



Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction

Christopher Butler

Download now

Read Online ➞

Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction

Christopher Butler

Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction Christopher Butler

Postmodernism has become the buzzword of contemporary society over the last decade. But how can it be defined? In this highly readable introduction the mysteries of this most elusive of concepts are unraveled, casting a critical light upon the way we live now, from the politicizing of museum culture to the cult of the politically correct. The key postmodernist ideas are explored and challenged, as they figure in the theory, philosophy, politics, ethics and artwork of the period, and it is shown how they have interacted within a postmodernist culture.

About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, **Very Short Introductions** offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction Details

Date : Published 2003 by Oxford University Press (first published 2002)

ISBN : 9780192802392

Author : Christopher Butler

Format : Paperback 144 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Nonfiction, Art, Theory

 [Download Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction Christopher Butler

From Reader Review Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction for online ebook

Ahmed Elsayy says

[illegible]

Afshin says

To read a comprehensive introductory book on Postmodernism from a critical point of view with a considerable effort to be fair, was very informative and enjoyable. I love these series of "A Very Short Introduction" and this special one by Christopher Butler is not an exception. This is not only a good introduction for whoever is new to the subject but also a good wrap up for others. Enjoy!

Peter says

I liked that this book criticizes pomo so relentlessly but the arguments in a trump era seem less relevant than ever (unfortunately for everyone)

Clif says

You go into an art museum and find a canoe supported by four golf clubs. On top of the canoe is a rubber chicken. The title of the work is "Your Table Is Ready"

Welcome to Postmodernism, but realize that you are very late. In fact, this movement within the arts world is fading, having reached its peak in the 1980's and 90's.

The word still pops up frequently, though, so why not find out what it is all about?

Christopher Butler does us a valuable service in writing this short book that covers the topic across the arts of literature, music and painting providing many examples and a penetrating critique that carefully defines terms and is a pleasure to read.

Postmodernism questions authority. It does this by revealing the influence of cultural forces behind works of art, forces that surround us so completely we fail to see that they are not natural and inevitable, if we see them at all. Most will view an artwork and be either pleased or repulsed by the superficial appearance, not appreciating how much lies beneath the surface.

Postmodernism also questions authority in the sense of authorship. Can the artist really claim to be the source of his/her work in the sense of knowing what that work is about? Even if I paint a village scene, am I justified in claiming that it is simply that and nothing more? Isn't it possible (postmodernists would say

inevitable) that there are influences on me when I paint of which I am unaware and that someone viewing my painting might well see these influences even in spite of my denial they were a factor in my work?

It's all about meaning - who and what makes meaning. Postmodernism is valuable for casting doubt on received wisdom, gut reaction and the idea that there is one fixed, best way in which to see any work of art. It invites digging into any work, not taking what the author of the work says about it as gospel, realizing that all creativity and its reception are loaded with baggage. Perception is not antiseptic, not clean and concise. This is not to say there is no meaning, but that it isn't one thing to the exclusion of all else.

Butler offers criticism of postmodernism as well as explanation. It can go too far, take itself too seriously, result in absurdity, deconstruction to the point of destruction, leaving pieces that are not allowed to be assembled in any way because no one way is better than another, a protesting critique that offers nothing in exchange. Since construction is power, said to be a bad thing, we are left helpless, unable to promote one interpretation over another.

This short introduction continues the very high standard I have found throughout the series. At the end of each read, I have no doubt that the author is deeply informed and has made a clear presentation. I feel informed at a basic level about the subject. What more could one ask of an introduction?

AC says

This book is much better than his book on Modernism: A very short... It is focused, and well digested (not scattered, like the other one). And I *am* sympathetic, of course, to his rather undisguised hostile attitude towards Postmodernism.

But the book *is* a bit superficial -- which is justifiable, perhaps, given the tendency of books on this topic to obfuscate by speaking about themselves from *within* the jargon...; but it is also a bit boring. I don't know if it is the author who is boring or the topic that I (certainly do) find boring -- or maybe both. Or maybe it's me, and not you... but since the Postmodernists deny the existence of the transcendental ego (the unified self), there is no me... or rather, me is entirely made up of the junctions of you's.

So it definitely *isn't* me... that's at fault...

Whew...! (what a relief!)

Arghya Dutta says

First, let me warn the reader that the author of this book is not a postmodernist. So, though the book presents a really good account of postmodernism, sometimes it is very critical to postmodern ideas. In this review I will be saying about my thoughts on the topics discussed in the book, specifically on the topic of postmodernist critique of sciences.

Now, to me, the most important contribution of postmodernism is to instil a kind of cautiousness while reading any social and historical texts. As they say all the theories are constrained by the society in which we live and, consequently, our perceptions and opinions of reality is determined by those factors.

Now I have a few thoughts:

1) Why is it *intrinsically bad* to have opinions about some issues, social or otherwise? Most of the social theories progress after assuming some basic premises. Are all of them harmful?

2) As far as I understand, long before this postmodernist ideas came we have a fair understanding of biases or predispositions in historical texts. Apart from some details, what is the new contribution of postmodernism regarding these sceptic ideas?

