

Theoretical and Cultural Perspectives

Postmodernism

The context of all art and design.

No work is created in isolation.

All work has cultural significance.

Objects and ideas have a relationship with things that surround them.

Every history has a theory.

Every theory has a history.

All practice is situated.

Your practice is embedded into cultural, political, economic and philosophical frameworks.

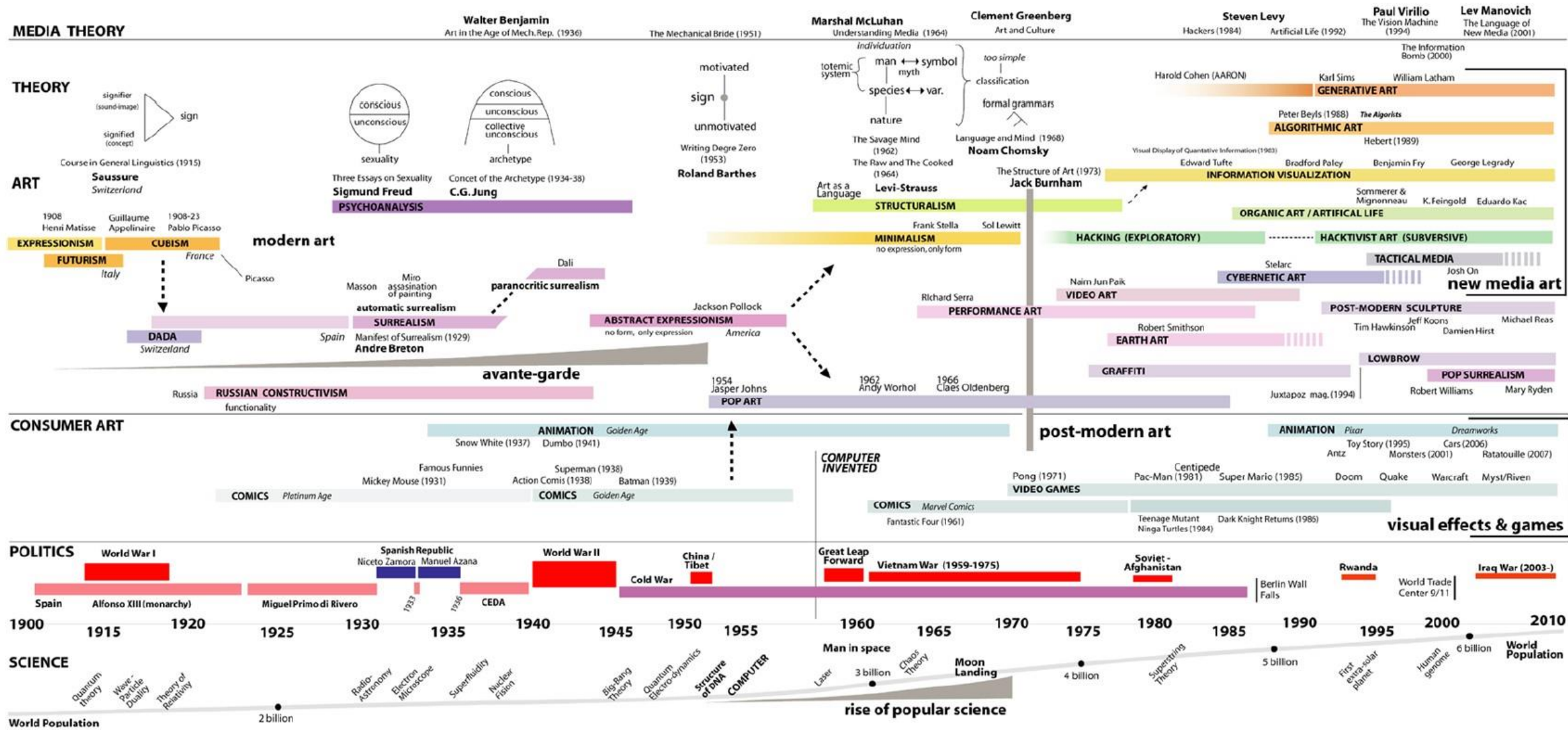
Every artefact comes with an area of research.

