

The gradual and contestable transition from the modern to what has come to be labeled as the postmodern era has been characterized as unnerving. This transition, it is said, has unsettled and is still in the process of disquieting all areas of human enterprise and knowledge. The term postmodernism encompasses a disputable set of ideas and features; its time frame and applicability to different subjects are also questionable. It is this very aspect of questioning that most aptly delineates the process by which postmodernist outlooks approach the contemporary world. At the core of this questioning lies an incredulity toward any reality and truth. Rather, reality, postmodernism says, is constructed and defined solely by language. This foregrounding of language before the existence of external reality casts a new light on the creation of meaning and identity in the postmodern world.

The modernist endeavor to find the essential core in one's identity disintegrates in the postmodern understanding of identity as a cultural construct that is determined only in relation to its surroundings. Without these relations, be it familial or societal, identity - and for that matter all meaning - bears no substance and faces the perpetual threat of becoming lost. A sense of loss informs postmodern philosophy, and it entails the uncertainty and relativism of all meaning. The contexts that might define an identity are fluid. Modernist texts evince a need to impose some kind of order on the chaos and instability of the modern world. This order would be usually sought in the form of narrative; based on language, narrative is a structure that invents and grants meaning to life. Postmodernism also permits the proposition that narration is the device with which human beings create and frame their histories.