

Postmodernism

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Previous: [Modernism](#)

[Postmodernity](#)

[Postmodern philosophy](#)

[Postmodern architecture](#)

[Deconstructivist Architecture](#)

[Postmodern literature](#)

[Postmodernist film](#)

[Postmodern music](#)

[Critical theory](#)

[Globalization](#)

[Minimalism in Art](#)

[Minimalism in Music](#)

[Consumerism](#)



Andy Warhol's iconic Marilyn Monroe

Postmodernism is an idea that has been extremely controversial and difficult to define among scholars, intellectuals, and historians, as it connotes to many the hotly debated idea that the modern historical period has passed. Nevertheless, most agree that postmodern ideas have taken place in philosophy, art, critical theory, literature, architecture, design, interpretation of history, and culture since the late 20th century.

Postmodernity, a separate term, describes social and cultural conditions connected to the era in which postmodernism arose.

Contents

- 1 Overview
 - 1.1 Descriptions of postmodernism
 - 1.2 Connotations
- 2 Term
- 3 Development of postmodernism
 - 3.1 From modernism
 - 3.2 Notable philosophical contributors
- 4 Deconstruction
- 5 Social construction, structuralism, post-structuralism

- [6 Criticism](#)
 - [6.1 As political](#)
 - [6.2 As intellectually and artistically disingenuous](#)
 - [6.3 As a false distinction](#)
 - [6.4 As empty rhetoric](#)
- [7 See also](#)
 - [7.1 Theoretical postmodernism](#)
 - [7.2 Cultural and political postmodernism](#)
 - [7.3 Postmodernism in law](#)
 - [7.4 Postmodernism in theology](#)
- [8 Notes](#)
- [9 References and further reading](#)
 - [9.1 Books](#)
 - [9.2 External links](#)

Overview

Scholars and historians most commonly hold postmodernism to be a movement of ideas that has both replaced and extended [modernism](#) by countering and borrowing from a number of modernism's fundamental assumptions. For example, modernism places a great deal of importance on ideals such as [rationality](#), [objectivity](#), and progress -- as well as other ideas rooted in [The Enlightenment](#), and as [positivist](#) and [realist](#) movements from the late 19th century -- while postmodernism questions whether these ideals can actually exist at all.

Postmodernism adherents often argue that their ideals have arisen as a result of particular [economic](#) and [social](#) conditions, including what is described as "[late capitalism](#)" and the [omnipresence](#) of [broadcast](#) media, and such conditions have pushed society into a new [historical period](#). However, a large number of thinkers and writers hold that postmodernism is at best simply a period, variety, or extension of modernism and not actually a separate period or idea. In a nutshell, the pro-postmodernism argument runs that [economic](#) and [technological](#) conditions of our age have given rise to a decentralized, media-dominated society in which ideas are [simulacra](#) and only inter-referential representations and copies of each other, with no real original, stable or objective source for [communication](#) and [meaning](#). [Globalization](#), brought on by innovations in

communication, manufacturing and transportation, is often cited as one force which has driven the decentralized modern life, creating a culturally pluralistic and profoundly interconnected global society lacking any single dominant center of political power, communication, or intellectual production.

Postmodern scholars argue that such a decentralized society inevitably creates responses/perceptions that are described as post-modern, such as the rejection of what are seen as the false, imposed unities of meta-narrative and hegemony; the breaking of traditional frames of genre, structure and stylistic unity; and the overthrowing of categories that are the result of logocentrism and other forms of artificially imposed order. Instead, they value the collage of elements, the play and juxtaposition of ideas from different contexts, and the deconstruction of symbols into the basic dynamics of power and place from which those symbols gain meaning as signifiers. In this it is related to post-structuralism in philosophy, minimalism in the arts and music, the emergence of pop, and the rise of mass media.

Scholars who accept the division of post-modernity as a distinct period believe that society has collectively eschewed modern ideals and instead adopted ideas which are rooted in the reaction to the restrictions and limitations of those ideas, and the present is therefore a new historical period. While the characteristics of postmodern life are sometimes difficult to grasp, most postmodern scholars point to very concrete and visible technological and economic changes that have brought about the new types of thinking.

