Also available from Routledge

Poetry: The basics
Jeffrey Wainwright
0–415–28764–2

Shakespeare: The basics
Sean McEvoy
0–415–36246–6

Literary Theory: The basics
Hans Bertens
0–415–35112–X

Contemporary British Novelists
Nick Rennison
0–415–21709–1

The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism (second edition)
Edited by Stuart Sim
0–415–33359–8

The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature
Edited by Neil Cornwell
0–415–23366–6

Who's Who in Contemporary Women's Writing
Edited by Jane Eldridge Miller
0–415–15981–4

Who's Who in Dickens
Donald Hawes
0–415–26029–9

Who's Who in Shakespeare
Peter Quennell and Hamish Johnson
0–415–26035–3

Who's Who in Twentieth-Century World Poetry
Edited by Mark Willhardt and Alan Michael Parker
0–415–16356–0

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO CRITICAL THEORY

Edited by
Simon Malpas and Paul Wake

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

FURTHER READING

Abelove, Henry, Barale, Michèle Aina and Halperin, David (eds) (1993) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, London: Routledge.
This is still the best collection of essays covering the theorization of sexuality and its relationship to theories of gender. See especially essays by Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler and John D'Emilio.

Bristow, Joseph (1997) *Sexuality*, London: Routledge.
This book's attention to the origins of desire as theorized by Freud and Lacan will provide useful information for students new to the discussion of sexuality and psychoanalytic theory. Bristow also provides an important historical overview of the origins of the field of sexology during the nineteenth century.

Garber, Linda (2001) *Identity Poetics: Race, Class, and the Lesbian-Feminist Roots of Queer Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press.
This book does a superb job of looking at the origins of queer theory and its relationship to the work of feminists from the 1970s and 1980s. Garber usefully complicates any notion of a uniform body of work termed 'gender theory' with an examination of the class and racial politics underlying broad strokes of theorization.

Glover, David and Kaplan, Cora (2000) *Genders*, London: Routledge.
This book examines first the broad body of work in feminist and masculinity studies. It then usefully examines recent work in queer theory as it relates to earlier theoretical interests. This accessible book complements Bristow's above. The two will be helpful to all beginning students of theory.

Hall, Donald E. (2003) *Queer Theories*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
For students eager to explore the emergence of queer theory and its usefulness in applied literary and cultural criticism, this book may provide helpful information and examples. In particular, its last section of readings of literary texts including *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Giovanni's Room*, and *The Color Purple* offer some useful models of how queer theory can be applied by students and scholars.

10
POSTMODERNISM

LINDA HUTCHEON

DEFINING THE POSTMODERN

In the final decades of the twentieth century and even into the new millennium, the term 'postmodern' has appeared to be more casually bandied about than carefully defined. For some it was a mere 'moment', while for others it was a more general 'condition'. Some denigrated it to just a 'style'; still others elevated it to a historical 'period'. These variations do not only signal differences in critics' perspectives, however; they also mark the multiplicity and complexity of the cultural phenomena gathered together under this heading. There is certainly no shortage of differing opinions and competing models of postmodernism, but the critics are not the only ones to blame for the sometimes confusing number of explanations and descriptions. Although the word existed before, it first gained wide acceptance (and its current meaning) in the field of architecture in the 1970s, and referred to works that were 'doubly coded', as the influential architecture theorist Charles Jencks (1986: 7) put it: that is, new and modern(ist), but also historical, although in a parodic or ironic way. These hybrid buildings self-consciously took advantage of all the technical advances of modernist architecture, but their historical echoes of earlier traditions challenged the anti-historical emphasis on purity of form alone that had resulted in those familiar stark, undecorated skyscrapers typical of what was called modernism's International Style.

