CHAPTER 1

POSTMODERNISM : AN OVERVIEW
“Postmodernism”, says Hans Bertens, “is an exasperating term.”
Berten’s remark has been testified by many other theorists and critics of postmodernism. The reason behind the difficulty in defining the term is its enormous complexity and the daunting multiplicity of views about its meaning, scope and implications. Ihab Hassan states that, “postmodernism suffers from a certain semantic instability, that is, no clear consensus about its meaning exists among scholars.”

This point is elaborated further by Bertens:

Postmodernism, then, means and has meant different things to different people at different conceptual levels, arising from humble literary-critical origins in the 1950s to a level of global conceptualization in the 1980s.

This lack of unanimity and complex diversity notwithstanding, postmodernism has assumed an enormous significance in the philosophical, aesthetic and cultural debates over the past few decades. The term is used to refer to a wide range of phenomena such as an epistemological stance, a cultural and aesthetic style, a


critical practice and an economic condition. Some critics have tried to underline the main usages of the term. Patricia Waugh, for example, remarks that postmodernism tends to be used in three main senses; as a reference to the contemporary cultural epoch, as an aesthetic practice and as a development in the philosophical thought.4

The first thing to catch attention in the term postmodernism is its etymological derivation from modernism. The suffix 'post' seems to imply something that comes after modernism, and therefore connotes periodization. How postmodernism stands in relation to modernism has, however, been a subject of intense debates which have centered around the crucial question: if and how postmodernism is a break from modernism. While for some theoreticians postmodernism constitutes a break from modernism, for others it is essentially a continuation of modernism. It has, nevertheless, become increasingly clear that postmodernism has come to be understood as a concept which despite certain overlappings with the primary concerns of modernism, cannot be

equated with it. It is now asserted by most critics that postmodernism connotes a different set of responses to the issues of philosophy, art and culture than modernism. For example, Lyotard who is arguably the most oft-quoted figure on postmodernism, in *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) presents the postmodern condition as one characterized by the breakdown of all systems and foundational truths. He sees postmodernism offering a critique to modernism which he regards continuing, in some important ways, the project of the Enlightenment:

I will use the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.  

As against modernism which is characterized by some kind of faith in a grand narrative, he defines postmodernism as "incredulity toward all grand narratives."

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Silvio Gaggi describes the critical stance of postmodernism towards modernism in these terms:

Often the modern period is used to refer to the entire epoch of Western civilization since the Renaissance. Postmodernism, in this context, suggests not simply that which follows the early twentieth century culture, but that which follows the entire humanist tradition, a central component, of the culture of the modern period. The creation of a new designation suggests that in some way the postmodern world is different from the modern one. Not surprisingly, therefore, the term posthumanism is another of the numerous 'post' prefixed words bandied about in the postmodern period. When postmodernism is used this way, the suggestion is that certain fundamental premises of the humanist tradition—the confidence in reason as a faculty enabling humans to come to an understanding of the Universe, the belief in the existence of the self and the acceptance of the individual as the primary existential entity—have been transcended or rejected as no longer tenable.6

The perception that postmodernism departs significantly from modernism underlies the arguments of even some of its most vocal critics. Jurgen Habermas, for example, regards postmodernism as a betrayal of modernism which he sees as continuing the project of the Enlightenment. His thesis is that modernity is an unfinished project

that has the potential of achieving the emancipatory goals in the social and political domains. Postmodernism, Habermas argues, by its explicit admission of skepticism regarding human reason, tends to subvert the aims of modernity.\(^7\) Hans Bertens describes Habermas’s position in these terms:

...he sees aesthetic modernity (avant-gardist modernism) as engaged in an attempt to enable a return to the project of modernity as it was originally conceived. That project as formulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art, according to their inner logic. At the same time, this project intended to release the cognitive potentials of each of these domains to set them free from their esoteric forms. The Enlightenment philosophers wanted to utilize this accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life, that is to say, for the rational organization of everyday social life.\(^8\)

For its champions, postmodernism adopts a critical stance towards modernism by subjecting to a rigorous critique some important assumptions of humanism that had continued to be intact

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in modernism, the faith in human reason being a central one. A seminal point here is the appropriation of the main ideas of French poststructuralism by the postmodernist thought. The enormous impact of poststructuralism on contemporary thought can be witnessed in the manner in which the fundamental assumptions of the humanist tradition like the belief in human reason, the stable human subject, the belief in emancipation through progress, and the neutrality of linguistic discourse, have been radically contested by it. Although postmodernism began to be debated rather independently in America when critics like Ihab Hassan tried to theorize it without relating it to poststructuralism, yet very soon a virtual conflation between the two occurred. As Hal Foster rightly remarks, "postmodernism is hard to conceive without the continental theory, structuralism and poststructuralism in particular." 9

The enormous influence of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century writers like Freud, Marx and Nietzsche had already unsettled some of the long-established ideas of the humanist tradition. What the poststructuralist writers did was to problematize

even more radically these notions with newer insights and perceptive tools. It is worth mentioning that poststructuralism, in essence, has been seen as continuing further the philosophical projects of thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger. Derrida and Foucault, especially, have substantially drawn on the insights of these thinkers. Postmodern critics too trace its origins to Nietzsche and Heidegger. Ihab Hassan, for example, while discussing the roots of the postmodern thought remarks:

Nietzsche’s radical perspectivism, not merely his skepticism, challenged the grounds on which philosophy, from Plato to Hegel, had sought to build. Nature, language and mind no longer congruent, defied the articulations of a sovereign code.\(^{10}\)

Similarly, Best and Kellner note that Nietzsche's assault on the fundamental categories of Western philosophy provided the theoretical premises for many poststructuralist and postmodern critiques:

He [Nietzsche] attacked philosophical conceptions of the subject, representation, causality, truth, value, and system, replacing Western philosophy with a perspectivist orientation for which there are no

facts, only interpretations, and no objective truths, only the constructs of various individuals or groups. 11

Even Patricia Waugh regards Heidegger's critique of the Cartesian assumption of a radical split between the knowing subject and the inert object of knowledge as a shaping influence on postmodernism:

