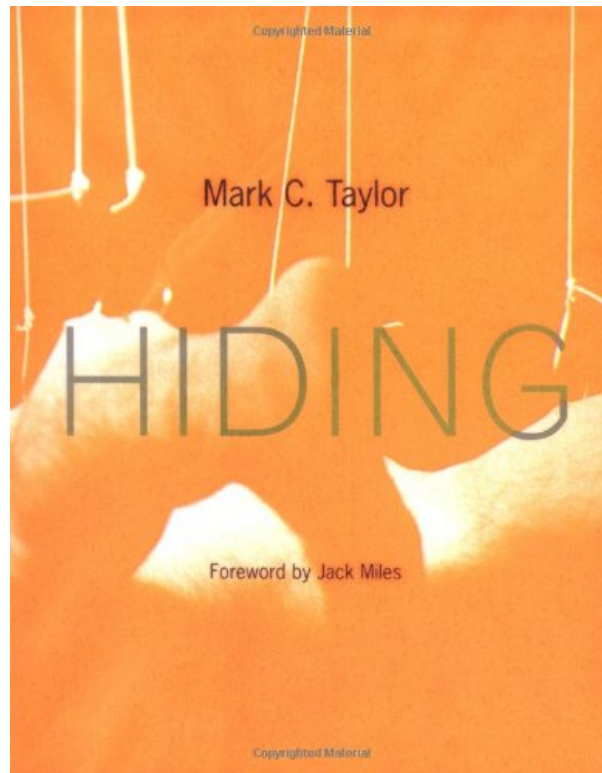
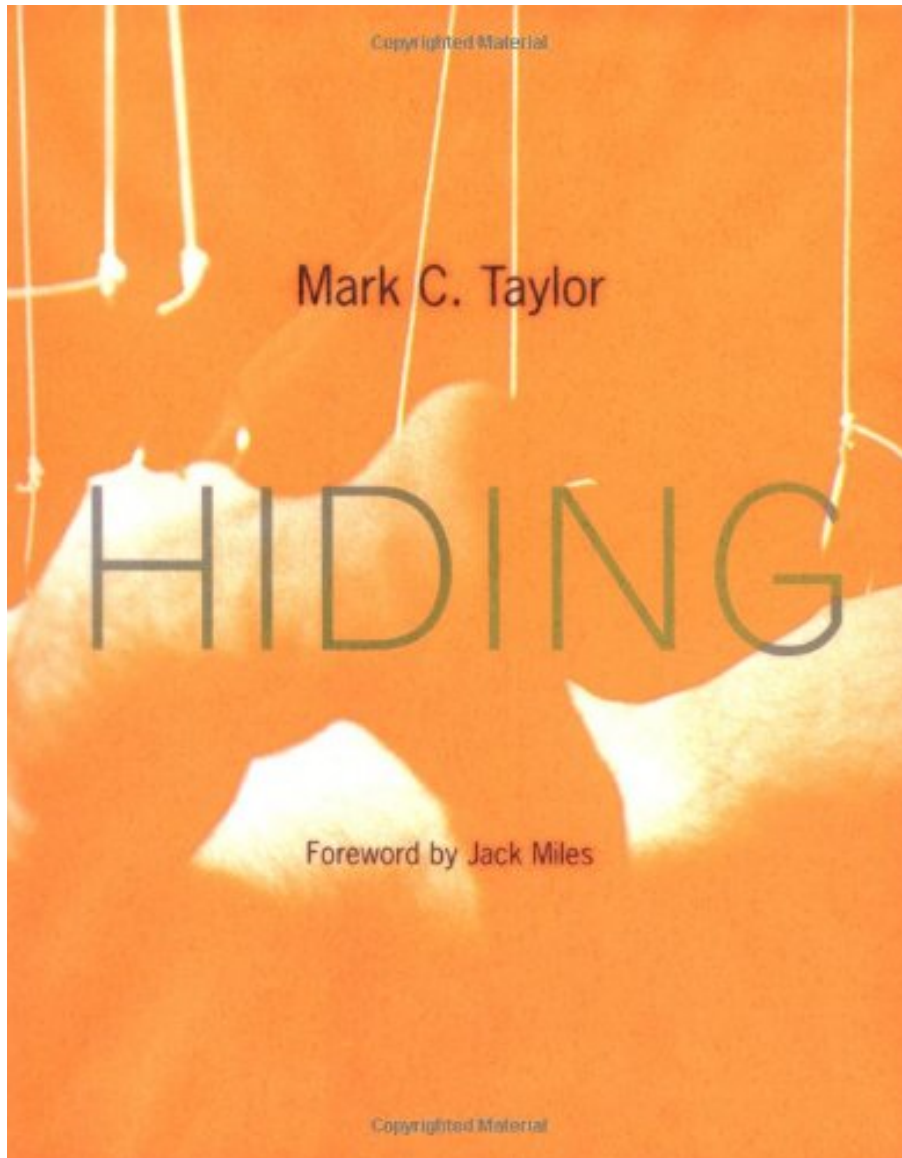


