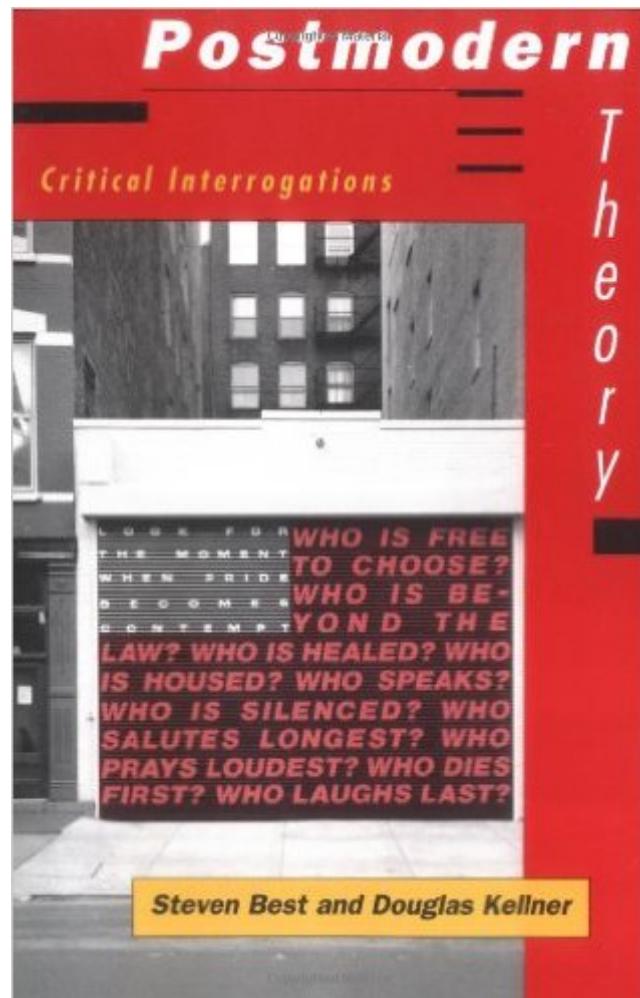


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# Postmodern Theory



## Synopsis

In this timely volume, the authors systematically analyze postmodern theory to evaluate its relevance for critical social theory and radical politics today. Best and Kellner provide:<sup>\*</sup> An introduction and critique of the work of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Laclau and Mouffe, and Jameson, which assess the varying contributions and limitations of postmodern theory<sup>\*</sup> A discussion of postmodern feminist theory and the politics of identity<sup>\*</sup> A systematic study of the origin of the discourse of the postmodern in historical, sociological, cultural, and philosophical studies. The authors claim that while postmodern theory provides insights into contemporary developments, it lacks adequate methodological and political perspectives to provide a critical social theory and radical politics for the present age.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I agree with one of the other reviewers of this book. If you don't have a knack for sorting out the often convoluted writing styles of postmodern theorists, this book would not be a good introductory text for the novice. That aside, the book successfully, for me, meandered through the postmodern junkpiles of many of the more well known postmodernists of the last 30 years: Lyotard, Jameson, Baudrillard, Foucault, Deleuze & Guattari, and Habermas, to name a few. I liked it that Best and Kellner's politics and goals were always unapologetically evident. Their effort to systematically conceptualize each theorist's contribution to "postmodernism", and to explore the points at which

different theorists cross path, depart in different directions, and/or altogether miss each other, is to hypothesize the possibility and need of a critical postmodernism - one that reflectively grounds and ungrounds itself in the traditions of critical theory and postmodernism. The translucency of their analysis makes them not so much an objective observer of postmodernist writings, but situuates them within the debates as participants. I believe that their review and arguments were cogent and progressive. It is a great book for exploring the primary texts you plan to hit.

I remember my first encounter with postmodernism over 10 years ago when I started college and wished for a more gentle introduction. Pomo authors are notoriously difficult to understand not so much because their work is difficult, but their texts are seldom self-contained. To understand Foucault, you must know something about Nietzsche, Heidegger, and to a smaller extent, Sartre. In fact, to understand Foucault, you would have to read quite a bit of Foucault's canon because each text in each period of his writing is a collage of a much bigger picture. I think this is the best introduction to postmodernism on the market. The authors discuss several seminal figures in pomo: Foucault, Baudrillard, Lyotard, etc. Their summaries and analysis are frequently good but at times flawed. This book is a good primer into pomo but I would not end with this book.