It was not long before the term 'postmodern' spread to other art forms that also demonstrated a paradoxical mixing of seeming opposites: the traditional (though ironized) and the new, and history and the self-conscious quoting of other art. Literature, the visual arts (especially photography), dance, film, theatre and music (classical and popular) all defined their own postmodernism, as did philosophy, sociology, historiography, psychoanalysis and theology. This move from the realm of the arts into what the French call the 'human sciences' was inevitable, given the very close connections between theory and practice in the postmodern. As we shall see, the impulse of postmodern art both to exploit and then to undermine the conventions upon which it depended – from formalism (or a concern for artistic form) to **mimesis** (with a focus on the imitation of nature or life) – was matched by the urge of poststructuralist theory to call attention to and then deconstruct our unexamined assumptions about basic things like meaning in language or even human identity. Art and theory clearly had overlapping concerns and at least one common method of operation:

that is, looking for and then exposing contradictions in what appeared at first to be a totally unproblematic, coherent and unified whole. In a sense, the conflation of theory and practice came about because of shared responses to common provocations.

The conflating process was helped along by the fact that there were a good number of postmodern artists who doubled as theorists: witness the Italian semiotician-novelist, Umberto **Eco**; the British literary theorist and writer of 'academic' novels, David Lodge; the American novelist and influential essayist, John Barth; the British photographer and cultural theorist, Victor Burgin; the list could go on. The postmodern artist was clearly no longer the inarticulate, silent, alienated creator figure of the Romantic or even modernist tradition. Nor was the theorist the dry, detached, dispassionate writer of the academic tradition, however. From the Slovenian psychoanalytic theorist, Slavoj **Žižek**, to the American cultural analyst, Michael Bérubé, theorists showed they could write with sharp wit, verbal play and anecdotal verve.

The borders between theory and practice were not the only ones to be crossed in what many saw as the democratizing push of the postmodern. The boundaries between popular and high art, between mass and elite culture, were frequently blurred or simply ignored, be it in the populist theorizing of American critic Leslie Fiedler or in German photographer Hans Haake's documentary exposés of the capitalist roots of the (high) art world. This border-crossing did not involve the uncritical or celebratory espousing of the commercial (as many accused American Pop Art such as that of Andy Warhol of doing), but rather offered a critical confrontation with the definitions of and assumptions underlying our concepts of both the popular and the elite. In a novel like Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (*Il nome della rosa*), with its bringing together of the popular detective story format, medieval monastic history and philosophy and contemporary semiotic theorizing, this mixing of levels of culture created a strange state of 'in-betweenness'. The resulting formal and thematic hybrid challenged any simple notions we might have had of homogeneity or uniformity in either art or theory.

This postmodern way of thinking – which many see as paradoxical – can be characterized as displaying a 'both/and' kind of logic. Making *distinctions* but not making *choices* (which would be an 'either/or' kind of logic) between the popular and the elite, the postmodern offered instead a model that would force us to consider equally both sides of this (or any other) binary opposition, and in effect to undo or to 'deconstruct' the seeming opposition between its two terms. There is an obvious parallel here with the theorizing of Jacques **Derrida**, the French philosopher and founder of the theory known as deconstruction. Demonstrating how every binary conceals within it an implied hierarchy of values, Derrida strove not to reverse but, more radically, to undo both the opposition and its implicit evaluation of one term as superior. In the process he made us rethink the relationship between not only the oral and the written (his main interest) but also such familiar binaries as high art/popular, white/black, male/female, and so on. For the poststructuralist Derrida, as for most postmodern artists and theorists,

any seemingly coherent whole (say, the 'self') carries within itself the deconstructable **traces** of its own contradictions (in this case, the '**other**'). Of course, the very word 'postmodern' illustrates this, for it carries within itself the 'modern' – from which it both derives and deviates. It is 'post' in the sense of both temporally 'after' and conceptually 'beyond'.

