

This site was developed for a group of therapists who study postmodern thinkers. If you're a therapist interested in the postmodern therapy movement you can [click here](#) to read more about it.

Provisional Definitions of Common Postmodern Terms from A to D courtesy of [Lois Shawver](#)

abduction - a reasoning procedure aimed at coming up with good hypotheses to explain observed cases. The success of abduction is compromised if all rival hypotheses are equally compatible with the evidence (i.e., [underdetermined](#).) Abduction was an area of philosophy expanded upon by [Peirce](#). [return](#)

agonistics - a combative striving to overcome an opponent. [return](#)

akrasia - ancient Greek word for weakness of the will. [return](#)

allopathy - A method of treating disease with remedies that produce effects different from those caused by the disease itself. [return](#)

alterity - lack of identification with some part of one's personality or one's community, differentness, otherness. [return](#)

analytic philosophy - a currently dominant form of philosophy in the English speaking world. It maintains that philosophy is a (logical) analysis of concepts. Analytic philosophers attempt to identify concepts that are the same in different languages (although, of course, expressed with different words). See [Quine](#) and [Davidson](#). Analytic philosophy has nothing to do with psychoanalysis.

analog communication - a nonverbal communication transmitted through body signs and actions. [return](#)

anomie - social instability, alienation and a sense of purposelessness cause by a steady erosion of standards and values. [return](#)

apodictic truths - an imaginary concept of truth in which it is supposed that we know the truth with absolute certainty. To be an apodictic truth there must be no possibility of mistake. It is common to use this term in making an argument. One might say, "Suppose X was an *apodictic truth*. Then, we would also know ..." [return](#)

aporia - Wonder and amazement before the confusing puzzles and paradoxes of our lives and of the universe. Socrates and the other ancient philosophers tried to evoke the philosophic spirit in young men by awakening their aporia, not by simply providing answers to these puzzles. [return](#)

appreciative inquiry - a form of inquiry initiated by the [Taos Institute](#). It is designed for use in organizational consultations and intended to result in organizational

You must own the book that launched the postmodern movement. It's scholarly, but it's short and cheap and you'll want it for reference, at least. .

[The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge \(Theory and History of Literature\)](#)
www.amazon.com

Read an array of therapists talking about the way the concept of *mental illness is changing*.

[Pathology and the Postmodern : Mental Illness as Discourse and Experience \(Inquiries in Social Construction\)](#)
www.amazon.com

transformation. [return](#)

analysand - the psychoanalytic patient is often referred to as an *analysand*. [return](#)

atomic propositions - part of early Wittgenstein's [picture theory of meaning \(or sometimes called the picture theory of language\)](#). An atomic proposition is a statement that consists either of simple unanalyzable pictures of a corresponding reality or else is composed of such pictures. [return](#)

autopoiesis - [Maturana's](#) and [Varela's](#) term, autopoiesis is the system that makes living beings autonomous systems. [return](#)

autopoietic unity - a single living organism, such as a person, or a flea ([Maturana](#) and [Varela](#)) It is their organization that defines them as unities. There are first and second order autopoietic unities. When organisms undergo [structural coupling](#), they become a new composite unity which is called second-order. Their most popular book is [Tree of Knowledge](#) . [return](#)

being - The word "being" (or "Being") sounds odd to many people who first start to read philosophy, but it is a key term. It is used in the sense of "really existing". The philosophy of "being" is about that which "really exists" as opposed to illusion. If one holds, as the ancient philosopher [Thales](#) did, that all reality was really "water", then your theory of "being" is that everything is water. If you believe, as Plato did, that that which we see and feel around us is just a distorted copy of the real world which exists beyond our ability to perceive it, in another realm, then that is your theory of "being". Whatever your theory of "being" it is your "[ontology](#)". The two terms are synonymous. Your theory of "being" might also include a theory of what "nothing" is, and also how it (i.e., nothing) relates to being. Although the ancient philosopher [Parmenides](#) felt that including "nothing" in your theory of being was a sure way to go mad. Parmenides theory of being was that there was no "nothing", only "being". Sartre became famous for his theory of Being as it related to his theory of Nothing in his classic book, [Being And Nothingness](#) .

binary - having two forms, or two parts. In postmodern and postmodern related philosophy, the term "binary" refers to a distinction that recognizes no middle term, no gray area between two extremes. [return](#)

binary thinking - If you use "binary thinking," you are a person who sees no gray, no fuzziness between your categories. Everything is black or white. [return](#)

borderzone - [Lyotard's](#) term for an area of discussion that allows people who ordinarily speak within different schools of thought, or regions of language, to come together and communicate. So, a borderzone would be an area of discussion, for example, where a teenage son and a parent might find some home of making sense together, perhaps talking about sports. Disputes can surely happen in borderzones, but there is also the possibility of meaningful exchange whereas outside the borderzone communication seems hopeless. Lyotard also used a Latin term "[pagus](#)" to refer to borderzones. [return](#)

bracket - phenomenologist, Husserl's, word. It means to philosophically ignore what exists beyond perception ([patterned jello](#)) in order to thoroughly explore how conceptualization and construal cause us to experience things the way we do. In some contexts, this term also means to philosophically ignore some aspects of experience in order to focus other aspects. [return](#)

bricolage - a french work that means" to use something that is easy at hand for a tool that it was not designed for. A brick used for a hammer, for example, is bricolage. Postmodern authors talk about the way language grows by the means of established terms being used as a kind of bricolage, as a brick might be used for a hammer. For example, the word "tree" was, presumably, once a bricolage term when it was first used

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to speak of the "tree of life." Most bricolage in language passes us by without our noticing it. The phrase "passes us by" in the last sentence was probably originally "bricolage" when someone first invented the phrase. Language is much richer with bricolage than we typically notice. [return](#)

both/and - contrasted with "either/or", a phrase encouraging the avoidance of black and white thinking that presumes there are no in-betweens, not possibility of multiple solutions existing together simultaneously.

