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[英] 比格纳尔（Bignell J.） 著

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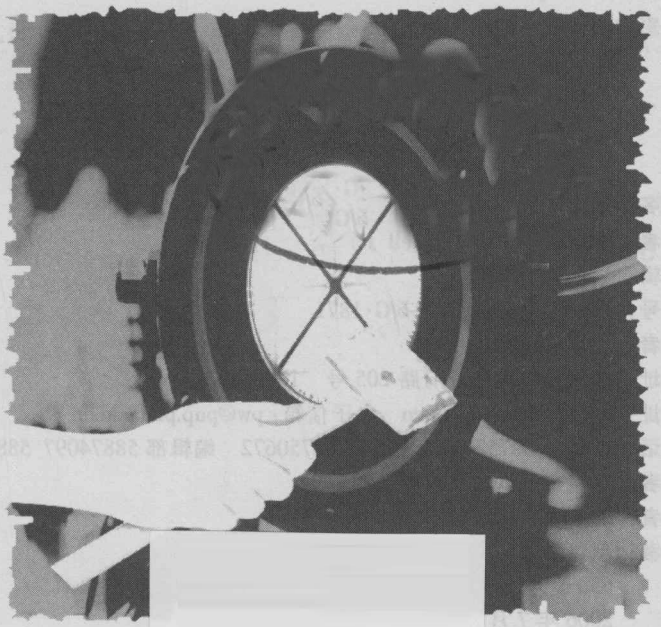

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PREFACE

This is a book that I have wanted to write for a long time. Some fifteen years ago, as a graduate student, I was already interested in the writing of such people as Marshall McLuhan, Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard. Although I was by training a student of literature, and enthused primarily by French structuralist theory, I had a hazy sense that their diverse ideas about culture might have interesting relationships to the media. As my studies turned increasingly toward film and television, aspects of postmodern thought began to have more influence on my work. Teaching film, television and other contemporary media involved communicating versions of postmodern theory to students, and the complexities and problems of these approaches became increasingly evident. When what seemed a long stretch of research time became available, I decided to embark on this project. The scope of the book has both expanded and contracted during the writing. The often helpful comments of anonymous readers of the original proposal have encouraged me to add strands of argument and topics of analysis which were not originally planned, and I hope that this finished product does justice to these suggestions. In order to make room for a broader discussion, I have simplified the planned structure of the book, and reduced the space for detailed analysis of particular films, television programmes, computer games and other media products which were going to be included. The book aims for a balance between close analysis and discursive argument, though the proportions of these kinds of writing vary from chapter to chapter. I hope that the book will be a helpful contribution to debates about postmodern media culture, and will enable future work on contemporary media culture and theories of the postmodern.

At a point near the completion of the book I changed jobs, and this caused considerable disruption to my plans. In this context, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people who provided support and encouragement during the writing of this book. The editorial team at Edinburgh University Press were consistently supportive of the project, and I thank them for their forbearance and understanding. During my time in the Department of English at the University of Reading, I was given research leave which allowed me to complete a first draft of the book. I am grateful to Cedric Brown, Head of Department, for this opportunity, as well as for his renowned efficiency and effectiveness more generally. Colleagues at the University of Reading, both in English and in other departments, were also helpful intellectually and personally. In particular, I am grateful to the members of the Critical Theory Reading Group for their indulgence of my obsessions and their contributions to my thinking. Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, Stephen Thomson and Daniela Caselli deserve especial thanks. When I moved to the Department of Media Arts at Royal Holloway College, University of London, completing this book prevented me for a while from embracing my new environment as wholeheartedly as I would have liked, and I am grateful to Carol Lorac, Head of Department, for smoothing my transition to new responsibilities, and to my new colleagues for their friendly welcome. Among the many others who have made important contributions, I would like to thank David Lusted for his salutary scepticism about the postmodern, Jacqui Griffiths for her incisive thinking about critical theory, and Mandy Merck for alerting me to a useful source at the last minute. My friend Joel Soiseth provided the cover illustration for this book, and I hope that the writing inside does justice to his fascinating work. My partner Lib Taylor has supported me intellectually and emotionally throughout, and she has my grateful thanks and my love.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: MEDIA CULTURE AND THE POSTMODERN