SITUATING THE POSTMODERN

POSTMODERNISM

Within cultural and aesthetic history, it is modernism – the art and theory of the primarily Europeanized West of the first third of the twentieth century – that offers the initial defining relationship for 'postmodernISM', the word now used to describe a certain kind of art and theory born in and flourishing after the infamous counter-cultural sixties. But that relationship is a complex one of both similarity and difference, or (to put it in historical terms) of both continuity and rupture. In architecture, postmodernism gained public recognition through the 1980 Venice Biennale exhibition with its descriptive but provocative title: 'the presence of the past'. Italian architect Paolo Portoghesi analysed the twenty façades comprising the exhibit's 'Strada Novissima' (the newest street), arguing that their very newness lay paradoxically in their parody of historical traditions such as classicism, thereby showing how architecture was rethinking **modernism**'s famous (and defining) purist break with history. For revolutionary modernist architects like Mies van der Rohe, buildings had been considered pure form and thus new (i.e. modern) in the sense of not being repositories of the past. For equally revolutionary postmodern architects who contested modernism's stranglehold on the world's cityscapes (think of all those blocks of high-rises), the past of our built environment had to be revisited, but critically and from the perspective gained after (that is, post) modernism. With the aid of distancing techniques like irony and parody, they could recall a shared vocabulary and a history of architectural forms (banished by modernists) without falling into the trap of nostalgia or antiquarianism. 'The past whose presence we claim is not a golden age to be recuperated', argued Portoghesi (1983: 26). Its artistic forms and its social meanings alike were to be reconsidered through critical reflection. But what is important to remember is that postmodern architecture could not have happened without modernism: there was clear continuity, even as there were equally obvious differences.

Although modernism in literature and visual art, for example, meant something else – related but not exactly the same – there are analogies to be drawn. American critic Ihab Hassan was one of the first to make the link between postmodernism in literature and a certain kind of modernist avant-garde writing, and was one of the many (including Jean-François **Lyotard**, the French philosopher and early definer of the postmodern) to see in *Finnegans Wake*, the radically experimental novel by Irish arch-modernist James Joyce, the precursor

or even epitome of the postmodern. But Hassan became best known for his later typology or categorization of modernism and postmodernism in terms of contraries, creating a long list of (very un-postmodern) binary oppositions. For instance, in his terms, if modernism stood for form, purpose and hierarchy, postmodernism represented anti-form, play and anarchy (Hassan 1987: 91–2).

Modernism, of course, was no more a unified movement or concept than postmodernism. To risk generalizing, however, the postmodern openly broke from three high modernist tenets: its concentration on form; its belief in the autonomy of the work of art and thus its willed separation of art from the social and historical world; its insistence on the firm distinction between high art and consumer or mass culture (what Andreas Huyssen (1986) called 'the great divide'). But there were other sides to modernism, as Hassan saw early on, from which postmodernism learned much – namely, the various avant-gardes' attempts to break down the borders between art and life as well as between the popular and the elite, and also their experimental challenges to the existence of any single Truth – be it in defining what 'art' was or how to live one's life in society. Such challenges, of course, were among the reasons modernism was rejected by twentieth-century totalitarian regimes: both Hitler and Stalin perceived only too clearly its threats. There were other continuities too, however, with modernism in all its forms: the ironic parody of Joyce would find its echo in that of the elusive American novelist, Thomas Pynchon, and the controversial British feminist writer Angela Carter. Works of art that self-consciously contained within themselves their own first critical commentary – that is, works that were called self-reflexive or metafictional – proliferated in the modernist period and continued into the postmodernist. Because of the nineteenth-century historical focus of much postmodern culture, and the fashion in the 1990s for Victorian film and television adaptations, it has been argued that 'post-Victorian' might be a more accurate term than postmodern (Sadoff and Kucich 2000). But in fiction, as in visual art or film, the postmodern has actually ranged more widely in its appropriation and critical reconsidering of the past: from German writer Patrick Süskind's fictional exploration of the olfactory life of eighteenth-century France in his novel *Perfume* (*Das Parfum: die Geschichte eines Mörders*) to American photographer Cindy Sherman's ironic self-insertion into Renaissance painting scenarios.

The complicated relationship of the 'post' to the 'modern', therefore, is one of critical rethinking, leading either to a continuation and often intensification (of irony, parody, self-reflexivity) or a rejection (of ahistoricity, barriers against the popular). This cultural and artistic relationship, however, is itself based upon another broader one that is social and political in nature, and has its roots in a series of earlier German thinkers whose work was revisited (and reinterpreted) by French poststructuralist theorists: the philosopher Friedrich **Nietzsche**; the articulator of political revolution, Karl **Marx**; and the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund **Freud**.