# **HIDING (RELIGION AND POSTMODERNISM) BY MARK C. TAYLOR**



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## Amazon.com Review

"To read this book right, you have to read it wrong," writes Jack Miles in the foreword to Mark C. Taylor's Hiding, the first indication that what lies within is not your typical work of philosophy. Become distracted by its surface charms rather than convinced by its argument, in other words, and you've grasped the author's intent. Hiding aims to seduce as much as convince, Miles writes, and in that aim it succeeds.

A professor at Williams College, Taylor is a truly interdisciplinary thinker whose work draws on theology, art and architecture, linguistics, literary criticism, fashion, technology, and even tattoos. In Hiding, he takes these diverse influences and weaves a virtual web of postmodern delights. Even the book's striking graphic design is part and parcel of Taylor's thought, eliminating the dichotomy between what is said and how it is presented. Indeed, throughout Hiding Taylor explores the hypnotizing play of surfaces that characterizes late-20th-century life, holding that this play leads not to meaninglessness but an infinite expansion of meanings. In his final chapter, he speculates about a possible nontotalizing yet holistic system--a structure he visualizes not as "a universal grid organizing opposites nor a dialectical system synthesizing opposites but a seamy web in which what comes together is held apart and what is held apart comes together...."

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A philosopher of religion and technology, Mark C. Taylor means to disabuse us of our archaic notion that what lies beneath the surface is any more significant or real than what rides on the skin of things.... With occasional pages entirely blank or black, text interrupted by drifting quotations and fonts commingled, the book wears its heart on its sleeve, but its sleeves are unhappily short, especially in this era of a thinning ozone layer when we must all cover up. -- The New York Times Book Review, Hillel Schwartz

## From the Back Cover

Nothing defines postmodernism so well as its refusal of depth, its emphasis on appearance and spectacle, and its tendency to collapse a three-dimensional world in which image and reality are distinct into a two-dimensional world in which they merge. Our postmodern world is a world of surfaces and our postmodern condition one of profound superficiality. For Mark C. Taylor, the disappearance of depth we sense all around us is a change full of creative possibility. Taylor introduces us to a popular culture in which detectives - the

postmodern heroes of Paul Auster and Dennis Potter - lift surfaces only to find more surfaces, and in which fashion advertising plays transparency against hiding. He looks at the current preoccupation with body piercing and tattooing and asks whether these practices actually reveal or conceal. The limitless spread of computer networks, the history of phrenology, the "religious" architecture of Las Vegas - all are brought within the scope of Taylor's brilliant analysis. Postmodernism, he shows, has given us a new sense of the superficial, one in which the issue is not the absence of meaning but its uncontrollable, ecstatic proliferation. Conceived and developed with designers Michael Rock and Susan Sellers, this work transgresses the boundary that customarily separates graphic design from the story within a text and embodies the very tendencies it analyzes.

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The age of information, media, and virtuality is transforming every aspect of human experience. Questions that have long haunted the philosophical imagination are becoming urgent practical concerns: Where does the natural end and the artificial begin? Is there a difference between the material and the immaterial? In his new work, Mark C. Taylor extends his ongoing investigation of postmodern worlds by critically examining a wide range of contemporary cultural practices.

Nothing defines postmodernism so well as its refusal of depth, its emphasis on appearance and spectacle, its tendency to collapse a three-dimensional world in which image and reality are distinct into a two-dimensional world in which they merge. The postmodern world, Taylor argues, is a world of surfaces, and the postmodern condition is one of profound superficiality.