Critical discourses which make use of the term 'postmodern' are one of the dominant forms for addressing contemporary culture as something which is undergoing significant change, and as John Storey notes, 'popular culture is usually cited as a terrain on which these changes are to be most readily found'.[1] The citation of popular culture, and of mass-media culture in particular, is a central concern of this book. Some of the theorists of the postmodern in contemporary culture have used examples of specific media products, institutions, or audiences (especially Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, for instance), while some (like the influential Jean-François Lyotard or Jürgen Habermas) rarely use media examples, despite the relevance of their ideas to the media. However, many of the current studies which take their lead from these theorists have labelled particular media texts or practices as postmodern without being able to integrate a wide-ranging critique of contemporary media culture with a critique of theories of the post-modern. In this book I demonstrate and analyse the interdependence of theories and examples in critical approaches to the postmodern and media culture. The purpose of this re-examination of existing work is to show that the postmodern is a discursive construct which depends on the citation of particular kinds of objects, be they texts, institutions, audiences, or ways of conceptualising these and other aspects of media culture. This issue is central to the debates outlined in the first chapter of this book, which discusses the versions of the postmodern proposed by critical theories of media culture. As well as outlining key

propositions about media culture which have been advanced in theories of culture, the chapter places emphasis on the use of media culture itself as a terrain on which critical discourse stands. For while the postmodern is 'readily found' in media culture, media culture enables the discourses in and of the postmodern to establish themselves as modes of address to the contemporary.

The media examples referred to in the work I consider in Chapter 1 include television, cinema and information technology, and I shall discuss theories of the postmodern by cultural critics in relation to examples of, or references to, media products, media institutions, or media consumption. I shall show that theories of the postmodern are in part a response to developments in media culture, and that the theoretical discourses about the postmodern provide relevant models of how contemporary media culture can be evaluated. In other words, contemporary media and theories of the postmodern are mutually implicated and mutually defining, and this double movement is taken further in the chapters which follow. Chapter 1 sets the terms for the rest of the book by arguing that there are three interrelated critical projects which need to be carried out. These are: to assess the status of media examples in definitions of the postmodern; to evaluate the role of discourses about the postmodern in studying the media; and consequently to discuss the relationships between the media, the notion of the postmodern and contemporary culture. It is these three kinds of work which dominate this book, in different proportions and with different emphases. As well as rethinking some of the extensive work on the postmodern which has already been done, I also contribute conceptual and analytical work of my own, which supports or reorients significant strands of thought on postmodern media culture.

My contention is that the postmodern is a flexible and often useful conception which both allows discussion of disparate developments in media culture relating to production, texts and consumption, and performs a role in theoretical discourse which has been left empty by the supposed demise of other theoretical models (like Marxist criticism or empirical sociology), which have been deployed in critical work on media culture. From the 1970s onwards, academic work on media culture has taken a lead from Louis Althusser's essays on ideology,[2] and Roland Barthes' work on the mythologies of popular culture,[3] seeking to show how media texts position individual subjects in

processes of interpellation. Classic works like Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements* demonstrated with subtlety, conceptual complexity and political rigour, how media texts displace production by consumption as the basis of identity, obscure class and economic relations between people, and solicit the subject to construct meaning through relations with objects.[4] Agency is located in the text or media object itself, with only minimal opportunities for agency by the viewer, consumer or user. While conflict, contradiction and resistance may occasionally be present in the text as part of its internal dynamics of signification, leading to possibilities of process and struggle by the subject, the function of the text as an agent of interpellation would finally be successful. This predominantly Leftist discourse, whose effectivity I have myself promoted elsewhere,[5] began to be challenged with increasing force until by the middle of the 1980s it had been replaced at the centre of intellectual culture by a heterogeneous mix of critical discourses grouped under the umbrella term 'postmodernism'. While this situation has been variously applauded or attacked, the notion of the postmodern has a significant role and some enabling effects in contemporary thinking about media culture. However, there is considerable ambiguity and diversity in the ways in which the terms modern, modernity, postmodern, postmodernity and other related forms are deployed in discourses in and about media culture. One of these is the vexed question of periodising the postmodern, and I have already implicitly claimed in this paragraph that a shift to a postmodern form of media theory can be identified in a particular decade.