POSTMODERNITY

Although there is considerable slippage between the two terms, postmodernISM is usually used to talk about cultural and artistic dimensions, while postmodernITY usually connotes the more general social and political context. The two are clearly not easily separable, however. (For one thing, both carry within themselves their defining modern 'other'.) In most accounts, the movement from Renaissance humanism to the start of what German philosopher Jürgen **Habermas** calls the 'project of **modernity**' began with seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes' infamous phrase *cogito ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am – a concept that placed human reason at the centre of human existence. In Anglo-American philosopher Stephen Toulmin's terms, this move entailed a shift 'to a higher, stratospheric plane, in which nature and ethics conform to abstract, timeless, general, and universal theories' (Toulmin 1990: 35). On this plane, connections among our knowledge of Nature, of ourselves, and of history and society are said to be objectively determined. This then provides us with a foundation for ordering our understanding of our world and for progressing towards what is called Truth. Rational knowledge is therefore not dependent on our particular culture and is totally value-free; it exists in the form of what Lyotard called '**grand narratives**' (*grandes histoires*) or '**metanarratives**' which, in effect, centre or orient and make sense of the world for us (Lyotard 1984: 26).

Postmodernity, on the other hand, saw these grand explanatory schemes as simply some among many possible narratives. There are countless 'little narratives' (*petites histoires*), argued Lyotard, that jockey for position, begging for our attention and allegiance. There is no single Truth; there are, instead, multiple truths, thus causing what he called a crisis of legitimation. What the postmodern did was deprive the modern of its idea of a single anchoring centre (it was thus 'de-centred') and of any certainty (as rationally established). This was the effect of what Lyotard calls the postmodern 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). Not surprisingly, there has been considerable negative reaction to this unsettling and deconstructing move, and from a wide variety of political and philosophical positions. Habermas argued that the project of modernity, with its roots in the eighteenth-century **Enlightenment** faith in rationality, was still unfinished and required completion – not destruction (1980). (For Lyotard, that particular grand narrative of modernity, on the contrary, had been ended by history – by which he meant the Nazi concentration camps (1992: 18).) American Marxist critic Fredric **Jameson** saw in the postmodern only the negative 'cultural logic of late capitalism' (Jameson 1984; 1992). For French sociologist Jean **Baudrillard**, postmodernity brought with it a crisis in how we represent and understand the world around us.

Why, we might well ask, was the postmodern perceived as such a threat? One reason may lie in its social and political history. The calling of attention to little narratives could be seen, in part, as the result of a series of oppositional

movements, primarily in Europe and North America, which arose during the 1960s and 1970s. Students, workers, women, gays and lesbians, African and Native Americans, and many others took to the streets to make sure their little narrative was heard; the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements were protests against the tyranny of the grand narratives of repressive **power**. In other parts of the world, decolonization brought with it a generalized awareness not only of challenges to imperial metanarratives but also of the limitations of a purely Euro-American focus. Out of all this came what African American theorist Cornel **West** aptly called 'the new cultural politics of difference' (1990). Those who had been ignored by the grand narratives now demanded to be heard. Herein lay the roots of the postmodern focus on those who have been excluded, those variously referred to in the theory as the marginal, the ex-centric, the **different** or the other.

This historical context also explains the very real threat to modernity's belief in the value of the universal and the general, or what came to be called the 'totalizing'. One of the lessons to be learned from the differing views of (post)modernity held by the German Habermas and the French Lyotard was that one's particular national culture and history had a determining effect on one's theorizing. So too, some argued, did things like religion, gender, race, ethnicity and sexual choice. The local and the particular became the anchors of post-modern 'situated knowledges' (**Haraway** 1991: 195) in a more generic way than they were in the more focused theories of identity politics just listed (to which we shall return shortly).

In an even broader sense of the word, 'identity' became another point of contention in postmodernity. In fact, the very word came to be replaced by the term 'subjectivity'; the 'individual' became the '**subject**'. The core of modernity's idea of human identity had come from two sources: liberal humanism and capitalism. From the Renaissance on, humanism had placed 'Man' at its centre and granted 'him' a unique, coherent, rational, autonomous identity. However, the individual was still said to partake of a general and universalized essence called 'human nature'. Capitalism (or so German critical theorist Theodor W. **Adorno** argued (1978: 280)) both needs and yet manipulates 'him' into mass conformity in the name of democratic ideals. Postmodernity de-centred these concepts of selfhood, and substituted for this monolith of 'Man' the ambiguity of the 'subject'. Under the influence of poststructuralist theory's view of human consciousness as not the source of language, but as constructed in and by language, the postmodern adoption of this idea of the 'subject' was also meant to suggest both the 'subject' of a sentence (the agent of a verb) and the idea of being 'subjected to' the language that constructs one's identity.

