10 Postmodernism

The postmodern condition

Postmodernism is a term current inside and outside the academic study of popular culture. It has entered discourses as different as pop music journalism and Marxist debates on the cultural conditions of late or multinational capitalism. As Angela McRobbie (1994) observes,

> Postmodernism has entered into a more diverse number of vocabularies more quickly than most other intellectual categories. It has spread outwards from the realms of art history into political theory and onto the pages of youth culture magazines, record sleeves, and the fashion pages of Vogue. This seems to me to indicate something more than the mere vagaries of taste (13).

She also suggests that 'the recent debates on postmodernism possess both a positive attraction and a usefulness to the analyst of popular culture' (15). What is certainly the case is that as a concept postmodernism shows little sign of slowing down its colonial-like expansion. Here is Dick Hebdige's (1988) list of the ways in which the term has been used:

> When it becomes possible for people to describe as 'postmodern' the decor of a room, the design of a building, the diegesis of a film, the construction of a record, or a 'scratch' video, a television commercial, or an arts documentary, or the 'intertextual' relations between them, the layout of a page in a fashion magazine or critical journal, an anti-teleological tendency within epistemology, the attack on the 'metaphysics of presence', a general attenuation of feeling, the collective chagrin and morbid projections of a post-War generation of baby boomers confronting disillusioned middle age, the 'predicament' of reflexivity, a group of rhetorical tropes, a proliferation of surfaces, a new phase in commodity fetishism, a fascination for images, codes and styles, a process of cultural, political, or existential fragmentation and/or crisis, the 'de-centring' of the subject, an 'incredulity towards metanarratives', the replacement of unitary power axes by a plurality of power/discourse formations, the 'implosion of meaning', the collapse of cultural hierarchies,

> the dread engendered by the threat of nuclear self-destruction, the decline of the university, the functioning and effects of the new miniaturised technologies, broad societal and economic shifts into a 'media', 'consumer' or 'multinational' phase, a sense (depending on who you read) of 'placelessness' or the abandonment of placelessness ('critical regionalism') or (even) a generalised substitution of spatial for temporal coordinates – when it becomes possible to describe all these things as 'postmodern' . . . then it's clear we are in the presence of a buzzword (2009: 429).

For the purposes of this discussion I shall, with the exception of some necessary theoretical exposition, consider postmodernism only as it relates to the study of popular culture. To facilitate this I shall focus on the development of postmodern theory from its beginnings in the United States and Britain in the early 1960s, through its theorization in the work of Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson. This will be followed by a discussion of two examples of postmodern culture: pop music and television. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of three more general aspects of postmodernism: the collapse of absolute standards of value, the culture of globalization and convergence culture.

Postmodernism in the 1960s

Although the term 'postmodern' had been in cultural circulation since the 1870s (Best and Kellner, 1991), it is only in the 1960s that we see the beginnings of what is now understood as postmodernism. In the work of Susan Sontag (1966) and Leslie Fiedler (1971) we encounter the celebration of what Sontag calls a 'new sensibility' (1966: 296). It is in part a sensibility in revolt against the canonization of modernism's avant-garde revolution; it attacks modernism's official status, its canonization in the museum and the academy, as the high culture of the modern capitalist world. It laments the passing of the scandalous and bohemian power of modernism, its ability to shock and disgust the middle class. Instead of outraging from the critical margins of bourgeois society, the work of Pablo Picasso, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Bertolt Brecht, Igor Stravinsky and others had not only lost the ability to shock and disturb, but had also become central, classical: in a word – canonized. Modernist culture has become bourgeois culture. Its subversive power has been drained by the academy and the museum. It is now the canon against which an avant-garde must struggle. As Fredric Jameson (1984) points out,

> This is surely one of the most plausible explanations for the emergence of post-modernism itself, since the younger generation of the 1960s will now confront the formerly oppositional modern movement as a set of dead classics, which 'weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living', as Marx [1977] once said in a different context (56).

Jameson (1988) argues that postmodernism was born out of

> the shift from an oppositional to a hegemonic position of the classics of modernism, the latter's conquest of the university, the museum, the art gallery network and the foundations, the assimilation . . . of the various high modernisms, into the 'canon' and the subsequent attenuation of everything in them felt by our grandparents to be shocking, scandalous, ugly, dissonant, immoral and antisocial (299).

For the student of popular culture perhaps the most important consequence of the new sensibility, with its abandonment of 'the Matthew Arnold notion of culture, finding it historically and humanly obsolescent' (Sontag, 1966: 299), is its claim that 'the distinction between "high" and "low" culture seems less and less meaningful' (302). In this sense, it is a sensibility in revolt against what is seen as the cultural elitism of modernism. Modernism, in spite of the fact that it often quoted from popular culture, was marked by a deep suspicion of all things popular. Its entry into the museum and the academy was undoubtedly made easier (regardless of its declared antagonism to 'bourgeois philistinism') by its appeal to, and homologous relationship with, the elitism of class society. The postmodernism of the 1960s was therefore in part a populist attack on the elitism of modernism. It signalled a refusal of what Andreas Huyssen (1986) calls 'the great divide . . . [a] discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture' (viii). Moreover, according to Huyssen, 'To a large extent, it is by the distance we have travelled from this "great divide" between mass culture and modernism that we can measure our own cultural postmodernity' (57).

The American and British pop art of the 1960s presented a clear rejection of the 'great divide'. It rejected Arnold's definition of culture as 'the best that has been thought and said' (see Chapter 2), preferring instead Williams's social definition of culture as 'a whole way of life' (see Chapter 3). British pop art dreamed of America (seen as the home of popular culture) from the grey deprivation of early 1960s Britain. As Lawrence Alloway, the movement's first theorist, explains,

> The area of contact was mass produced urban culture: movies, advertising, science fiction, pop music. We felt none of the dislike of commercial culture standard among most intellectuals, but accepted it as a fact, discussed it in detail, and consumed it enthusiastically. One result of our discussions was to take pop culture out of the realm of 'escapism', 'sheer entertainment', 'relaxation', and to treat it with the seriousness of art (quoted in Frith and Horne, 1987: 104).

Andy Warhol was also a key figure in the theorizing of pop art. Like Alloway, he refuses to take seriously the distinction between commercial and non-commercial art. He sees 'commercial art as real art and real art as commercial art' (109). He claims that '"real" art is defined simply by the taste (and wealth) of the ruling class of the period. This implies not only that commercial art is just as good as "real" art – its value simply being defined by other social groups, other patterns of expenditure' (ibid.). We can of course object that Warhol's merging of high and popular is a little misleading.

Whatever the source of his ideas and his materials, once they are located in an art gallery the context locates them as art and thus high culture. John Rockwell argues that this was not the intention or the necessary outcome. Art, he argues, is what you perceive as art: 'A Brillo box isn't suddenly art because Warhol puts a stacked bunch of them in a museum. But by putting them there he encourages you to make your every trip to the supermarket an artistic adventure, and in so doing he has exalted your life. Everybody's an artist if they want to be' (120).

Huyssen (1986) claims that the full impact of the relationship between pop art and popular culture can be fully understood only when located within the larger cultural context of the American counterculture and the British underground scene: 'Pop in the broadest sense was the context in which a notion of the postmodern first took shape, and from the beginning until today, the most significant trends within postmodernism have challenged modernism's relentless hostility to mass culture' (188). In this way, then, postmodernism can be said to have been at least partly born out of a generational refusal of the categorical certainties of high modernism. The insistence on an absolute distinction between high and popular culture came to be regarded as the 'un-hip' assumption of an older generation. One sign of this collapse was the merging of pop art and pop music. For example, Peter Blake designed the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album; Richard Hamilton designed their 'white album'; Andy Warhol designed the Rolling Stones' album *Sticky Fingers*. Similarly, we could cite the new seriousness emerging in pop music itself, most evident in the work of performers such as Bob Dylan and the Beatles; there is a new seriousness in their work and their work is taken seriously in a way unknown before in considerations of pop music.

Huyssen also detects a clear relationship between the American postmodernism of the 1960s and certain aspects of an earlier European avant-garde; seeing the American counterculture – its opposition to the war in Vietnam, its support for black civil rights, its rejection of the elitism of high modernism, its birthing of the second wave of feminism, the welcome it gave to the gay liberation movement, its cultural experimentalism, its alternative theatre, its happenings, its love-ins, its celebration of the everyday, its psychedelic art, its acid rock, its 'acid perspectivism' (Hebdige, 2009) – 'as the closing chapter in the tradition of avantgardism' (Huyssen, 1986: 195).

By the late 1970s the debate about postmodernism crossed the Atlantic. The next three sections will consider the responses of two French cultural theorists to the debate on the 'new sensibility', before returning to America and Fredric Jameson's account of postmodernism as the cultural dominant of late capitalism.

Jean-François Lyotard

Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) principal contribution to the debate on postmodernism is *The Postmodern Condition*, published in France in 1979, and translated into English in 1984. The influence of this book on the debate has been enormous. In many

respects it was this book that introduced the term 'postmodernism' into academic circulation.