For many cultural commentators, postmodernism's inescapable play of surfaces is cause for despair. Taylor, on the other hand, shows that the disappearance of depth in postmodern culture is actually a liberation replete with creative possibilities. Taylor introduces readers to a popular culture in which detectives—the postmodern heroes of Paul Auster and Dennis Potter—lift surfaces only to find more surfaces, and in which fashion advertising plays transparency against hiding. Taylor looks at the contemporary preoccupation with body piercing and tattooing, and asks whether these practices actually reveal or conceal. Phrenology and skin diseases, the "religious" architecture of Las Vegas, the limitless spread of computer networks—all are brought within the scope of Taylor's brilliant analysis. Postmodernism, he shows, has given us a new sense of the superficial, one in which the issue is not the absence of meaning but its uncontrollable, ecstatic proliferation.

Embodying the very tendencies it analyzes, *Hiding* is unique. Conceived and developed with well-known designers Michael Rock and Susan Sellars, this work transgresses the boundary that customarily separates graphic design from the story within a text. The product of nearly three decades of reflection and writing, *Hiding* opens a window on contemporary culture. To follow the remarkable course Taylor charts is to see both our present and past differently and to encounter a future as disorienting as it is alluring.

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- Binding: Paperback
- 360 pages

Amazon.com Review

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Five Stars

By steve blankenship

Well done.

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

Ahead of its time

By A Customer

I first resisted *Hiding*. I wanted to disapprove of its subject matter (skin, mystery novels, fashion, Vegas, and on!). I really tried not to like it. But it's grown on me in ways that I find quite challenging. And that challenge is what's best about it.

There was a review in BookForum about *Hiding* that couldn't let go of the central tenet of this cunning book: surface is not to be underestimated. Surface (as opposed to depth) is not simply a dead-end but the

beginnings of a new worldview. While older worryworts and curmudgeonly librarian types may protest this premise, sorry, I've got five words for all of you: Sean "Puffy" Combs, Grammy Winner.

The layout of the book is as provocative as its content: our current state of affairs. Supermodels are celebrities, COPS is reality television, Las Vegas is a family getaway, tattooing is our youth's version of long hair. All of these topics get brought up and explored in studied and thoughtful detail. Yet, Taylor doesn't dissect these cultural changes from a sterile laboratory atop an ivory tower -- he digs right into it. His section on fashion reads like it's a special pullout to W magazine (let's see that happen!) and you don't need a dictionary to make sense of the fundamental mysteries being wrestled with throughout this fast-paced tome. It can be difficult, at times, to make sense of some of the more poetic or lyrical moments but then I also don't care much for rap or French cinema. All in all, I'd put this (quite beautiful to look at) book right up there with anything Barthes has written -- with the added bonus that this is an enthusiastically eclectic and sincerely postmodern collage.

9 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

how to climb out of the postmodern soup. . .

By W. B. MCCORKLE Jr.

A positive alternative to Baudrillard's dim view of the postmodern condition can be found in Mark C. Taylor's 1997 book *HIDING*--a philosophical re-visioning of our contemporary Western society that instead of clinging to vestigial epistemic notions of depth and foundationalism, embraces a holistic, worldwide web view of social structures. By way of an extended, elaborate metaphor that describes our ontological condition as being intimately related to our embryonic development (we are nothing more than layers of skin upon layers of skin, ad infinitum), Taylor suggests a new epistemic outlook that no longer makes an issue of depths, but rather focuses upon the complex relationship of interactive, interacting phenomena--in his phrase, "the profundity of surface." Emergent, virtual technologies retroactively point to our own socially constructed "reality" as always-already virtual itself, and to get caught up in the trap of defining contemporary phenomena in terms of outdated analytical models will only succeed in an inescapably circular logic; as he puts it, "After (the) all has been said and done, the question that remains is not 'What is virtual reality?' but 'What is not virtual reality?' (267). This shift in focus allows us to give our undivided attention to the realm of practice, to aesthetics, to surface; like Slavoj Zizek in *TARRYING WITH THE NEGATIVE*, Taylor would have us interface with things-in-themselves, allowing us to become aware of our positioning within a complex web of relations between phenomena, as well as what that positioning will allow us to do.

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