Anyone who's studied only a few of the major thinkers in postmodern thought may find themselves losing touch with the larger picture-- that is, what constitutes postmodernism? Or even, what are the major themes and problems of this subject matter? Answering these questions is fundamental in order to assist a reader of postmodernist texts in knowing simply just what to look for while reading as well as understanding the value of postmodernism in its effectiveness to critique modern conditions. Best and Kellner have written the only book I've found with an attempt to answer these questions. It's written for serious beginners or well-read intermediate-level students, not with the implicit assumption of a lazy reader (as in titles like 'Kant in 90 Minutes' or 'Postmodernism for Dummies'). Both Terry Eagleton ('After Theory', 'Literary Theory') and these writers have been accused of oversimplification or misleading readers on the meaning of certain concepts. I'm not in a position to assert these claims, but I make it a habit not to treat any text as Biblical truth. Certainly, as I read more I will develop my own ideas about the precise meanings of concepts described by Foucault, Deleuze and others. With that in mind, I've found Postmodern Theory to be an outstanding overview of the authors under discussion. It is a difficult book, but written with a clarity such that the language is no impediment to following the discourse. That is, I can read it on a crowded bus :) Early on, the authors differentiate between poststructuralism and postmodernism.

The thinkers under discussion all fall into the latter school. Poststructuralists like Derrida are therefore not covered under the book's scope. Many major thinkers have chapters dedicated to them: Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Baudrillard, Lyotard; other chapters discuss the critical theory of the Frankfurt School: Marxism, Jameson, Adorno, Habermas, and finally, a chapter looking "toward the reconstruction of critical social theory" which describes where postmodernism succeeds and fails in its critique of the problems it wishes to analyze. Primarily, Kellner and Best focus on postmodernism's overriding themes: micropolitics, irrationalism, and the attack on the grand narratives of modernist or structuralist philosophies. The authors endorse the critical theory of the Frankfurt School as a more effective groundwork methodology to analyze capitalism and other modern dilemma and finally, conclude that for all postmodernism has to offer, its methods are fundamentally useless and its course, a dead-end. Read postmodernism, they say, learn from it, enjoy it, but take it with a grain of salt. This 'conclusion' is not a surprise finale to the book, but is a criticism that pervades the text. Rather than the chronological histories found in many histories of philosophy, the book's organization is mostly topical, while the writers do provide information on the timelines and relationships between authors, including influences and comparative analyses of authors' thoughts. The thrust of the book is to give readers a sense of the variegated governing principles of postmodern thought and reference the sources of these ideas, assisting the reader immeasurably in sifting through your bookstores' section of cultural theory to find the books you're ready to dive into. The principles discussed by Best and Kellner typically revolve around the postmodern interpretations of history and the organization of society. They illuminate obtuse ideas such as those found in the frustratingly (and wonderfully) cryptic works of Deleuze and Guattari, and provide descriptions of the overall patterns of thought for many postmodern thinkers. For me, this was a diamond in the rough and is certain to vastly improve my reading comprehension in the future, as well as help me to choose between authors I may or may not be interested in. Highly recommended for those who feel lost in the dense reams of postmodern theory.

This is likely one of the best introductions to an arguably incongruent set of beliefs. Drs. Best and Kellner are wonderful researchers and writers. This book has been helpful for both school writings/research and my own vested interest in understanding PMT and related ideas.

I am an accounting academician, who has recently gotten into the application of post-structuralism/post-modernism to financial modeling and reporting. This text gave a good overview to some of the major contributors to post-modernism. I had a much better understanding,

particularly of Baudrillardian thought, after reading this. The only thing that I was hoping the text would do better was to differentiate between post-structuralism and post-modernism. I still do not understand the difference, if there is one. While the author briefly addresses this, I do not see much of a difference. I have asked many of my colleagues in liberal arts, and they have difficulty explaining the difference as well.

This is the third Best and Kellner work on postmodernism that I've read and actually it should be read before the others because it treats the major thinkers in the field. As always with these authors there's a bit of the "smartest guys in the room" stuff going on but it's not obtrusive. Maybe most academics just can't help it.-- the seemingly trivial point-scoring against other writers. Solid background for further reading in postmodern philosophy. It's pretty hard going if you didn't major in philosophy as I didn't. When it bogs down, just move on.

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