Critics of the idea reject that it represents liberation, but instead a failure of creativity, and the supplanting of organization with syncreticism and bricolage. They argue that post-modernity is obscurantist, overly dense, and makes strong assertions about the sciences which are demonstrably false.

There are often strong political overtones to this debate, with conservative commentators often being the harshest critics of post-modernism. There is a great deal of disagreement on whether or not these technological and cultural changes represent a new historical period, or merely an extension of the modern one. Complicating matters further, others have argued that even the

postmodern era has already ended, with some commentators asserting culture has entered a post-postmodern period.

The opportunity to generate polemic in any discussion of the postmodern is prodigious. Keeping an eye on the two following basic issues can often help orient one to the various politics and agendas that tend to cloud or obscure different discussions of the postmodern. One is the problem of critical distance and the other is a problem of nomenclature.

1) What is the author's take on the idea that critical distance and the potential for real objectivity are unattainable? This question can be seen at work in both Haraway's comments (see below) about what she sees as Jameson's main thesis on postmodernism, and in Laclau's mapping of an "analytic terrain" where the "given" is no longer a viable myth. Pejoratively put, this collapse of critical distance is decried as "aestheticist" or as aestheticizing ideology in many discussions (Norris). The usual implication is that the culprits are decadent, apolitical and dangerously irrational. The historical antecedents referred to are often Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde's "dandyism" and the "art for art's sake" movement. Whereas for many differently oriented commentators those same decriers of aestheticism are often themselves denounced as totalitarian rationalists, modernists, "mere" moralizers, reactionaries and unsophisticated know-nothings (Haraway; Giroux).

2) The terms postmodern, postmodernity and postmodernism can be seen to associate or conjure different meanings: the term postmodern is inclusively ambiguous of what people mean when they talk about issues that come up in discussions of postmodernity and postmodernism. Postmodernity is a sign for contemporary society, for the stage of technological and economic organization which our society has reached. Postmodernism then can be, as Eco says, a "spiritual" category rather than a discrete period in history; a "style" in the arts and in culture indebted to ironic and parodic pastiche as well as to a sense of history now seen less as a story of lineal progression and triumph than as a story of

recurring cycles.

Analogously, and only for purposes of illustration, the condition of modernity is often spoken of as the rapid pace and texture of life in a society experienced as the result of the industrial revolution (Berman). However, modernism is a movement in culture and the arts usually identified as a period and style beginning with impressionism as a break with Realism in the fine arts and in literature. Prior to modernism one finds periods and styles associated with other distinct aesthetic movements, e.g., Romanticism and Realism. For instance, both Blake and Balzac, Romantic and Realist representatives respectively, could be said to have had some experience of modernity, to have lived during the early stages of the expansion of bourgeois or industrial capitalism and technology and science, whereas no one thinks of their respective arts or modes of expression as obviously "modernist."

-Van Piercy, alt.postmodern FAQ file, Version 1.05 [\[1\]](#)

Descriptions of postmodernism

- "Postmodernism is incredulity towards metanarratives." Jean-Francois Lyotard [\[2\]](#)
- "A generation raised on channel-surfing has lost the capacity for linear thinking and analytical reasoning." Chuck Colson [\[3\]](#)
- "Postmodernist fiction is defined by its temporal disorder, its disregard of linear narrative, its mingling of fictional forms and its experiments with language." - Barry Lewis, Kazuo Ishiguro
- "Weird for the sake of [being] weird." - Moe Szyslak, of The Simpsons [\[4\]](#)
- "It's the combination of narcissism and nihilism that really defines postmodernism," Al Gore [\[5\]](#)
- "Post-modernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is." - David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. [\[6\]](#), [\[7\]](#), [\[8\]](#)
- "We could say that every age has its own post-modern, just as every age has its own form of mannerism (in fact, I wonder if postmodern is not simply the modern name for *Manierismus*...). I believe that every age reaches moments of crisis like those described by Nietzsche in the second of the *Untimely Considerations*, on the harmfulness of the study of history. The sense that the past is restricting, smothering, blackmailing us." - Umberto