What was clear in the postmodern notion of the subject as divided within itself, and as anything but a coherent and independent source of reason and meaning (*cogito ergo sum*), was the strong impact of the thinking of a number of French poststructuralist theorists: literary semiotician Roland **Barthes**' analysis of how we come to accept the 'doxa' – public opinion, the 'Voice of Nature', the given,

what goes without saying (1977a: 47); the related theorizing of how we are recruited as 'subjects' by **ideology** (that is, how we are subjected to social values and made to internalize them as 'natural') that was carried out by Marxist philosopher Louis **Althusser**; psychoanalyst Jacques **Lacan**'s rereading of Freud's theories of the unconscious through the lenses of structuralist linguistics; philosopher Gilles **Deleuze**'s provocative reconsideration of Nietzsche's idea of the will to power. However, French theorist Michel **Foucault** was paramount in calling attention to the subject in relation to this idea of power and in rethinking the nature of power relations. For Foucault, power is not imposed from above and it is not something outside us. Power is everywhere, he argued; but so too is resistance. The aim of his work, he said, was to 'locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates . . . in short, the "polymorphous techniques of power"' (Foucault 1984: 11). And the result was an interrogation of the power that lies inherent in the language we use daily (and thus daily gets perpetuated by it) as well as the power of the institutions that support and are supported by that language.

Out of this intersection of poststructuralist theories came not only a linking of the self to the world (through language and power) but also a postmodern sense of selfhood or subjectivity that flatly contradicted everything about identity defined by modernity's humanism and rationalism. This postmodern self was not seen as a coherent whole, but rather as always having traces of the other within itself. Once again, 'both/and' thinking replaced 'either/or'. Binary oppositions were deconstructed; implied hierarchies were challenged, as Derrida said they should be. Like its cultural and artistic form (postmodernISM), postmodernITY as a social and political condition appeared fundamentally contradictory, or at the very least paradoxical: it was both a break from and a continuation of what had come before. But there were other, even more basic, postmodern paradoxes as well.

POSTMODERN PARADOXES

BOTH INWARD-LOOKING *AND* OUTWARD-LOOKING

Like poststructuralist theory, postmodern art self-consciously looked inwards to examine critically the concepts and conventions that underpinned the very idea of 'art', but it did not do so in the way some modernist art had: that is, arguing for art's self-sufficient autonomy from the world. On the contrary, Barthes' analysis of what he called 'mythology' and Althusser's theorizing of **Ideological State Apparatuses** had had their impact: both theories had worked to reveal and then 'denaturalize' what seemed 'natural' in society and culture. So too did photographic artists like the American Barbara Kruger and novelists like Canadian Timothy Findley (in a work such as *Famous Last Words*). Using the deconstructing tools of parody, irony and self-reflexivity, they critically considered the structures and conventions of their art, but always in terms of the

relation of these formal elements to **ideology**. While Jameson saw in postmodern parody only emptiness and pastiche (Jameson 1992: 17), others saw in it the very embodiment of a postmodern paradox (Hutcheon 1988: 11). Parody both continues the life of the work it parodies (by the very act of parodying it), but in a sense it also abducts it for its own critical purposes; it both installs and subverts at the same time. As an ironic form of **intertextuality**, parody engages the history of art, and through it a larger social and cultural history.

