



## Postmodernity - Positioning the postmodern

<sup>1</sup> S Selvapriya, <sup>2</sup> K Gayathri

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D, Nadar Saraswathi Colleg of Atrs and Science, Theni, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup> MA, Nadar Saraswathi Colleg of Atrs and Science, Theni, Tamil Nadu, India

### Abstract

Beginning Post colonialism is an attempt to help you to make your own beginnings in one of the most exciting and challenging field of study that has emerged in recent years. It aims to introduce you to the various ways that we can approach, perhaps for the first time, literature in English produced by writers who either come from, or have an ancestral purchase upon, countries with a history of colonialism. For postmodernism has indeed shown an extraordinary capacity to renew itself in the conflagration of its demise.

**Keywords:** postmodernity, positioning, postmodern, colonialism

### Introduction

The question of postmodernity is now central to any attempt to chart cultural change and, to understand contemporary social phenomena. This does not mean that some fully-fledged new society has been born or that, if such a thing could be identified, it would be best to call it postmodern. Wolfgang Iser, appropriately, with 'our postmodern modernity? For the question of postmodernity offers an opportunity to reappraise modernity, to read the signs of the times as indicators that modernity itself is unstable, unpredictable, and seems to forsake the foreclosed future that it once seemed to promise.

### Positioning the postmodern

These paradoxes push us again to the question: what kind of phenomenon is the postmodern? It is easy to brush it off impatiently as intellectual fad fashion but this would fly in the face of some significant evidence for seismic social – cultural shifts. One way to approach the problem is to explore the postmodern as an experience of crisis, comparing and contrasting it with other such periods to discover what resolutions, if any, were sought before. We have seen how Bruno was right to see *BLADE RUNNER* as posing historical questions, which have not gone away despite the postmodern preoccupation with space. By situating postmodern phenomena in time, we might be able to discern what sorts of questions-of knowing and begin, of ethics and politics- are raised, and also to understand better why the postmodern might be seen as a nation or realistic hope.

One possible parallel with the current crisis of modernity is the Baroque crisis of the first half of the seventeenth century. As Bryn Turner says:

*Like our own time, the Baroque crisis, especially in Spain and France, was sparked off by unmanageable fiscal crisis resulting from a transformation of the world economy, and it was associated with a chronic urban crisis of population growth and urban unrest. More importantly, Baroque politics*

*were a response to the cultural crisis of the Protestant Reformation, and its associated individualism and commercialism.*

This period produced Leibniz's theodicy, justifying this as the best of all worlds, Monteverdi's music as sound-alchemy, and Bernini's sculptures divinizing sexuality and so on. High and low cultures were mixed, a fascination developed with the artificial and contrived, together with an interest in metaphor and melancholy. Behind this an absolutist state attempted to reintegrate its subject through the production of a kind of mass culture. Of course, such analogies are limited, but the coming authoritarianism or succeeded in protecting people from the vagaries of the market.

Another parallel might be made with *fin de siècle* turbulence a century ago, or even with millennialism. Emil Durkheim's work on suicide and the division of labour, and Sigmund Freud's on aggression, were explicitly connected within modern civilization. The heartless and bloodless Enlightenment modernity led to a search for antidotes in the 'irrationalities' (Durkheim) or the 'illusion' (Freud) of religion. It is interesting, to say the least, in the light of this to note the growth of 'New Age' religious manifestations accompanying the growth of other postmodern phenomena since the 1980s. But not only New Age: discussions of postmodernity have also spawned skepticism about secularity in general. Religion is back on the sociological agenda.

Towards the end of the first millennium, Barry Smart reminds us, 'Western civilization was beset by fears about the end of the world, the eruption of "legions of the devil" out of the East, and the prospect that epidemics would wipe out humankind. So we should not be taken in too easily by talk of tally new times! But it is true that today hope is in short supply, since the postmodern further is turned in on itself, rather as *Blade Runner* portrays it. Susan Sontag says: 'the look into future, which was once tied to a vision of linear progress, with more knowledge at our disposal than anyone could have dreamed, turned into a vision of disaster'. But as

Martin Jay observes, several postmodern theorists indulge in dire fantasies of 'apocalypse forever', which pick up only the first motif from the two normally evoked by religious apocalypse, destruction and revelation. Ecological disaster, moral panic in the wake of AIDS, these represent the abyss beyond which, for Baudrillard and his Canadian exponent Arthur Kroker at least, no redemptive moment lies.