For Lyotard the postmodern condition is marked by a crisis in the status of knowledge in Western societies. This is expressed as an 'incredulity towards metanarratives' and what he calls 'the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation' (xxiv). What Lyotard is referring to is the supposed contemporary collapse or widespread rejection of all overarching and totalizing frameworks that seek to tell universal stories ('metanarratives'): Marxism, liberalism, Christianity, for example. According to Lyotard, metanarratives operate through inclusion and exclusion, as homogenizing forces, marshalling heterogeneity into ordered realms, silencing and excluding other discourses, other voices in the name of universal principles and general goals. Postmodernism is said to signal the collapse of all metanarratives with their privileged truth to tell, and to witness instead the increasing sound of a plurality of voices from the margins, with their insistence on difference, on cultural diversity, and the claims of heterogeneity over homogeneity.[1]

Lyotard's particular focus is on the status and function of scientific discourse and knowledge. Science is important for Lyotard because of the role assigned to it by the Enlightenment.[2] Its task, through the accumulation of scientific knowledge, is to play a central role in the gradual emancipation of humankind. In this way, science assumes the status of a metanarrative, organizing and validating other narratives on the royal road to human liberation. However, Lyotard claims that since the Second World War, the legitimating force of science's status as a metanarrative has waned considerably. It is no longer seen to be slowly making progress on behalf of humankind towards absolute knowledge and absolute freedom. It has lost its way – its 'goal is no longer truth, but performativity' (46). Similarly, higher education is 'called upon to create skills, and no longer ideals' (48). Knowledge is seen no longer as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. Like science, education will be judged by its performativity; and as such it will be increasingly shaped by the demands of power. No longer will it respond to the question, 'Is it true?' It will hear only, 'What use is it?' 'How much is it worth?' and 'Is it saleable?' (51). Postmodern pedagogy would teach how to use knowledge as a form of cultural and economic capital without recourse to concern or anxiety about whether what is taught is true or false. At my own university the magic word is 'employability' – the absolute measure of all things academic.

Before leaving Lyotard, it is worth noting his own less than favourable response to the changed status of culture. The popular culture ('contemporary general culture') of the postmodern condition is for Lyotard an 'anything goes' culture, a culture of 'slackening', where taste is irrelevant, and money the only sign of value (79). The only relief is Lyotard's view that postmodernist culture is not the end of the much superior culture of modernism, but the sign of the advent of a new modernism. Postmodernism is that which breaks with one modernism to form a new modernism: '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' (ibid.).

Steven Connor (1989) suggests that *The Postmodern Condition* may be read 'as a disguised allegory of the condition of academic knowledge and institutions in the

contemporary world' (41). Lyotard's 'diagnosis of the postmodern condition is, in one sense, the diagnosis of the final futility of the intellectual' (ibid.). Lyotard is himself aware of what he calls the contemporary intellectual's 'negative heroism'. Intellectuals have, he argues, been losing their authority since 'the violence and critique mounted against the academy during the sixties' (quoted in Connor, 1989: 41). As Iain Chambers (1988) observes,

> the debate over postmodernism can . . . be read as the symptom of the disruptive ingression of popular culture, its aesthetics and intimate possibilities, into a previously privileged domain. Theory and academic discourses are confronted by the wider, unsystemized, popular networks of cultural production and knowledge. The intellectual's privilege to explain and distribute knowledge is threatened; his authority, for it is invariably 'his', redimensionalized. This in part explains both the recent defensiveness of the modernist, particularly Marxist, project, and the cold nihilism of certain notorious strands in postmodernism (216).

Angela McRobbie (1994) claims that postmodernism has enfranchised a new body of intellectuals: 'the coming into being of those whose voices were historically drowned out by the (modernist) metanarratives of mastery, which were in turn both patriarchal and imperialist' (15). Moreover, as Kobena Mercer (1994) points out,

> While the loudest voices in the culture announced nothing less than the end of everything of any value, the emerging voices, practices and identities of dispersed African, Caribbean and Asian peoples crept in from the margins of postimperial Britain to dislocate commonplace certainties and consensual 'truths' and thus open up new ways of seeing, and understanding, the peculiarities of living in the twilight of an historic interregnum in which 'the old is dying and the new cannot be born' [Gramsci, 1971] (Mercer, 1994: 2).

Jean Baudrillard

Jean Baudrillard, according to Best and Kellner (1991), 'has achieved guru status throughout the English speaking world' (109). They claim that 'Baudrillard has emerged as one of the most high profile postmodern theorists' (111). His presence has not been confined to the world of academia; articles and interviews have appeared in many popular magazines.

Baudrillard claims that we in the West have reached a stage in social and economic development in which 'it is no longer possible to separate the economic or productive realm from the realms of ideology or culture, since cultural artefacts, images, representations, even feelings and psychic structures have become part of the world of the economic' (Connor, 1989: 51). This is partly explained, Baudrillard argues, by the fact

that there has been a historical shift in the West, from a society based on the production of things to one based on the production of information. In *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, he describes this as 'the passage from a metallurgic into a semiurgic society' (1981: 185). However, for Baudrillard, postmodernism is not simply a culture of the sign: rather it is a culture of the 'simulacrum'.

A simulacrum is an identical copy without an original. In Chapter 4, we examined Benjamin's claim that mechanical reproduction had destroyed the 'aura' of the work of art; Baudrillard argues that the very distinction between original and copy has itself now been destroyed. He calls this process 'simulation'. This idea can be demonstrated with reference to CDs and films. For example, when someone buys a copy of Steve Earle's *The Revolution Starts Now*, it makes little sense to speak of having purchased the original. Similarly, it would make no sense for someone having seen *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* in Newcastle to be told by someone having seen the film in Shanghai or Berlin that he had seen the original and she had not. Both would have witnessed an exhibition of a copy without an original. In both cases, film and CD, we see or hear a copy without an original. A film is a construction made from editing together film footage shot in a different sequence and at different times. In the same way, a music recording is a construction made from editing together sounds recorded in a different sequence and at different times.

Baudrillard (1983) calls simulation 'the generation by models of a real without origins or reality: a hyperreal' (2). Hyperrealism, he claims, is the characteristic mode of postmodernity. In the realm of the hyperreal, the distinction between simulation and the 'real' implodes; the 'real' and the imaginary continually collapse into each other. The result is that reality and simulation are experienced as without difference – operating along a roller-coaster continuum. Simulations can often be experienced as more real than the real itself – 'even better than the real thing' (U2). Think of the way in which *Platoon* has become the mark against which to judge the realism of representations of America's war in Vietnam (and increasingly its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan). Asking if it has the 'look' of *Platoon* is virtually the same as asking if it is realistic.

The evidence for hyperrealism is said to be everywhere. For example, we live in a society in which people write letters to characters in soap operas, making them offers of marriage, sympathizing with their current difficulties, offering them new accommodation, or just writing to ask how they are coping with life. Television villains are regularly confronted in the street and warned about the possible future consequences of not altering their behaviour. Television doctors, television lawyers and television detectives regularly receive requests for advice and help. I saw an American tourist on television enthusing about the beauty of the British Lake District. Searching for suitable words of praise, he said, 'It's just like Disneyland.' In the early 1990s the Northumbria police force introduced 'cardboard police cars' in an attempt to keep motorists within the law. I recently visited an Italian restaurant in Morpeth in which a painting of Marlon Brando as the 'Godfather' is exhibited as a mark of the restaurant's genuine *Italianicity*. Visitors to New York can do tours that bus them around the city, not as 'itself' but as it appears in *Sex and the City*. The riots following the acquittal of the four Los Angeles

police officers captured on video physically assaulting the black motorist Rodney King were headlined in two British newspapers as ‘LA Lawless’ and in another as ‘LA War’ – the story anchored not by a historical reference to similar disturbances in Watts, Los Angeles, in 1965, or the implications of the words – ‘No justice no peace’ – chanted by demonstrators during the riots; the editors chose instead to locate the story within the fictional world of the American television series *LA Law*. Baudrillard calls this ‘the dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV’ (55). Politicians increasingly play on this, relying on the conviction politics of the ‘photo-opportunity’ and the ‘sound bite’ in an attempt to win the hearts and minds of voters.

In New York in the mid-1980s the City Arts Workshop and Adopt a Building commissioned artists to paint murals on a block of abandoned buildings. After consultations with local residents it was agreed to depict images of what the community lacked: grocery store, newsstand, laundromat and record shop (Frith and Horne, 1987: 7). What the story demonstrates is something similar to the Northumbria police story – the substitution of an image for the real thing: instead of police cars, the illusion of police cars; instead of enterprise, the illusion of enterprise. Simon Frith and Howard Horne’s (1987) rather patronizing account of working-class youth out at the weekend illustrates much the same point:

> What made it all real for them: the TAN. The tan courtesy of the sun bed. No one here had been on a winter break (this is the Tebbit generation); they’d bought their look across the counter of the hairdresser, the beauty parlour and the keep fit centre. And so every weekend they gather in dreary, drizzly York and Birmingham and Crewe and act not as if they were on holiday but as if they were in an advertisement for holidays. Shivering. A simulation, but for real (182).