As students you are looking to become active, independent researchers.

Where have we been, and where are we going?

Modernism and Postmodernism are the most significant cultural, literary, art and design movements of the last 120 years. It is essential to be aware of their influence and what they mean.

They provide large areas of reference and critical study, so may be useful as research terms. If you work or practice in the arts, it is essential to have knowledge of these critical perspectives.



Rama Hoetzlein, *Timeline of Twentieth Century Art and New Media*, 2009-2010

The bad news (soz!)

Postmodernism is notoriously difficult to define, which in itself, is (ironically) symptomatic of postmodernism.

It is often perceived as being in opposition to Modernism, but it is not. It is a reaction or a response to Modernism, i.e. 'post' – after.

The V&A Museum London offers an introduction ...

'An unstable mix of the theatrical and theoretical, ... '



Jean François Lyotard 1924 - 1998

Lyotard was a French philosopher and writer who published *The Postmodern Condition* in 1979. The term Postmodernism was already being cited in the arts, philosophy and literature, but Lyotard's interpretation is the most widely acknowledged:

The Postmodern Condition

‘I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse ... 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 ...

I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives.

(The Postmodern Condition, xxiii–xxiv)

Incredulity: the state of being unwilling or unable to believe something.

Metanarratives: an overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people’s beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences.

Metanarratives (Grand Narratives)

The term Postmodernism attempts to consolidate the often-differing accounts of numerous thinkers of the time such as Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze.

Central to the philosophy is the denial of 'facts' or 'truths' as these only serve to distance us from reality. Lyotard was driven by an unwillingness to accept societal or idealistic truths historical stories that legitimise cultural practices. The broadly accepted truths were identified as metanarratives or grand narratives.

The previous Modernist-defining principle was for improvement. In art, design and society there was a belief that the new ways of thinking would progress and improve the societal, cultural and political lives of everyone - new types of housing, new political movements, new objects to purchase, new forms of representation in art and design.

Art and design movements such as Cubism, Surrealism, Futurism, Bauhaus; and political movements such as Socialism, Fascism and Capitalism each provided a clearly defined ideology that suggested that if their principles were followed, things could, and would improve.

There was an inherent belief in human progress through the development of human knowledge. Reason and science were clearly aligned to progress.

The questioning of Modernist ideals

Having witnessed the atrocities and failures of the Second World War, there was universal skepticism towards universal ideologies. The world had witnessed Nazism, Fascism, the holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima. These were all driven by political ideologies, or metanarratives.

New ways of thinking

Postmodernism takes the position that when these ideologies are questioned and deconstructed, there is a realisation and an awareness that the actual distinction between 'things' is not real, or an absolute 'truth', but in actuality are social constructs.

The individual

In Postmodernism, race, class and gender; and power structures such as those relied on in politics and religion, are not accepted as universal truths.

The new way of thinking is that they are only presented as 'truths'.

Postmodernism looks to deconstruct these established hierarchies allowing the individual to define their validity. Individual subjective choice is seen as more valid than the fixed meanings and truths presented by modernism previously.

The Death of the Author

Postmodernism also subscribes to the theory that art and literary works, i.e. 'texts', have no single unique meaning, moreover individuals derive their own meanings from these works.

The reader not the writer

The 1967 essay *The Death of the Author*, published by Roland Barthes, apposes the idea that a literary work should be analysed in relation to the person who produced the work, but moreover, that the audience shapes the meaning of any given text. Postmodernism promotes a reader-response, whilst rejecting the notion of 'authorial intent':

'The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.' (Barthes, R.)

Characteristics of Postmodernist art and design.

