POST MODERNITY

Presentation By: Dr. Sujit Kumar Choudhary, Dept. of Sociology, MGCUB

Complexity of Contemporary World

- We live in a world in which aspects of postmodernity are in constant tension with aspects of modernity and pre-modern existence…

- A world that is both industrial and postindustrial, in which many of the qualities that characterized by modernity (*the speeding up of time and compression of space that resulted in part from urbanization, industrialization, and automation*) have become conditions in postmodernity alongside and in relation to virtual technologies and the flows of capital, information, and media in the era of globalization.

- Anthony Giddens thinks a new sociological theory capable of grasping the complexity of contemporary society.

- Giddens describes the modern world as a "juggernaut". Modernity in the form of a juggernaut is extremely dynamic, it is a 'runway world' with great leaps in the pace, scope and profoundness of change over prior systems.

Modernity

☐ Modernity involves the rise of modern society, a rationalistic epistemology (the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality), and an individualistic and objective ontology (claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality) (Torfing 1999:303).

☐ Secularized society with an institutional separation of the state from civil society, a much greater degree of social and technical division of labour, and the formation of nation-state uniting cultural and political borders.

☐ The idea of modernism changed with the Enlightenment, the cultural movement associated with **scientific progress and reason**, future oriented versus being based on a relation to the past.

☐ Modernity reached its height in the 19th century and into the early 20th century with movement of populations.

☐ Demographics found cities attracting millions from the countryside and industrial capitalism flourished.

Modernity (Cont.)

☐ It was characterized by the experience of upheaval and change, yet also of optimism and a belief in a better, more advanced future.

☐ Modernism was characterized by a sense of knowing that was forward looking and positive – belief in knowing what was true and real as what was for the best in a given society.

☐ **Anthony Giddens** defines modernity in terms of four basic institutions:

1) **Capitalism**: characterized by commodity production, private ownership of capital, propertyless wage labour and a class system.
2) **Industrialism**: involves the use of inanimate power sources and machinery to produce goods.
3) **Surveillance Capacities**: the supervision of the activities of subject population in the political sphere.
4) **Military Power**: the control of the means of violence, including the industralisation of war

Postmodernism

➢ Postmodernism is the blanket term containing many strands of thought.

➢ Jean Francois Lyotard announced the postmodernity in 1979 in "The Post-modern Condition".

➢ The Postmodern is characterized by **questioning** these sorts of knowledge and belief in progress.

➢ Do we really know that progress is always a good thing?

➢ Postmodernism insists that there are many truths as opposed to a single pure truth.

➢ In postmodernism all social institutions fall under scrutiny, as do all philosophical assumptions.

➢ There is a questioning of all ideologies rather than accepting certain truths as natural.

➢ A constant quest for authenticity.

Postmodernism (Cont.)

➢ Social inequalities are structured more by patterns of consumption than production.

➢ Postmodernism questions the idea of presence, or immediate experience as being reliable and real.

➢ Why? Because everything is **mediated** through language, images, social forces, etc. So postmodernism works in tension with modernism and the past.

➢ Postmodernism emphasizes ideas of pluralism and multiplicity - especially of meaning. There are multiple subjectivities and identity categories like race, gender, class, age…

➢ There is a belief that texts can have many meanings.

➢ The idea of hypertext reflects postmodernism in using a network model with multiple pathways rather than linear narrative to organize knowledge and information.

➢ Hyper commodification of products in which they are consumed not in terms of value but in terms of their semiotic capacity to establish unequal relationship.

Postmodernism (Cont.)

➢ Classes are dissolving and the most advanced societies are no longer class societies.

➢ It destabilizes contemporary social theory.

➢ It values difference as there are no absolute values that commands faithfulness.

➢ It critiques all limiting assumption in social and political life

➢ It is suspicious of any evolutionary theory and all centralizing tendencies and celebrates a diversity of approaches to social life and decentralized social movements.