The 1998 case of the imprisonment of *Coronation Street* character Deirdre Rachid is perhaps a classic example of hyperrealism (see Photo 10.1). The tabloid press not only covered the story, it campaigned for her release, in much the same way as if this was an incident from ‘real life’. The *Daily Star* launched a campaign to ‘Free the Weatherfield

Photo 10.1 An example of hyperrealism.

Source: Daily Express/N&S Syndication and Licensing

One', and invited readers to phone or fax them to register their protest. They also produced a free poster for readers to display in car windows. The *Sun* asked readers to sign their petition and invited them to buy specially produced campaign T-shirts. MPs were described as sympathetic to Deirdre's plight. The *Star* quoted Labour MP Fraser Kemp's intention to speak to Home Secretary Jack Straw: 'I will tell the Home Secretary that there has been an appalling miscarriage of justice. The Home Secretary should intervene to ensure justice is done and Deirdre is released.' Questions were asked in the Houses of Parliament. The broadsheets joined in (in the way they always do) by commenting on the tabloid stories.

In spite of all this, I think we can say with some confidence that the overwhelming majority of people who demonstrated their outrage at Deirdre Rachid's imprisonment and celebrated her release did so without believing that she was a real person, who had been unjustly sent to prison. What she is – and what they knew her to be – is a real character in a real soap opera (between 1972 and 2014), watched three times a week by millions of real viewers. It is this that makes her a significant cultural figure (and of significant cultural reality). If hyperrealism means anything, it cannot with any credibility signal a decline in people's ability to distinguish between fiction and reality. It is not, as some Baudrillardians seem to want to suggest, that people can no longer tell the difference between fiction and reality: it is that in some significant ways the distinction between the two has become less and less important. Why this has happened is itself an important question. But I do not think that hyperrealism really supplies us with the answer.

The answer may have something to do with the way in which, as noted by John Fiske (1994), the 'postmodern media' no longer provide 'secondary representations of reality; they affect and produce the reality that they mediate' (xv). He is aware that to make an event a media event is not simply in the gift of the media. For something to become a media event it must successfully articulate (in the Gramscian sense discussed in Chapter 4) the concerns of both public and media. The relationship between media and public is complex, but what is certain in our 'postmodern world' is that all events that 'matter' are media events. He cites the example of the arrest of O.J. Simpson: 'Local people watching the chase on TV went to O.J.'s house to be there at the showdown, but took their portable TVs with them in the knowledge that the live event was not a substitute for the mediated one but a complement to it. On seeing themselves on their own TVs, they waved to themselves, for postmodern people have no problem in being simultaneously and indistinguishably livepeople and mediapeople' (xxii). The people who watched the arrest seemed to know implicitly that the media do not simply report or circulate the news, they produce it. In order to be part of the news of O.J. Simpson's arrest it was not enough to be there, one had to be there on television. This suggests that there is no longer a clear distinction between a 'real' event and its media representation. O.J. Simpson's trial, for example, cannot be neatly separated into a 'real' event that television then represented as a media event. Anyone who watched the proceedings unfold on TV knows that the trial was conducted for the television audience as much as for those present in the court. Without the presence of the cameras this would have been a very different event indeed.

Baudrillard's (1983) own example of hyperrealism is Disneyland: he calls it 'a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation' (23). He claims that the success of Disneyland is due not to its ability to allow Americans a fantasy escape from reality, but to the fact that it allows them an unacknowledged concentrated experience of 'real' America.

> Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America, which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the society in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real (25).

He explains this in terms of Disneyland's social 'function': 'It is meant to be an infantile world, in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the "real" world, and to conceal the fact that real childishness is everywhere' (ibid.). He argues that the reporting of 'Watergate' operated in much the same way. It had to be reported as a scandal in order to conceal the fact that it was a commonplace of American political life. This is an example of what he calls 'a simulation of a scandal to regenerative ends' (30). It is an attempt 'to revive a moribund principle by simulated scandal . . . a question of proving the real by the imaginary; proving truth by scandal' (36). In the same way, it could be argued that recent revelations about the activities of certain businessmen operating in the financial markets of London had to be reported as a scandal in order to conceal what Baudrillard calls capitalism's 'instantaneous cruelty; its incomprehensible ferocity; its fundamental immorality' (28–9). In other words, blame the bankers in order to protect the system that enables and encourages their greed and criminality. Or, as we are told in Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, 'What's breaking into a bank compared with founding a bank?'

Baudrillard's general analysis supports Lyotard's central point about postmodernism, the collapse of certainty, and the dissolution of the metanarrative of 'truth'. God, nature, science, the working class, all have lost their authority as centres of authenticity and truth; they no longer provide the evidence on which to rest one's case. The result, he argues, is not a retreat from the 'real', but the collapse of the real into hyperrealism. As he says, 'When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality . . . a panic stricken production of the real and the referential' (12–13). This is an example of the second historical shift identified by Baudrillard. Modernity was the era of what Paul Ricoeur (1981) calls the 'hermeneutics of suspicion',[3] the search for meaning in the underlying reality of appearances. Marx and Freud are obvious examples of this mode of thinking (see Chapters 4 and 5). Hyperreality thus calls into question the claims of representation, both political and cultural. If there is no real behind the appearance, no beyond or beneath, what can be called with validity a representation? For example, given this line of argument, *Rambo* does not represent a type of American thinking on

Vietnam, it *is* a type of American thinking on Vietnam; representation does not stand at one remove from reality, to conceal or distort, it *is* reality. The revolution proposed by Baudrillard's theory is a revolution against latent meaning (providing, as it does, the necessary precondition for ideological analysis). Certainly this is how the argument is often presented. But if we think again about his accounts of Disneyland and Watergate, does what he has to say about them amount to very much more than a rather traditional ideological analysis – the discovery of the 'truth' behind the appearance?

Baudrillard is ambivalent about the social and cultural changes he discusses. On the one hand, he appears to celebrate them. On the other, he suggests that they signal a form of cultural exhaustion: all that remains is endless cultural repetition. I suppose the truth of Baudrillard's position is a kind of resigned celebration. Lawrence Grossberg (1988) calls it 'celebration in the face of inevitability, an embracing of nihilism without empowerment, since there is no real possibility of struggle' (175). John Docker (1994) is more critical:

> Baudrillard offers a classic modernist narrative, history as a linear, unidirectional story of decline. But whereas the early twentieth-century high literary modernists could dream of an avant-garde or cultural elite that might preserve the values of the past in the hope of a future seeding and regrowth, no such hope surfaces in Baudrillard's vision of a dying, entropic world. It's not even possible to write in a rational argumentative form, for that assumes a remaining community of reason (105).

Fredric Jameson

Fredric Jameson is an American Marxist cultural critic who has written a number of very influential essays on postmodernism. Where Jameson differs from other theorists is in his insistence that postmodernism can best be theorized from within a Marxist or neo-Marxist framework.

For Jameson postmodernism is more than just a particular cultural style: it is above all a 'periodizing concept' (1985: 113). Postmodernism is 'the cultural dominant' of late or multinational capitalism. His argument is informed by Ernest Mandel's (1978) characterization of capitalism's three-stage development: 'market capitalism', 'monopoly capitalism' and 'late or multinational capitalism'. Capitalism's third stage 'constitutes . . . the purest form of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas' (Jameson, 1984: 78). He overlays Mandel's linear model with a tripartite schema of cultural development: 'realism', 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' (ibid.). Jameson's argument also borrows from Williams's (1980) influential claim that a given social formation will always consist of three cultural moments ('dominant', 'emergent' and 'residual'). Williams's argument is that the move from one historical period to another does not usually involve the complete collapse of one cultural mode and the installation of another. Historical change may simply bring about a shift in the relative place of different cultural modes. In a given social formation, therefore, different cultural modes will

exist but only one will be dominant. It is on the basis of this claim that Jameson argues that postmodernism is 'the cultural dominant' of late or multinational capitalism (modernism is the residual; it is unclear what is the emergent).

Having established that postmodernism is the cultural dominant within Western capitalist societies, the next stage for Jameson is to outline the constitutive features of postmodernism. First, postmodernism is said to be a culture of pastiche: a culture, that is, marked by the 'complacent play of historical allusion' (Jameson, 1988: 105). Pastiche is often confused with parody; both involve imitation and mimicry. However, while parody has an 'ulterior motive', to mock a divergence from convention or a norm, pastiche is a 'blank parody' or 'empty copy', which has no sense of the very possibility of there being a norm or a convention from which to diverge. As he explains,

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar 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 and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody (1984: 65).

Rather than a culture of supposed pristine creativity, postmodern culture is a culture of quotations; that is, cultural production born out of previous cultural production.[4] It is therefore a culture 'of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense' (60). A culture of images and surfaces, without 'latent' possibilities, it derives its hermeneutic force from other images, other surfaces, the exhausted interplay of intertextuality. This is the world of postmodern pastiche, 'a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum' (1985: 115).