Pluralism

Appropriation

Complexity

Contradiction

Irony

Intertextuality

Hyperreality

Historical reference

Ornamentation and pattern

Bold colours and shapes

Form (does not) follow function

Everyday materials – valuable objects

Layering

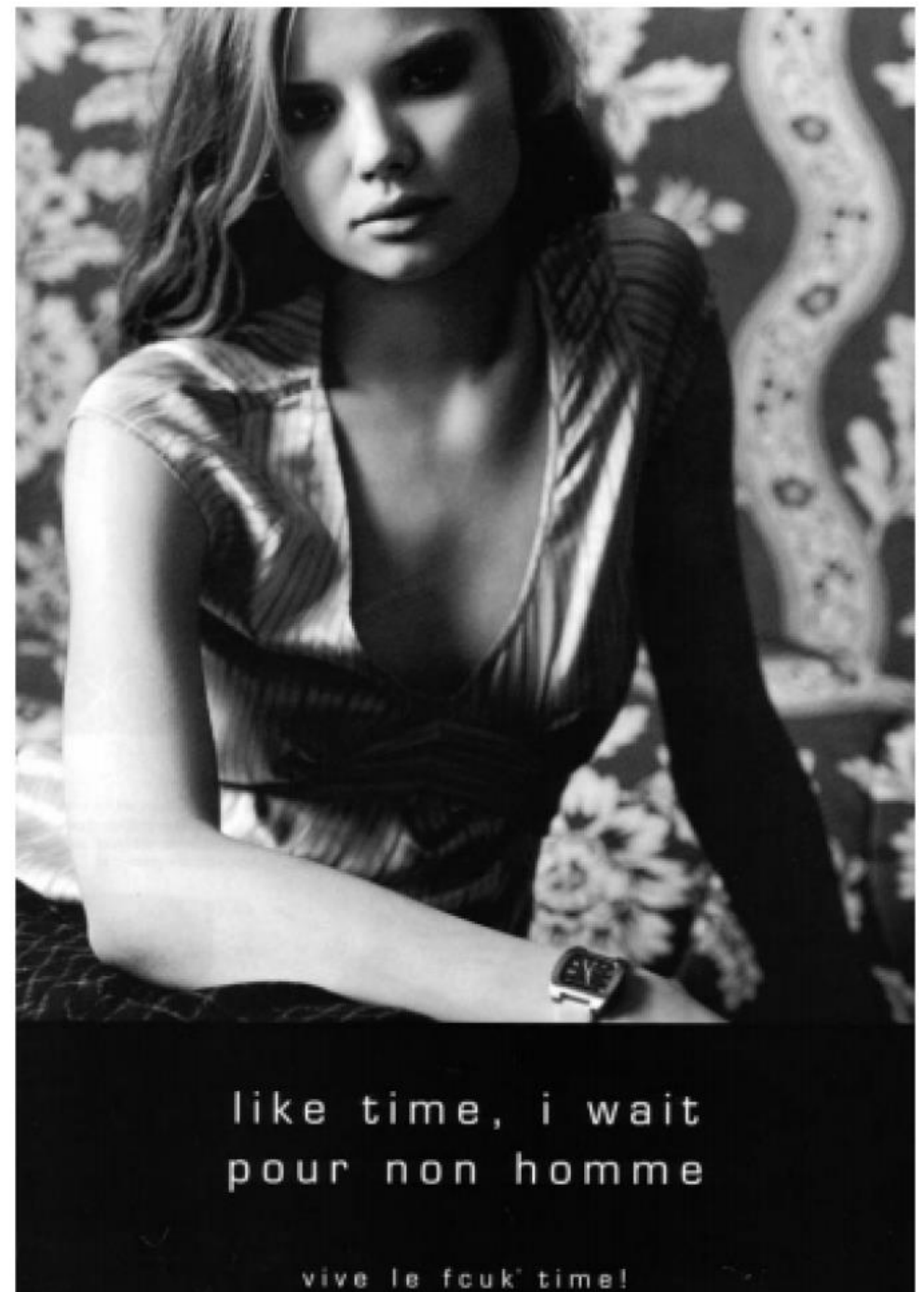
Humour, wit, parody and pastiche

High/low culture

Symbolic reference

Like time, I wait pour non homme'
(*Like time, I wait for no man*).
FCUK 2002.

