

This dictionary was developed as a support document for psychotherapists and counselors studying postmodern philosophy. If you would like to read more about the postmodern therapy movement, [click here](#) to read a brief website account.

Postmodern Terms

for philosophers, psychotherapists, scholars and the curious
from I to N

ideology - A set of ideas, doctrines, or beliefs that form the basis of an political or economic system and inspire individuals, groups, classes or cultures. Sometimes, ideology is understood as creating ideas for certain inspired groups to use as weapons against other groups. [return](#)

imbricate - overlapping at the edges. Sometimes this means, making category boundaries more fuzzy. Postmodern authors recognize the natural fuzziness of language and distinguish fuzziness from unclarity. For example, imagine telling a person, "Stand over there" as you point vaguely to a spot. You don't need to provide precise coordinates for your meaning to be clear. This is a point made by [Ludwig Wittgenstein](#) in the Philosophical Investigations. [return](#)

implicate order - a term introduced by David Bohm. The implicate order "implicate order" is the depth structure of reality that permits the formula or recipe for reality to be contained in it parts. In the implicate order the entire universe is stored in each part.

incredulity - disbelief or skepticism. We are incredulous when we are skeptical or disbelieving. [Lyotard](#) made this an important concept for postmodernism by saying that postmoderns are *incredulous* of [metanarratives](#), that is, they are skeptical about claims that are overgeneralized. [return](#)

indexical - a term like 'that,' 'this,' 'now,' 'there,' or 'soon.' That is, a term whose meaning is highly dependent on context. These terms present philosophical difficulties. statements incorporating indexicals are true in some circumstances and not in others. "There is a book on *that* table," is true or not depending on the table 'that' stands for. Indexicals are also called 'deictic expressions.' Clarity in writing depends on a good mastery of indexicals, using them when their meaning is clear and avoiding them when it is not. [return](#)

individualism - the philosophy that claims that the primary purpose of culture is the wellbeing of the individuals. It is often contrasted with "collectivism" or "[systems theory](#)" which holds that the system often colors and shapes what appears to be individual traits, aspects, and behaviors and should be given priority over the well-being of particular individuals.

inductive logic - Whereas deductive logic reasons only with ideas (or premises), induction reasons with observations. Inductive logic has the general form, "I have observed many cases like this in similar or identical situations so I conclude that this is what happens in all such situations." Contrast inductive logic with [deductive logic](#). [return](#)

induction - reasoning based on [inductive logic](#). [return](#)

idiom - [Lyotard](#)'s term for the distinctive local language we develop when the available terms will not work to say what we want to say. Idioms develop in [borderzones](#). [return](#)

inhabit - a term [Bakhtin](#) used to talk about the way in which our utterances are to others. So, when someone says, out of the blue, "Life is hard," it can be presumed that this is a response to someone who "inhabits our utterances" and stimulates us to want to say that "life is hard". A similar idea is behind [Freud](#)'s concept of free association. [return](#)

inscribed - in postmodern text this often means that a person has been highly influenced by and accepted a particular notion, norm, or belief. [return](#)

institutionalization theorem - [Parsons](#) proposal that common value standards will determine and limit what is knowable as fact within an institutional framework. This institutionalization of values will ensure that objects are viewed within a common framework. [return](#)

The term "incredulity" is a term in your ordinary dictionary. However, the founder of the current postmodern movement, Jean-Francois [Lyotard](#), made incredulity central to his definition of postmodernism. Remember, you can be incredulous without being disbelieving. You can just be doubtful. Postmodernism isn't cynicism.

Lyotard's key postmodern book is *The Postmodern Condition*. If you're serious about learning postmodernism, you might want this inexpensive text, even if it is just for reference. It has a few difficult words in it, but you can always look up their meaning on the internet, as you are obviously aware.

[Click here](#) to check out this book in Google.

intertextuality - The way in which texts reference other texts. The links to other websites in this dictionary make up the dictionary's "intertextuality". [return](#)

introspection - Reflective consciousness, or the pondering on the distinctiveness of one's particular thoughts and feelings. The person who introspects opens up a sense of private [subjectivity](#). Arguably, without introspection, one has no subjectivity. (Contrast with [extrospection](#).) [return](#)

Investigations - Shorthand term for [Wittgenstein](#)'s major later book, [Philosophical Investigations](#), in which he criticizes his earlier book, the [Tractatus](#) and his own [picture theory of language](#). Check out the commentary in the pink box on the right if you want to learn more.