Jameson's principal example of postmodern pastiche is what he calls the 'nostalgia film'. The category could include a number of films from the 1980s and 1990s: *Back to the Future I*, *II* and *III*, *Peggy Sue Got Married*, *Rumble Fish*, *Angel Heart*, *Blue Velvet*. He argues that the nostalgia film sets out to recapture the atmosphere and stylistic peculiarities of America in the 1950s. He claims that 'for Americans at least, the 1950s remain the privileged lost object of desire – not merely the stability and prosperity of a *pax Americana*, but also the first naive innocence of the countercultural impulses of early rock and roll and youth gangs' (1984: 67). He also insists that the nostalgia film is not just another name for the historical film. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that his own list includes *Star Wars*. Now it might seem strange to suggest that a film about the future can be nostalgic for the past, but as Jameson (1985) explains, '[*Star Wars*] is metonymically a . . . nostalgia film . . . it does not reinvent a picture of the past in its lived totality; rather [it becomes a nostalgia film], by reinventing the feel and shape of characteristic art objects of an older period' (116).

Films such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, *The Mummy Returns* and *Lord of the Rings* operate in a similar way to evoke metonymically a sense of the narrative certainties of the past. Therefore, according to Jameson, the nostalgia film

works in two possible ways: it recaptures and represents the atmosphere and stylistic features of the past; and/or it recaptures and represents certain styles of viewing of the past. What is of absolute significance for Jameson is that such films do not attempt to recapture or represent the 'real' past, but always make do with certain myths and stereotypes about the past. They offer what he calls 'false realism', films about other films, representations of other representations (what Baudrillard calls simulations: see discussion in the previous section): films 'in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces "real" history' (1984: 67). In this way, history is supposedly effaced by 'historicism . . . the random cannibalisation of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion' (65–6). Here we might cite films like *True Romance*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Kill Bill*.

The failure to be historical relates to a second stylistic feature identified by Jameson: cultural 'schizophrenia'. He uses the term in the sense developed by Lacan (see Chapter 5) to signify a language disorder, a failure of the temporal relationship between signifiers. The schizophrenic, he claims, experiences time not as a continuum (past–present–future), but as a perpetual present that is only occasionally marked by the intrusion of the past or the possibility of a future. The 'reward' for the loss of conventional selfhood (the sense of self as always located within a temporal continuum) is an intensified sense of the present. Jameson explains it thus:

> Note that as temporal continuities break down, the experience of the present becomes powerfully, overwhelmingly vivid and 'material': the world comes before the schizophrenic with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious and oppressive charge of affect, glowing with hallucinatory energy. But what might for us seem a desirable experience – an increase in our perceptions, a libidinal or hallucinogenic intensification of our normally humdrum and familiar surroundings – is here felt as loss, as 'unreality' (1985: 120).

To call postmodern culture schizophrenic is to argue that it has lost its sense of history (and its sense of a future different from the present). It is a culture suffering from 'historical amnesia', locked into the discontinuous flow of perpetual presents. The 'temporal' culture of modernism has given way to the 'spatial' culture of postmodernism.

Jim Collins (2009) has identified a similar trend in recent cinema, what he calls an 'emergent type of genericity' (470): popular films that 'quote' other films, self-consciously making reference to and borrowing from different genres of film. What makes Collins's position more convincing than Jameson's is his insistence on 'agency': the claim that such films appeal to (and help constitute) an audience of *knowing bricoleurs*, who take pleasure from this and other forms of bricolage. Moreover, while Jameson argues that such forms of cinema are characterized by a failure to be truly historical, Peter Brooker and Will Brooker (1997a), following Collins, see instead 'a new historical sense . . . the shared pleasure of intertextual recognition, the critical effect of play with narrative conventions, character and cultural stereotypes, and the power rather than passivity of nostalgia' (7). Brooker and Brooker argue that Quentin Tarantino's films, for example,

> can be seen as reactivating jaded conventions and audience alike, enabling a more active nostalgia and intertextual exploration than a term such as 'pastiche', which has nowhere to go but deeper into the recycling factory, implies. Instead of 'pastiche', we might think of 'rewriting' or 'reviewing' and, in terms of the spectator's experience, of the 'reactivation' and 'reconfiguration' of a given generational 'structure of feeling' within 'a more dynamic and varied set of histories' (ibid.).

They point to the ways in which Tarantino's work presents an 'aesthetic of recycling . . . an affirmative "bringing back to life", a "making new"' (Brooker and Brooker, 1997b: 56).

According to Collins (2009), part of what is postmodern about Western societies is the fact that the old media are not simply replaced by the new, but are recycled for circulation together with the new. As he explains, 'The ever-expanding number of texts and technologies is both a reflection of and a significant contribution to the "array" – the perpetual circulation and recirculation of signs that forms the fabric of postmodern cultural life' (457). He argues that 'This foregrounded, hyperconscious intertextuality reflects changes in terms of audience competence and narrative technique, as well as a fundamental shift in what constitutes both entertainment and cultural literacy in [postmodern culture]' (460). As a consequence of this, Collins argues, 'Narrative action now operates at two levels simultaneously – in reference to character adventure and in reference to a text's adventures in the array of contemporary cultural production' (464).

Jameson's final point, implicit in his claim that postmodernism is the 'cultural dominant' of late or multinational capitalism, is the claim that postmodernism is a hopelessly commercial culture. Unlike modernism, which taunted the commercial culture of capitalism, postmodernism, rather than resisting, 'replicates and reproduces – reinforces – the logic of consumer capitalism' (1985: 125). It forms the principal part of a process in which 'aesthetic production . . . has become integrated into commodity production generally' (1984: 56). Culture is no longer ideological, disguising the economic activities of capitalist society; it is itself an economic activity, perhaps the most important economic activity of all. Culture's changed situation can have a significant effect on cultural politics. No longer is it credible to see culture as ideological representation, an immaterial reflection of the hard economic reality. Rather, what we now witness is not just the collapse of the distinction between high and popular culture, but the collapse of the distinction between the realm of culture and the realm of economic activity.

According to Jameson, when compared to 'the Utopian "high seriousness" of the great modernisms', postmodern culture is marked by an 'essential triviality' (85). More than this, it is a culture that blocks 'a socialist transformation of society' (ibid.). Despite his rejection of a moral critique as inappropriate ('a category mistake'), and regardless of his citing of Marx's insistence on a dialectical approach, which would see postmodern culture as both a positive and a negative development, his argument drifts inexorably to the standard Frankfurt School critique of popular culture. The postmodern collapse of the distinction between high and popular has been gained at the cost of modernism's

'critical space'. The destruction of this critical space is not the result of an extinction of culture. On the contrary, it has been achieved by what he calls

> an 'explosion': a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself can be said to have become 'cultural' in some original and as yet unauthorised sense (89).

The thorough 'culturalization' or 'aestheticization' of everyday life is what marks postmodernism off from previous socio-cultural moments. Postmodernism is a culture, which offers no position of 'critical distance'; it is a culture in which claims of 'incorporation' or 'co-optation' make no sense, as there is no longer a critical space from which to be incorporated or co-opted. This is Frankfurt School pessimism at its most pessimistic (see Chapter 4). Grossberg (1988) sounds the critical note with economy:

> For Jameson . . . we need new 'maps' to enable us to understand the organisation of space in late capitalism. The masses, on the other hand, remain mute and passive, cultural dupes who are deceived by the dominant ideologies, and who respond to the leadership of the critic as the only one capable of understanding ideology and constituting the proper site of resistance. At best, the masses succeed in representing their inability to respond. But without the critic, they are unable even to hear their own cries of hopelessness. Hopeless they are and shall remain, presumably until someone else provides them with the necessary maps of intelligibility and critical models of resistance (174).

Although Jameson can be located within the traditions of Frankfurt School pessimism, there is a sense in which he is not quite as postmodern as one of the School's leading figures, Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse's (1968b) discussion of what he calls 'affirmative culture' (the culture or cultural space that emerged with the separation of 'culture' and 'civilization', discussed in Chapter 2) contains little of Jameson's enthusiasm for the historical emergence of culture as a separate sphere. As he explains,

> By affirmative culture is meant that culture of the bourgeois epoch, which led in the course of its own development to the segregation from civilisation of the mental and spiritual world as an independent realm of value that is also considered superior to civilisation. Its decisive characteristic is the assertion of a universally obligatory, eternally better and more valuable world that must be unconditionally affirmed: a world essentially different from the factual world of the daily struggle for existence, yet realisable by every individual for himself 'from within', without any transformation of the state of fact (95).

Affirmative culture is a realm we may enter in order to be refreshed and renewed in order to be able to continue with the ordinary affairs of everyday life. 'Affirmative'

culture invents a new reality: 'a realm of apparent unity and apparent freedom was constructed within culture in which the antagonistic relations of existence were supposed to be stabilised and pacified. Culture affirms and conceals the new conditions of social life' (96). The promises made with the emergence of capitalism out of feudalism, of a society to be based on equality, justice and progress, were increasingly relegated from the world of the everyday to the realm of 'affirmative' culture. Like Marx and Engels (1957) on religion, Marcuse (1968b) argues that culture makes an unbearable condition bearable by soothing the ontological pain of existence.

> One of the decisive social tasks of affirmative culture is based on this contradiction between the insufferable mutability of a bad existence and the need for happiness in order to make such an existence bearable. Within this existence the resolution can be only illusory. And the possibility of a solution rests precisely on the character of artistic beauty as illusion. . . . But this illusion has a real effect, producing satisfaction . . . [in] the service of the status quo (118–24).