A perfume ad that knows it is a perfume ad. Self-referential of all perfume advertisements by ironically re-appropriating the genre-specific language device (romanticised French) used for these type of advertisements. It ironically challenges gender stereotyped relationships. This is advertising informing advertising.





American designer April Greiman (along with early collaborator Jayme Odgers) used postmodern graphic styles throughout the 80's and 90's. She was widely recognized as one of the first designers to embrace computer technology as a design tool.

Define me?

Grayson Perry
Awarded Most Excellent
Order of the British Empire
(CBE), cross dresser,
ceramicist, artist, Turner
prize winner, writer,
broadcaster uses classical
forms to deconstruct
popular culture.



Grason Perry (CBE) Postmodern credentials

- Reappropriation of home crafts such as tapestry and textiles
- Has dual identity - an alter ego 'Claire'
- Uses fantasy and childhood memories in his artworks
- Transvestitism is part of his gender identity
- Uses parody in his work
- Folk art based practice (ceramics, textiles, performance)
- International award-winning artist
- Keen biker and Harley Davidson owner
- TV personality

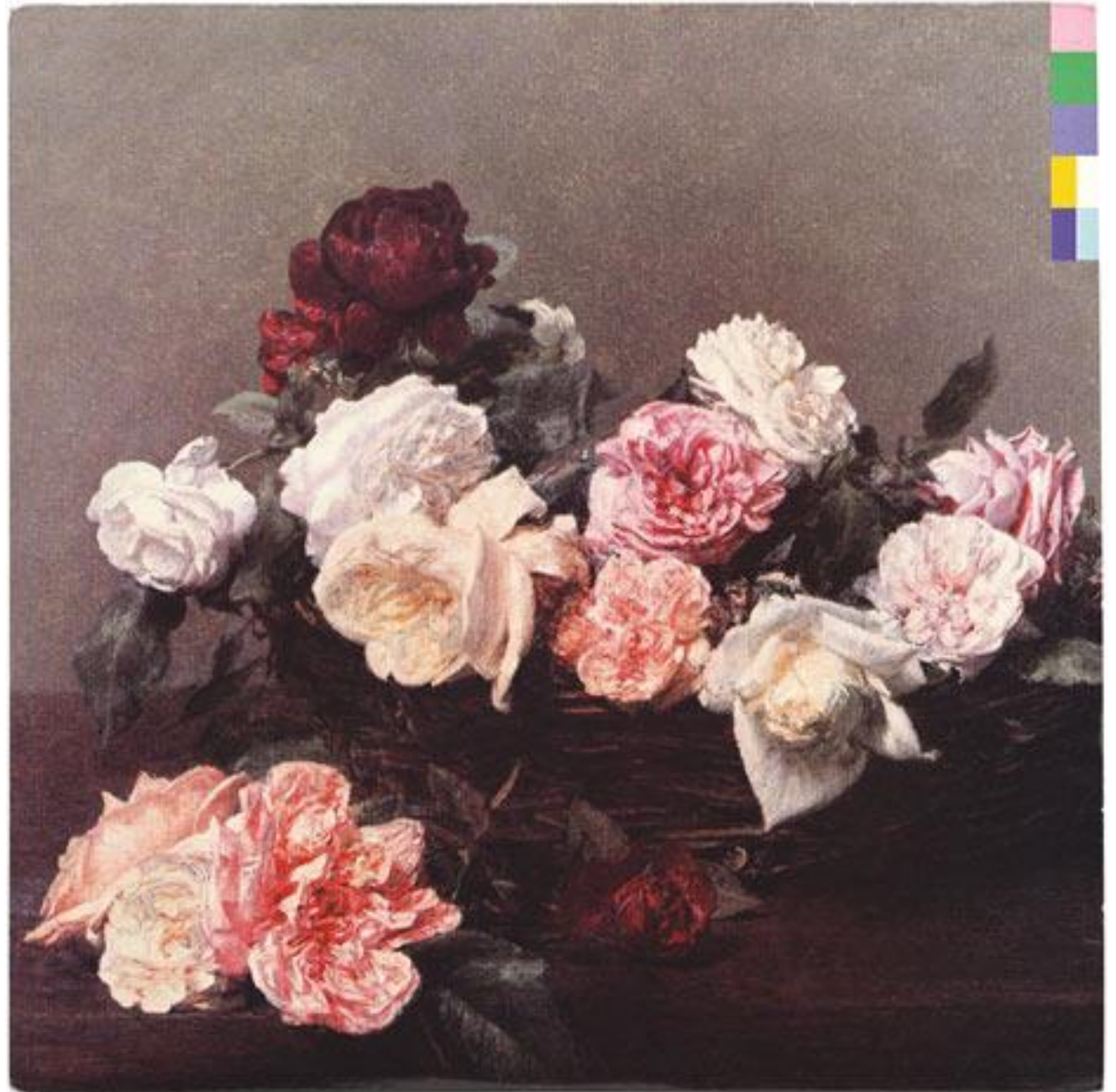
New Order:

