
Postmodernism

Rachel K. Fischer

Rachel K. Fischer is a Cataloging Bibliographer for YBP Library Services in New Hampshire. She has a MLIS from Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois, and a BFA in Fine Art from Columbia College in Chicago.

*Correspondence concerning this column should be addressed to **Aimee Graham**; e-mail: aimee.graham90@gmail.com.*

When presented with subjects unfamiliar to the general public, the selection of an appropriate and rounded catalog is important to libraries, both public and academic. And stretching across multiple genres of subjects, including literature and philosophy, the concept of postmodernism may not be an easy undertaking for those not in the field to grasp. Fortunately Rachel Fischer, who holds a MLIS from Dominican University and a BFA in Fine Arts from Columbia College, has provided a well-rounded collection focusing on the topic, ranging from introductory texts, art, and literature, all the way to religion and multimedia. This is her second contribution to the Alert Collector.—*Editor*

If you really do not understand what postmodernism is yet, you are not alone. The term was first coined in the 1950s but did not become a well-known philosophical term in France until the 1970s; however, it was not uncommon for those who studied philosophy and sociology in the United States to have never heard of the term. Postmodernism is still not taught widely in universities outside of art history, philosophy, humanities, and cultural theory classes, yet postmodernist theories have truly impacted how we understand our society and interact with other societies today.

So what is postmodernism? It is a term that is inseparable with the study of other known philosophies. Postmodernism's precursors include linguistic theory, semiology, phenomenology, and modernism, and were closely associated with German philosophers like Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. French philosophers like Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Derrida contributed to making postmodernism what it is today. Since then other "post" terms have become more common in the classroom, such as postcolonialism, postethnic, poststructuralism, postproduction, and even postblack.

In relation to art and literary theory, Jean-François Lyotard stated in *The Postmodern Condition*, "The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable." With this quotation, one can see that postmodernism is tied strongly to cultural theory. As an example, it explores how our society has viewed stereotypes throughout history and how the cultures of our world are intermingling in a globalized society to become hybrids of each other.

While the meaning of postcolonialism may seem obvious

to you, the postmodern dialogue debates whether colonialism has ended on the one end and examines the cultural theory of hybridity on the other. Being postethnic or postblack may not sound possible to you; however, it relates to the postmodern dialogue that explores the globalized point when all cultures have become hybrids of each other. While postproduction sounds like a filmmaking term, in postmodernist theory it refers to the point in which society is not inventing anything new. There are no more ideas to invent so inventions are recycling old ideas in new ways; this is a useful theory to study as a part of art theory or visual communication, due to its relationship to theories of appropriation and reproduction.

Many contemporary artists and authors have found these ideas fascinating to explore. Through visual communication and literary methods, they have taken these ideas related to the exploration of identity, history, and culture and found new ways to represent this way of analytical thinking. With the hope of influencing the world around them, these artists and authors present historical events or themes in their work, like stereotypes, as a way to have a necessary dialogue about the meaning of our cultures and life itself.

The resources that have been chosen for this list were chosen to represent postmodernism as a whole. The list begins with several general introductory works on postmodernism. It is then broken down into the following subject matter: art and architecture, history and ethnic studies, literature, philosophy, religion, serials, and multimedia. The history and ethnic studies section includes books on postcolonialism and postethnic theory. The philosophy section includes works on semiology and phenomenology and works by well-known postmodern philosophers. Given that there are so many subjects related to postmodernism, this is just a starting point for any academic or public library to refer to in order to update its collection and prepare for a future in which postmodernism is taught more widely in schools across the country.

BOOKS

Introductory Texts

Drolet, Michael, ed. *The Postmodernism Reader: Foundational Texts*. London: Routledge, 2004 (ISBN: 9780415160841).

This is an excellent resource to turn to for an introduction to the writings of postmodern philosophers. The authors featured in this text include Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and others. The topics in this anthology include modernity, postmodernism, aesthetics, politics, and history.

Malpas, Simon. *The Postmodern*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2005 (ISBN: 9780415280655).

As a basic introduction to the theory of postmodernism, this is an excellent addition for any library. Malpas clearly explains the difference between modernism and postmodernism. He provides an overview of the related philosophers and their writing. It includes sections related to history and politics.

Taylor, Victor E. and Charles E. Winqvist, ed. *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 2001 (ISBN: 9780415152945).

If your library already has Credo Reference Academic (<http://corp.credoreference.com>), then this title is already in your collection. However, if it does not, then this is an excellent reference book to add to any library's collection. This encyclopedia provides a general introduction to important vocabulary, theories, and philosophers related to postmodernism.

Art and Architecture

Foster, Hal, et al. *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2011 (ISBN: 9780500289518).

This two-volume set on contemporary art is one of the most comprehensive and important art history texts that have been published to this date. It is an excellent resource to refer to for research related to understanding the different contemporary art movements, such as the difference between modernism and postmodernism, the artists involved in these art movements, and the key theories that have shaped these movements.

Jencks, Charles. *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-Modernism Going?* Chichester: Wiley/Academy Press, 2007 (ISBN: 9780470030110).