From his first major work, *Being and Time* (1927) and more insistently in later essays collected in *The Question Concerning Technology or Poetry, Language, Thought*, Heidegger developed a critique of Cartesianism as the founding methodology of modernity: one which he saw as productive of the violences of the West and inadequate as a ground for knowledge. For Heidegger, the Cartesian assumption of a radical split between knowing subject and inert object of knowledge has led to a world in which the detached superiority of the scientist becomes the model and ground of all existence. Instead of experiencing world as a texture through which we come to be, world is observed as an inert material body to be manipulated through a series of dualisms generated by the subject-object split (mind/body, spirit/matter, reason/emotion, masculinity/feminity).12

It is these rather unsettling ideas that reached their culmination in the works of Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Barthes,

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Lacan, Kristeva and others. In due course, the appeal of these ideas began to be felt by thinkers, artists, historians and other social scientists on both sides of the Atlantic, leading to a perception that a new age had dawned upon the Western world. Lyotard’s work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* attempts to capture the spirit of this age characterized by a loss of belief in all grand narratives and totalizing philosophies which make political, religious, social and ethical prescriptions. These grand narratives lay claim to the knowledge of truth and hence claim for themselves grounds of legitimacy. They include Marxism, Christianity and the Enlightenment Project, all of which have lost their credibility as universal truths. For Lyotard, Wittgenstein’s ‘language games’ offer a better alternative of little narratives which function on the principles of performativity and on a smaller scale. Human experience is fragmented into numerous localized roles, into different ‘language games’, each with their particular contexts and rules for judging actions.

Lyotard’s book established that the postmodern condition would have pluralism, heterogeneity and performativity as the
principles of legitimacy for knowledge. Postmodern condition, hence, is characterized by a problematization of all knowledge. Using the traditional philosophical terminology, it can be argued that postmodernism is a thorough-going critique of both subjectivity and objectivity. The important point, however, is that this critique derives its strength largely from the critical insights provided by poststructuralism and hence foregrounds the primacy of language in its critical activity.

The traditional Western thought was premised upon a concept of the human subject that serves as a condition for the possibility of all knowledge. Descartes' 'cogito ergo sum' provides the basis for this idea of a rational, self-sufficient and enormously competent human subject capable of arriving at conclusive epistemological truths by means of rational inquiry. Contrary to this, postmodern thought concludes that the human subject is itself constituted by a complex web of cultural and linguistic factors that precede it. This idea about the human subject can be seen as having its point of departure in the works of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, all of whom challenged the notions of a unitary, stable and autonomous subject.
One of the earliest theorists to draw from these theoretical insights was Louise Althusser who argued that "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects", and, "has the function of constituting concrete individuals as subjects."\(^\text{13}\) In fact, Althusser's interpretation of Marx's ideas on human subjectivity is as illuminating as it is provocative:

He [Marx] drove the philosophical categories of the subject...etc from all the domains in which they had reigned supreme. Not only from political economy (rejection of the myth of homo economicus, that is of the individual with definite faculties and needs as the subject of the classical economy); not just from history (rejection of social atomism and ethico-political idealism); not just from ethics (rejection of the Kantian ethical idea); but also from philosophy itself: for Marx's materialism excludes the empiricism of the subject (and its inverse: the transcendental Subject).\(^\text{14}\)

Althusser's remarks suggest that one of Marx's important contributions to philosophy lies in his challenge to the traditional concept of the human subject.


However, the most influential poststructuralist to have challenged the notion of the unified self is Michel Foucault, who is constantly invoked in the debates on postmodernism. In the words of Louis McNay:

Foucault’s whole oeuvre is oriented to breaking down the domination of a fully self-reflexive, unified and rational subject at the centre of thought in order to clear a space for radically ‘other’ ways of thinking and being.\(^\text{15}\)

The very concept of ‘archaeology’ which Foucault uses to critique the traditional historical analysis derives from his idea that the human subject is not at the centre of historical process. McNay explains this in these words:

Foucault argues that there does not exist any prediscursive subject that can be located as the origin of meaning, but rather that the notion of a unified subject is an illusion generated through structural rules that govern discursive formations. The technique of archaeology- the disclosure of these latent, deep level structures that constitute the condition of possibility of all thought and speech-represents a powerful attack on the subjectivism of

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phenomenological and biographical approaches to intellectual history.\textsuperscript{16}

Foucault, describing the archaeological method, writes:

Archaeological analysis individualizes and describes discursive formations...Far from wishing to reveal general forms, archaeology tries to outline particular configurations.\textsuperscript{17}

This approach is actually an attempt to reveal the inherent flaws in the traditional historical approach which assumes a kind of general historical continuity of the past. As against this, the archaeological method describes how the very concepts of knowledge are constituted within specific discursive formations and how human subjectivity itself comes to be constructed by these discourses. The idea of a sovereign subject is thus shown to be flawed by interrogating the assumptions that lead to the privileging of the subject as operating prior to and independent of discourse.


Foucault uses yet another concept which he calls genealogy to critique the liberal humanist concept of a sovereign subject. He himself describes his project in the following terms:

One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that is to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledge's discourses, domains of objects, etc. without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history.¹⁸

Foucault's thesis bases itself on a more rigorous inquiry of the social process of subject formation which is the site of complex power relations. Foucault states his position in emphatic terms:

If there is one approach that I do reject...it is that...which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity—which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness. It seems to me that the historical analysis of scientific

discourse should, in the last resort, be subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice.¹⁹

Yet another influence on the postmodern idea of subjectivity has been of Jacques Lacan, the French poststructuralist theorist. Lacan explored the construction of subjectivity by an analysis of linguistic and ideological structures that organize both the conscious and the unconscious of the humans. Lacan’s model offers a critique of the humanist conception of the subject existing prior to and independent of the linguistic discourse. For Lacan, subjectivity is brought into existence by the process of signification. It is the human subject’s entrance into the social order through language that determines its perception of itself and reality. The human subject, in other words, owes its existence as a social being, to the differential system of language that precedes it and determines its perception. Lacan, like Foucault, emphasizes the role of ‘the other’ in the process of the construction of subjectivity. Humans always acquire concepts about themselves in relation to others, individuals and events alike, and hence the subject bears within itself a condition of

absence. By acquiring language, Lacan argues, the human subject enters the symbolic order where it is reduced to an empty signifier within the field of 'the other'. Lyotard, explaining the postmodern position about the subject, writes:

