

POSTMODERNISM IN A VERY TINY NUTSHELL

<u>Modernism</u>	<u>Postmodernism</u>
Form (closed)	Anti-form (open)
Purpose	Play
Design	Chance
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Finished Art Object	Process/Performance
Distance	Participation
Totalization	Deconstruction
Centering	Dispersal
Metaphor	Metonymy
Signified (underlying meaning)	Signifier (words, language, symbols)
Depth	Surface
Determinacy	Indeterminacy

Philosophical assertions of postmodernism:

- Objective “Truth” with a capital T is not real or knowable (and not interesting anyway)
- Individual or localized “truths” are both more useful and more interesting
- The binaries/dichotomies that we base so much of our understanding of the world are constructed (artificial), lack usefulness, and usually serve to disempower or marginalize a group of people
- Direct knowledge of the world is impossible
- “All we can know is what we *say* about the world. Language. Texts. There is nothing other than language in the sense that it is our only way to access ‘reality.’”

Postmodern fictions:

- Reject the idea of progress, unity, and coherence
- “In postmodern fiction, there is no promise of a utopian future. Instead, we receive new styles of registering the world.” –Hassumani, *Salman Rushdie: A Postmodern reading of his major works*
- Extend modernist fiction’s tendency to replace linear narratives with “open text”—more open for interpretation and manipulation by the reader
- Are self-referential—that is, they will often expose the fact that they are texts, created by someone, with certain materials, meant to be received by a particular audience
- Force readers to have an active but not immersive reading experience—you play with the text and help build its meaning rather than getting lost in it or getting sucked into it

Questions from a postmodern perspective:

How does this text work to question enlightenment/modernist ideas? In what ways does this text mess with or play with the reader and his/her expectations as a reader? In what ways does this text stray from the typical narrative structure, and how do those deviations affect the text’s meaning? Is process preferred over product? How? Why?