This critique on the postmodern arts movement was written by a well-known author on the subject. Jencks discusses the theory and its relationship to modernism as a reaction to modernism's shortcomings as an art theory. Being such a young art movement, postmodernism's future is questioned.

Jencks, Charles. *The Story of Post-Modernism: Five Decades of the Ironic, Iconic and Critical in Architecture*. Chichester: Wiley, 2011 (ISBN: 9780470688953).

This is a recently updated history of postmodern architecture. The book describes the roots of the movement and the architectural theories from the 1960s to the present time.

History and Ethnic Studies

Acheraiou, Amar. *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 (ISBN: 9780230298286).

Multicultural ideas related to the hybrid cultures that have developed as the world has evolved into a postcolonial state of globalization are important postmodern theories. Acheraiou analyzes the idea of hybridity and argues against the idea of postcolonialism, believing that the world still needs to be decolonized, questioning the current state of globalization.

Hollinger, David A. *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*. New York: Basic Books, 2006 (ISBN: 9780465030651).

The postmodern idea of being postethnic has become a controversial theory, so much so that Hollinger has added a

new postscript for this edition that responds to his critics. Despite the controversy surrounding the subject, the author's ideas are an important contribution to understanding multi-cultural issues of identity, as the world's ethnic groups become hybrids, including elements of other ethnicities.

Nayar, Pramod K. *Postcolonialism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010 (ISBN: 9780826400468).

This book is an excellent guide to understanding post-colonialism in literature and cultural studies. Nayar explains the theory and background in depth and in a manner understandable to students. The author provides examples of literature and cultural texts that will help the reader understand the theory. In addition, he relates it to other interdisciplinary topics like gender studies, history, and politics.

Southgate, Beverley. *Postmodernism in History: Fear or Freedom?* London: Routledge, 2003 (ISBN: 9780415305389).

Southgate provides an original analysis of postmodernist theories within a historical context. She discusses the precursors of postmodernism and its relation to historical issues and believes that this theory should continue to be studied in the future.

Thompson, Willie. *Postmodernism and History*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004 (ISBN: 9780333963395).

In this book, Thompson presents his introduction to postmodern theory in a way that is easy for students to understand; he explains the impact that postmodernism has had on history.

Watkin, Christopher. *From Plato to Postmodernism: The Story of Western Culture Through Philosophy, Literature and Art*. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011 (ISBN: 9780715638286).

If you are looking to add an updated book on the history of civilization to your collection, you may want to choose this item. This volume begins with Greco-Roman history and philosophy, proceeds through the history of Western civilization and culture to the modern times, and ends with postmodernism. It is an excellent resource for both high school and college students.

Literature

Acheraiou, Amar. *Rethinking Postcolonialism: Colonialist Discourse in Modern Literatures and the Legacy of Classical Writers*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008 (ISBN: 9780230552050).

Although postmodernism is not part of the title of this book, postcolonialist theory is an important theme that is examined as a part of postmodern cultural theory. Acheraiou analyzes the theme of colonialism in literature and provides his own analysis of postcolonialism in relation to colonial history.

Ashton, Jennifer. *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 (ISBN: 9780521855044).

As part of the Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture series, this book is a must-have for any library. This book is an excellent resource for those interested in understanding the links between modernist and postmodernist theories in relation to modern and contemporary poetry, explaining and analyzing the works of key authors of these movements.

Hoffmann, Gerhard. *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005 (ISBN: 9789042018860).

This work is just one volume of the many that have been published as part of the Postmodern series by Rodopi. Hoffman analyzes American fiction that was written between 1960 and 1980 and is an excellent resource for those interested in studying the link between modernist and postmodernist theory in American fiction.

Hoover, Paul, ed. *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013 (ISBN: 978-0393341867).

This is a newly revised edition of the Norton Anthology of poetry. It includes the works of 114 postmodern poets. The essays and poems are an excellent resource to turn to for those interested in reading, writing, and studying postmodern literature.

Nicol, Bran. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 (ISBN: 9780521861571).

As part of the Cambridge Introductions to Literature series, this book is a must have for all libraries. This book provides an introduction to the key authors of the postmodern era in a way that does not emphasize the theory but explains the literary styles and techniques that is common among these authors.

Music

Gloag, Kenneth. *Postmodernism in Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 (ISBN: 978-0521151573).

Although the idea of postmodernism may seem much more abstract in relation to music than to visual and ethnic culture, Gloag expertly shows the link between postmodern theory and music composition. This book emphasizes the composers and their works that were written between 1950 and the present.

Philosophy

Barthes, Roland. *Elements of Semiology*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977 (ISBN: 9780374521462).

Barthes is a well-known French philosopher. This is an

THE ALERT COLLECTOR

essential semiology text for those interested in studying the meaning of signs in relation to linguistics, postmodernism, and cultural theory. Barthes' writing on semiology has been featured in texts used in university classrooms around the country.

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies: the Complete Edition*, in a New Translation. New York: Hill and Wang, 2013 (ISBN: 9780809071944).