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at “nodal” points of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be.²⁰

Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, quotes the statements of some important theorists whose ideas about human subjectivity have been of vital importance to postmodern thought. She approvingly quotes the following remark of Emile Benveniste:

Language is the possibility of subjectivity because it always contains the linguistic forms appropriate to the expression of subjectivity, and discourse provokes the emergence of subjectivity because it consists of discrete instances.²¹

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Hutcheon incorporates yet another remark of Benveniste:

It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject, because language alone establishes the concept of ‘ego’ in reality, in *its* reality.\(^{22}\)

The implications of these insights are described by Hutcheon in these words:

If the speaking subject is constituted in and by language, s/he cannot be totally autonomous and in control of her or his subjectivity, for discourse is constrained by the rules of the language and open to multiple connotations of anonymous cultural codes.\(^{23}\)

Inextricably linked to the above discussed critique of the humanist position on subjectivity is the critique of the objective knowledge, another central concern of postmodernism. The traditional philosophical schools’ assumption of the possibility of objective knowledge has remained the foundation of realism in art. Postmodern thinkers have offered a radical critique of these ideas in their views about how knowledge is always bound up with its


\(^{23}\) *Ibid.*
essential complicity with factors like power, situatedness and textuality.

The two main propounders of these ideas, Derrida and Foucault, in their critical projects, demonstrated how the notion of objective knowledge rests upon flimsy grounds. Both have used their critical methods to critique our long-established notions about the past and its availability through historical texts. Their works demonstrate the untenability of the idea that we can have an unmediated, objective knowledge of the past, since past is available to us only through texts and texts are discursive practices. It is important to remember, however, that postmodernism does not reject the past, neither does it say that no knowledge of the past is possible, but that all knowledge of it is textual and available in the form of narratives.

Foucault, as already discussed, employs certain new approaches which he calls ‘archaeology’ and ‘genealogy’, to demonstrate the inherent flaws in the traditional historical thought. In Foucault’s analysis, there are no moments of origin and no purposive movements in the historical flux. Instead of these, his
analysis discovers dispersion, disparity and difference that are very often covered up by the traditional historical thought. A seminal essay by Foucault ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’ serves to demonstrate his use of some Nietzschean insights to reveal the tendency of the traditional historical thought to construct the essence of historical events and then claim its discovery or retrieval.

Contrary to this, the method employed by Foucault strives to identify the ruptures and points of dissolution in the seemingly unbroken continuity of the past and tries to preserve the dispersion inherent in the occurrence of events. Barry Smart describes the Foucauldian paradigm of genealogy in these terms:

By way of summary we may note that genealogy stands in opposition to traditional historical analysis; its aim is to record the singularity of events; to reveal beneath the constructed unity of things not a point of origin but dispersion, disparity and difference, and the play of dominations. Genealogical analysis is thus synonymous with the endless task of interpretations for there is no hidden meaning or foundation beneath things, merely more layers of interpretation which through accretion have achieved the form of truth, self-evidence and necessity and which, in turn, it is the task of genealogy to breach.24

What genealogy affirms significantly for the postmodern thought is the concept of perspectivism in knowledge especially historical knowledge. This is reminiscent of Nietzsche's rejection of a single and final perspective of knowing. Foucault, following Nietzsche, concludes that what we call truth is the product of countless factors lying outside the object of knowledge and is hence a construct.

Foucault's concept of genealogy is seminal for understanding his another influential idea of the relation between knowledge and power because while investigating the complex relation between the two, he examines the production of epistemological ideas within the web of power-knowledge relationship. For Foucault, what usually passes for objective knowledge are actually discourses inflected with power mechanisms of a complex nature. The very condition of the possibility of knowledge is inextricably bound with the operations of power that are ubiquitous. Foucault states that "power is constructed and
functions on the basis of particular powers, myriad issues, myriad effects of power.”

The traditional historical thought has been contested by yet another line of thought within postmodernism and that is Derrida’s deconstruction. Derrida’s critical strategies have radically altered the views about textual discourses and their referentiality to events. In Derrida’s whole oeuvre, it is his ideas on textuality that have problematized the traditional notions about history and its truth-value. For Derrida, history is a text and a text itself is a configuration in which meaning is always produced by a process of signification that never reaches what he calls the ‘transcendental signified.’ Nicholas Royle has rightly noted that “the implications of Derrida’s work for historiography are quite massive.”

Derrida’s perceptive analysis of writing and the implications of this analysis have already been recognized by contemporary literary

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theory. The same critique applies to historiography. Royle explains the implications of deconstruction for historiography in these terms:

To say that history is radically determined by writing, then, is to say that it is constituted by a general or unbounded logic of traces and remainders—general and unbounded because these traces and remains, this work of remainders and remnants are themselves neither presences nor original: rather they too are constituted by traces and remains in turn.27

Hence, for Derrida textuality is the condition of history and textuality itself carries with it the potential of its own critique. Derrida argues that there can be no meaning inherent in the text without a context and context itself is unbounded. It is this state of being ‘unbounded’ that generates a perpetual difference of meaning. Applying this idea to history, we see that history can never escape the condition of being a text whose production involves a process of constructing meaning in language. Rather than capturing something ‘given’, the very exercise of writing implies a process of selection, distribution, contextualization, combination and reconstruction, connecting and disconnecting and ultimately endowing the

‘seamless past’ with certain meanings and not others. History, therefore, cannot lay claim to the objective and neutral knowledge of the past, since everything that a historian relies on for his work of historiography, including himself or herself is a text. Historians, howsoever objective they might try to be, can never escape their condition of situatedness in a web of discourses. There exists no Archimedean point from which to carry out a truly objective study of the past. There are only some events that find a place in the historical records and become ‘facts’. History itself is permeated by the institutional forces that work to promote certain favoured versions to the exclusion of the others.

