emphasis highlights the postmodernist view that humans are not unique and are still subject to all biological processes. She adds gender to this by specifically targeting the cruelty of the female biology (ie. the beekeeping story). • Note 4: Postmodernism has been widely impacted by the work of Lacan and Derrida, who bridged the gaps between Freud,

	deconstruction, and feminist theory. There is a consensus regarding the “ontological fragmentation” of the self, however, there is a “gulf between how these theories appear in their abstract and reiterated literary critical formulations compared with their vivid particularity in a number of postmodern texts” (9). The “source of incoherence” can be a number of places, depending on the text’s central focus (ie. in a text about gender, sexual desire may be the source, as in <i>Portnoy’s Complaint</i>). It is also a response to the wider culture (ie. a growingly sexualized culture sparks the postmodern satire of the aforementioned text). • Note 5: Author Angela Carter portrays issues of sex and gender as something akin to role-playing– when this is made conscious by the one playing the role, it becomes subject to deconstruction, as seen in “Flesh and the Mirror.” This leads to a puppet theater scene, in which Carter, the author, is in a power struggle with her protagonist’s lover who is conversely in a power struggle with the protagonist herself. (see also <i>Last Year at Marienbad</i> and stories with author self-insertion such as <i>The French Lieutenant’s Woman</i>).
Hill/ Serena Kerkstra	• Quote 1: “Postmodern theory speaks of the end of history, the loss of the referent, the impossibility of critical distance and the celebration of ‘newfound’ difference. However, if you add the first three of these to the last one, then you are forced to ask: ‘What is difference?’ Without history, without reference to the social, without some sense of distance (what one might call an ethics or politics) the notion of difference, itself, is placed under question. It is this tension between the desire to celebrate difference within the commodity form and, at the same time, the need to construct a commodity world without history or social referent, that lets loose the kinds of difference that emerge in postmodern cinema.” (p. 104) • Quote 2: “The discourse of the Enlightenment can be accused of hiding its history of slavery and oppression–part of the very conditions that made it possible. Postmodernism raises those conditions to the level of the signifier, making them part of the pleasure of the text, whether we are talking about the space of drugs, crime and deprivation inhabited, at the level of signification, by most of black Hollywood at the moment, or the female corpses that litter the postmodern movie scene. As audiences we view, and yet we do not see, that the blood, torture, death and horror that visually enframes the postmodern narrative, that provides the very meat of its drama, are psychic compensations for the vivid yet blank perfection of its commodity form.” (p. 111)

	• Note 1: Capitalism and globalization has eroded the American film industry by “intensifying” narratives to produce a commodity that is designed for success in the global market. Ex: intensified pain, pleasure, and difference / otherness. This can result in superficial narratives. • Note 2: Difference has a critical role in postmodern cinema as an organizer and signifier, but the signifiers come with a cost. • Note 3: Postmodern cinema’s celebration of difference often creates otherness in shifted forms. Ex: In Predator 2 (1990), Danny Glover is liberated from the stereotype of being the ‘black sidekick who dies first’ and is instead a black hero who survives. However, this comes at the cost of the predator having black signifiers such as hair that resembles dreadlocks. • Note 4: The “female corpse” is a common signifier in postmodern cinema, sometimes used to pay the cost of seeing female protagonists break stereotypes. Ex: In Basic Instinct (1992), Sharon Stone is a strong bisexual murderer who kills several women. Or in Silence of the Lambs (1991), where Jodie Foster is a career-driven agent-in-training investigating the murders of young women. • Note 5: Postmodern cinema aspires to confront late-stage capitalism (explore it, critique it, etc) but since it is also a product of capitalism, it gets distracted by intensification and difference.
--	---