**Fredric Jameson – Postmodernism and Consumer Society**

Background

-considered as the leading American exponent (persuasion theorist) of Marxist criticism

-also intellectually sound with structural and post-structural ideas

-recently interested in the idea of ‘late capitalism’ and its relation to postmodernism

The concept of postmodernism

-concept not widely accepted or understood today

-postmodern works are reactions to modern works (in all art forms)

-there will be as many different forms of postmodernism as there were types of high modernism as the former is a reaction to those forms

-a key feature is the lack of distinction between high culture and mass/popular culture

-they incorporate different aspects of popular culture with high culture so that the distinction between them is increasingly difficult to make

-lack of distinction is called ‘effacement’

-different indication of this can be found in contemporary theory: where once academic discourses could still be distinguished, today we have a type of ‘theory’ that incorporates many schemes of thinking or none of them at all (political, scientific, sociological, literary etc.)

-marks the end of philosophy

-product of postmodernism is a ‘theoretical discourse’ (which is a periodizing concept, created in parallel to the rise of new formal features in culture/new type of social life/new economic order)

Pastiche

-imitation or mimicry of other styles (together with parody)

-modern literature offers great scope for parody since the writers have all been defined by the invention of rather unique styles that are unmistakable from another

-parody ‘capitalizes’ on the uniqueness of these styles and mocks the original

-there is a linguistic norm in contrast to which the styles of the great modernists can be mocked

-but perhaps modern literature, in its fragmentation and privatisation, foreshadows tendencies in society as a whole: fragmentation leads to the removal of just one linguistic norm (ie – it has disappeared)

-in that case, the idea of parody using a linguistic norm would not work

-parody is impossible: pastiche appears (parody doesn’t exist because there is no linguistic norm)

-pastiche is still an imitation, but a neutral one – it lacks parody’s humour (what is called a blank parody)

Why classical modernism has been replaced by postmodernism

-‘death of the subject’ or the end of individualism

-modernism relies on the concept of individualism

-but this concept is ideological and today, in the age of corporation, bureaucracies in business and in state etc the older bourgeois individual subject does not exist

-postmodernists believe that the older bourgeois individual subject doesn’t exist today but was a myth in the past – there have never been autonomous subjects

-unclear what writers and artists of the current period are meant to be doing. They will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds as they have already been invented.

-hence, the only possible form to continue with, is pastiche – since stylistic innovation is not possible

-failure of art, the failure of the new and the imprisonment of the past

Postmodernism and time

-‘textuality’ or ‘ecriture’

-Lacan and schizophrenia: originally considered as a language disorder. Linguistic version of the Oedipus complex – not biological but rather the connection between paternal authority and linguistic function. Failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language.

-Lacan and the two/three components of a linguistic sign:

* Relationship between a signifier (a material object/sound of the word/script of the text) and a signified (the meaning of that material word or text)
* Third component would be the ‘referent’ – the real thing as opposed to the concept or sound

-Structuralism tries to dispel the old conception as language as naming (adam example) which involves 1-to-1 correspondence between a signifier and a signified

-sentences don’t work that way: we don’t translate individual signifiers into signified on a 1-to-1 basis – we instead read the sentence as a whole

-there is an interrelationship of all the signifiers in a sentence – ‘meaning-effect’

-schizophrenia is the breakdown of the relationship between signifiers

-Lacan: the experience of time and identity is also an effect of language.

-it is because language has a past and a future, because the the sentence moves in time that we can have what seems to us a concrete experience of time

-but since the schizophrenic does not know language articulation in that way, they do not have our experience of temporal continuity – they are forced to live in the perpetual present with no connections with the past or the future

-in that sense their material signifiers are isolated and therefore the whole concept of personal identity is unknown because we rely on the persistent meaning of ‘I’ and ‘me’ over time

-on the other hand, they will have a far more intense experience of the present

-they have no personal identity yet also cannot do anything because they cannot commit to a certain continuity over time

-they have an undifferentiated vision of the world in the present

-do not make connections

-in normal speech we try to look past materiality towards meaning/in schizophrenia the breakdown of language creates vivid, literality where meaning is lost

-a signifier that has lost its signified has been transformed into an image

-in temporal art forms today this is reflected in the frustration and desperation of the creations – lack of connection and fluidity and meaning as a whole, different bits pieced together that aren’t connected

-temporal discontinuity

Cultural Production

-classical modernism was seen as scandalous/an oppositional art

-now they are no longer weird and replusive but realistic and ‘classics’

-very little in contemporary that society finds scandalous and those that are are still commercially successful

-contemporary art may have the same features as old high modernism but its position in society has shifted: society is continuously changing with artistic experimentation (clothing/advertising)

-the classics of high modernism are now classed in the canon and are taught – therefore losing their older subversive power

-social change following WW2 – marks a radical break from the society where high modernism was an underground force

-emergence of postmodernism correlates with the emergence of this new moment of late, consumer or multinational capitalism

-disappearance of a sense of history, society has lost its capacity to retain its own past and has begun to live in a perpetual present (eg media exhaustion of news – relegating such recent historical experiences as rapidly as possible into the past – serve as agents to our historical amnesia)

-postmodernism: transformation of reality into images / fragmentation of time into perpetual presents – are consonant with this process

-critical value of the new art – replicates/reinforces/reproduces the logic of consumer capitalism – is there also a way in which it resists that logic? (older modernism functioned against its society)