

Excerpts from a variety of sources illustrating the central ideas of Postmodernism

A general and wide-ranging term which is applied to literature, art, philosophy, architecture, fiction, and cultural and literary criticism, among others. Postmodernism is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of scientific, or objective, efforts to explain reality. In essence, it stems from a recognition that reality is not simply mirrored in human understanding of it, but rather, is constructed as the mind tries to understand its own particular and personal reality. For this reason, postmodernism is highly skeptical of explanations which claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races, and instead focuses on the relative truths of each person. In the postmodern understanding, interpretation is everything; reality only comes into being through our interpretations of what the world means to us individually. Postmodernism relies on concrete experience over abstract principles, knowing always that the outcome of one's own experience will necessarily be fallible and relative, rather than certain and universal.

Postmodernism is "post" because it denies the existence of any ultimate principles, and it lacks the optimism of there being a scientific, philosophical, or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody - a characteristic of the so-called "modern" mind. The paradox of the postmodern position is that, in placing all principles under the scrutiny of its skepticism, it must realize that even its own principles are not beyond questioning. As the philosopher Richard Tarnas states, postmodernism "cannot on its own principles ultimately justify itself any more than can the various metaphysical overviews against which the postmodern mind has defined itself."

(Accessed on 9.14.14 at <http://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/gen gloss/postm-body.html>)

"Simplifying to the extreme, I define the postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives." -- Jean-François Lyotard
The postmodern as a historical/cultural "condition" based on a dissolution of master narratives or metanarratives (totalizing narrative paradigms like progress and national histories), a crisis in ideology when ideology no longer seems transparent but contingent and constructed.

(Accessed on 9.14.14 at <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/pomo.html>)

Ben Agger, professor of sociology at the University of Texas at Arlington, writes in his book *Postponing the Postmodern*: "I characterise science as fiction, a literary account that creates a believable world."

(Accessed on 9.14.14 at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/has-postmodernism-killed-social-science-1/191804.article>)

Post Modernism in pop culture: from Dean Koontz' *The Face*

"Corky taught literature from the deconstructionist perspective, instilling in students the belief that language can never describe reality because words only refer to other words, not to anything real. He taught them that whether a piece of writing is a novel or a law, (presumably a scientific law) each person is the sole arbiter of what that writing says and what it means, that all truth is relative and philosophical texts actually have no meaning other than what each person wants them to mean."

(Accessed on 9.14.14 at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/has-postmodernism-killed-social-science-1/191804.article>)

Some postmodernists become what we could call postcritical. This is a different group of postmodernists. By postcritical I mean ... that this group of postmodernists came to apply their radical critique of political and social norms so fully that they undermined the use of those norms to criticize the status quo.

Jacques Derrida and other French poststructuralists fueled a new movement in philosophy: postmodernism. Postmodernists deny presence or immediate relation of our ideas, perceptions, or representations to objectivity. All presentation presupposes representation or the use of signs, which are constructed by us. Some postmodernists make the historical claim that contemporary society or knowledge function without the need for authenticity or unity that earlier, modern society and thought required. Thus Jean-François Lyotard argued that contemporary science no longer seeks, nor requires, a unified picture of the world while Jean Baudrillard claimed that we literally no longer interact with reality, but with a hyperreality of simulations.

Others, inspired by Michel Foucault, argued that social normalcy is constructed by repressing social deviants and the identity of majority cultures by the suppression of minorities. Feminists like Iris Marion Young, Susan Bordo, and Sandra Harding, postcolonial writers like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Americanist philosopher of race Cornel West find in post modernism a means of social critique.

(From Lawrence Chain, "The Modern Intellectual Tradition: From Descartes to Derida" The Teaching Company, 2010)