Eco, "A Correspondence on Post-modernism" with Stefano Rosso in Hoesterey, op cit., pp. 242-3 [\[9\]](#), [\[10\]](#)

Connotations

Postmodernism connotes the idea that knowledge has become commodified. With the "computerisation of society" and the dominance of a mass-media, knowledge becomes fluid. The true seat of power then is wherever the knowledge is being controlled. The state becomes less powerful as more agents can wield or control this knowledge. The state itself is subject to that which it controls--the state's actions are reported and effectively taught to the masses through them and so they have the definitive decision on what goes in, and therefore what the masses are taught.

The role, proper usage, and meaning of postmodernism remain matters of intense debate and vary widely with context.

Term

As with many other divisions, the use of the term is subject to the [lumpers and splitters](#) problem. There are those who use very small and exact definitions of postmodernism, often for theories perceived as [relativist](#), [nihilist](#), [counter-Enlightenment](#) or [antimodern](#). Others believe the world has changed so profoundly that the term applies to nearly everything, and use postmodernism in a broad cultural sense. People who believe postmodernism is really just an aspect of the modern period may instead use terms such as "late modernism".

The term does not apply to post-anything aside from following modern thought. The term *post-modern* can be viewed as an intentional contradiction, which reflects the spirit of [irony](#) or silliness for which it is sometimes known, but also for its central idea--that all polarities, at some point, overlap.

Development of postmodernism

From modernism

Modernity is defined as a period or condition loosely identified with the Industrial Revolution, or the Enlightenment. One "project" of modernity is said to have been the fostering of progress, which was thought to be achievable by incorporating principles of rationality and hierarchy into aspects of public and artistic life. (see also post-industrial, Information Age).

Although useful distinctions can be drawn between the modernist and postmodernist eras, this does not erase the many continuities present between them. (These continuities are why some refer to post-modernism as both the cessation and continuation of modernism.) One of the most significant differences between modernism and postmodernism is the concern for universality or totality. While modernist artists aimed to capture universality or totality in some sense, postmodernists have rejected these ambitions as "metanarratives."

This usage is ascribed to the philosophers Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. Lyotard understood modernity as a cultural condition characterized by constant change in the pursuit of progress, and postmodernity to represent the culmination of this process, where constant change has become a *status quo* and the notion of progress, obsolete. Following Ludwig Wittgenstein's critique of the possibility of absolute and total knowledge, Lyotard also further argued that the various "master-narratives" of progress, such as positivist science, Marxism, and Structuralism, were defunct as a method of achieving progress.

Writers such as John Ralston Saul among others have argued that postmodernism represents an accumulated disillusionment with the promises of the Enlightenment project and its progress of science, so central to modern thinking.

Notable philosophical contributors

Thinkers in the mid and late 19th century and early 20th century, like Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, through their arguments against objectivity, and emphasis on skepticism (especially concerning social morals and norms), laid the groundwork for the intellectual movement in the 20th century called existentialism. Writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert

Camus, and Samuel Beckett, drew heavily from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and other previous thinkers, and brought about a new sense of subjectivity, and forlornness, which greatly influenced contemporaneous thinkers, writers, and artists. Karl Barth's important fideist approach to theology and lifestyle, brought an irreverence for reason, and the rise of subjectivity. Post-colonialism after World War II contributed to the idea that one cannot have an objectively superior lifestyle or belief. This idea was taken further by the anti-foundationalist philosophers: Heidegger, then Ludwig Wittgenstein, then Derrida, who re-examined the fundamentals of knowledge; they argue that rationality was neither as sure nor as clear as modernists or rationalists assert. Psychologists also assert a cognitive bias, which points at the human bias of truth.