Cartesian - Having to do with the philosopher Descartes. [return](#)

catachresis - to misuse or strain the use of words [return](#)

catharsis - when therapy is thought of as "catharsis" it is thought of as a way of emptying oneself of frustration and misery. If a person says that an experience is "cathartic," it means that pent up resentment or emotion was expressed and no longer demands the same expression. Whether catharsis actually works to rid a person of negative emotion is a controversial topic. [return](#)

chimpanzoid - a term [Vygotsky](#) used to refer to the developmental period in which the child learns some language before thought and speech come together. [return](#)

CLS - Collaborative Language Systems, the name given to [Anderson](#) and [Goolishian's](#) form of therapy in which the therapist takes a deliberately 'not-knowing' stance. [Click here to goto a website on CLS](#) at the Houston-Galveston Institute. [return](#)

cogito - Literally, "cogito" is Latin for "I think," but in philosophical circles this term is often used as shorthand for Descartes famous dictum "I think therefore I am," which, in Latin, is "Cogito ergo sum." [return](#)

Collaborative Language Systems - See [CLS](#) [return](#)

Communicative Action - [Habermas'](#) term. Communicative action is rational communication for the purpose of cooperative solidarity. Habermas talks about different kinds of communication and the way they work. [return](#)

commodification - the subordination of public and private realms to the logic of capitalism. In other words, to say certain things (e.g., friendship, women) have become "commodified" is to say they are now valued primarily for their commercial value. With commodification aspects of our lives that are culturally conditioned take on the mythology of being "natural" but their continued appreciation is dependent on their commercial value. [return](#)

constructivism - Is sometimes contrasted with social constructionism (sometimes called merely "[constructionism](#).") Constructivism is based on a theory of cognitive perspective. The constructivist argues that each individual has a kind of cognitive bias and all happenings in the world are colored by that bias. A constructivist may or may not be a social constructionist. [return](#)

constructionism - short for [social constructionism](#) [return](#)

construct validity - one of the forms of [validity](#) for an [operational definition](#). If a test has "construct validity" then it measures what it says it measures, or rather there is evidence that it measures what it says it measures. There are various standard ways of trying to establish that a test has "construct validity." One standard way is triangulation. We have "triangulation" if another test that is supposed to measure the same thing gives the same results as the test being studied, then this is used as evidence for construct validity in the test being studied. For example, one might measure the distance by traveling along the ground, but one can also measure it by the time it takes for a sound to reach one. This is because these two measures have been triangulated, that is ground distance measurement has been triangulated with sound travel measurement of distance, and thus sound travel has been given "construct validity" in the measurement of distance and can be used independently. (See [face validity](#).) [return](#)

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content analysis - A research procedure for studying naturally occurring conversations in settings such as task groups or therapy groups. Content analysis is done with a list or matrix of concepts that serve to focus the study and evaluate specific processes. In the majority of cases, these concepts do not investigate the actual content of speech but rather the process of speaking (such questioning or advising). Content analysis systems differ, however, in the the categories of speech they investigate.

contingent - in philosophical texts, this term often refers to that which can come and go (contingent on circumstances). That which must exist forever is "not contingent". [return](#)

correspondence theory of truth - a philosophical idea that truth consists in the correspondence between language and reality. The statement, "There is a chair in the corner" is true if there is a real chair in a real corner which corresponds to the statement. There are problems with the correspondence theory of truth. For example, what would be necessary for the statement, "Tomorrow he will likely feel better"? to be true? Would he actually have to feel better tomorrow? What states of affairs would have to exist in order for it to be true that it is likely he would feel better? [return](#)

conversability - the ability to create conversation. In a recent unpublished paper [Rorty](#) hypothesized that the [stubbornness](#) shown by [Spinoza](#) and [Socrates](#), along with their conversability, might be the reason that we are inclined to see them as wise. [return](#)

conversation analysis (CA) - A research methodology for studying naturally occurring conversation. It was developed by [Harvey Sacks](#) in conjunction with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson and involves a close examination of recorded conversation that is "transcribed" with an analysis procedure that captures many of the non-content elements of the speech with a technical notation. The conversation is studied without utilizing a list of content categories for evaluating what is said. In contrast, the investigations often look at turn-taking and study the way context shapes speech and speech shapes context.

countertransference - feelings that the psychoanalyst has for the [analysand](#) that are more a reflection of the analyst's personal history than a reaction to the behavior or characteristics of the analysand. This is the opposite of transference. [return](#)

critical distance - [Ian Parker](#) and [Frederic Jameson](#)'s term. We put the [discourse](#) behind us, consign it to the past, as we analyze it. [return](#)

critical listening - listening for mistakes, flaws of thinking, or problems in what the speaker is saying. It is contrasted with [generous listening](#). [return](#)

critical reading - to read in a way that looks for fallacies and defects in the writing. It is to be contrasted with "[reading generously](#)." This distinction between generous and critical reading is analogous to a parallel distinction between [generous](#) and [critical listening](#). [return](#)

critical theory - Although the term is sometimes used more broadly, in most contexts it refers to the school of thought represented by the "Frankfurt School," which is a school of thought that combines psychoanalysis and Marxism. A key text of this school of thought is [Adorno & Horkheimer 72](#) [return](#)

cybernetics - a study of the control processes in biological and artificial systems. Cybernetics reduces the field to a system that maintains itself by the mutual influence of its parts. [return](#)

cyberspace - an internet word. All of the internet occurs in "cyberspace." [return](#)

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