But the postmodern was historical in other ways as well. In contrast to Jameson's assertion that the victory of capitalist commodification meant a loss of 'genuine historicity' and therefore a 'random cannibalization' of the styles of the past (1984: 65), novels like American writer E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* or Canadian poet and novelist Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* were not only parodic (though certainly not randomly so) of past literary works but they also dealt directly with both the past and its recording – that is, with history and historiography. While the novel has, from its very inception, been a genre that is both fictive and worldly, the particular form of it that has been labelled 'historiographic metafiction' (Hutcheon 1988: 5) was perhaps the most obvious of the postmodern paradoxical forms that were both self-consciously fictive ('metafiction') and yet directly addressing historical issues, events and personages. Again the overlap between theory and practice made itself felt. In the discipline of history, theorists like the Americans Hayden V. **White** and Dominick LaCapra and the French Paul Veyne and Michel de **Certeau** raised the same issues as the fiction, issues such as the implications of the fact that novels and historiography share a narrative form, or the role of language in the construction of fictional and historical 'worlds'. The postmodern was not ahistorical, despite Jameson's assertion to the contrary, but instead was obsessed with history (Elias 2001: 1). But because poststructuralism and postmodernism together had challenged Western cultural assumptions about totalities and coherent unities, logic and reason, consciousness and subjectivity, representation and truth(s), the history with which the postmodern concerned itself was not the single, neutral or objective Truth assumed of empirical History (with the capital letters symbolizing here the status as 'absolutes' held by these concepts). The claim that historical knowledge is always partial, provisional and in the end indeterminate was not new to postmodernism. But what both postmodern historiographic theory and literature taught was that both history and fiction are equally '**discourses**', that is, ways of speaking about (and thus seeing) the world that are constructed by human beings; both are systems of meaning by which we make sense of the past – and the present. The meaning of history is not therefore in the events but in the narrative (or, quite simply, the story) that makes those past events into present historical 'facts'.

Blurring the boundaries between history and fiction, between the documentary and the self-reflexive, postmodern writing was also paradoxically both serious and playful. This was what attracted American Indian writer Gerald Vizenor to it, for he argued that the postmodern condition found its correlative in

native oral cultures, especially in their trickster figure (Vizenor 1989: x–xii). Both narcissistically self-reflexive and yet engaged with the real world of history – as known through its historiographic narratives – postmodern writing was both ironically intertextual and historically engaged. It managed this feat by putting into the foreground (and thus challenging) the conventions and the unacknowledged ideology of these various discourses, asking us to question the process by which we represent our selves and our world to ourselves, and thereby making us aware of the means by which we literally *make* sense of and construct order out of experience in our particular culture (see Ermarth 1992). These 'representations' (another central postmodern concept) therefore do not so much *reflect* us and our world (as realist fiction implied) as grant meaning and value to both. And that meaning is never considered single, authentic, pure, closed and homogeneous – and guaranteed by the author's authority and originality; instead it is plural, hybrid, shifting, open and heterogeneous – and thus inviting collaboration with the reader (Trachtenberg 1985: xii): again, both inward-looking and outward-looking.

BOTH POLITICIZED *AND* FENCE-SITTING

Another paradox involved postmodernism's ability to engage and even deconstruct political issues and yet – precisely because of its inclusive both/and logic – still remain sitting on the fence, in a sense, when it came to moving from analysis to action. This was where various politically interventionist movements and postmodernism parted company. Australian cinema theorist Barbara Creed articulated the difference for feminism, but her remarks could apply equally well to any other group, including the more recent 'post' – the postcolonialist:

> Whereas feminism would attempt to explain that crisis [of legitimation described by Lyotard as defining the postmodern] in terms of the working of patriarchal ideology and the oppression of women and other minority groups, postmodernism looks to other possible causes – particularly the West's reliance on ideologies which posit universal truths – Humanism, History, Religion, Progress, etc. While feminism would argue that the common ideological position of all these 'truths' is that they are patriarchal, postmodern theory . . . would be reluctant to isolate a single major determining factor.
>
> (Creed 1987: 52)

The kind of strategic focusing on a single issue that is usually needed for political action was not really possible within postmodern 'both/and' thinking. But this did not stop postmodernism from being seen as a threat to more politically engaged groups.

Fearing the absorption of their own specific interventionary oppositional agendas into those of the generic category called postmodernism, and deeply suspicious of the postmodern's apparent lack of a theory of political action or what was called agency, feminists in the 1980s were among the first to attack

postmodernism's complicitous form of critique, that is, its tendency to deconstruct cultural monoliths (a positive) but never to reconstruct (decidedly a negative). Postmodernism, 'in its infinitely skeptical and subversive attitude toward normative claims, institutional justice and political struggles, is certainly refreshing. Yet it is also debilitating' (Benhabib 1992: 15). For oppositional critics, the value of postmodern theory's suspicion of truth-claims and its 'denaturalizing' and deconstructing impulses was compromised by its eventual canonization as a kind of super-discourse of opposition (Heble 1996: 78). For some, postmodernism's deliberate open-endedness, its 'both/and' thinking, and its resolute lack of resolution risked immobilizing oppressed people. Others responded, however, by arguing that postmodernism was as liberating and empowering as it was disturbing: it all depended on whose power was being challenged. The act of installing but then subverting those grand narratives had the potential to fulfil what African American writer bell **hooks** called a 'yearning' for a critical voice in those who had been silenced by the dominant powers (1990).