[return](#)

Wittgenstein's [Philosophical Investigations](#) It's hard to believe but you can buy this enormously important book on Amazon for ten bucks (Just click the link and you can check it out and maybe buy it). It was this very book that Lyotard read which formed the core idea of his postmodern philosophy. Click here to buy the book from Amazon. Or, if you prefer, you can have Wittgenstein and Lyotard's philosophies portrayed dramatically by professional actors. To purchase the movie just [click here](#). You'll be on a page that lists postmodern therapist/authors. Find "Lois Shawver" to get to the movie. This movie is especially for therapists, counselors and students of these two professions.

joint-action - Term introduced by [John Shotter](#). It refers to actions we engage in with others so that we are unable to say the extent to which we, personally, caused something to happen or the other(s) caused it to happen. A teacher tries to teach a child to read, but the child does not learn. Did the teacher cause this problem? The child? Or the parents? It's a joint action in that we cannot attribute the cause of the situation entirely to one person or another with any degree of confidence or certainty. [return](#)

Katherine's story - [Katherine Levine](#) once told a story of doing therapy in a way that I believe illustrates the postmodern spirit. She described her client as a young rape victim who one day asked her therapist, "Am I still a virgin? Now that I have been raped?" And Katherine, moved by the client's sadness spoke from her heart saying, "Oh, I think you're still a virgin!" and she talked for a while explaining why she thought this. Then she noticed that the girl was not listening, and Katherine said, "But that's not what you think, is it?" And the girl shook her head "no" and began talking about what she thought. [return](#)

knowing approach - distinguished from the [not-knowing](#) approach. To approach something from a knowing position is to approach it as an expert, as if you know the answers. To approach it from a not-knowing approach is to approach it as if you did not know the answers. The knowing approach is typically [modern](#) and the modern therapist typically presents herself as knowing what is good for the client. The postmodern approach is typically [not-knowing](#). [return](#)

koinonia - Patrick de Mare's term for impersonal fellowship. [Click here to read more](#). [return](#)

language game - [Wittgenstein](#)'s term. The term is used in several related senses. A primitive language game generally refers to one of Wittgenstein's thought experiments in which we imagine a tribe of people with very minimal and primitive language. Often the term is used to refer to a somewhat bounded rule-governed sub-segment of ordinary language. Sometimes it is used to refer to the whole of an actual language. [Click here for a fuller account of the concept of language-game](#). [return](#)

law of contradiction - one of three principles required by logical thinking set down by Aristotle. A thing cannot be both itself and not itself. [return](#)

law of the excluded middle - one of three principles required by logical thinking set down by Aristotle. The law of the excluded middle tells us that all statements must be treated as either true or false. There is no middle ground. [Click here for more information](#). [return](#)

law of identity - one of three principles required of logical thinking set down by Aristotle. A thing is always itself. [return](#)

Lebenswelt - [Husserl](#)'s word for lived world of institutional and mundane experience. It is the world created by people although they are unaware of doing so. [return](#)

legitimate - [Lyotard](#) talks about the different ways that various communities lend legitimacy or authority to their statements. In pre-modern communities narrative is legitimated by people saying that they have heard these stories before. Science uses its own legitimating

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method and textual practices. In modernity statements are largely legitimated through cross-referencing. In postmodernity, Lyotard proposes, that legitimation may occur through the practice of parody. How this works is the subject of his book *The Postmodern Condition*. [\(Click here to read more on legitimation in Lyotard.\)return](#)

listen generously - see "[generous listening](#)". [return](#)

little narrative - [Lyotard](#)'s term for a narrative in which key terms are being defined locally and the meaning of these terms is local and provisional. [return](#)

local meaning - The little narrative of postmodernity involves us in negotiations of local meaning. This just means we say to each other, "This is what I mean by X" and the other negotiates for the meaning of X. [return](#)