In recent years, these ideas have received a new impetus at the hands of certain writers like Hayden White, Richard Evans, Frank Ankersmit and Dominick LaCapra. Their analytical studies have, despite a stiff resistance offered by traditional historiographers, now found a firm foothold in academic circles and can no longer be dismissed as mere ‘intellectual vandalism’. The postmodernist position on history, therefore, contests all thought-systems which claim to derive their strength from history, Marxism being the
central one. This calls for addressing the main charges brought against postmodernism by its detractors, mainly Marxists and liberal humanists. It is argued that postmodernism upholds the negation of history and referentiality, and is ultimately complicitous with and affirmative of contemporary consumerism. These critics accuse postmodernism of a culpable escape into textuality at the cost of engagement with reality. It is argued that postmodernism is informed by the ideology of linguistic determinism that reduces all reality to linguistic codes. Newman’s caricature offers an example of this:

It [postmodernism] is fiercely dedicated to the integrity of autonomous verbal expression, and stands four square against the extra-literary pressures that have always surrounded fiction as a genre. It recognizes that its basic resources are irreparably, and without apology, literary. Above all, this writing is concerned with language, if not as the creator of reality, then as the ultimate shaper of consciousness. It is never framed by a dominant outside reality, and it thus tends eventually to reduce all distinctions to linguistic ones, exemplifying both temporal and historical subjectivity. It is radical aesthetically, largely apolitical and ahistorical, and in its
relation of even the most terrifying matters, purportedly value-
free.28

Such criticism, it must be said, is provoked by the claims of certain
theorists who equate postmodernism with the final disappearance of
reality. Jean Baudrillard, for instance, has been associated with this
kind of approach to postmodernism. His thesis is that the
contemporary times are characterized by the all-pervading presence
of signs leading to a condition where simulation replaces the original
and reality collapses into hyperreality:

There is no longer any critical and speculative distance between
the real and the rational. There is no longer really even any
projection of models in the real ... but an in-the-field, here-and-
now transfiguration of the real into model. A fantastic short-
circuit: the real is hyperrealised. Neither realised nor idealised: but
hyperrealised. The hyperreal is the abolition of the real not by
violent distinction, but by its assumption, elevation to the strength
of the model.29

28 Charles. Newman. ‘The Postmodern Aura: The Act of Fiction in the Age of
Inflation.’ 1984, Salmagundi 63/64, p. 172.

29 Jean Baudrillard. Simulations Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman
In his book *The Illusions of the End* (1994), Baudrillard argues that with the acceleration of change and transformation during the course of modernity we have now reached a point at which things happen too quickly to make sense:

the acceleration of modernity, of technology, of events and media, of all exchanges - economic, political and sexual - has propelled us to 'escape velocity', with the result that we have flown free of the referential sphere of the real and of history.30

It is of utmost importance to understand that postmodernism's contestation of the epistemological status of history does not amount to a rejection of the past. Simon Critchley has shown that Derrida's purpose is not to reduce the world of real objects, things and events into discourses, into mere texts, which means rejecting their existence altogether. Explaining Derrida's concept of the text, he says that this idea does not:

want to turn the world into some vast library, nor does it wish to cut off reference to some 'extra textual realm'. Deconstruction is not bibliophilia. Text *qua* text is glossed by Derrida as the entire ‘real-history-of-the-world and this is said in order to emphasize the fact that the word 'text' does not suspend reference ‘to history, to

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the world, to reality, to being and especially not to the other'. All
the latter appear in an experience which is not an immediate
experience of presence—the text or context is not present, but
rather the experience of a network of differentially signifying
traces which are constitutive of meaning. Experience or thought
traces a ceaseless movement of interpretation within a limitless
context.31

Derrida himself clarifies his position in these terms:

What I call ‘text’ implies all the structures called ‘real’,
‘economic’, ‘historical’, ‘socio-institutional’, in short all possible
referents. Another way of recalling once again that ‘there is
nothing outside the text’. That does not mean that all referents are
suspended, denied or enclosed in a book, as people have claimed,
or have been naive enough to believe and to have accused me of
believing. But it does mean that every referent and all reality has
the structure of a differential trace and that one cannot refer to this
‘real’ except in an interpretative experience. The latter neither
yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of differential
referring. That’s all.32

Linda Hutcheon explains Derrida’s view on the subject of reference

as follows:

1922, p.39.

Derrida’s denial of the transcendental signified is not a denial of reference or a denial of any access to extra-textual reality. However, it is meant to suggest that meaning can be derived only from within texts through deferral, through differance. This kind of poststructuralist thinking has obvious implications for historiography and historiographic metafiction. It radically questions the nature of the archive, the document, evidence. It separates the (meaning-granted) facts of history-writing from the brute events of past.33

Hutcheon sums up the postmodern view of history in these terms:

What the postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past (“exertions of the shaping, ordering imagination”). In other words, the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past ‘events’ into present historical ‘facts’. This is not a ‘dishonest refuge from truth’ but an acknowledgement of the meaning-making function of human constructs.34

The postmodern idea of text is intimately related to another concept which evolves from it, the idea of intertextuality. In fact,

34 *Ibid*, p.89.
poststructuralism has invited some serious critical attention on account of this view. Derrida, Barthes and Julia Kristeva have provided this new critical concept that disrupts the foundational theories of meaning. Intertextuality has been seen as a highly destabilizing concept by the liberal humanist tradition which itself testifies to the strength of its critical appeal.