Something that produces satisfaction in the service of the status quo does not sound like something a Marxist would want to regret coming to an end. Moreover, does its demise really block, as Jameson claims, the transition to a socialist society? It might in fact be possible to argue just the opposite case.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001) share some of Jameson's analysis of the postmodern, but unlike Jameson they recognize the possibility of agency.

> Today it is not only as a seller of labour-power that the individual is subordinated to capital, but also through his or her incorporation into a multitude of other social relations: culture, free time, illness, education, sex and even death. There is practically no domain of individual or collective life which escapes capitalist relations. But this 'consumer' society has not led to the end of ideology, as Daniel Bell announced, nor to the creation of a one-dimensional man, as Marcuse feared. On the contrary, numerous new struggles have expressed resistance against the new forms of subordination, and this from within the heart of the new society (161).

Laclau and Mouffe also refer to 'the new cultural forms linked to the expansion of the means of mass communication. These . . . make possible a new mass culture which . . . profoundly shake[s] traditional identities. Once again, the effects here are ambiguous, as along with the undeniable effects of massification and uniformization, this media-based culture also contains powerful elements for the subversion of inequalities' (163). This does not mean that there has necessarily been an increase in 'material' equality. Nevertheless,

> the cultural democratization which is the inevitable consequence of the action of the media permit the questioning of privileges based upon older forms of status. Interpellated as equals in their capacity as consumers, even more numerous groups are impelled to reject the real inequalities which continue to exist. This 'democratic

> consumer culture' has undoubtedly stimulated the emergence of new struggles which have played an important part in the rejection of old forms of subordination, as was the case in the United States with the struggle of the black movement for civil rights. The phenomenon of the young is particularly interesting, and it is no cause for wonder they should constitute a new axis for the emergence of antagonisms. In order to create new necessities, they are increasingly constructed as a specific category of consumer, which stimulates them to seek a financial autonomy that society is in no condition to give them (164).

Postmodern pop music

A discussion of postmodernism and popular culture might highlight any number of different cultural texts and practices: for example, television, music video, advertising, film, pop music, fashion, new media, romantic love (Storey and McDonald, 2014a, 2014b, and Storey, 2014). I have space here to consider only two examples, television and pop music.

For Jameson (1984) the difference between modernist and postmodernist pop music is quite clear: the Beatles and the Rolling Stones represent a modernist moment against which punk rock (the Clash, for example) and new wave (Talking Heads, for example) can be seen as postmodernist. Andrew Goodwin (1991) has quite correctly pointed out that Jameson's compressed time-span solution – pop music culture's rapid progression through 'realism' (rock'n'roll), 'modernism', 'postmodernism' – enabling Jameson to establish a modernist moment against which to mark out a postmodernist response, is a very difficult argument to sustain. As Goodwin convincingly argues, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones are as different from each other as together they are different from the Clash and Talking Heads. In fact, it would be much easier to make an argument in which the distinction is made between the 'artifice' of the Beatles and Talking Heads and the 'authenticity' of the Rolling Stones and the Clash.

Goodwin himself considers a number of ways of seeing pop music and pop music culture as postmodernist. Perhaps its most cited aspect is the technological developments that have facilitated the emergence of 'sampling'. He acknowledges that the parallel with some postmodern theorizing is interesting and suggestive, but that is all it is – interesting and suggestive. What is often missed in such claims is the way in which sampling is used. As he explains, 'textual incorporation cannot be adequately understood as "blank parody". We need categories to add to pastiche, which demonstrate how contemporary pop opposes, celebrates and promotes the texts it steals from' (173). We also need to be aware of 'the historicizing function of sampling technologies in contemporary pop' (ibid.), the many ways in which sampling is 'used to invoke history and authenticity' (175). Moreover, in regard to Jameson's argument about nostalgia replacing history, 'it has often been overlooked that the "quoting" of sounds and styles acts to historicize contemporary culture' (ibid.). Rap is perhaps the best

example of sampling being used in this way. When asked to name *the* black means of cultural expression, the African American cultural theorist Cornel West (2009), answered, 'music and preaching'. He went on to say,

> rap is unique because it combines the black preacher and the black music tradition, replacing the liturgical ecclesiastical setting with the African polyrhythms of the street. A tremendous articulateness is syncopated with the African drumbeat, the African funk, into an American postmodernist product: there is no subject expressing originary anguish here but a fragmented subject, pulling from past and present, innovatively producing a heterogeneous product. The stylistic combination of the oral, the literate, and the musical is exemplary . . . it is part and parcel of the subversive energies of black underclass youth, energies that are forced to take a cultural mode of articulation because of the political lethargy of American society (386).

This is a rejection of Jameson's claim that such work can be dismissed as an example of postmodern pastiche. The intertextual play of quotations in rap is not the result of aesthetic exhaustion; these are not the fragments of modernism shored against aesthetic ruin and cultural decline, but fragments combined to make a voice to be heard loudly within a hostile culture: the twisting of dismissal and denial into defiance.[5]

Postmodern television

Television, like pop music, does not have a period of modernism to which it can be 'post'. But, as Jim Collins (1992) points out, television is often seen as the 'quintessence' of postmodern culture. This claim can be made on the basis of a number of television's textual and contextual features. If we take a negative view of postmodernism, as the domain of simulations, then television seems an obvious example of the process – with its supposed reduction of the complexities of the world to an ever-changing flow of depthless and banal visual imagery. If, on the other hand, we take a positive view of postmodernism, then the visual and verbal practices of television can be put forward, say, as the knowing play of intertextuality and 'radical eclecticism' (Charles Jenks in Collins, 1992: 338), encouraging, and helping to produce, the 'sophisticated *bricoleur*' (Collins, 1992: 337) of postmodern culture. For example, a television series such as the now classic *Twin Peaks*[6] both helps to constitute an audience as bricoleurs and is watched in turn by an audience who celebrate the programme's bricolage. According to Collins,

> Postmodernist eclecticism might only occasionally be a preconceived design choice in individual programs, but it is built into the technologies of media sophisticated societies. Thus television, like the postmodern subject, must be conceived as a site – an intersection of multiple, conflicting cultural messages.

> Only by recognising this interdependency of bricolage and eclecticism can we come to appreciate the profound changes in the relationship of reception and production in postmodern cultures. Not only has reception become another form of meaning production, but production has increasingly become a form of reception as it rearticulates antecedent and competing forms of representation (338).

Another divide within the approach to television as postmodern is between textual and 'economic' analysis. Instead of the semiotic sophistication of its intertextual play and radical eclecticism, television is condemned as hopelessly commercial. Collins uses *Twin Peaks* as a means of bringing together the different strands of the relationship between postmodernism and television. *Twin Peaks* is chosen because it 'epitomises the multiple dimensions of televisual postmodernism' (341). He argues that the postmodernism of the television series is the result of a number of interrelated factors: David Lynch's reputation as a film maker, the stylistic features of the series, and, finally, its commercial intertextuality (the marketing of related products: for example, *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer*).

At the economic level, *Twin Peaks* marks a new era in network television's view of the audience. Instead of seeing the audience as a homogeneous mass, the series was part of a strategy in which the audience is seen as fragmented, consisting of different segments – stratified by age, class, gender, sexuality, geography, ethnicity and 'race' – each of interest to different advertisers. Mass appeal now involves attempts to intertwine the different segments to enable them to be sold to different sections of the advertising market. The significance of *Twin Peaks*, at least from this perspective, is that it represents an attempt by American network television to win back affluent sections of the television audience supposedly lost to cable, cinema and video – in short, the so-called 'yuppie' generation. Collins demonstrates this by addressing the way the series was promoted. First, there was the intellectual appeal – Lynch as auteur, *Twin Peaks* as avant-garde television. This was followed by *Twin Peaks* as soap opera. Together the two appeals soon coalesced into a postmodern reading formation in which the series was 'valorised as would-be cinema and would-be soap opera' (345). Similar marketing techniques have been used to promote many recent television programmes. The obvious examples are *Desperate Housewives*, *Sex and the City*, *Six Feet Under*, *The Sopranos*, *Lost*, *Mad Men*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *Borgen*, *The Bridge*, *Game of Thrones*, *Breaking Bad*, *The Wire*, *The Killing*, *Homeland*, and *Riviera*.

The marketing of *Twin Peaks* (and similar television programmes) is undoubtedly supported and sustained by the polysemic play of *Twin Peaks* itself. The series is, as Collins suggests, 'aggressively eclectic' (ibid.), not only in its use of conventions from Gothic horror, police procedural, science fiction and soap opera, but also in the different ways – from straight to parody – these conventions are mobilized in particular scenes. Collins also notes the play of 'tonal variations . . . within and across scenes' (ibid.). This has led some critics to dismiss *Twin Peaks* as 'mere camp'. But it is never simply camp – it is never simply anything – continually playing with our expectations, moving the audience, as it does, from moments of parodic distance to moments of emphatic intimacy. Although this is a known aspect of Lynch's filmic technique, more

significantly it is also a characteristic 'reflective of changes in television entertainment and of viewer involvement in that entertainment' (347). As Collins explains,

> That viewers would take a great deal of pleasure in this oscillation and juxtaposition is symptomatic of the 'suspended' nature of viewer involvement in television that developed well before the arrival of *Twin Peaks*. The ongoing oscillation in discursive register and generic conventions describes not just *Twin Peaks* but the very act of moving up and down the televisual scale of the cable box. While watching *Twin Peaks*, viewers may be overtly encouraged to move in and out of an ironic position, but watching other television soap operas (nighttime or daytime) involves for many viewers a similar process of oscillation in which emotional involvement alternates with ironic detachment. Viewing perspectives are no longer mutually exclusive, but set in perpetual alternation (347–8).