Modernity, postmodernity, postmodernism and the postmodern are terms which suggest a historical consciousness, and which view history as a whole that can be divided into periodising segments. The terms describe culture, which is thus simultaneously addressed as if it were a whole, and also as something that is in a process of dynamic and uneven change from one state to another. As Peter Osborne has written: 'What is rare is to find the ideas of postmodernism, postmodernity and the postmodern the object of philosophical attention at the level at which they are constituted, as periodising concepts of cultural history'.[6] As Osborne shows, versions of the postmodern in cultural theory have rarely been analysed systematically as theories of time, history and cultural change, and need to be considered as discourses which constitute the temporality, history and referentiality of the postmodern,

rather than simply denoting a set of texts or cultural relations which could be grouped together. The subtitle of this book was to have been *Theoretical Discourses and Their Objects*, and a version of this title now appears as the title of chapter one. The title was and is intended to alert the reader to two ways in which the book will address postmodern media culture. One of these is a focus on which objects, drawn from contemporary media culture, theories take, or can take, as the examples on which to base their conceptions of the postmodern. The second interpretation would be to note what the objectives of theoretical discourse may be. For, among other objectives, theoretical discourse on postmodern media culture may describe, celebrate, or decry either the use of the term postmodern in relation to media culture, or the media culture which is taken to be postmodern, or both. One of the problems in writing about the relationship of postmodern media to culture and politics is the issue of the relationship between the objects of analysis and the subject of interpretation. I have already signalled that the objects of analysis have a constitutive relationship to the theoretical outcomes which they support, and the status of the subject of theory is parallel to this. The subject of interpretation can take a range of guises. This subject can be the critic, as producer of a critical discourse, or the spectator or audience of a media production who is spoken for by the critical discourse, or a generalised and abstract subject of postmodernity, a collective 'we' which is claimed to inhabit a postmodern scene, and may even be constituted by it. Conversely, as in Terry Eageleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, a 'we' dominates a discourse critical of the postmodern, and 'our present conditions of life' demand a moral and political rejection of the postmodern in favour of an anticipated unity of humanity underwritten by a transhistorical biological nature and its needs.[7] Just as I argue that the objects of analysis in the postmodern are crucial to its significance, so too the subjects of postmodern theory are an important topic of analysis in constituting its address to contemporary media culture.

Any reference to the distinctiveness of the media culture of the present must imply a history, either of a genetic and diachronic developmental process which prepares for it, or a synchronic structural break whereby an earlier period gives way to a new structure. Osborne diagnoses the usage of the term postmodern in cultural theory correctly I think, stating that 'the popularity and tenacity of postmodernism as a

diagnostic discourse of "the times" can be seen to bespeak a desire for totalization in the medium of cultural experience which is not currently satisfied by any other critical tendency'.[8] The postmodern is a loose set of ideas critiquing Enlightenment reason, and having a Neitzchean flavour, combining Nietzsche's questioning of the categories of thought and of the status of theory itself, with a legacy of Marxian political engagement that stresses the relationship between cultural activity (or the lack of it) and politico-economic power structures. Media culture is a terrain on which communication between people in a concrete historico-economic situation takes place. This conclusion both derives from and departs from Marx's theory of the commodity, which addressed texts, technologies and media as things which mediate relations between thing-like individuals in capitalism. I argue that the objects of postmodern media culture, whether considered as texts, technologies, or modes of audience relations, function as the location of communicative relationships between people. But the critical metalanguages which address this situation are widely regarded to have lost the stability and authority which legitimate their claims to seize their objects of analysis adequately and to communicate satisfactory theories of culture. Postmodern theory shares with Marxism a commitment to analysing the politics of culture and the relations of culture to political and economic power. As a corollary to this, it shares Marxism's Hegelian heritage in idealist philosophy by invoking a theory of history, but at the same time postmodern cultural theory problematises that history. For postmodern theory, by virtue of the prefix 'post', suggests a totalising history in which the postmodern is both a stage in a teleological progression, but also a final subsumption of history into a null state that has absorbed past, present and future into itself. One of the characteristic moves in postmodern theory is the resistance to totalising grand narratives of history, as identified by Jean-François Lyotard. So postmodern theory is both a grand narrative itself, and a means of claiming that such grand narratives have lost their legitimacy. The consequence of this, as Osborne has shown, is that postmodern theory is marked by 'this paradox of self-referentiality' around historicisation and the power of theoretical discourse to produce it.[9] This book, while occupying a different terrain to Osborne's philosophical study of time and modernity, will focus on and explore the ramifications of this problem of self-referentiality.