The roots of intertextuality can be traced to Saussurean idea of meaning as entirely relational. No sign, Saussure argued, has meaning in isolation and comes to mean something only because it exists in relation to other signs. Meaning arises through the relational activity of signs. The implications of structuralism for literary theory were far reaching as the emphasis shifted from the author as the source of meaning to the sign-system of language. Poststructuralism further problematized the idea of stability of meaning by showing that this sign system too is unstable. Derrida, for example, offers an elucidation of how all sign systems operate on the basis of inherent differences such that:

no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each element... being constituted on the basis of the trace within
it of the other elements in the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text.... Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.\(^{35}\)

The impetus to the concept of intertextuality, however, came from Barthes, who in his two very influential essays 'The Death of the Author' and 'From Work to Text', used the concept to challenge the notion of authorship. The following passage taken from 'The Death of the Author' presents the seminal idea about intertextuality:

> We know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author- God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writing, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is tissues of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture...The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writing, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on anyone of them. Did he wish to express himself, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely.\(^{36}\)


Intertextuality poses a direct challenge to the romantic view of the author as the creator of meaning. It concludes that meaning originates from a linguistic-cultural system that precedes and constitutes the author's consciousness. It contests all kinds of formation by demonstrating that no text can be supposed to have a boundary that separates it entirely from either its context or other texts. It foregrounds the concept that every word is permeated with traces of other words and can have no self-sufficient meaning. The shift, therefore, is not towards the author's consciousness but away from it towards the field of enunciation, the field of complex socio-cultural-linguistic relations.

The significance of intertextuality and its implications for postmodernism have been recognised both by the champions and detractors of postmodernism alike. Whereas liberal humanists and Marxists draw attention to the subversive tendencies of intertextuality, for postmodernists it offers an effective critique of the notions underlying those of the author, presence of meaning, and self-sufficiency of the text. The concept has opened up new possibilities of research into the production of meaning in culture.
No text, discourse or institution can be taken as autonomous since all exist in the field of cultural signification. This concern finds expression in what is usually called the postmodern blurring of boundaries between fact/fiction, high/low, and other such binaries. Foucault has commented on the concept of intertextuality in these words:

The frontiers of a book are never clear cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full-stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network.\(^{37}\)

From the above discussion it is evident that postmodernism is a term with an all-encompassing range which covers almost all the contemporary disciplines of knowledge. The focus here, however, has been to illustrate some of the seminal concepts of postmodern thought, especially as a radical shift in the foundational epistemic categories of the human subject, language and history. These ideas have found a simultaneous expression in the literary practice of the past few decades and what constitutes postmodern literary and

artistic practice is inextricably bound up with them. John Johnston has argued that postmodernism has, for the past few decades, revolved round three broad categories: “literary/aesthetic postmodernism, historical (or cultural) postmodernism and theoretical postmodernism.” 38 Out of these the most familiar version, according to Johnston, is the literary or aesthetic one “advanced by people like Patricia Waugh and Brian McHale in England, and Jerome Klinowitz and Ihab Hassan in the United States.” 39 Ihab Hassan, perhaps, was the first critic to recognize a need for a new term to classify the works that had appeared on the American literary scene in the 1950s. In his early writings, especially the essays of the 1960s like ‘The dismemberment of Orpheus’ (1963) and ‘The Literature of Silence’ (1967), Hassan used the term modernism as a broad concept accommodating newer literary expressions under the category. He, however, soon felt the inadequacy of the term modern and was led to use the term postmodern for writers like de Sade, Hemingway, Kafka, Genet and Beckett.


39 Ibid.
In his later writings, Hassan became increasingly interested in the significant shift in contemporary European literature which necessitated a theoretical analysis of a different kind. At this point of time, in the late 1970s and 1980s, Hassan became aware of the importance of the French poststructuralist influence on the general postmodern thought. Poststructuralism, Hassan realized, could no longer be kept out of the debate on postmodernism. Other writers too recognized this important factor and Allen Thiher’s *Words in Reflection: Modern Language Theory and Postmodern Fiction* (1984) offered chapters on Wittgenstein, Heidegger, de Saussure and Derrida, thus demonstrating the increasing acceptability of the poststructuralist relation with the fiction writing of postmodernism. In the following year Hilary Lawson wrote *Reflexivity: The Postmodern Predicament* (1985) focusing on Derrida’s significance for postmodernism.

As noted above, the recognition of poststructuralist theories especially deconstruction raised the important problem of referentiality of literature. Interpreting self-reflexive tendencies as the negation of the world or reality was largely because of
misunderstanding some of the central concepts of the poststructuralist thought. Perceptive critics, however, were quick to point out that extreme self-reflexivity could not be attributed to postmodernism. Earlier in the 1980s, John Barth had labelled his self-reflexive short stories collected in his own *Lost in the Funhouse* as mainly late-modernist, while they had been considered postmodernist by many. For Barth, a true postmodern writer like Italo Calvino, "keeps one foot always in the narrative past....and one foot in the structuralist present." 40

This recognition of the danger of relegating postmodern literature to the prison-house of language with no referential value came from some of the foremost theorists of postmodern literature. Incidentally, these were also the writers who undertook the difficult task of arriving at a systematic poetics of postmodernism. In 1987, Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* made an attempt to formulate a distinctive poetics that could explain adequately the concerns of postmodern novels. The central tenet of McHale’s formulation of postmodernism is the idea that sees it as making a shift from the

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epistemological questions characteristic of the modern period to the ontological questions. He writes:

The dominant of modernist fiction is *epistemological*. That is, modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as those mentioned by Dick Higgins in my epigraph: “How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?” Other typical modernist question might be added: “what is there to be known? Who knows it? How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?” 41

On this formulation, McHale includes novels as Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier* which is featured by an unreliable narrator and Kafka’s *The Trial* which depicts an individual’s persecution but significantly declines to offer any motive for the court’s actions. As against the modernist fiction, the dominant of postmodernist fiction is ontological:

Postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like the ones Dick Higgins calls ‘*Post cognition*’: ‘which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?’ Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world it projects, for instance: “what is a world?:

what kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?\textsuperscript{42}

McHale offers examples of Thomas Pynchon's novels that foreground the idea of uncertainty in postmodernist fiction. The simultaneous existence of more than one worlds points to their constructed nature. The reader finds himself constantly beset with a situation where he has to ask himself whether the world he is reading about is anything except his own construction.