Features of postmodern culture begin to arise in the 1920s with the emergence of the Dada art movement. Both World Wars (perhaps even the concept of a World War), contributed to postmodernism; it is with the end of the Second World War that recognizably post-modernist attitudes begin to emerge. Some identify the burgeoning anti-establishment movements of the 1960s as an early trend toward postmodernism. The theory gained some of its strongest ground early on in French academia. In 1979 Jean-François Lyotard wrote a short but influential work *The Postmodern Condition: A report on knowledge*. Also, Richard Rorty wrote *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes are also strongly influential in 1970s postmodern theory.

Marxist critics argue that postmodernism is symptomatic of "late capitalism" and the decline of institutions, particularly the nation-state. The literary critic Fredric Jameson and the geographer David Harvey have also identified post-modernity with "late capitalism" or "flexible accumulation". This situation, called finance capitalism, is characterized by a high degree of mobility of labor and capital, and what Harvey called "time and space compression." They suggest that this coincides with the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system which they believe defined the economic order following the Second World War. (See also Consumerism, Critical theory) Other thinkers assert that post-modernity is the natural reaction to mass broadcasting and a society conditioned to mass production and mass politics.

The movement has had diverse political ramifications: its anti-ideological ideas appear conducive to, and strongly associated with, [the feminist movement](#), racial equality movements, [gay rights movements](#), most forms of late 20th century [anarchism](#), even the [peace movement](#) and various hybrids of these in the current [anti-globalization movement](#). Unsurprisingly, none of these institutions entirely embraces all aspects of the postmodern movement in its most concentrated definition, but reflect, or in true postmodern style, borrow from some of its core ideas.

Influencer	Year	Influence
<u>Søren Kierkegaard</u>	c.1843	" <i>Truth is Subjectivity</i> ", stressing the importance of experience and relativity over absolute, concrete thoughts
<u>Friedrich Nietzsche</u>	c.1880	no fixed values, God is dead , all perception is interpretation
<u>Dada movement</u>	c.1920	a focus on the framing of objects and discourse as being as important, or more important, than the work itself
<u>Karl Barth</u>	c.1930	fideist approach to theology brought a rise in subjectivity
<u>Martin Heidegger</u>	c.1930	rejected the philosophical grounding of the concepts of "subjectivity" and "objectivity"
<u>Ludwig Wittgenstein</u>	c.1950	anti-foundationalism , no certainty , a philosophy of language
<u>Thomas Samuel Kuhn</u>	c.1962	posited the rapid change of the basis of scientific knowledge to a provisional consensus of scientists, coined the term " paradigm shift "
<u>W.V.O. Quine</u>	c. 1962	developed the thesis of indeterminacy of translation, ontological relativity, and refuted a priori knowledge
<u>Jacques Derrida</u>	c.1970	re-examined the fundamentals of writing and its consequences on philosophy in general; sought to undermine the language of western metaphysics (deconstruction)

<u>Michel Foucault</u>	c.1975	examined discursive power in <i><u>Discipline and Punish</u></i> , with Bentham's panopticon as his model, and also known for saying "language is oppression" (Meaning that language was developed to allow only those who spoke the language not to be oppressed. All other people that don't speak the language would then be oppressed.)
<u>Jean-François Lyotard</u>	c.1979	opposed universality, meta-narratives, and generality
<u>Richard Rorty</u>	c.1979	philosophy mistakenly imitates scientific methods; argues for dissolving traditional philosophical problems; <u>anti-foundationalism</u> and anti-essentialism
<u>Jean Baudrillard</u>	c.1981	<i><u>Simulacra and Simulation</u></i> - reality created by <u>media</u>

Deconstruction

Deconstruction is a term which is used to denote the application of post-modern ideas of criticism, or theory, to a "text" or "artifact". A deconstruction is meant to undermine the frame of reference and assumptions that underpin the text or the artifact.

