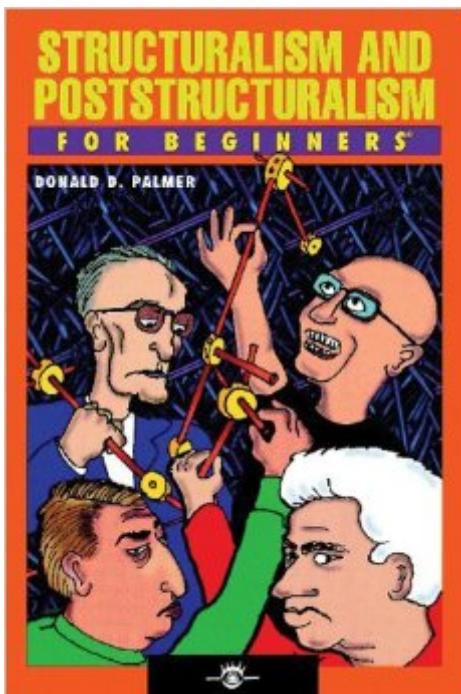


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Structuralism And Poststructuralism For Beginners



Synopsis

"What is Structuralism? How is it possible? And once the structures of Structuralism have been discovered, how is Poststructuralism possible?" Thus begins Don Palmer's *Structuralism and Poststructuralism For Beginners*. If Nobel or Pulitzer ever made a prize for making the most difficult philosophers and ideas accessible to the greatest number of people, one of the leading candidates would certainly be Professor Don Palmer. From his *Sartre For Beginners* and *Kierkegaard For Beginners* to his *Looking at Philosophy*, author/illustrator Don Palmer has the magic touch when it comes to translating the most brutally difficult ideas into language and images that non-specialists can understand. "In its less dramatic versions," writes Palme, "structuralism is just a method of studying language, society, and the works of artists and novelists. But in its most exuberant form, it is a philosophy, an overall worldview that provides an account of reality and knowledge."

Poststructuralism is a loosely knit intellectual movement, comprised mainly of ex-structuralists, who either became dissatisfied with the theory or felt they could improve it. *Structuralism and Poststructuralism For Beginners* is an illustrated tour through the mysterious landscape of Structuralism and Poststructuralism. The book's starting point is the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. The book moves on to the anthropologist and literary critic Claude Lévi-Strauss; the semiologist and literary critic Roland Barthes; the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser; the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan; the deconstructionist Jacques Derrida. Learn among other things, why structuralists say: Reality is composed of not Things, but Relationships Every "object" is both a presence and an absence The total system is present in each of its parts The parts are more real than the whole The book concludes by examining the postmodern obsession with language and with the radical claim of the disappearance of the individual - obsessions that unite the work of all these theorists.

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Customer Reviews

This book undoubtedly represents the basics for any inquiry into the major ideas of structuralism and poststructuralism. Palmer's exquisite, synthetic introduction into these socio-political and discursive phenomena is enlightening. He travels with us from the Swiss Ferdinand de Saussure's semiological system and the structuralist mythical order of the French/Belgian Claude Lévi-Strauss, to the post/structuralist Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and, finally, to the master-poststructuralist, Jacques Derrida himself. Palmer's approach represents perhaps the easiest, albeit comprehensively explanatory, work into concepts otherwise unfairly considered esoteric postmodern artifacts. Nothing will give you a better first acquaintance to the "sign", "signifier", "signified", "la langue", "la paraféle", "intertextuality", "indeterminacy of meaning", "writerly" and "readerly" texts, "deconstruction", "dissemination", "epistème", and "logocentrism" among others, than this pleasant, joyful (inter)text, filled with highly inspired sketches. The glossary at the end of the book is itself a treasure. Read this book in the bus, airplane, or train and (post) structuralism will become your friend. Don't let the detractors of postmodernism intimidate you. Palmer's book provides you with the best tool for fighting back, this time with knowledge.

"Structuralism" and "Poststructuralism" have become buzzwords, bandied about frequently but only rarely understood. The concepts are difficult, especially for someone who doesn't have a background in philosophy, linguistics, or social sciences. To make matters worse, many of the most famous and influential of the Poststructuralist thinkers revel in obscurity, deliberately making their writing as abtruse and convoluted as possible. This is an excellent introduction to the concepts of Structuralism and Poststructuralism. Palmer studies a few of the most important scholars on the topic -- beginning with Saussure, the father of Structuralism and of modern linguistics and going on to Lacan, Foucault, Barthes, and Levi-Strauss. He touches upon their major contributions to the subject, giving explanations which can be grasped by any bright and interested layman. If you are interested in studying these thinkers, I would definitely recommend checking out this book first. It will provide you with a good grounding and keep you from feeling utterly mystified as you plumb the

murky and obscure depths of modern philosophy. My only complaints are relatively minor. First, he makes a passing statement that Plato was "hardly bourgeois" ... when in fact Plato was quite clearly a bourgeois, even a reactionary, thinker. Second, the drawings are regrettable: Palmer is much better as a philosopher and writer than as an illustrator. Still, this is one of the best introductory texts available on the subject. Highly recommended.

This text was used in my undergraduate anthropological theory course as a way to learn about the structural and post-structural movements in a fun and relaxed way. However, it did not work. The text is largely based on comic-style pictures. A cursory glance might lead one to think, "Wow, this sure looks like fun! What an easy way to learn about these complicated theories!" However, I did not finish this book with a firm understanding of any of the concepts presented. I did learn some new vocabulary, but I did not leave with a solid understanding of any of it, nor would I be able to explain it to another person. The book quickly became irritating. It was not enjoyable or fun. The other books used in my course, which were much more clear and to-the-point, were far more helpful in explaining these concepts. This was a waste of two hours of my life. Most of the other students in my course agreed with my view. However, there were a couple who enjoyed this text as a break from the other books we were using, but these students were also not able to adequately explain structuralism/post-structuralism after the reading. If you are a professor who insists on using this book in a course (which I do not recommend), I would highly recommend assigning a different reading on structuralist and post-structuralist thought BEFORE having your students read this book. Perhaps starting this book with some understanding might make it easier to grasp the points made by the silly comics and pictures.

I am by no means a scholar or student, just some that wanted to learn a little more about these words I kept hearing. The book turned out to be pretty informative and as far as I can tell pretty accurate. That being said, my complaint with the book was that it appears to have been aimed at about a high school reading level. I found it to be a little too simplistic for my tastes. I'm sure there are folks that this book would be perfect for, unfortunately, it was not what I was looking for. I was hoping for a little more depth.

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