Coming back to the question of referentiality in postmodern literary works, McHale's version of postmodernism offers to see it in terms of pluriform, polyphonic being and contests the extreme self-reflexivity of these works. Hans Bertens writes about McHale's analysis in these terms:

For McHale, postmodernist fiction negotiates the tension between self-reflexivity and representation by abandoning the modernist emphasis on epistemology—which leads inevitably towards reflexivity for an emphasis on ontology. Knowing loses its privileged position to pluriform, polyphonic being. The one world which the modernist sought to know is replaced by a plurality of autonomous worlds that can be described and the relations between

which we can explore, but that can never be the objects of true knowledge.43

Of all theorists of postmodern literature, however, Linda Hutcheon’s comprehensive work that appeared in 1988 under the title *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, merits the most serious critical attention. The strength of Hutcheon’s theoretical model can be attributed to her appropriation of the seminal ideas of the leading French poststructuralists including Derrida, Foucault, Barthes and Lyotard, in her discussion of postmodern literary theory and practice. But more important is her firm stance that postmodernism is neither ahistorical nor apolitical, but retains a critical edge towards contemporary issues. This idea was further enhanced and more assiduously explicated by Hutcheon in her *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989). A remarkable feature of Hutcheon’s formulation of a postmodern poetics is her recognition that such a project should proceed from an analytic study of the postmodern works, that is, the literary practice itself. She arrives at a poetics of postmodernism from the study of

postmodern artifacts. Despite this, her distinction lies in relating very perceptively the postmodern literary practice to a theoretical basis provided by the poststructuralist thought.

Her critical project, therefore, has the value of recognizing and incorporating the poststructuralist insights while maintaining that postmodern literary works retain a critical edge and hence cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the contemporary social and political reality. Hutcheon stresses the point that postmodernism is doubly-coded, one that is both self-reflexive and referential. She remarks that "postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges." Hutcheon's thesis takes seriously the tendency to regard postmodern art as entirely self-reflexive, thereby divesting it of any representational value. For its detractors, liberal humanists and Marxists alike, postmodernism thus understood ends up as a dishonest refuge from reality, content with social and political quietism. Hutcheon therefore tries to reveal the flaw in this argument by affirming that postmodernism can never be equated with aesthetic

formalism. The following observation made by Bertens upon Hutcheon’s model allows one to see its value:

Hutcheon’s attractive (and immensely successful) model has the great advantage that it, in her own words, gives equal value to the self-reflexive and historically grounded and can thus retain a political dimension (even if it simultaneously calls political commitments into question). Because of its refusal to surrender to sheer textuality, it can, with a certain amount of credibility, investigate the determining role of representations, discourses, and signifying practices. It can, in other words, address the matter of power.45

Hutcheon’s argument that postmodernism is both self-reflexive and historical was anticipated by John Barth in ‘The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodern Fiction.’ (1980) where he argued that postmodern writing should attempt to achieve a kind of synthesis between modernism and realism by avoiding both extreme self-reflexivity of the former and naïve illusionism of the latter. For Hutcheon, too, extreme self-reflexivity is a feature of late modernist literature rather than of postmodern literature:

Postmodern forms want to work toward a public discourse that would overtly eschew modernist aestheticism and hermeticism and its attendant political self-marginalization.46

For Hutcheon, ‘historiographic metafiction’ is the representative postmodern art form, one that offers the model of self-reflexive representation. ‘Historiographic metafiction’ both installs and subverts what it installs only to problematize our notions about history and its truth-value:

In challenging the seamless quality of the history/fiction (or world/art) join implied by realist narrative, postmodern fiction does not disconnect itself from history or the world. It foregrounds and thus contests the conventionality and unacknowledged ideology of that assumption of seamlessness and asks its readers to question the process by which we represent our selves and our world to ourselves and to become aware of the means by which we make sense of and construct order out of experience in our particular culture. We cannot avoid representation. We can try to avoid fixing our notion of it and assuming it to be transhistorical and transcultural. We can also study how representation

legitimizes and privileges certain kinds of knowledge including certain kinds of historical knowledge.⁴⁷

Hutcheon emphasizes the double-codedness of postmodernism and its self-consciously contradictory nature to distinguish it from modernism. Postmodernism, she insists “takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement.”⁴⁸ And one of the most successful strategies to create a contradictory stance on any statement is the use of parody. The use of parody in literature is quite old but the term has all long been taken to mean a ridiculing imitation of a previous work of art. Already in her *Theory of Parody* (1985), Hutcheon had argued that the concept of parody needs to be freed from the constraint of the traditional definition. Parody, according to her, is a much profound literary concept than is ordinarily understood. She states:


The kind of parody I wish to focus is an integrated structural modeling process of revisiting, replaying, inventing and transculturalizing previous work of art.\textsuperscript{49} 

She regards parody as an apt postmodern form because of its potential to critique the traditional humanist ideas about art and its relation to reality. For her, “the parodied text is not a target but a weapon”, underscoring that the scope of parody is much broader than merely ridiculing some other work. It is a form of auto-referentiality fraught with ideological implications. While Hutcheon states that, “parody often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality---is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders,” \textsuperscript{50} she departs from the prevailing interpretation that postmodern parody is ultimately value-free and devoid of any critical potential. It is noteworthy that Frederic Jameson had taken this view of postmodern parody, rejecting its critical stance towards reality and regarding it as a mere pastiche. Jameson identifies pastiche as a defining formal


feature of postmodern aesthetics. He sees two factors as crucial in the emergence of the ‘universal practice’ in the contemporary literary world whereby texts speak in the ‘dead’ language and forms of the past. For him it is the notion of the ‘decentering’ of the formerly sovereign or autonomous subject that necessitates the ‘imitation of dead styles’. Secondly, he links the emergence of pastiche to the absence of a linguistic norm. He is careful to assert the critical potential of parody, but finds it to have been displaced by pastiche in postmodern art:

Parody finds itself without a vocation; it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place. 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 blind parody, a statue with blind eyes.\footnote{Frederic Jameson. \textit{Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.} London and New York: Verso, 1991, pp.17-18.}