In its original use, a "deconstruction" is an important textual "occurrence" described and analyzed by many postmodern authors and philosophers. They argued that aspects in the text itself would undermine its own authority or assumptions, that internal contradictions would erase boundaries or categories which the work relied on or asserted. Post-structuralists beginning with Jacques Derrida, who coined the term, argued that the existence of deconstructions implied that there was no intrinsic essence to a text, merely the contrast of difference. This is analogous to the scientific idea that only the variations are real, that there is no established norm to a genetic population, or the idea that the difference in perception between black and white is the context. A deconstruction is created when the "deeper" substance of text opposes the text's more "superficial" form. This idea too is not isolated to post-structuralists, but is related to the idea of hermeneutics in literature, intellectuals as early as Plato asserted it, and so did modern thinkers such as Leo Strauss. Derrida's

argument is that deconstruction proves that texts have multiple meanings, and the "violence" between the different meanings of text may be elucidated by close textual analysis.

Popularly, close textual analyses describing deconstruction within a text are often themselves called *deconstructions*. Derrida argued, however, that deconstruction is not a method or a tool, but an occurrence within the text itself. Writings about deconstruction perhaps are referred to in academic circles as *deconstructive readings*, in conformance with this view of the word.

Deconstruction is far more important to postmodernism than its seemingly narrow focus on *text* might imply. According to Derrida, one consequence of deconstruction is that the text may be defined so broadly as to encompass not just written words, but the entire spectrum of symbols and phenomena within Western thought. To Derrida, a result of deconstruction is that no Western philosopher has been able to successfully escape from this large web of text and reach the purely text-free "signified" which they imagined to exist "just beyond" the text.

The more common use of the term is the more general process of pointing to contradictions between the intent and surface of a work, and the assumptions about it. A work then "deconstructs" assumptions when it places them in context. For example, someone who can pass as the opposite sex is said to "deconstruct" gender roles, because there is a conflict between the superficial appearance, and the reality of the person's gender.

Social construction, structuralism, post-structuralism

Often opposed to deconstruction are social constructionists, both labelled as such within the analytic tradition, or not, as is usually the case in the continental tradition. This is deeply intertwined with the thesis of social determinism governing in the social sciences during most of the 20th century. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's book The Social Construction of Reality started this term. Usually in the continental tradition, the terms structuralism or post-structuralism are used. Maurice Merleau-Ponty is seen as the biggest contributor to structuralism, which is epitomized well in the philosophy of Claude Levi-Strauss. Michel Foucault was also a structuralist, but then turned to what would be termed poststructuralism, but then disputed he

espoused belief in that, as well. Structuralism historically gave way to post-structuralism, Often the role of postmodernism within the analytic tradition is minimized, although the major figures of analytic tradition in the 20th century, including [Thomas Kuhn](#) and his epistemology, as well as [Quine](#)'s conceptualization of ontological relativity, show a heavy similarity with works in the continental tradition for their lack of belief in absolute [truth] as well as in the pliability of language. In the continental tradition, most of the works emphasize the fact that power dissimulates, and that society constructs reality, while its individuals remain powerless or close to it. Oftentimes, both continental and analytic sources request a renewed subjectivity, borrowing heavily from [Immanuel Kant](#), while they largely reject his a priori/a posteriori distinction. They both minimize discussions of practical ethics, instead borrowing heavily from post-Holocaust accounts of the need for an ethics of responsibility, which is very rarely practically defined. One of the large differences between analytic postmodern sources and continental postmodern sources is that the analytic tradition by and large guards at least some of the tenets of liberalism, while many continental sources flirt with, or completely immerse in, [Marxism](#).

See article [Postmodernism Manifestations](#)

Criticism

The term *post-modernism* is often used pejoratively to describe tendencies perceived as [Relativist](#), [Counter-enlightenment](#) or [antimodern](#), particularly in relation to critiques of [Rationalism](#), [Universalism](#) or [Science](#). It is also sometimes used to describe tendencies in a society that are held to be antithetical to traditional systems of [morality](#). The criticisms of postmodernism are often complicated by the still fluid nature of the term, and in many cases the criticisms are clearly directed at [poststructuralism](#) and the philosophical and academic movements that it has spawned rather than the broader term postmodernism.