Oscillation in discursive register and generic conventions is a primary factor in many recent television programmes. Again, the obvious examples are *Desperate Housewives*, *Sex and the City*, *Six Feet Under*, *Mad Men*, *Game of Thrones*, *Breaking Bad* and *The Sopranos*. The key point to understand with regard to *Twin Peaks* and postmodernism is that what makes the programme different from other television programmes is not that it produces shifting viewing positions, but that it 'explicitly acknowledges this oscillation and the suspended nature of television viewing. . . . [It] doesn't just acknowledge the multiple subject positions that television generates; it recognises that one of the great pleasures of the televisual text is that very suspension and exploits it for its own sake' (348).

Umberto Eco (1984) has identified a postmodern sensibility exhibited in an awareness of what he calls the 'already said'. He gives the example of a man who cannot tell his lover 'I love you madly', and says instead: 'As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly' (39). Given that we now live in an increasingly media-saturated world, the 'already said' is, as Collins (1992) observes, 'still being said' (348). For example, we can identify this in the way that television, in a effort to fill the space opened up by the growth in satellite and cable channels, recycles its own accumulated past, and that of cinema, and broadcasts these alongside what is new in both media.[7] This does not mean that we must despair in the face of Jameson's postmodern 'structure'; rather we should think in terms of both 'agency' and 'structure' – which ultimately is always a question of 'articulation' (see Chapter 4). Collins provides this example of different strategies of articulation:

> The Christian Broadcasting Network and Nickelodeon both broadcast series from the late fifties and early sixties, but whereas the former presents these series as a model for family entertainment the way it used to be, the latter offers them as fun for the contemporary family, 'camped up' with parodic voice-overs, supergraphics, reediting designed to deride their quaint vision of American family life, which we all know never really existed even 'back then' (334).

There can be little doubt that similar things are happening in, for example, music, cinema, advertising, fashion, and in the different lived cultures of everyday life. It is not

a sign that there has been a general collapse of the distinctions people make between, say, high culture/low culture, past/present, history/nostalgia, fiction/reality; but it is a sign that such distinctions (first noticed in the 1960s, and gradually more so ever since) are becoming increasingly less important, less obvious, less taken for granted. But this does not of course mean that such distinctions cannot be, and are not being, articulated and mobilized for particular strategies of social distinction. But above all, we should not take any of these changes at face value; we must always be alert to the what, why and for whom something is being articulated, and how it can always be articulated differently, in other contexts (see Chapter 12).

Postmodernism and the pluralism of value

Postmodernism has disturbed many of the old certainties surrounding questions of cultural value. In particular, it has problematized the question of why some texts are canonized, while others disappear without trace: that is, why only certain texts supposedly 'pass the test of time'. There are a number of ways to answer this question. First, we can insist that the texts which are valued and become part of what Williams (2009) calls the 'selective tradition' (see Chapter 3) are those that are sufficiently polysemic to sustain multiple and continuous readings.[8] The problem with this approach is that it seems to ignore questions of power. It fails to pose the question: 'Who is doing the valuing, in what context(s) and with what effects of power?' In short, it is very difficult to see how a process in which only certain people have the power and cultural authority to ensure the canonical reproduction of texts and practices can really be described as simply an effect of a text's polysemy.

Rather than begin with polysemy, cultural studies would begin with power. Put simply, a text will survive its moment of production if it is selected to meet the needs and desires of people with cultural power. Surviving its moment of production makes it available to meet the (usually different) desires and needs of other generations of people with cultural power. The selective tradition, as Williams (2009) points out, is 'governed by many kinds of special interests, including class interests'. Therefore, rather than being a natural repository of what Arnold (2009) thought of as 'the best that has been thought and said' (see Chapter 2), it 'will always tend to correspond to its *contemporary* system of interests and values, for *it* is not an absolute body of work but a continual selection and interpretation' (Williams, 2009: 38–9; original emphasis). Particular interests, articulated in specific social and historical contexts, always inform the selective tradition. In this way, what constitutes the selective tradition is as much about policing knowledge as it is about organizing terrains of critical inquiry.

It is not difficult to demonstrate how the selective tradition forms and re-forms in response to the social and political concerns of those with cultural power. We have only to think of the impact that, say, feminism, queer theory and post-colonial theory have had on the study of literature – women writers, gay writers, writers from the

so-called colonial periphery have become a part of the institution of literature, not because their value has suddenly been recognized in some disinterested sweep of the field: they are there because power encountered resistance; even when the selected texts remain the same, how and why they are valued certainly changes; so much so that they are hardly the same texts from one historical moment to the next.[9] To paraphrase the Four Tops: 'It's the same old text / But with a different meaning since you achieved relative power'.[10] Or to put it in a less danceable discourse, a text is never really the issuing source of value, but always the site where the construction of value – variable values – can take place.

Of course, when we ascribe value to a text or practice, we are not (or rarely ever) saying this is only of value to me; our evaluation always (or usually always) includes the notion that the text or practice should also be of value to others. The trouble with some forms of evaluation is that they insist that their community of others is an ideal community, with absolute cultural authority over all other valuing communities. It is not that they insist that all others should consume what they value (it is usually better for 'value' if they do not), but they do insist on due deference for their judgements and absolute recognition of their cultural authority to judge (see discussion of the 'culture and civilization' tradition in Chapter 2).[11]

The postmodern return to questions of value has witnessed an increased interest in the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984). As I pointed out in Chapter 1, Bourdieu argues that distinctions of 'culture' (whether understood as text, practice or way of living) are a significant aspect in the struggle between dominant and subordinate groups in society. He shows how arbitrary tastes and arbitrary ways of living are continually transmuted into legitimate taste and the only legitimate way of life. The consumption of culture is thus a means to produce and to legitimate social difference, and to secure social deference.

Bourdieu's project is to (re-)locate 'value' in the world of everyday experience, to suggest that similar things are happening when I 'value' a holiday destination or a particular mode of dress, as are happening when I 'value' a poem by T.S. Eliot or a song by Paul Robeson or a photograph by Cindy Sherman or a piece of music by Gavin Bryars. Such evaluations are never a simple matter of individual taste; cultural value operates both to identify and to maintain social difference and sustain social deference. Distinction is generated by learned patterns of consumption that are internalized as 'natural' preferences and interpreted and mobilized as evidence of 'natural' competences, which are, ultimately, used to justify forms of social and cultural domination. The cultural tastes of dominant groups are given institutional form, and then, with deft ideological sleight of hand, their taste for this institutionalized culture (i.e. their own) is held up as evidence of their cultural and, ultimately, their social, superiority. The effect of such cultural distinction is to produce and reproduce social distinction, social separation and social hierarchy. It becomes a means of establishing differences between dominated and dominant groups in society. The production and reproduction of cultural space thus produces and reproduces social space.

Bourdieu's purpose is not to prove the self-evident, that different classes have different lifestyles, different tastes in culture, but to identify and interrogate the

processes by which the making of cultural distinctions secures and legitimates forms of power and control rooted in economic inequalities. He is interested not so much in the actual differences, but in how these differences are used by dominant groups as a means of social reproduction. The much heralded collapse of standards rehearsed (almost weekly) in the 'quality' media may be nothing more than a perceived sense that the opportunities to use culture to make and mark social distinction are becoming more and more difficult to find, as, for example, when Classic FM (both radio and magazine) continues to blur the once firm boundary between high and popular culture and Premier League football is, in many instances, as expensive as, say, ballet or opera.

Perhaps the most significant thing about postmodernism for the student of popular culture is the dawning recognition that there is no absolute categorical difference between high and popular culture. This is not to say that one text or practice might not be 'better' (for what/for whom, etc., must always be decided and made clear) than another text or practice. But it is to say that there are no longer any easy reference points to which we can refer, which will automatically preselect for us the good from the bad. Some might regard such a situation (or even the description of such a situation) with horror – the end of *Standards*. On the contrary, without easy recourse to fixed categories of value, it calls for rigorous, if always contingent, standards, if our task is to separate the good from the bad, the usable from the obsolete, the progressive from the reactionary. As John Fekete (1987) points out,

> By contrast [to modernism], postmodernism may be at last ready – or may, at least, represent the transition to a readiness – unneurotically, to get on without the Good-God-Gold Standards, once and for all, indeed without any capitalised Standards, while learning to be enriched by the whole inherited inventory once it is transferred to the lower case. . . . We need to believe and enact the belief that there are better and worse ways to live the pluralism of value. To see all cows as the same colour would truly amount to being lost in the night. But the prospect of learning to be at ease with limited warranties, and with the responsibility for issuing them, without the false security of inherited guarantees, is promising for a livelier, more colourful, more alert, and, one hopes, more tolerant culture that draws enjoyment from the dappled relations between meaning and value (17).

