

# What is Heroic?

Anti heroes have been defined as:

“A main character in a dramatic or narrative work who is characterized by a lack of traditional heroic qualities, such as idealism or courage”, but I think a more appropriate way of defining them may be a little subtler.

There are shades of gray to the character, which when done well, make them more real than the stylized heroes of the ‘superman’ variety. The post-modern<sup>1</sup> essayist might say that since universal ideals remain relative to the context and culture of the narrator in any story then ‘heroic’ deeds cannot be so clearly defined as to determine the ‘goodness’ or ‘rightness’ of a feat.

In the small video that is posted on line, which we also saw in class, you see examples of non-traditional heroes which illustrate their varied nature. The next movie in the series that we will see, illustrates a different point of view, and investigates the nature of the term “hero” in film. It will reach beyond what we saw in “The Big Lebowski” by the Coen Brothers but in a more disturbing, yet real vein. It distorts reality, motive and human interaction.

It questions truth and values. It utilizes approaches of the French New Wave, in the way it approaches the time based narrative and the Italian Realists in the way it was shot, but it will also make use of editing techniques or montages which will focus our point of view in the direction that the author wishes, therefore creating an element of surprise. It will question the concepts of ‘goodness’ or ‘right’ analytically. The name of the movie is “Babel.”

Some things to ponder;

Is there a hero in this narrative?

In a broader context what does the deaf Japanese girl represent?

What do the references to Coca Cola in the beginning Moroccan desert sequences with Cate Blanchett and Brad Pitt mean?

What does the movie say about American culture and how we measure human life?

Are American’s lives more important than the lives of others?

## **Some of the elements of modernism (and post modernism) :**

- “1. an emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity in writing and in visual arts as well; an emphasis on HOW seeing (or reading or perception itself) takes place, rather than on WHAT is perceived. An example of this would be stream-of-consciousness writing. (*see James Joyce*)
2. a movement away from the apparent objectivity provided by omniscient third-person narrators, fixed narrative points of view, and clear-cut moral positions. Faulkner’s multiply-narrated stories are an example of this aspect of modernism.
3. a blurring of distinctions between genres, so that poetry seems more documentary (as in T.S. Eliot or ee cummings) and prose seems more poetic (as in Woolf or Joyce).
4. an emphasis on fragmented forms, discontinuous narratives, and random-seeming collages of different materials.
5. a tendency toward reflexivity, or self-consciousness, about the production of the work of art, so that each piece calls attention to its own status as a production, as something constructed and consumed in particular ways.
6. a rejection of elaborate formal aesthetics in favor of minimalist designs (as in the poetry of William Carlos Williams) and a rejection, in large part, of formal aesthetic theories, in favor of spontaneity and discovery in creation.
7. A rejection of the distinction between “high” and “low” or popular culture, both in choice of materials used to produce art and in methods of displaying, distributing, and consuming art.”

**“Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed” , By Mary Klages, Continuum Press, January 2007**

**Read...<http://www.colorado.edu/English/courses/ENGL2012Klages/pomo.html>**

**for a more detailed analysis of post modernism vs. modernism**

# **Postmodernism: Why is it so messed up, and how does it relate to Film Appreciation?**

No one really likes post modernist theory or the relativism it represents. It bandies about ideas which make us nervous. There is no such thing as truth? No such thing as reality? Like the former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neil used to say all politics is local. It appears he was a political mouthpiece for Postmodernist theorists line of reasoning.

Even Einstein's Theory of Relativity superficially slides comfortably into that postmodernist cubby hole. Science and mathematics are relative and that makes everything else by association even more *relativer*. (Just like the word 'relativer' that I just made up.)

Let's look closer at how all of this developed with a thumbnail view of history, and the process which brought us to this confusing state. This is admittedly a western focus of history, which eventually evolved into the tenets of postmodernism .

## **Eurocentric outlook:**

### ***The Ancient World:***

***Rulers/Royalty*** ends with the fall of the Roman Empire, and the rise of the Church { in Western Societies anyway}.

### ***circa 10th-14th Century.***

#### ***The Middle Ages (underrated)***

***(British historians consider it beginning with the fall of Hastings in 1066 AD)***

Lasts until the Renaissance. As information once available only to the church spreads through conquest and cultural cross pollination the quest for knowledge increases.

### ***late 14th-15th C.***

***Renaissance and Humanism:*** Man becomes the measure of all things/nascent stage of scientific observations

### ***16th-18th C.***

***The Reformation and the Age of Enlightenment:*** Humanity questions the church.

Reason: the ability to critically analyze information which is democratically available to an audience which is becoming broader by way of its economical availability gives rise to a mercantile class who question 'authority'.

### ***19th C.***

#### ***Modernism:***

With the increase in knowledge, humans began to believe that we lived in an ordered universe which could be analyzed using scientific processes which would be able to define the essence of life at its most basic level.

### ***20th C.***

#### ***PostModernism:***

Shortly after WWII, responding to social and cultural breakdowns that he believes he sees developing in American society, C. Wright Mills begins to look into the causes of this breakdown. He sees the rapid changes in art, science and technology, as driving forces behind a rising sense of paranoia in Americans. He questions if America's collective neuroses is due to their inability to keep up with the changes around them.

Jacques Derrida, Susan Sontag and others write lengthy essays developing the basis for a new perspective in social discourse. They see that universality of mores and values are less prominent than previously thought. They see that mores social interaction are local in perspective. This theory tears at the fabric of truth and replaces it with a shifting cloud which

is defined by cultural context. Truth becomes relative to your individual perception based on socio-economic factors, genetics, environment and a host of other elements making it impossible to pin down. They, along with others, see that society's reliance on a grand narrative to tie everyone together into a cohesive collective of universal love is beginning to deteriorate.

Qualities which define Post Modernism in film.

Some of us equate reality with stability. It is comfortable, if nothing else, to hope that there are some things in the universe that are immovable, inert and irrevocably changeless, but the universe does not act as we would hope. It never has been stable. Nothing is truly inert. What postmodernism explains in film as it does in other art forms, is that the stability of a system rests within the understanding of the individual that the system in which we live is always in flux. Change is inevitable and eternal.

What films do well is question our beliefs system, by cutting open the belly of the grand narrative and exposing its entrails to view. What becomes apparent more often than not is that those things that you believe are true are never quite as simple as they seem.