➢ Post-modern covers: A new epoch, New cultural products & New theories of society

Jacques Derrida (1930-)

- ☐ French philosopher and a sociologist
- ☐ Used a deconstructive approach
  - ☐ Illustrated in his three works
    - ■ Of grammatology, Writing and Difference, Speech and Phenomena
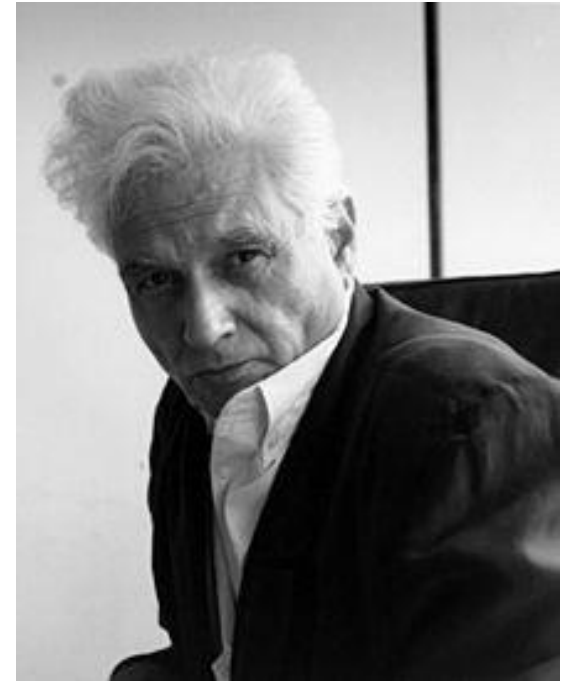
Developed the concept of discourse
   "emphasizes the primacy of the words we use, the concepts they embody, and the rules that develop within a group about what are appropriate ways of talking about things"

Derrida & Postmodernism

- Deconstruction of language, society and culture
- Language can be reduced to writing which does not control the subjects
- All institutions are structures, are nothing but writing and incapable of controlling the individual

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998)

- One of the world's foremost philosophers and a noted French postmodernist

- Covered a variety of topics such as postmodern conditions, modernist and post modernist art, knowledge and communication, language metanarratives, and legitimization.

- Multiplicity of views and meanings.

- Looking for polysemic and alternative meanings.

Art, Architecture, and Postmodernism

- Believed that the postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher because the text she or he creates is not governed by pre-established rules and cannot be judged according to the applications of given categories
- Defined postmodernity as a product, or an effect, of the development of modernity itself

Postmodernism and Knowledge

- Societies that have computer knowledge are at the forefront in the transformation process to postmodernity

- Advancing technology has a direct effect on knowledge (economically powerful nations have exerted their will on less-developed nations)

- Knowledge and power are two sides of the same question: Who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-o308cW0hKI

Legitimation, Language, Narratives

- Believed that grand narratives of knowledge had lost their credibility in the postmodern society and their claims of legitimacy

- Believed narratives are an integral aspect of culture and directly affect the language of any given society

- Used language games to contrast narrative and scientific knowledge

- Defines modernism as the attempt to legitimate science by appeal to 'metanarratives', or philosophical accounts of the progress of history in which the hero or knowledge struggles toward a great goal

Language Games

- Rules do not carry within themselves their own legitimation, but are object of a contract between players

- If there are no rules, there is no game, so even one modification of one rule alters the nature of the game

- Every utterance should be thought of as a 'move' in a game

Language Games (Cont.)

- Language shows an example of the first efforts of legitimacy
- Each human born into the world/place that has already been labeled or constructed by past events and/or by those in power
- It is an infants responsibility to emancipate themselves (become an owner of themselves)
- Language is that tool of emancipation

JEAN BAUDRILLARD (1929~2006)

> A noted French Social Scientist

> 1968: started publishing: System of Objects; Consumer society, Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, The Mirror Production, Symbolic Exchange and Death, America, On the Beach, and Cool Memories.