Fekete's point is not significantly different from the argument made by Susan Sontag (1966) at the birth of the postmodern 'new sensibility':

> The new sensibility is defiantly pluralistic; it is dedicated both to an excruciating seriousness and to fun and wit and nostalgia. It is also extremely history-conscious; and the voracity of its enthusiasms (and of the supercession of these enthusiasms) is very high-speed and hectic. From the vantage point of this new sensibility, the beauty of a machine or of the solution to a mathematical problem, of a painting by Jasper Johns, of a film by Jean-Luc Godard, and of the personalities and music of the Beatles is equally accessible (304).

The global postmodern

One way in which the world is said to be becoming postmodern is in its increasing globalization. Perhaps the dominant view of globalization, especially in discussions of globalization and culture, is to see it as the reduction of the world to an American 'global village': a global village in which everyone speaks English with an American accent, wears Levi jeans and Wrangler shirts, drinks Coca-Cola, eats at McDonald's, surfs the net on a computer overflowing with Microsoft software, listens to rock or country music, watches a mixture of MTV and CNN, Hollywood movies and reruns of *Dallas*, and then discusses the prophetically named World Series, while drinking a bottle of Budweiser and smoking a Marlboro cigarette. According to this scenario, globalization is the supposed successful imposition of American culture around the globe, in which the economic success of American capitalism is underpinned by the cultural work that its commodities supposedly do in effectively destroying indigenous cultures and imposing an American way of life on 'local' populations. Photo 10.2 presents a very succinct version of this argument. It is a photograph of a sculpture depicting people entering a Coca-Cola house as Chinese citizens and leaving as little Coca-Cola people. There are at least three problems with this view of globalization.

The first problem with globalization as cultural Americanization is that it operates with a very reductive concept of culture: it assumes that 'economic' success is the same as 'cultural' imposition. In other words, the recognition of the obvious success

Photo 10.2 The Coca-Colonization of China.

of American companies in placing products in most of the markets of the world is understood as self-evidently and unproblematically 'cultural' success. For example, American sociologist Herbert Schiller (1979) claims that the ability of American companies to successfully unload commodities around the globe is producing an American global capitalist culture. The role of media corporations, he claims, is to make programmes that 'provide in their imagery and messagery, the beliefs and perspectives that create and reinforce their audiences' attachments to the way things are in the system overall' (30).

There are two overlapping problems with this position. First, it is simply assumed that commodities are the same as culture: establish the presence of the former and you can predict the details of the latter. But as John Tomlinson (1999) points out, 'if we assume that the sheer global presence of these goods is *in itself* token of a convergence towards a capitalist monoculture, we are probably utilising a rather impoverished concept of culture – one that reduces culture to its material goods' (83). It may be the case that certain commodities are used, made meaningful and valued in ways that promote American capitalism as a way of life, but this is not something that can be established by simply assuming that market penetration is the same as cultural assimilation.

Another problem with this position is that it is an argument that depends on the claim that commodities have inherent values and singular meanings, which can be imposed on passive consumers. In other words, the argument operates with a very discredited account of the flow of influence. It simply assumes that the dominant globalizing culture will be successfully injected into the weaker 'local' culture. That is, it is assumed that people are the passive consumers of the cultural meanings that supposedly flow directly and straightforwardly from the commodities they consume. To think that economic success is the same as cultural success is to work under the influence of what I shall call 'mode of production determinism' – that is, the argument that how something is made determines what it can mean or what it is worth (it is Hollywood, etc., what do you expect?). Such analysis always seems to want to suggest that 'agency' is always overwhelmed by 'structure'; that consumption is a mere shadow of production; that audience negotiations are fictions, merely illusory moves in a game of economic power. Moreover, 'mode of production determinism' is a way of thinking that seeks to present itself as a form of radical cultural politics. But all too often this is a politics in which attacks on power are rarely little more than self-serving revelations about how 'other people' are always 'cultural dupes' (see Chapters 4 and 12).

A second problem with globalization as cultural Americanization is that it operates with a limited concept of the 'foreign'. First of all, it works with the assumption that what is foreign is always a question of national difference. But what is foreign can equally be a question of class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, generation, or any other marker of social difference (see Figure 10.1). Moreover, what is foreign in terms of being imported from another country may be less foreign than differences already established by, say, class or generation. Furthermore, the imported foreign may be used against the prevailing power relations of the 'local' (see Photo 10.3 and Figure 10.2).

Local	*Locals*
national	class
	ethnicity
	gender
	generation
	'race'
	sexuality, etc.

Figure 10.1 The 'foreign'.

This is probably what is happening with the export of hip hop. What are we to make of the global success of hip hop? Are, for example, South African, French, Chinese or British rappers (and fans of hip hop) the victims of American cultural imperialism? Are they the cultural dupes of a transnational music industry? A more interesting approach would be to look at how South Africans, French, Chinese or British youth have 'appropriated' hip hop, used it to meet their local needs and desires. In other words, a more interesting approach would be one that looked at what they do with it, rather than only what it supposedly does to them. American culture is worked on; it is used to make space within what is perceived as the dominant national culture.

Photo 10.3 'Imagine there's no countries'.

Figure 10.2 'Imagine there's no countries'.

Another problem with this very limited notion of the foreign is that it is always assumed that the 'local' is the same as the national. But within the national, there may well be many 'locals' (see Figure 10.1). Moreover, there may be considerable conflict between them, and between them and the dominant culture (i.e. 'the national'). Globalization can therefore both help confirm and help undo local cultures; it can keep one in place and it can make one suddenly feel out of place. For example, in 1946, addressing a conference of Spanish clerics, the Archbishop of Toledo wondered '[h]ow to tackle' what he called 'woman's growing demoralization – caused largely by American customs introduced by the cinematograph, making the young woman independent, breaking up the family, disabling and discrediting the future consort and mother with exotic practices that make her less womanly and destabilize the home' (quoted in Tomlinson, 1997: 123). Spanish women may have taken a different view.

A third problem with the model of globalization as cultural Americanization is that it assumes that American culture is monolithic. Even in the more guarded accounts of globalization it is assumed that we can identify something singular called American culture. George Ritzer (1999), for example, makes the claim that 'while we will continue to see global diversity, many, most, perhaps eventually all of those cultures will be affected by American exports: America will become virtually everyone's "second culture"' (89).

Globalization as cultural Americanization assumes that cultures can be lined up as distinct monolithic entities, hermetically sealed from one another until the fatal moment of the globalizing injection. Against such a view, Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1995) argues that globalization, as cultural Americanization,

> overlooks the countercurrents – the impact non-Western cultures have been making on the West. It downplays the ambivalence of the globalising momentum and ignores the role of local reception of Western culture – for example the indigenization of Western elements. It fails to see the influence non-Western cultures have been exercising on one another. It has no room for crossover culture – as in the development of 'third cultures' such as world music. It overrates the homogeneity of Western culture and overlooks the fact that many of the standards exported by

> the West and its cultural industries themselves turn out to be of culturally mixed character if we examine their cultural lineages (53).

Moreover, the idea of globalization as the imposition of a singular and monolithic American culture (a middle-class culture of whiteness) begins to look very different, less monolithic, when we consider, for example, the fact that the United States has the third largest Hispanic population in the world. In addition, it is estimated that by 2076, the tricentennial of the American Revolution, people of Native American, African, Asian or Latin descent will make up the majority of its population.

Hall (1996b) has written that postmodernism 'is about how the world dreams itself to be American' (132). If this is the case, we may be all dreaming of many different Americas, depending on which bits of America we choose to consume. For example, if the material for our dreams is gathered from American popular music, the geography and geometry, the values, images, myths, styles, will be different depending on whether, for example, it is blues, country, dance, folk, heavy metal, jazz, rap, rock'n'roll, sixties rock, or soul. At the very least, each genre of music would produce different political articulations, in terms of class, gender, 'race', ethnicity, sexuality and generation. To recognize this is to recognize that cultures, even powerful cultures such as that of the USA, are never monolithic. As Said (1993) observes, '[A]ll cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic' (xxix). Moreover,

> [n]o one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are now [no] more than starting points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly exclusively, White, or Black, or Western, or Oriental (407–8).

Globalization is much more complex and contradictory than the simple imposition of, say, American culture. It is certainly true that we can travel around the world while never being too far from signs of American commodities. What is not true, however, is that commodities equal culture. Globalization involves the ebb and flow of both homogenizing and heterogenizing forces, the meeting and the mingling of the 'local' and the 'global'. To understand this in a different way: what is exported always finds itself in the context of what already exists. That is, exports become imports, as they are incorporated into the indigenous culture. This can in turn impact on the cultural production of the 'local'. Ien Ang (1996) gives the example of the Cantonese Kung Fu movies that revitalized the declining Hong Kong film industry. The films are a mixture of 'Western' narratives and Cantonese values. As she explains:

> Culturally speaking, it is hard to distinguish here between the 'foreign' and the 'indigenous', the 'imperialist' and the 'authentic': what has emerged is a highly distinctive and economically viable hybrid cultural form in which the global

> and the local are inextricably intertwined, in turn leading to the modernized reinvigoration of a culture that continues to be labelled and widely experienced as 'Cantonese'. In other words, what counts as 'local' and therefore 'authentic' is not a fixed content, but subject to change and modification as a result of the domestication of imported cultural goods (154–5).