As political

[Michel Foucault](#) rejected the label of postmodernism explicitly in interviews but is seen by many to advocate a form of critique that is "postmodern" as it breaks with the utopian and transcendental

nature of "modern" critique by calling universal norms of the Enlightenment into question.

[Giddens](#) (1990) rejects this characterisation of modern critique by pointing out that a critique of Enlightenment universals were central philosophers of the modern period, most notably Nietzsche. What counts as "postmodern" is a stake in political struggles where the method of critique is at stake. The recurring themes of these debates are between essentialism and anti-foundationalism, universalism and relativism, where modernism is seen to represent the former and postmodernism the latter. This is why theorists as diverse as Nietzsche, [Lacan](#), Foucault, Derrida and Butler have been labelled "postmodern". Not because they formed an intellectual grouping at any one historical time but because they are seen by their critics to reject the possibility of universal, normative and ethical judgments.

A sophisticated rendition of this debate can be found between Seyla Benhabib (1995) and [Judith Butler](#) (1995) in relation to feminist politics. Benhabib argues that postmodern critique comprises three main elements: an anti-foundationalist conception of the subject and identity, the death of History (and notions of teleology and progress), and the death of metaphysicae defined as the search for objective Truth - which can all have strong and weak variations. Benhabib argues against these positions as she holds that they undermine the bases from which feminist politics can be founded as strong versions of postmodernism remove the possibility for agency, sense of selfhood, and the appropriation of women's history in the name of an emancipated future. The denial of normative ideals removes the possibility for utopia, central for ethical thinking and democratic action.

Butler responds to Benhabib by arguing that her use of "postmodernism" is an expression of a wider paranoia over anti-foundationalist philosophy, in particular, [poststructuralism](#).

“A number of positions are ascribed to postmodernism - Discourse is all there is, as if discourse were some kind of monistic stuff out of which all things are composed; the subject is dead, I can never say “I” again; there is no reality, only representation. These characterizations are variously imputed to postmodernism or poststructuralism, which are conflated with each other and sometimes conflated with deconstruction, and understood as an indiscriminate assemblage of French feminism, deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Foucauldian analysis, Rorty's conversationalism, and cultural studies ... In reality, these movements are opposed: Lacanian psychoanalysis in France positions itself

officially against poststructuralism, that Foucauldian rarely relate to Derrideans ... Lyotard champions the term, but he cannot be made into the example of what all the rest of the purported postmodernists are doing. Lyotard's work is, for instance, seriously at odds with that of Derrida”

Butler uses this debate over the definition of "postmodernism" to demonstrate how philosophy is implicated in power relationships. She defends poststructuralist critique by arguing that the critique of the subject is not the end but the beginning of analysis as the questioning of accepted "universal" and "objective" norms is the first task of enquiry.

The debates continue.

As intellectually and artistically disingenuous

Charles Murray, a critic of postmodernism, defines the term:

By contemporary intellectual fashion, I am referring to the constellation of views that come to mind when one hears the words multicultural, gender, deconstruct, politically correct, and Dead White Males. In a broader sense, contemporary intellectual fashion encompasses as well the widespread disdain in certain circles for technology and the scientific method. Embedded in this mind-set is hostility to the idea that discriminating judgments are appropriate in assessing art and literature, to the idea that hierarchies of value exist, hostility to the idea that an objective truth exists. Postmodernism is the overarching label that is attached to this perspective.

—Charles Murray, [1]

Central to the debate is the concept of "objectivity" and what it means. Denial of the practical possibility of objectivity is held to be the postmodern position, and a hostility towards claims advanced on the basis of objectivity its defining feature. It is this underlying hostility toward the

concept of [objectivity](#), evident in many contemporary [critical theorists](#), that is the common point of attack for critics of postmodernism. Many critics characterise postmodernism as an ephemeral phenomenon that cannot be adequately defined simply because, as a [philosophy](#) at least, it represents nothing more substantial than a series of disparate conjectures allied only in their distrust of [modernism](#).