> His work changed: 1960's modernist and Marxist

> 1980's postmodernist and critic of Marxism
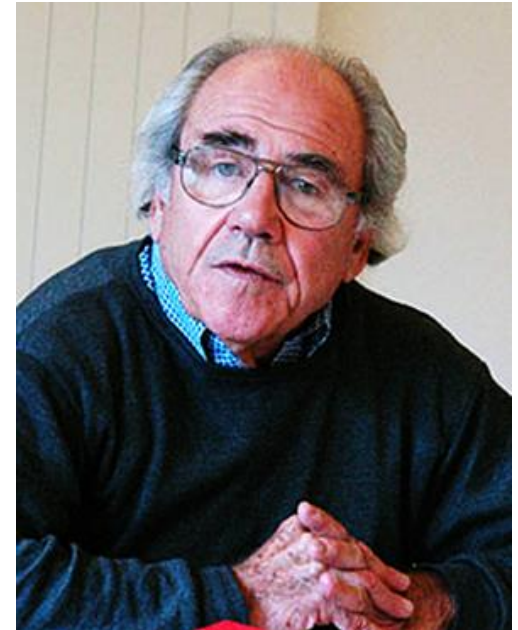
Baudrillard and Postmodernism

- In the 1970s, he put forward the notion of 'symbolic exchange' as an alternative to economic exchanges (Symbolic Exchange and Death 1976).

- Post-modern society becomes self referential and characterized by 'simulation' and 'simulacra' which are the representation of any aspect of consumption.

- Simulations are unlike representations, which make reference to a real object; simulacra stand on their own without requiring recourse to real objects or worlds elsewhere.

- Our culture, with computers and TV sets, is the paradigm for global looking practices ruled by the simulacra of virtual media images.

- Baudrillard has described the late twentieth century as a period during which images through media became more real than the real - they are hyperreal.

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVMf2hhfer0&feature=related

Contemporary Society: Consumer Society

- Baudrillard argues in his book "In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities (1983)" that contemporary society has entered into a phase of implosion (disintegration).

- He believed that our society is no longer dominated by production, but by developments of consumerism, the media, entertainment, and information technologies.

- Mass media and entertainment led our society undergone a "catastrophic" revolution that has led to the death of "social" society. The postmodern society is bombarded by too many massages and means and so on.

Fredric Jameson (1934-)

Postmodernism

☐ Post modernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1984), New Left Review (Journal) & 1991

☐ The post modern situation as possessing both positive and negative aspects of post-modernism

☐ Characteristics:

1. Superficiality: simulacrum (copy of a copy)

2. Lack of emotion

3. No history

4. Deep flux and great confusion created through computer and electronic machines.

Postmodernism (Cont.)

- Like Jean Baudrillard, Jameson believed that culture dominants are a pattern of representation that appears across different media and art forms.

- In late capitalism, culture is dominated by consumerism and mass media.

- He used the example of Las Vegas to explain that with late capitalism, aesthetic production has become integrated into commodity production, and it spilled over into architecture as well.

- Hyperspace: an area where modern conceptions of space are useless in helping us to orient ourselves. People develop cognitive maps in order to maneuver in the complexity of society (cannot find the exit in casino/hotel). And hyperspace is not just exists in postmodern society, it also can be find in history.

Michel Foucault (1926~1984)