The other significant connotation of the prefix 'post' in the postmodern is the definition of the postmodern in contrast to modernity or the modern. The modern is itself posited in contrast to the traditional, which the modern reacts against and assigns to a previous time. But as time and change continue to occur, what was modern keeps falling back into the traditional at the same time as further exemplars of the modern appear. Again, Osborne encapsulates this paradox of modernity well:

> Modernity is a form of historical time which valorizes the new as the product of a constantly self-negating temporal dynamic. Yet its abstract temporal form remains open to a variety of competing articulations. In particular, by producing the old as remorselessly as it produces the new, and in equal measure, it provokes forms of traditionalism the temporal logic of which is quite different from that of tradition as conventionally received.[10]

Therefore modernity as the time of the modern should not refer to an epoch with a starting and ending point, whether the modern is centred on the appearance of a new kind of individual subject, or a newly post-feudal socio-economic arrangement, for example. Because it is the term for what is new, the modern keeps producing the traditional as its other, and both the traditional and the modern thereby continually change their meaning. Furthermore, the production of the modern in the West has been the starting point for the use of the term modern, and therefore has a spatial dimension as well as a temporal one. To extend the notion of modernity to postcolonial societies already imposes a homogeneous production of spatiality and temporality across the globe which may cover over the specific cultural differences which affect what space and time mean, and what modernity and tradition mean. One of the concerns of this book is the limits which can be set to the spatial, geographical reach of postmodern media culture, and the relationship between a media culture which is postmodern and one which is not.

In the postmodern, the modern takes the place of the traditional as that which has been superseded, in the sense that in some places and at some times, a decisive change in culture seems to occur that creates this new third stage. So while modern means 'of the present' as

opposed to 'of the traditional past', postmodern could denote the transformation of the tradition of modernity into a new modernity, or a return to the traditional which has occurred as part of this new version of the modern. The postmodern is discursively placed as at once another kind of modernity and as something distinctly different from it. The point is made by Osborne, who writes, referring to Lyotard's postmodern as the nascence of the modern, which I discuss in Chapter 1:

> It is the irreducible doubling of a reflexive concept of modernity as something which has happened, yet continues to happen – ever new but always, in its newness, the same – that the identity and difference of the 'modern' and the 'postmodern' plays itself out at the most abstract level of the formal determinations of time.[11]

Modernity happened in the past, so that the postmodern goes beyond it. But the fact that the postmodern is also the new makes it part of the modern since 'modern' refers to the presentness of a state of affairs. In this book my own discourse refers as consistently as possible to 'the postmodern' as a means of addressing and distinguishing a media culture claimed to be different from that of an anterior modernity, and is thus used relationally rather than as a way of denoting a particular period.

The discourses which address the postmodern have their own histories. For the discursive status of theorists, media objects and practices which are cited in critical discourse changes, so that analysing the citations of theoretical discourses and examples of media culture could provide a history of notions of the postmodern. This task is taken up by, for example, Hans Bertens' *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*, where the ambiguity of the term requires its materialisation through examples and a history of its use, stabilising its viability as an analytical description of the present.[12] One of the confusions which this entails, however, is caused by the different ways in which the term postmodern is used in discourses that address different aspects of culture. There are significant differences between the evolving attributions of the term in theoretical work on, for example, literature, film and the visual arts. Since the topic of this book is media culture, these differences are not addressed in any detail, but they are occasionally relevant to this study for two reasons. First, while I analyse film, television and computer-based

media most often in the chapters which follow, I do include some work on popular written fiction where films are based on a literary source, and I do discuss some studies of the postmodern in photography which have a bearing on photography as an art form. Second, some of the philosophical and theoretical writing on the postmodern originated in the contexts of aesthetics and art criticism, though it has since been disseminated widely in criticism of other cultural forms, particularly contemporary media. However, while it would be interesting to follow up these problems of origin and cross-fertilisation, I am content to claim that the drift of work on the postmodern across disciplines and cultural forms is part of the issue of reference, of how a theoretical discourse makes claims to address a particular object of analysis, which is discussed throughout this book. Indeed it could be argued that postmodern theories of culture are in part distinguished by an implicit claim to generalisability across disciplines and cultural forms, at the same time as such a totalising ambition is problematised by postmodern theories.