Jameson’s stance is attributable to the general attitude of the Marxist critics who regard all forms of postmodern art as de-historicized, wallowing in the mire of self-referential images; in brief, an art
divorced from reality. Responding to Jameson’s distinction between parody and pastiche, Terry Eagleton argues that although parody of a sort is not alien to postmodernism, it is deplorable that:

what is parodied by postmodernist culture, with its dissolution of art into the prevailing forms of commodity production, is nothing less the revolutionary art of the twentieth century avant-garde. It is though postmodernism is among other things a sick joke at the expense of such revolutionary avant-gardism, one of whose major impulses, as Peter Burger has convincingly argued in his Theory of the Avant-Garde, was to dismantle the institutional autonomy of art, erase the frontiers between culture and political society and return aesthetic production to its humble, unprivileged place within social practices as a whole. In the commodified artifacts of postmodernism, the avant-gardist dream of an integration of art and society returns in monstrously caricatured form...Postmodernism, from this perspective, mimes the formal resolution of art and social life attempted by the avant-garde while remorselessly emptying it of its political content.52

These arguments of the two leading Marxist critics have been persuasively dealt with by Hutcheon who insists that postmodern parody is political through and through, primarily because it serves to underline the political and ideological nature of all

representations. Hutcheon is deeply critical of Eagleton who, according to her, fails to appreciate the critical stance in postmodernism while approving of the same in the modernist revolutionary avant-garde. In fact, postmodernism’s relation with modernism can be seen more perceptively keeping in view that avant-garde is nearer to postmodern than to modernism. What postmodernism challenges is modernism’s view of the autonomy of art and individual subjectivity. Modernism sought in art an order which it failed to find in life. Modernists attempted to flee from the chaos of history and discontinuities of the modern world into the formal world of art. T S Eliot believed that all disparate experiences are always forming new wholes in the mind of the poet.

This inward turn, so characteristic of all great modernists, highlights their preoccupation with the inner world of human consciousness. The modernist assumption of aesthetic autonomy postulates a perspective from outside, an Archimedean viewpoint from where to respond to the modern world. This assumption stands radically challenged by postmodernism. Another feature that
postmodern radically departs from is modernism’s uncritical acceptance of all language, thought and representation as neutral.

The historical avant-garde too aims to deconstruct the very ideology of art by relating it to the large social and cultural institutions. Unlike modernism, it is highly conscious of the political nature of all representations and seeks to interrogate the operations of the dominant cultural discourses. This explains the apparent tendency of disruption of all that is fixed by avant-garde. These concerns of avant-garde are obsessions with post-modernism. The subversive tendencies of postmodern art forms are indicative of the postmodern concern with challenging the conventional configurations of experience and perceptions. Postmodern art works to challenge the dominant cultural discourse while being quite aware that the challenge itself is contained within some discourse. This self-consciousness of postmodernism sets it apart from the avant-garde.

Postmodernism is not avant-garde because of its provisional and self-consciously contradictory character. While as avant-garde is overtly oppositional to tradition and places faith in the ability of art
to change social reality rather directly; postmodernism neither desires any break with the past nor regards art as capable of effecting a social change, though, as Hutcheon maintains, ‘questioning and problematizing may set up the conditions for possible change.’ Hutcheon’s argument on this point is based on the accepted stance of postmodernism, one which is derived from the works of Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault and the rest. Postmodernism opposes all attempts to regard representations as natural. By virtue of its relentless critique of natural and neutral, it resists all efforts to naturalize what it regards to be ideological.

Roland Barthes called this process which enables us to see the oft-concealed ideology of our notions of reality as de-doxification. The term doxa, itself means something that is accepted as natural and de-doxification is the recognition of this supposed ‘natural’ as ideological. Barthes’ main thrust as a critic was to denaturalize our assumptions of the human self and the ‘objective’ world outside us. Hutcheon sees similar potential in postmodern parody as it enables to expose the political and ideological nature of all human discourses. But whileas all the earlier forms and strategies of
criticism posited a position outside the realm of the criticized object, postmodern parody denies the possibility of any such view from outside. On the contrary, it foregrounds its complicity with the object of its critique, since it contends the implicated nature of all viewpoints. Postmodernism, thus, is a complicitious critique of all social and political phenomena. Hutcheon suggests that postmodern parody is complicitious with the values it subverts. This subversion, nevertheless, takes the form of denaturalization:

It seems reasonable to say that the postmodernism’s initial concern is to denaturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life, to point out that those entities we unthinkingly experience as ‘natural’ they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism are in fact ‘cultural’, made by us, not given to us.  

The implications of the ideas discussed above are of central importance to the thesis of a poetics of postmodernism. Postmodern literary works foreground the ideological and political nature of all representations and radically question our assumptions of objectivity and neutrality. It is at this point that the issue of power and its role in representation becomes seminal to a poetics of postmodernism. Hans

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Bertens, as already discussed, is quick to see how Foucault enters the picture of Hutcheon’s thesis of postmodernism. Foucault’s ideas on discourse and its overwhelmingly determining character of both the subjective self and objective knowledge should undoubtedly find a significant place in any attempt to delineate a poetics of postmodernism. Hutcheon states that “the relation of power to knowledge and to historical, social and ideological contexts is an obsession of postmodernism.”

Language itself is inextricably bound with the ideological contexts and it is not possible to purge language of these contextual traces. Our prevalent cultural signification generates a field of power which is all-pervading. In the words of Terry Eagleton:

"Discourses, sign-system and signifying practices of all kinds, from film and television to fiction and the languages of natural science, produce effects, shape forms of consciousness and unconsciousness, which are closely related to the maintenance or transformation of our existing systems of power."

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Power is a ubiquitous phenomenon, a process rather than a product that permeates the cultural signification to the core. Postmodernism, especially deconstruction, has tried to unravel the hidden power relationships in the general tendency of binary opposition. Every binary, the argument goes, conceals a power relation that divides it into a hierarchy of the privileged and the under-privileged. Thus the seemingly innocuous binaries of male/female, white/black, western/eastern, are tied up with power relations. Postmodernism thus strikes at the very basis of this hierarchical division.