Globalization may be making the world smaller, generating new forms of cultural hybridity, but it is also bringing into collision and conflict different ways of making the world mean. While some people may celebrate the opening up of new global 'routes', other people may resist globalization in the name of local 'roots'. Resistance in the form of a reassertion of the local against the flow of the global can be seen in the increase in religious fundamentalism (Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism) and the re-emergence of nationalism, most recently in the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia. A more benign example of the insistence on 'roots' is the explosive growth in family history research in Europe and America. In all of these examples, globalization may be driving the search for 'roots' in a more secure past in the hope of stabilizing identities in the present.

Globalization is a complex process, producing contradictory effects, in changing relations of culture and power. One way to understand the processes of globalization is in terms of Gramsci's concept of hegemony. From the perspective of the post-Marxist cultural studies appropriation of hegemony theory, cultures are neither something 'authentic' (spontaneously emerging from 'below'), nor something which is simply imposed from 'above', but a 'compromise equilibrium' (Gramsci, 1971: 161) between the two; a contradictory mix of forces from both 'below' and 'above'; both 'commercial' and 'authentic'; both 'local' and 'global'; marked by both 'resistance' and 'incorporation', involving both 'structure' and 'agency'. Globalization can also be seen in this way. As Hall (1991) observes:

> what we usually call the global, far from being something which, in a systematic fashion, rolls over everything, creating similarity, in fact works through particularity, negotiates particular spaces, particular ethnicities, works through mobilizing particular identities and so on. So there is always a dialectic, between the local and the global (62).

Hegemony is a complex and contradictory process; it is not the same as injecting people with 'false consciousness'. It is certainly not explained by the adoption of the assumption (mocked by the authors) that 'hegemony is prepackaged in Los Angeles, shipped out to the global village, and unwrapped in innocent minds' (Liebes and Katz, 1993: xi). A better way of understanding the processes of globalization is one that takes seriously not just the power of global forces, but also those of the local. This is not to deny power but to insist that a politics in which 'local' people are seen as mute and passive victims of processes they can never hope to understand, a politics that denies agency to the vast majority, or at best recognizes only certain activities as signs of agency, is a politics that can exist without causing too much trouble to the prevailing structures of global power.

Convergence culture

Another aspect of the postmodern is convergence culture, 'where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways' (Henry Jenkins, 2006: 2). Convergence involves the flow of media content across a range of different platforms. This is not simply a matter of new technologies but a process that requires the active participation of consumers.

Convergence culture, like most popular culture discussed in this book, is a site of struggle and negotiation. It cannot be explained and understood as something imposed from 'above' or as something spontaneously emerging from 'below'; it is a complex and contradictory combination of both forces. As Jenkins observes,

> Convergence . . . is both a top–down corporate-driven process and a bottom–up consumer-driven process. Corporate convergence coexists with grassroots convergence. Media companies are learning how to accelerate the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets, and reinforce viewer commitments. Consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other consumers (18).

Convergence culture is the result of three factors. The first is concentration of media ownership. Owning a range of different platforms encourages producers to distribute content across these different platforms. So, for example, a company may publish the book of the film, together with the game based on both and promote these in its magazines and newspapers and through its internet sites and mobile phone companies.

The second is technological change. This has created a new range of platforms for media content. For example, we can now do so many more things with a mobile phone than just make phone calls. We can take, send and receive photos and videos; make, send and receive sound files; send and receive text messages; download information from the internet; receive 'goal alerts'; play games; and use as a calendar, an alarm clock and a calculator (see Jewitt, 2005).

The third factor involves the consumers of media. I may, for example, choose to listen to my favourite music on my laptop, my CD or DVD player, my iPod, my car radio, on TV or radio, or on Youtube via my TV. The same music is made available on different platforms, but I have to actively participate to make the system work. Moreover, I select which platform best suits my pleasure and convenience.

The British science fiction television series *Doctor Who*, as Neil Perryman (2009) points out, 'embraces convergence culture on an unprecedented scale' (478). The BBC has made the programme available across a range of different platforms: mobile phones, podcasts, video blogs, websites, interactive red-button adventures and online games. In addition, it has launched two complementary series that take characters into other contexts. As Perryman observes,

> Doctor Who is a franchise that has actively embraced both the technical and cultural shifts associated with media convergence since it returned to our television screens in 2005. Its producers have attempted to provide extra-value content and narrative complexity for both a hardcore fanbase and a mainstream audience by deploying a series of evolving and changing storytelling strategies across a wide range of media platforms (488).

Afterword

Postmodernism has changed the theoretical and the cultural bases of the study of popular culture. It raises many questions, not least the role that can be played by the student of popular culture: that is, what is our relationship to our object of study? With what authority, and for whom, do we speak? As Frith and Horne (1987) suggest,

> In the end the postmodern debate concerns the source of meaning, not just its relationship to pleasure (and, in turn, to the source of that pleasure) but its relationship to power and authority. Who now determines significance? Who has the right to interpret? For pessimists and rationalists like Jameson the answer is multinational capital – records, clothes, films, TV shows, etc. – are simply the results of decisions about markets and marketing. For pessimists and irrationalists, like Baudrillard, the answer is nobody at all – the signs that surround us are arbitrary. For optimists like Iain Chambers and Larry Grossberg the answer is consumers themselves, stylists and subculturalists, who take the goods on offer and make their own marks with them (169).

Chapter 12 will consist mostly of an attempt to find answers to some of these questions.

Notes

1. The rise of religious fundamentalism is difficult to locate in Lyotard's postmodern condition.
2. For a critical introduction to the Enlightenment, see Porter (1990).
3. See Ricoeur (1981).
4. In the eighteenth-century opera, pastiche was a very common practice. See Storey (2006 and 2010a).
5. For an interesting example of postmodern sampling that involves this book, listen to 'High Definition' by the Granite Countertops.
6. In 2017 Twin Peaks returned, screened on both television and Netflix. FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper (played once again by Kyle MacLachlan) goes back to the town where twenty-five years earlier he had investigated the murder of homecoming queen Laura Palmer.
7. The expansion of the market in DVD 'box sets' has undoubtedly contributed to this development.

8. See Easthope (1991), Connor (1992) and the debate on value between Easthope and Connor in *Textual Practice*, 4 (3), 1990 and 5 (3), 1991. See also Frow (1995).
9. See Tompkins (1985) and Smith (1988).
10. The Four Tops, 'It's The Same Old Song', *Four Tops Motown Greatest Hits*, Motown Record Company. The line should run as follows, 'It's the same old song / But with a different meaning since you've been gone.'
11. See Storey (2003).

Further reading

Storey, John (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, 4th edn, Harlow: Pearson Education, 2009. This is the companion volume to the previous edition of this book. A fully updated 5th edition containing further readings is due for publication in 2018. An interactive website is also available (www.routledge.com/cw/storey), which contains helpful student resources and a glossary of terms for each chapter.

Appignanesi, Lisa (ed.), *Postmodernism*, London: ICA, 1986. A collection of essays – mostly philosophical – on postmodernism. McRobbie's contribution, 'Post-modernism and popular culture', is essential reading.

Best, Steven, and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, London: Macmillan, 1991. An excellent introduction to the debate about postmodernism.

Boyne, Roy and Ali Rattansi (eds), *Postmodernism and Society*, London: Macmillan, 1990. A useful collection of essays, with a very good introduction to the main issues in the debate about postmodernism.

Brooker, Peter and Will Brooker (eds), *Postmodern After-Images: A Reader in Film, Television and Video*, London: Edward Arnold, 1997. An excellent collection of essays, with very good introductory sections.

Campbell, Neil, Jude Davies and George McKay, *Issues in Americanization*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. A very good collection of essays on a variety of topics relating to the idea of Americanization. The introduction is excellent.

Collins, Jim, *Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Postmodernism*, London: Routledge, 1989. A very interesting book, situating popular culture in the debate about postmodernism.

Connor, Steven, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. A comprehensive introduction to postmodernism: useful discussion of popular culture.

Docker, John, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. The aim of the book is to challenge the way a century of modernist theory has understood twentieth-century popular culture. Intelligent, polemical and very readable.

Featherstone, Mike, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, London: Sage, 1991. An interesting sociological discussion of consumer culture and postmodernism. Essential reading.

Hebdige, Dick, *Hiding in the Light*, London: Comedia, 1988. A collection of essays mostly related to questions of postmodernism and popular culture. Essential reading.

Jenkins, Henry, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York: New York University Press, 2006. The key book on the emergence of 'convergence culture'.

Morris, Meaghan, *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism*, London: Verso, 1988. A collection of essays concerned with both theory and analysis. Essential reading.

Ross, Andrew (ed.), *Universal Abandon: The Politics of Postmodernism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. A useful collection of essays on postmodernism: some interesting discussion of popular culture.

Woods, Tim, *Beginning Postmodernism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999. Perhaps the best introduction to the debate that is postmodernism.