Power, Corruption & Lies

1983

By Peter Saville

The album artwork reappropriates the 1890 painting *A Basket of Roses* by French artist Henri Fantin-Latour, which is part of the *National Gallery's* permanent collection in London. The cover has no text, just a colour based code derived by Saville.



Post modern narrative.

Spike Jonze 2013 film, *Her*, has a Postmodernist (and Posthumanist) narrative that questions the core of relationships by suggesting the possibility that artificial intelligence could provide the same companionship that is looked for in a partner.

Every aspect of 'Samantha' (the AI character) is identifiable as being human, (i.e. compassionate, caring, empathetic, responsive, funny, creative), other than the fact that she is an operating system on a computer system. The metanarrative questioned here is whether it is necessary to be human to have a fulfilling relationship with another human. Irrelevant of biology/substance the relationship is still perceived and real.



The Vitra *Wiggle* Side Chair designed by Frank Gehry.

The material used to make this aesthetically pleasing and robust piece of furniture is everyday and relatively inexpensive. Corrugated cardboard and hardboard are reimagined into a stylish piece of furniture.



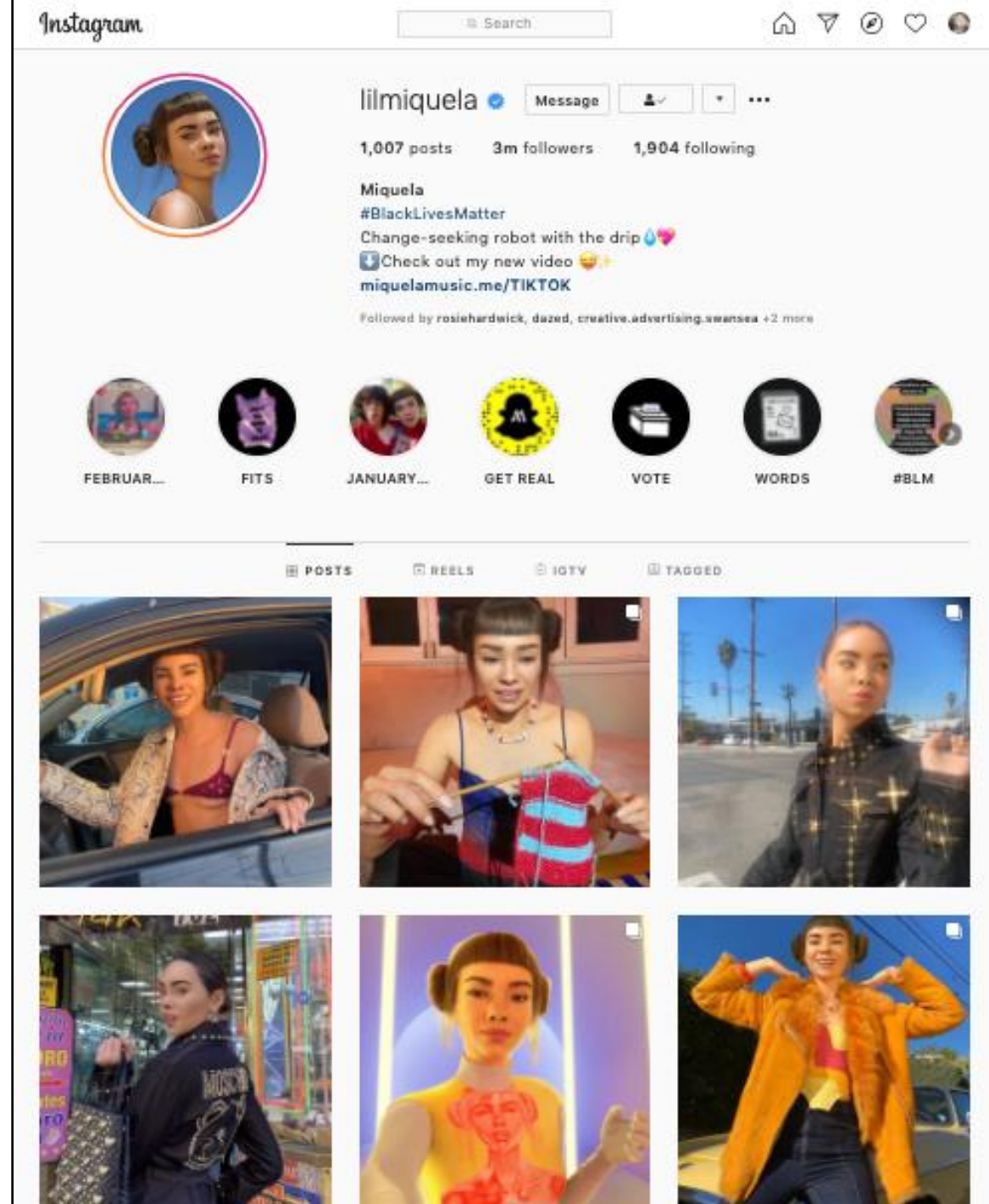
Postmodernism and digital media.

Digital transformation has promoted the exponential development of an immersive and constant, media-saturated world where the distinction between media representation and reality is becoming blurred. This questioning of perceived reality makes the identification between reality and hyperreality increasingly problematic.

As postmodernism rejects the authority of all texts, judgements are now based on opinions. Therefore, the difference between reality and the media is now collapsing. Images represent other images and are competing with each other.