From a perspective of a postmodern poetics, language and all forms of representation are politically inflected because there can be no escape from situatedness within ideology and discourse. A postmodern literary form raises the question of ideological power by revealing that every kind of representation in art is somebody’s representation. No author, artist or critic can avoid his or her implication with the discourse and can hence lay no claim to an apolitical representation. Reality does not exist except when represented through a text, spoken, visual or written, and all texts are discursive practices. Rather than positing the origin of a text in the
personality of the author, postmodernism declares that the text originates from a field of enunciation. An aesthetic product, no matter how aesthetically pure and uncontaminated it is alleged to be, is always linked with the larger enunciative field of social, political, religious and cultural significations, and all significations are linked with power relations. Hutcheon comments upon the idea discussed above in the following manner:

Both postmodern art and theory work to reveal the complicity of discourse and power by re-emphasizing the enunciation: the act of saying is an inherently political act, at least when it is not seen as only a formal entity.\(^\text{56}\)

The Foucauldian insights into the nature and operations of discourse are already visible here. Discourse, according to Foucault, operates by means of various procedures involving controls, constrains, permissibility, acceptability and rejection. It is over-arching in its operations and makes possible the production, dissemination and reception of all art forms. As language comes to be seen as ‘a social practice’ an instrument as much for manipulation and control as for

humanist self-expression, it also becomes clear that the linguistic is not separable from the extra-linguistic. No linguistic speech, written document or visual representation can exist in vacuum without invoking cultural connotations. Language is quite often an instrument of cultural power, a means of repression, of hiding rather than stating the truth and an instrument for manipulation. This is reminiscent of Lyotard’s brief but pointed statement, “to speak is to fight.”

The term ‘political’ occupies an important place in a poetics of postmodernism as it comes to signify the discursive nature of all representations. As already illustrated, Foucault’s examination of power and its operations in the constitution of human subjectivity and discourse of knowledge is of central concern to postmodernism. This calls for a revision of the term political and its usage. In postmodern art, politics becomes an inherent feature of all representation which it seeks to explore and reveal. Postmodern art problematizes the concept of neutral representation, the very basis of the realist tradition in art, by engaging with the political nature of representation. Art, postmodern works suggest, can never avoid
implication with the discursive practices which are themselves built into politically inflected relationships. "All language," as Hayden White has said, "is politically contaminated," and postmodern art works to reveal the political status of all representations claiming neutrality. This concern of postmodern art finds expression in the tendency to depart from the mimetic tradition in arts. The assumptions of the realistic tradition, which are thoroughly challenged by postmodernism, give way to the increasing awareness of inescapable implications with the ideologies inherent in artistic representation. Language in postmodern literary artifacts is no longer used only referentially or emotively, but as a means to explore how it can be used for purposes quite different from its commonly accepted usage. In fact, postmodernism theories illustrate the primacy of linguistic signs in constituting the human subject in the cultural field. Postmodern literature reflects this concern in its focus on the characters' construction in and through linguistic discourse. This idea manifests itself through what is termed as the

‘decentered subject’, in which the human subject is presented as more or less a point of intersection of various discourses.

Postmodern art draws attention to these ideas by foregrounding the issues of discourse and power. For Hutcheon, power is one of the central themes of historiographic metafiction’s investigations of the relation of art to ideology. The novels that Hutcheon cites like William Kennedy’s *Legs*, Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby* and Rushdie’s *Shame*, deal with the theme of ideological power inherent in the cultural discourse. In the final analysis, postmodern literature serves to denaturalize the paradigm of power distribution in cultural and social institutions. Notions of authority, authenticity, sacredness, filiations, duty, punishment and others are derived from a web of complex power distribution. Ideas about legitimacy and illegitimacy rest upon it and postmodern works lay bare the structures embedded in power. While doing so, postmodern art inscribes and challenges power. A simultaneous inscription and contestation of power means revealing its permeation of all ‘natural’ categories thereby contesting it from within, but reinscribing it suggests its inescapable determining mode.
It has been argued that Linda Hutcheon’s thesis of a postmodern poetics focusses almost exclusively on a specific literary genre ‘historiographic metafiction’ to the exclusion of other postmodern literary forms. Stephen Baker in his *The Fiction of Postmodernity* agrees with Hutcheon’s insights but is uneasy with what he calls “Hutcheon’s identification of postmodern fiction as ‘historiographic metafiction’.” Such objections can be dealt with if we take into consideration the vital fact that for Hutcheon ‘historiographic metafiction’ is the most apt postmodern form of art because it exemplifies the concerns of postmodernism and foregrounds its characteristic features. The same thing can be said about parody.

Viewed in a proper perspective it can be reasonably argued that despite the fact that parody and historiographic metafiction are typical postmodern literary forms, all that is postmodern is not reducible to them. In addition to these, other artistic forms which highlight the characteristic postmodern concerns that Hutcheon

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derives from the poststructuralists theorists are postmodern too. Hutcheon’s examination of the ideas like language, human subjectivity, power, intertextuality and discourse, which she finds in historiographic metafiction in abundance, might well be present in other literary expressions. In fact, Hutcheon herself alludes to this in her discussion of the avant-garde and Brecht’s theatre, both of which share many significant features with postmodernism. Hutcheon suggests a similarity between parody and Brecht’s aesthetic distance, both of which “involve both artist and audience in a participatory hermeneutic activity.” 59 Both ‘historiographic metafiction’ and Brecht’s Epic theatre “place the receiver in a paradoxical position, both inside and outside, participatory and critical.” 60 Both challenge the concept of linearity, development, and causality and foreground the process of subject’s construction by the dominant cultural and social structures. And ultimately both are subversive in their critique of representation as complicitous with the power structures.


It is therefore worthwhile to explore how the poetics of postmodernism delineated above is equally valid for other genres of literature and can provide foundation for a poetics of postmodern drama.