The most prominent recent criticism of postmodern art is that of John Gardner. Gardner wrote that the classification "post-modern" / "modern" applied to the art of his time was an evasion, a stab at nothing - i.e., a move to elude the basic function of criticism, which, according to Gardner, is to judge art's moral value.

The Stuckist art movement have issued a series of manifestos denouncing postmodernism for what they see as its "scientific materialism, nihilism and spiritual bankruptcy".[5]

As a false distinction

This [antipathy](#) of postmodernists towards modernism, and their consequent tendency to define themselves against it, has also attracted criticism. It has been argued that modernity was not actually a lumbering, totalizing monolith at all, but in fact was itself dynamic and ever-changing; the evolution, therefore, between "modern" and "postmodern" should be seen as one of degree, rather than of kind - a continuation rather than a "break." One theorist who takes this view is [Marshall Berman](#), whose book *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1982) (a quote from [Marx](#)) reflects in its title the fluid nature of "the experience of modernity."

As noted [above](#), some theorists such as [Habermas](#) argue that the supposed distinction between the "modern" and the "postmodern" does not exist, but that the latter is no more than a development within a larger, still-current, "modern" framework. Many who make this argument are academics with [Marxist](#) leanings, such as [Seyla Benhabib](#), [Terry Eagleton](#), [Fredric Jameson](#), and [David Harvey \(social geographer\)](#), who are concerned that postmodernism's undermining of Enlightenment values makes a progressive cultural politics difficult, if not impossible, e.g., "How can 'we' effect any change in people's poor living conditions, in inequality and injustice, if 'we'

don't accept the validity of underlying universals such as the 'real world' and 'justice' in the first place?" How is any progress to be made through a philosophy so profoundly skeptical of the very notion of progress, and of unified perspectives? The critics charge that the postmodern vision of a tolerant, pluralist society in which every political ideology is perceived to be as valid, or as redundant, as the other, may ultimately encourage individuals to lead lives of a rather disastrous apathetic quietism. This reasoning leads Habermas to compare postmodernism with conservatism and the preservation of the status quo.

Such critics often argue that, in actual fact, such postmodern premises are rarely, if ever, actually embraced — that if they were, we would be left with nothing more than a crippling radical subjectivism. They point to the continuity of the projects of the Enlightenment and modernity as alive and well, as can be seen in science, in political rights movements, in the very idea of universities, and so on.

To some critics, there seems, indeed, to be a glaring contradiction in maintaining the death of objectivity and privileged position on one hand, while the scientific community continues a project of unprecedented scope to unify various scientific disciplines into a theory of everything, on the other. Hostility toward hierarchies of value and objectivity becomes problematic to them when postmodernity itself attempts to analyse such hierarchies with, apparently, some measure of objectivity and make categorical statements concerning them.

As empty rhetoric

The criticism of Postmodernism as ultimately meaningless rhetorical gymnastics was demonstrated in the Sokal Affair, where Alan Sokal, a physicist, wrote a deliberately nonsensical article purportedly about interpreting physics and mathematics in terms of postmodern theory, which was nevertheless published by the Social Text, a journal which he and most of the scientific community considered as postmodernist. Interestingly, Social Text never acknowledged that the article's publication was a mistake, but supported a counter-argument defending the "interpretative validity" of Sokal's false article, despite the author's rebuttal of his own article. (*see the online Postmodernism Generator*)

See also

- [Postmodern architecture](#)
- [Contemporary art](#)
- [post-autonomous art](#)

Theoretical postmodernism

- [List of postmodern critics](#)
- [Critical race theory](#)
- [Media studies](#)
- [post-Postmodernism](#)
- [Recursionism](#)

Cultural and political postmodernism

- [Anti-racist math](#)
- [Decentralization](#)
- [Defamiliarization](#)
- [New Age](#)
- [Reinformation](#)
- [Syncreticism](#)
- [Remodernism](#)

Postmodernism in law

- [Critical legal studies](#)
- [judicial shamanism](#)

Postmodernism in theology

- [Postmodern Christianity](#)
- [Postmodern Religious Art](#)
- [Emerging church](#)
- [Discordianism](#)

Notes

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