Barthes is one of the foremost experts on semiotics. Being able to understand the meaning of cultural signs and symbols is important to understanding postmodernism and postmodern cultural theory. Excerpts from this work are featured in texts that are used in university classrooms, so this book is essential to have in an academic library as a resource for students.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995 (ISBN: 9780472065219).

This French philosopher is well known to those studying postmodernism. Excerpts from this book have been featured in textbooks that are used in classrooms throughout this country. In this work, Baudrillard focuses on issues of cultural materialism, production, and reproduction.

Derrida, Jacques. *Signature Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013 (ISBN: 9780226924540).

Derrida is most well known for his work related to the semiotic theory of deconstruction and his work on phenomenology. His writing is important to postmodernism and poststructuralism. This anthology is a collection of Derrida's writings that were published by *Critical Inquiry* between 1980 and 2002.

Derrida, Jacques. *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010 (ISBN: 9780810127654).

Derrida is a well-known expert on phenomenology, semiotics, and linguistics. This book is Derrida's introduction to Edmund Husserl's philosophies of phenomenology, which relates to deconstruction. Phenomenology is important to the study of postmodernism. This is an excellent resource for students interested in understanding both Derrida and Husserl.

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980 (ISBN: 9780226143293).

This book is a collection of Derrida's essays from 1959 to 1966. It contains his early essays on deconstruction, structuralism, and metaphysics. His essays are relevant to those who study literature, philosophy, and psychology.

Detmer, David. *Phenomenology Explained: From Experience to Insight*. Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2013 (ISBN: 9780812697971).

Phenomenology has been an important philosophical movement that has contributed to postmodernism since its

inception in 1900. This book provides an overview of the philosophy, its background, and key philosophers that have contributed to phenomenology.

Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Random House, 1984 (ISBN: 9780394713403).

Foucault was a well-known French postmodern philosopher. This book is an anthology of his most well-known writing as well as previously unpublished work. His writing stretches across many disciplines, including history, politics, and psychology, and is featured in textbooks that are used in university classrooms in this country. He is the most well known for his work that analyzes how power manifests itself in society.

Herrmann, Friedrich-Wilhelm Von. *Hermeneutics and Reflection: Heidegger and Husserl on the Concept of Phenomenology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013 (ISBN: 9781442669130).

The author of this book is a well-known German expert on phenomenology and hermeneutics. The book is an important critique of Martin Heidegger's and Edmund Husserl's work on phenomenology. The author presents his critique of Husserl from Heidegger's viewpoint.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984 (ISBN: 9780816611737).

This French philosopher is important to study for arts and sciences majors. Excerpts of this book have been included in textbooks that are used in university classrooms throughout this country. In this book, the author explains and analyzes the theory of postmodernism in relation to science, technology, and the arts.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge, 2012 (ISBN: 9780415558693).

Understanding perception within different cultures is important to postmodern cultural theory. Merleau-Ponty first published this book on phenomenology in 1945.

Religion

Berry, Philippa and Andrew Wernick, ed. *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion*. London: Routledge, 1992 (ISBN: 9780415066389).

This is a collection of essays by postmodern philosophers that explore the connection between spirituality, religion, and postmodernism. These essays additionally discuss ethics, politics, and feminism.

Gellner, Ernest. *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge, 1992 (ISBN: 9780415080248).

Unlike the other books on the list, this author criticizes postmodernism. He finds it too subjective and apologetic of colonialism. Gellner focuses on highlighting the strengths of Islam and the Enlightenment in relation to postmodernism.

Raschke, Carl A. *Postmodernism and the Revolution in Religious Theory: Toward a Semiotics of the Event*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012 (ISBN: 9780813933078).

In this book, Raschke analyzes the contributions that postmodernism has made to religious theory. He is most interested in the relationship between semiology and religion, since understanding symbols are inseparable with religion.

Taylor, Victor E. *Religion after Postmodernism: Rethorizing Myth and Literature*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008 (ISBN: 9780813927619).

In this book on religion and postmodernism, Taylor focuses on the relationship between the literary style of fables and religion. The literary style of traditional religions effects how one lives and why. The author believes it is important to reanalyze the meaning of beliefs according to postmodern philosophy.

Thacker, Justin. *Postmodernism and the Ethics of Theological Knowledge*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007 (ISBN: 9780754661856).

Unlike other books, Thacker criticizes postmodernist philosophers for their anti-religious beliefs. The author favors an analysis of postmodernism that includes ethics, knowledge, and religion.

SERIALS

Amiran, Eyal et al, ed. *Post Modern Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990–Present (E-ISSN: 1053-1920).

This electronic journal is the leading academic journal on postmodernism. Its focus is on the cultural and interdisciplinary studies of the theory. It features critical essays and reviews and is available through Project Muse.

MULTIMEDIA

Sollins, Susan. Art 21. PBS, 2001–2012. www.pbs.org/art21.

Art 21 has been featured on PBS for six seasons, to this date. Videos, companion books, and a companion website are available for all seasons. The website has clips and longer segments from all of the seasons available for free online. This series showcases modern and postmodern artists from around the world.