locus of control - a concept introduced into social learning theory the nineteen-sixties by J.B. Rotter. People could have either an internal or an external locus of control. If their locus of control was internal, they would seem themselves as doing things that resulted in things happening s they do. People with an external locus of control felt themselves to be a pawn of circumstance. [return](#)

logic - On PMTH, the word "logic" generally refers, not to the colloquial meaning of this term but to the system of formal reasoning introduced by [Aristotle](#). Aristotle's logic was based on three principles, the [Law of the Excluded Middle](#), the [Law of Contradiction](#) and the [Law of Identity](#). In recent times there are symbolic logics which can be more complex. In Aristotelean, or categorical, logic, a statement can be only true or false, not both at the same time. In modern logics, there can be alternative valuations of a statement. In [fuzzy logic](#), we can speak of the proportion of truth in each statement. [return](#)

logical paradox - A logical paradox consists of a statement which if true is false and if false is true. Thus consider "I am lying." If it is true and I am lying, then I am saying something false (that is what a lie is) and if it is false and I am saying something false, then it is true that I am lying. Such a statement is self-contradictory It contradicts itself. Its truth entails its falsity and its falsity entails its truth. [return](#)

logical positivism - Twentieth-century philosophical movement that is known for its determination to police assertive statements in order to reject as meaningless non-empirical statements that can not be verified. This means that logical positivism rejects all statements of metaphysics, theology, ethics and aesthetics as nonsense. The philosophy is represented by the work of [Bertrand Russell](#), (early but not late) [Ludwig Wittgenstein](#), [A. J. Ayer](#) and the members of the [Vienna Circle](#). [Further references on logical positivism](#). [return](#)

logocentrism - A distinctly cultural way of understanding. [Derrida](#) uses this term frequently to refer to the western cultural way of understanding that, he argues, was instituted by Plato. Western logocentrism privileges language over nonverbal communication, and it privileges speech over writing with a [metaphysics of presence](#). [Deconstruction](#) exposes the way in which we must have both sides of the dichotomy (such as writing and speech, or male and female) in order to have the privileged side. [return](#)

Lyotard's paradox - The paradox that one must become a dictator in order to set up a system in which the oppressed can have a voice. This paradox is elaborated by Samuel Weber in his afterword to Lyotard's interview published in English as [Just Gaming](#). [return](#)

marginalize - to leave out of the center of the text and (metaphorically) to put in the margin. Minority voices are often marginalized in this way. But the term can also be used more broadly to include the voices of people who are to shy or insecure to bring their concerns to center stage. Often this term is used in the phrase [marginalized voices](#). [return](#)

marginalized voices - people whose words are not given much weight. See [marginalizereturn](#)

meritocracy - a value which privileges the hardworking over the less driven. [return](#)

meta-narrative - [Lyotard](#)'s term. It means a story or narrative that is presumed to have great generality and represents a final and [apodictic](#) truth. [Modernists](#), Lyotard tells us, believe in metanarratives whereas postmoderns are incredulous of metanarratives. Postmoderns, in this sense of the term, are eclectic and gather their beliefs from a variety of sources while treating the resulting compilation as tentative. [return](#)

metaphysics of presence - the belief that the thoughts we have in the present are more real than the thoughts that we read that were [written](#) elsewhere and in the past. The metaphysics of presence tells us that if I have this thought and write it down, it is forever mine. [return](#)

mftc-I - mftc is a listserv. The pmth listserv was initiated late in 1998 when a schism occurred on the mftc list. The causes of that schism are complex, but pmth became a list for more scholarly and philosophical discussion while many members continued on both lists. [return](#)

modern - Also called "modernist." In the context of a [postmodern](#) vocabulary, the "modern"

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does not mean "contemporary." In fact, the "modern" or "modernism" is seen as out-of-date. The "modern" is understood to have emerged during the 18th century Enlightenment when philosophers were challenging superstitions (which often included religion) of [premodern](#) beliefs. They replaced faith in superstition with faith that science and objectivity could build us a better world. Moderns prefer objective and factual language. "Modern" therapies (as postmoderns use the term) are therapies that pretend to be scientific when they are not by using scientific sounding terms are methods. [return](#)

monologic - like a monologue. An essay is monologic if it does not bring in other views. Monologic is contrasted with [dialogic](#). [return](#)

myth of physical objects - [Quine](#)[return](#)



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