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Postmodernism is a broad movement that developed in the mid- to late 20th century across philosophy, the arts, architecture, and criticism, marking a departure from modernism. The term has been more generally applied to describe a historical era said to follow after modernity and the tendencies of this era.

Postmodernism is generally defined by an attitude of skepticism, irony, or rejection toward what it describes as the grand narratives and ideologies associated with modernism, often criticizing Enlightenment rationality and focusing on the role of ideology in maintaining political or economic power. Postmodern thinkers frequently describe knowledge claims and value systems as contingent or socially-conditioned, describing them as products of political, historical, or cultural discourses and hierarchies. Common targets of postmodern criticism include universalist ideas of objective reality, morality, truth, human nature, reason, science, language, and social progress. Accordingly, postmodern thought is broadly characterized by tendencies to self-consciousness, self-referentiality, epistemological and moral relativism, pluralism, and irreverence.

Postmodern critical approaches gained purchase in the 1980s and 1990s, and have been adopted in a variety of academic and theoretical disciplines, including cultural studies, philosophy of science, economics, linguistics, architecture, feminist theory, and literary criticism, as well as art movements in fields such as literature, contemporary art, and music. Postmodernism is often associated with schools of thought such as deconstruction, post-structuralism, and institutional critique, as well as philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Fredric Jameson.

Criticisms of postmodernism are intellectually diverse and include arguments that postmodernism promotes obscurantism, is meaningless, and that it adds nothing to analytical or empirical knowledge.

basic features of what is now called postmodernism can be found as early as the 1940s, most notably in the work of artists such as Jorge Luis Borges. However, most scholars today agree postmodernism began to compete with modernism in the late 1950s and gained ascendancy over it in the 1960s. Since then, postmodernism has been a powerful, though not undisputed, force in art, literature, film, music, drama, architecture, history, and continental philosophy.

The primary features of postmodernism typically include the ironic play with styles, citations and narrative levels, a metaphysical skepticism or nihilism towards a "grand narrative" of Western culture, and a preference for the virtual at the expense of the Real (or more accurately, a fundamental questioning of what 'the real' constitutes).

Since the late 1990s, there has been a growing sentiment in popular culture and in academia that postmodernism "has gone out of fashion". Others argue that postmodernism is dead in the context of current cultural production.