Developmental history is one of the modes of thought which is questioned in theories of the postmodern, as I have already briefly outlined, and as I discuss further in Chapter 1. Indeed one of the shorthand phrases for pinning down what the postmodern consists in is 'the end of history', in the sense that notions of progress, development and perfectibility have lost their force. The second chapter of this book draws together theoretical writing on the end of history thesis with examples drawn from media culture, in particular from cinema, which concern apocalyptic scenarios. As Mick Broderick has noted,[13] apocalyptic scenarios have been evident since the beginning of film, in such diverse forms as the natural catastrophes of *The Comet* (1910), *The End of the World* (1916), or the technological annihilations of *The Airship Destroyer* (1916), *Metropolis* (1926), *Deluge* (1923), and *Things to Come* (1936). Apocalyptic fictions include a concept of repetition that permits the production of new stories about the end, and since predictions of apocalypse are perpetually disconfirmed, narratives about the end have to keep recommencing. My analysis of apocalypse focuses specifically on the relationships between the postmodern, conceived as an end of history and thus as a perpetual endtime, and the gendering of two films which explicitly concern imminent apocalypses, *The Name of the Rose* (1986) and *Seven* (1996). As Christopher Sharrett has

argued, both theories of the postmodern and recent cinema are concerned with an apocalypticism in which there is both a crisis of meaning and a sense of the end of Western culture.[14] In Chapter 2, I show that postmodern discourse shares much with conservative *fin-de-siècle* thinking in relation to masculinity, for the end of history is simultaneously the end of masculine mastery for a Western male subject. End of history theses, notably those produced by Francis Fukuyama and Fredric Jameson, rest on crises of mastery which I find at work in the two films I discuss, demonstrating the interweaving of theoretical discourse with examples drawn from contemporary media culture.

Chapter 3 returns to the same two films, along with further films and popular literature, to discuss problems of judgement and value in the postmodern. As I show in Chapter 1, some critical writing on the postmodern proposes that one of its attributes is the impossibility of a critical distance from it, so that the discourse which names an example and states a case cannot legitimately claim the distance which allows evaluative judgement. The problem is how to establish the postmodern as the referent of discourse and at the same time to evaluate it. Already in the 1960s, Susan Sontag had claimed that the evolving 'new sensibility' which she discerned in the New York cultural scene was characterised by the fact that 'the distinction between "high" and "low" culture seems less and less meaningful'.[15] The assumption of Modernist art into official culture could be seen to reinforce the existing separation between elite cultures and popular ones, and for Andreas Huyssen, writing in 1986, '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'.[16] The third chapter of this book addresses the issue of the interrelation between high and popular culture, situating the discussion in further work on *The Name of the Rose* and *Seven*. The film *The Name of the Rose* was an adaptation of a bestselling paperback, a metafictional novel by the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco which had sold over two million copies by 1986, the year of the film's release.[17] The film, like the novel, straddled the divide between discourses associated with both high and popular culture, alluding to the heretical sects and theological politics of the fourteenth century as well as the cinematic murder mystery and thriller genres. *Seven* also deploys reference to high culture in ways which problematise the status and value of canonical traditions, especially the written,

textual traditions represented by English literature and the Bible. The chapter also analyses *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) and the 1897 novel on which it is based. Stoker's novel was once a popular-cultural vampire thriller, but has now become a literary 'classic'. The film plays a complex game of allusion to the literary, to the history of cinema, and to contemporary cultural concerns, mixing and multiplying its systems of reference and meaning. The diverse films and texts referred two in Chapter 3 enable a discussion of postmodern referentiality and problems of value and judgement, and the paralleling of theoretical questions of cultural hierarchies with the ways that these problems appear in these different cultural objects. Again, the relationships between theory and example, thesis and illustration, form part of the structure and the topic of the chapter.

Part of the postmodern problem of judging value in cinema relates back to the apocalyptic motifs which are the subject of Chapter 2. Contemporary cinema has been described as apocalyptic in that it is claimed to have abandoned classical narrative form, and become a cinema of attractions, especially in the Hollywood blockbuster. The death of cinema which is addressed here is the end of a relation between the subject and object of vision whose history goes back at least to the proto-cinematic devices of the nineteenth century. I would argue, along with Anne Friedberg, that image-producing apparatuses have become increasingly important in contemporary culture, to the extent that their effects provide the exemplarity on which a theory of postmodern media subjectivity can be constructed. Part of the body of reference for such a claim is the work on nostalgia and historicity produced by Fredric Jameson, and Friedberg states that her conception of postmodern subjectivity 'parallels Jameson's theorization of a "cultural dominant". Rather than simply proclaiming a temporal moment of rupture, I have traced the subtle transformation produced by the increasing cultural centrality of the image producing and reproducing apparatuses'.[18] This account immediately raises problems of politics, since it appears both univalent and global. Thus, for example, Jennifer Wicke[19] notes that Jameson's 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'[20] is focused on large-scale issues of aesthetics and politics, and so cannot take note of local resistances against hegemony, and ignores the gendering of the subject in the postmodern. In subsequent work, Jameson draws back from the totalising tendencies of this