- French Sociologists
- Discipline and Punish
- Madness and Civilization
- the Birth of the Clinic
- The Archaeology of Knowledge
- The History of Sexuality
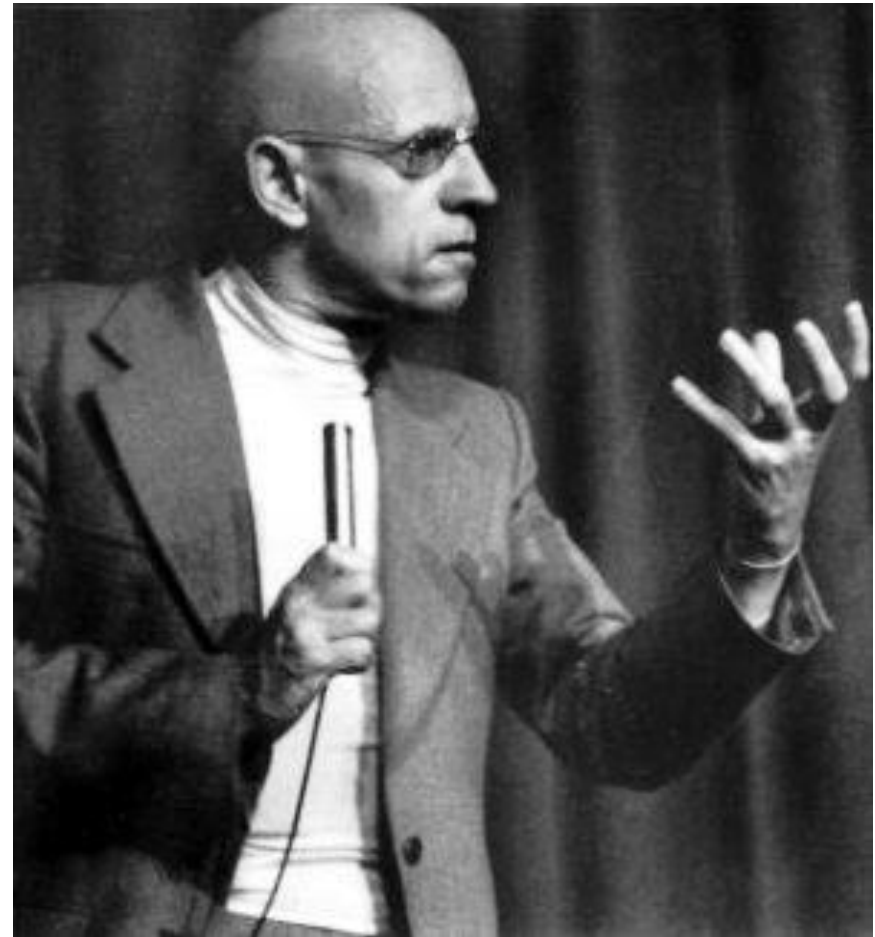
- There is no question of predicting history through grand theories and meta narratives. History happens by chance.

- Archaeology of Knowledge (1966): Power/Knowledge

- The nature of knowledge as power should not be hierarchical and also that the higher the knowledge the greater the power it wields the subjects

- Power and knowledge are implicative of each other.

Methodology

- He insisted that human sciences can be treated as autonomous systems of discourse.

- In methodological approaches, researcher must remain neutral as to the truth and meaning of the discursive system studies.

- All human sciences should be "discourse-object".

- He did not value the hermeneutic approach because he did not attempt to uncover any hidden meanings behind written words.

Discipline & Punishment

- His most famous work, Discipline and Punish (1975) describe a new way to see the prison system. In this book, Foucault explained the history and purpose of prison.

- There were three primary techniques of control: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination. The "power", in which means the "control" of people can be achieved by observing them.

- His structural analysis of total institutions led him to conclude that modern prisons reflect modern views of appropriate forms of discipline, especially as determined by those who possess power.

Sexuality

- In the book "the history of sexuality (1978)" Foucault challenges the hermeneutic belief in deep meaning by tracing the emergence of sexual confession and relating it to practices of social domination.

- What is "normal" and how one "should" feel.

- "Technologies of all kind are designed to control the freethinking behavior of individuals."

- Education system is controlled and people be taught to self-control.

- "in short, the modern world attempts to suppress impulses (desire) of al kinds, especially sexual, violent, and unruly (disruptive) ones" (Garner, 2000)

Power

- When he talked about power, he mentioned the intransigence of freedom and control (disciplinary power and punishment). There are many visible and invisible powers in our society to control people. "In contrast to monarchial power, there is disciplinary power, a system of surveillance which is interiorized to the point that each person is his or her overseer."

- Modern power (disciplinary control) only focuses on the nonobservance and to correct the deviant behaviors (crime).

- For his ideas about power, he argued that people do not "have" power implicitly. People only can engage with "power" because power is a technique or action. Furthermore, resistance will always exist with power (Power Theory is based on Marxian ideas but focuses on a new direction as he rejects Marx's ideas).

Relevancy

- Modernism: 1890s~about 1945
- Postmodernism: after WWII, after 1968
- Modern and postmodern are vague and have been applied to different aspects.
- Modernism and postmodernism are usually used to refer the technological advancements and new modes of thinking.
- "Modernist thinking is about search of an abstract truth of life; postmodernist thinkers believe that there is no universal truth, abstract or otherwise." Postmodernist believe the power from hyper-reality and they get highly influenced by mass media.

Criticism

- Against theory

- Illogical or non-rational aspects

- Concentrates on marginals

- Stress on intertextuality

- Denying of reality or truth

- Not having confidence on scientific method

Your Turn!

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

THANK YOU!