Yet, as postcolonial theorists insisted (echoing feminists before them), it can be hard to achieve activist ends (with firm moral values) in a postmodern world where such values are not permitted to be grounded in some firm and single Truth, where no utopian possibility of change is left untouched by irony and scepticism. Without a coherent unified notion of the human subject, others argued, no 'significantly transformative action' could take place (Eagleton 1996: 16). In contrast, Catherine Belsey has argued at length that poststructural theory offers a way – through critical reflection – of acting in the world for change (Belsey 2002b: 89–107). Be it Foucault writing about resistance and power or Lyotard theorizing postmodern language games – in which power shifts with whoever has the word in a dialogue – there have been theorists who have focused on the contradictions within ruling ideologies which allow room for not only resistance but real change. Postmodernism's critique, however, remained somewhat more complicit.

While it is obvious that 'both/and' thinking need not make us 'paralyzed or helpless' because we have to give up 'the luxury of absolute Truths' for the 'local and provisional truths' of postmodern 'situated knowledge' (Marshall 1992: 3), it is also the case that its inclusivity can result in the uncomfortable position referred to above as sitting on the fence. Seeing all sides of an issue, deconstructing oppositions, exposing the traces of the other in the same – these critical activities taught that we can never escape implication in what we are critiquing, and that goes for everything from humanism to capitalism. This was postmodernism's paradox. On the one hand, by the very act of critiquing, it granted seriousness and importance to what it was taking on. And in so doing, it revealed that there was no 'outside' from which to launch any 'objective' attack. The theory that grew out of gay and lesbian identity politics and known as 'queer theory' illustrates the same awareness of position in its very name. 'Queer' was originally a term of abuse, but when appropriated by gays and lesbians themselves, the word

changed meaning through irony, while still retaining the traces of its history. Not surprisingly, postmodern and queer theory and practice share both a theoretical base (in poststructuralist theory) and artistic techniques (irony and parody).

Lamenting the substitution of the 'micropolitics' of race, gender and sexuality for 'more classical forms of radical politics, which dealt in class, state, ideology, revolution, material modes of production' (Eagleton 1996: 22), British Marxist Terry Eagleton blamed the postmodern for this transformation (by which he meant reduction) of the concept of the political (Eagleton 1996: 24) and the move away from 'far-reaching political action' (Eagleton 1996: 9). But, as we have seen, these micro-political shifts, on the contrary, may have made the postmodern possible in the first place. But for years the Marxist left joined the neo-conservative right and even the liberal centre to attack or simply to dismiss the postmodern, as much for its politics as for its threatening deconstruction of Truth and reason, History and individuality. Yet postmodernism continued, and its impact is still felt today, although some have argued that electronic technology and globalization have moved us into another 'ism' – one yet to be given a name. Anglo-American cultural critic Dick Hebdige's memorable summing up of the situation over a decade ago still holds today: 'the degree of semantic complexity and overload surrounding the term "postmodernism" at the moment signals that a significant number of people with conflicting interests and opinions feel that there is something sufficiently important at stake here to be worth struggling and arguing over' (Hebdige 1991: 182).

FURTHER READING

Belsey, Catherine (2002b) *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
A brief and easy-to-digest introduction to difficult theories.

Bertens, Hans (1986) 'The Postmodern *Weltanschauung* and its Relation to Modernism: An Introductory Survey', in Douwe Fokkema and Hans Bertens (eds), *Approaching Postmodernism*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
A comprehensive survey of the history of the uses and meanings of the term 'postmodern'.