Representations are no longer wholly based on reality as they were previously – this is known as hyperreality, a concept attributed to French philosopher Jean Baudrillard.

Lil Miquela ‘Influencers are being upended by Virtual Influencers, and these CGI avatars may be disrupting something even more integral: truth. Miquela is a caricature of many users’ own Insta presence. We strive for and fawn over her exaggerated life, but ignore the warning: it’s not real. ‘Virtual Influencers do not *make* social media fake—social media platforms predicated on celebrating fictional ideologies of life grew to create an environment now ripe for fictional characters to step in and succeed.’ (Forbes)



Jean Baudrillard (1929 – 2007).

Baudrillard defined the media saturated world as hyperreality. Images on video games are no different to live footage on the news. Reality is no longer identifiable. These fictional images have come to represent reality – this he described as simulacra.

Disneyland is an example of a fictional world with no basis in reality. Representations are now playing a large part in society from the social media constructions of our curated identities to the purchasing of products because of what they represent, rather than their inherent qualities.

There are also however potential positive opportunities to be derived from simulacra.

Deepfake technology.

In the 2018 campaign advertisement for '*Malaria Must Die, So Millions Can Live*', deepfake technology is utilised to make Beckham appear to speak fluently about malaria in 9 different languages including Spanish, Arabic, Hindi and Mandarin, in addition to his native English.



Next week: Module Roundup

Module Deadline

Tuesday 29th April

Submit as one pdf file on Turnitin

(on our Moodle tile)

by 12 noon