3) Concerning the interaction between postmodernism and science:

i) First, going a bit off-topic let me say that there is a popular misunderstanding about the meaning of some theories of Mathematics and Physics: There is nothing imaginary or outlandish about the complex numbers, which have a real and an imaginary part; in a similar vein the implications of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle is, at least to a major portion, completely straight-forward. It is simply misleading to spin theories like "*What is most extraordinary is that the two hypotheses, the apocalypse of real time and pure war along with the triumph of the virtual over the real, are realised at the same time, in the same space-time, each in implacable pursuit of the other. It is a sign that the space of the event has become a hyperspace with multiple refractivity, and that the space of war has become definitively non-Euclidean.* (Baudrillard, Jean. 1995. *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Translated and with an introduction by Paul Patton. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.)

ii) I simply cannot understand how " $1+1=2$ " can be a social construct. To my delight, ahem ..., Alan Sokal published one article in a postmodernist journal titled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" where he said that the quantum theory of gravity is a social and linguistic construct! The acceptance of the completely meaningless article lead to the famous Sokal affair. Most of the postmodernist explanation of science is, in my humble opinion, total nonsense (or this, *please follow* the link for a seriously enlightening read!).

iii) I agree that there is the issue of multiple explanations of a single phenomenon, but the crucial point is that they usually operate in different regimes of some inherent parameter of the theory. Take for example the most hotly debated issue of high-temperature superconductor; many physicists are arguing about the correct and complete theory of it, which is still elusive, but what we presently have is some conflicting theories which either operate in the different regimes (of temperature, pressure, doping concentration etc.) or, surely, one of them is correct. Same is true for Newtonian and Einstein's theory of gravity: they simply operate in different regimes. So, I strongly disagree with the fact that there are "different stories/ narratives" which just float around.

Finally, do Postmodernsit ideas offer for any *stable* social or economic or artistic life? I will be glad if some of the more erudite friends here can provide some more insights regarding these questions, and, of course, their answers.

Christopher Roberts says

Okay, this book is a travesty.

First off, a philosopher or at the very least an art historian should have written this book, not a literature scholar. Not that it would have necessarily been better, because the big secret about postmodernism is almost nobody calls themselves a postmodernist, and at the most says things like, "I'm using a postmodernist technique of deconstruction." Critics of postmodernism usually attack a straw man of what they think a postmodernist is, complete with a series of positions that nobody I have ever met actually holds.

I'm going to go through a series of issues I have with this book and what it thinks a postmodernist is.

1. You would think Butler would do his best on literature, but while I am not a big fan of postmodernist literature and many of the authors that Butler mentions specifically, he never even tells us what postmodern literature is apart from contrasting it to a ridiculous definition on realism where the author portrays the world as it really is. Butler even states that liberal realism is the most useful form of literature, whatever that is.
2. I'm also not a huge fan of postmodernist art, but it has been useful in helping us question and try to come to grips with exactly what art is. You would think that Butler would mention that a time or two. Also, his main criticism is that postmodernist art is always in danger of re-enforcing the thing it is criticizing, which is a danger of all art as far as I can tell, and especially satire.
3. He spends more time on Foucault than anybody, never mentioning that Foucault rejected the label postmodernist. So basically the guy he spends the most time on said he wasn't a postmodernist, the authors he mentions he admits aren't completely postmodernists and then he harps about Derrida who was a post-structuralist, which is its own thing.
4. I have never met a person I consider to be a true relativist. Yet, the argument against postmodernists is always that they are relativists. As far as I can tell, the people that are labeled postmodernists never claim that truth is relative or that there is no objective reality, only express skepticism that the systems that people currently claim deliver this to us actually do so. What is funny about this is that a second later we usually hear how postmodernists are attacking the objective nature of the systems white men love best by bringing gender and race into everything.
5. Speaking of which, if you don't think history is merely a narrative designed to portray events in a certain light based on the values of the current society, then I don't know what to say. Just look at how Native Americans were portrayed, the myths about them, and how these myths are now being questioned. Sure, laypeople often distort history the most but historians and scientists have gotten in on the act quite a bit.
6. Speaking of criticisms of science, critics of postmodernists love to demonize them for daring to criticize science. Trouble is, they either hold up the worst examples of things so-called postmodernists have claimed, or do a Noam Chomsky and claim that postmodernists are obviously wrong because they cannot prove things by the standards of the systems they are criticizing in the first place. (The flaw in this logic should be obvious, but Chomsky is oblivious to it, as are most people.)

Paul Feyerabend is the best so-called postmodernist critic of science, and he questions the idea that science is a single method, that it portrays an objective reality, that its assumptions should be taken as proven because of science's success, that scientific revolutions proceed rationally, etc. etc. and gives detailed arguments to back them up. Number of times he or any of his arguments are mentioned in this book: 0.

Sohaib says

I enjoyed this book—kept me reading and excited—simply because I like the topic! Anyway, I don't think anyone immersed in popular literature (low culture) and with no critical inclinations would appreciate it. It's for those interested in criticism, literary theory and analysis; or simply those who want to understand postmodern art (literature for me), and even contemporary art, in a better way. Especially with those parody movies and 'broken' novels and poems, refracted in all kinds of directions, making those addicted to linearity and comfort and order lose their hold ... and patience.