Creed, Barbara (1987) 'From Here to Modernity: Feminism and Postmodernism', *Screen* 28.2: 47–67.
A clear and powerfully argued placing of postmodern alongside (and against) feminist theory and practice.

Elias, Amy J. (2001) *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
An excellent study of the interrelations of history and the genre of romance in postmodern fiction.

Hassan, Ihab (1987) 'Toward a Concept of Postmodernism', in *The Postmodern Turn*, Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.
A later and more developed version of Hassan's early and influential listing of the differences between the modern and the postmodern.

Hebdige, Dick (1991) 'Staking Out the Posts', in Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light*, London: Routledge.
'Stakes out' all the major concepts and theorists in an entertaining manner.
hooks, bell (1990) *Yearning: Race: Gender and Cultural Politics*, Boston, MA: South End Press.
Places postmodern theory and practice in the context of American race and gender politics in a balanced yet critical way.
Hutcheon, Linda (1987) 'Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism', *Textual Practice* 1.1: 10–31.
Derives a theory of the postmodern from artistic practice in various arts, using architecture as a model for the paradoxes of 'both/and' thinking.
Huyssen, Andreas (1986) *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism,* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
A thorough study of the defining differences between modern and postmodern attitudes to popular or mass culture.
Jameson, Fredric (1984) 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review* 146: 53–92.
The canonical argument against the postmodern for being apolitical and ahistorical pastiche.
Marshall, Brenda K. (1992) *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory*, New York: Routledge.
An accessible and engaging example of the overlapping of postmodern theory and practice in action.
Russell, Charles (1985) *Poets, Prophets and Revolutionaries: The Literary Avant-Garde from Rimbaud Through Postmodernism*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Clarifies the complex political and artistic relations between the modernist avant-gardes and postmodernism in terms of their double orientation – inward and outward.
Slemon, Stephen (1989) 'Modernism's Last Post', *Ariel* 20.4: 3–17.
A lucid analysis of the differences between postmodernism and postcolonialism, arguing the latter's need to retain modernist foundations for strategic political reasons.

11

RACE AND POSTCOLONIALITY

APOLLO AMOKO

Like all other fields of study and/or modes of critique in contemporary humanities, 'postcoloniality' and 'race' defy easy definition or summation. Whether conceived of singly or in tandem, each term holds together, in sometimes uneasy if not conflictual co-existence, a diverse range of critics working from a vast array of theoretical, ideological, aesthetic, historical and regional perspectives. What I present here is a particular partisan argument in the full knowledge that someone else working in the same field(s) would, in all likelihood, present the argument differently, if not present a different argument altogether. In short, I want to convey the sense that postcoloniality and race are sites of contestation and debate rather than clearly defined and readily summarized fields.

This chapter addresses three broad areas. First I seek to define two conjoined terms: 'race' and 'postcoloniality'. What does each term signify and what, if anything, does each have to do with the other? Why are they conceived of together in this instance? My suggestion is that, though the two terms refer to separable concepts, each of them is, in a fundamental sense, unthinkable without the other. Second, I trace the implications of race and postcoloniality for the discipline of English literature. Polemically, I suggest that, properly understood, the entwined terms, postcoloniality and race, spell the death of English literature as we have historically known it. The postcolonial/race critique renders untenable the idea of English literature originating in medieval England and radiating outwards, in the fullness of time, to the rest of the English-speaking world; it renders suspect, in the words of the postcolonial theorist Simon Gikandi, the 'common periodization of English studies in epochs such as Medieval, Renaissance, Augustan, or Victorian' (Gikandi 2001: 648). Third, I close by tempering the inflated rhetoric of my prior contentions. I attempt to account for the fact that the discipline of English literature seems to have remained remarkably unchanged in the wake of the postcolonial critique. The discipline seems to have reduced postcoloniality/race, for its radical rhetorical claims, into a mere field of study. The discipline seems to have simply tucked the field of postcolonial/race studies at the tail end of a largely unreconstituted English periodization.

To begin with a self-consciously hyperbolic statement: in conjunction with innovations in gender, sexuality, disability and cultural studies, postcolonial and race studies have, over the last 40 years, come to radically reconfigure the traditional discipline of English literature. (My statement is hyperbolic because it accepts the rhetorical claims made by various radical movements within English literature without taking into account the institutional context that both enables