A backward glance at apparent parallels serves to relativize our own perceived crises. One might hope that recalling how fears for the second millennium were not realized might help curb the apocalypticism evident in some postmodern accounts. On the other hand, attending to the nature of contemporary 'crises' may also help us recognize what is going on. What in premodern societies were 'dangers' related to stormy weather, crop failure or diseases have in the modern world been augmented by 'risks' created by the very processes of modernity we have been examining – ecological and nuclear risks being only the most obvious. Surely there must be ways of facing such risks without succumbing either to the hollow optimism of modern progressivism or to shrug of permanent postmodern apocalypse?

Maybe, but many writers note that the turn of the twentieth century is the close of the second Christian millennium. Manuel Castells opens his trilogy on 'The Information Age' by observing that the millennial shift of the 'Christian era' coincides with major technological and social change, seen in networking and globalization, against which religious commitment appears as defensive reaction. Other imply that some sources of present crises may be traced to that religious heritage, so that any hope still vested there is misplaced. As we have seen, the arguments for the partial rooting of modernity in Christian soil are strong, in terms of the origins both of capitalism and of technoscience. It comes as no surprise, then, given the connections between technoscience and (post) modern discourses, that technology critic such as David Noble (in *The Religion of Technology*) and Donna Haraway make these points.

Haraway sees 'Christian realism' at the heart of American technoscience, especially in its genetic and information sciences, a 'millennarian discourse about beginnings and ends, first and last things, suffering and progress, figures, figure and fulfillment'. The Oncomouse on the back cover 'doesn't have a crown of thorns on her head for no reason'. The millennial moment, for Haraway, should be grasped by those heretics, infidels and Jew wishing to 'reprogram the time machine' in the 'interests of a deeper, broader, and more open scientific literacy' than that which has in her view over-whelmingly informed modern technoscience may thus far. But while some Christianity-and-technoscience connections may be stiflingly narrow, surely exploration of cyborg potential is not the only alternative way forward. Within the 'diffraction' process commended by Haraway it would be surprising to find that the religious motifs that helped 'make a difference' in the first place had all been so drained of their power as to render them incapable of repeating the performance.

The nagging question remains: if postmodernity means the exhaustion of modernity, or at least draws our attention to modernity's limits, what now is an appropriate stance towards modernity? This question is made doubly difficult by the Janus-faced character of postmodernity, seen above in the

discussions of science, consumption and the body. Has modernity reached at terminal point so that, even if resuscitation attempts were made, they would be futile? Does modernity yet possess a flicker of life that might be fanned any other way of handling its current condition? In what follows, their responses are outlined: accepting the post-modern; reasserting of the modern; and reclaiming the premodern. They do not necessarily exclude each other.

### Conclusion

Let me try to sum up in a few paragraphs the main conclusions that can be derived from this brief survey of postmodernity. First, the concept of postmodernity is a valuable 'problematic' that alerts us to key questions concerning contemporary social changes. As a concept that invites participation in a debate over the nature and direction of present-day societies, in a globalized context, rather than one describing an already existing state of affairs. Quite unprecedented social and cultural shifts are occurring; whether or not 'postmodernity' is the best term to sum them up is a moot point. The important thing is to understand what is happening, not to agree on a concept to capture it with. 'Postmodernity' will do for now.

### References

1. Postmodernity – Second Edition – David Lyon. Published by arrangement with Open University Press. And published by Vinod Vasishatha for viva Books private limited.
2. Beginning Post Colonialism, John Mc Leod. Published by Manchester University Press.
3. The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies, Edited By Neil Lazarus. Published By The Press Syndicate of The University of Cambridge, The Pitt Building.