Here is a holistic summary of postmodernism as outlined by Butler:

- its affiliation with Freudianism and Marxism, thus its resistance to 'anything' bourgeois;
- its deconstructive skeptical approach;
- the death of the subject, i.e. we are subjected beings—the idea that our self is other-determined by social and economic hierarchizing structures;
- the politicizing of art;
- the trend for parody and pastiche in art and architecture;
- the 'depthlessness' and lack of affect in postmodern literature;
- the belief that everything is text;
- the belief that everything is fiction, a story;
- the belief that everything is interpretation, i.e. perspectivism ...

This book is great as an introduction, particularly for those unready for the rigorous theoretical accounts of postmodernism's avant-garde critics and theorists. What would really improve the understanding of the movement, in my experience, is reading (or observing) some of its art. Here I recommend reading postmodernist poetry and novels: Marylinne Robinson's *Housekeeping* , and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, or *A Mercy*—are perfect exemplars when it comes to narrative technique and thematic (deconstructive) representation.

Foad says

??? ??? "????? ???? ?????" ?? ??? ??? ????. ? ??? ???? ?? ??? ??? ???? ? ?? ????. ??? ???? ??
??? ?? ? ???? ? ???? ??????. ??? ? ? ???? ???? ???? ????.
???? ? ??? ???? ?? ???? ???? ? ?? ???? ???? ???? ? ? ???? ???? ???? ???? ? ? ???? ? ? ???? ? ?
????
??? ?

??? ? ? ???? ?

(view spoiler)

? ? : ???????? ?? ???? ????? ? ????? ? ?? ????? ? ???????? ????? ? ??? ????? ? ????? ??? ??? ????? ????????
????.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions #74), Christopher Butler
????? ?????? ?????: ??????? ??? ???? ??? 2011 ??????
?????: ?????? ?????? ?????? ???????????? ???????? : ???????? ?????? ?????? : ??? ?????? ?????? ??? 1389? ??
179 ?? ?????: 9789642241811? ?????? ?????????? ?? ? 177 ?? 179? ?????: ???????? ??? 21 ?
?. ???????

Joshua Nomen-Mutatio says

I read this in the Austin central library one afternoon and neglected a stack of books I'd greedily grabbed up while roaming around the third floor (where the philosophy and science stuff is).

The author doesn't feign "neutrality" and gives postmodernism a righteous kick in the pants where it is called for. Though this is not a stuffy, simple-minded dismissive screed (the kind you might find ultra-aesthetically conservative types make) either--it showcases both strengths and weaknesses rather well.

Full disclosure: I mainly liked it because I strongly agree with his diagnosis of the infamously slippery and nebulous concept of postmodernism. It's a brand of critique I've heard before (David Foster Wallace makes it wonderfully in various places, mainly interviews like this jaw dropping one for example), but it was a pleasure to read nonetheless. The author did a great job of condensing a broad swath of subjects and case studies into another one of the books that are a part of this fantastic "Very Short Introductions" series.

Taylor Stark says

A Very Short Introduction to Hating Postmodernism.

The author (a professor of English literature; not a philosopher or historian) is unabashedly against postmodernism. Every discussion of postmodernist theories is put before the reader with a sneer; "just look at how ridiculous these thoughts are." The author immediately dismisses every point that is brought up with unsupported assurances of how utterly nonsensical it all is yet never actually manages to convincingly disprove a single point. The whole thing is just dripping with vile. What did postmodernism ever do to you, Christopher Butler?

Although, delightful irony that in a book about postmodernism the author is so self-assured in his own unsupported opinions.

Abdullah Hussaini says

Untuk pengenalan, okeylah.

Ivy-Mabel Fling says

This is an excellent short guide to the destructive and narcissistic nature of postmodernism by a man who has seen what it has done to serious academic study. But it is not a real introductory guide to this way of thinking for those who know nothing about it, nor is it in any way neutral.

Zulhilmi Zakaria says

Saya tidak mahu menghabiskan buku ini. Satunya kerana saya sendiri masih belum biasa dengan idea-idea Derrida atau Foucault. Saya masih belum memahami Logocentric, Deconstruction, Aphoria milik Derrida. Bagaimana pula saya mahu membaca tulisan yang meradd idea-idea ini. Takut-takut tidak adil dalam menanggapi mereka. Cehh...

Tambahan, penulis juga bukan berlatarbelakang falsafah. Christopher Butler seorang penshara Bahasa Inggeris. Saya fikir itu tidak menjadi masalah. "Because everyone is philosopher", cuma apa yang penulis cuba patahkan hujah Deonstrutif Derrida dari sudut bahasa. Dan itu kurang menarik perhatian saya.

Jadi saya terpaksa menangguhkan dulu bacaan buku ini. Saya skip pembacaan hingga ke kesimpulan. Tidak tahulah samada mahu membaca semula atau tidak.

Jangan terpengaruh dengan review saya. Boleh jadi tepat atau tidak. Kerna sata bukan Nabi! Haha.

Selamat membaca.
