

GLOSSARY OF POST-MODERN TERMS

- agent or agency* — someone assumed to have authority and power, causal force.
- author* — person who writes or creates a text, or one who is responsible for an outcome.
- celebrate* — approve of something, applaud a point of view.
- chronophonism* — the modern assumption that time is chronological or linear. Post-modernists are opposed to chronophonism (Derrida 1981).
- counternormalizing analysis* — an analysis that denies a referent reality, rejects foundations, and ignores origins (Ashley and Walker 1990b: 40).
- de-centering* — absence of anything at the center or any overriding truth. This means concentrating attention on the margins.
- deconstruction* — a post-modern method of analysis. Its goal is to undo all constructions. Deconstruction tears a text apart, reveals its contradictions and assumptions; its intent, however, is not to improve, revise, or offer a better version of the text.
- different* — difference in the sense of dispute, conflict, or disagreement about the meaning of language (Lyotard 1988b: 193–94).
- distance* — a structuring principle that suggests definition rests not on the entity itself but in its positive and negative references to other texts. Meaning changes over time, and ultimately the attribution of meaning is put off, postponed, deferred, forever (Derrida 1972; 1981: 39–40).
- discourse* — all that is written and spoken and all that invites dialogue or conversation. Discourse “even promotes its own reformulation” (Agger 1990: 37).
- eroding* — acceptable post-modern alternative to re-presenting or representing. It is assumed to free one’s analysis of objects, facts, descriptions, generalizations, experiments, and truth claims (Tyler 1986: 129–30).
- foundationalism* — an attempt to ground inquiry or thought on pre-given principles assumed true beyond “mere belief or unexamined practice” (Fish 1989: 342; Bernstein 1986: 8–12). Post-modernists are anti-foundational. They contend that “questions of fact, truth, correctness, validity, and clarity can neither be posed nor answered” (Fish 1989: 344).
- genealogy* — history of the present that looks to the past for insight into today. It focuses on “local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges.” Genealogy dismisses the possibility of any view of history as a “unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise, and order . . . in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects” (Foucault 1980: 83).
- heroic* — modern social scientists sometimes focus on one event or person; and in so doing, post-modernists argue, they create heroes, attach excessive importance to the capacities of a single individual to effect change or influence specific, dramatic events. Post-modernists, rejecting this approach (heroic analysis), neither focus on individuals nor construct heroes. Many post-modernists call for the end of the subject, the death of the author.
- hyper-reality* — reality has collapsed, and today it is exclusively image, illusion, or simulation. The model is more real than the reality it supposedly represents. The hyper-real is “that which is already reproduced” (Baudrillard 1983c: 146). It is a model “of a real without origin or reality” (Baudrillard 1983c: 2).
- hyper-space* — post-modern term referring to the fact that our modern concepts of space are meaningless. Space doesn’t act according to modern assumptions. It has been annihilated, and spatial barriers have disappeared. Everything is in geographical flux, constantly and unpredictably shifting in space.
- imploding, implation* — tendency for phenomena in a post-modern world to explode inwardly, thus destroying themselves and one’s assumptions about them (Baudrillard 1983a). Meaning disappears altogether (Baudrillard 1983c: 57).
- intertextual* — infinitely complex interwoven interrelationships, “an endless conversation between the texts with no prospect of ever arriving at or being halted at an agreed point” (Bauman 1990: 427). Absolute intertextuality assumes that everything is related to everything else.
- logocentric* — an adjective used to describe systems of thought that claim legitimacy by reference to external, universally truthful propositions. Post-modernists are opposed to logocentric thought. They say such systems are really grounded in self-constituted logic. They consider them circular, self-referential, and self-satisfying. As post-modernists see it, no grounds exist for defensible external validation or substantiation (Derrida 1976: 49).
- moment* — indefinite point in time with undetermined duration or nonspecific geographical location or place. Post-modernists also use this term to refer to the stages or steps of social analysis.
- move* — as in chess, it is strategic. To “move” means to defend a position or take the discussion or analysis in a certain direction.
- narrative* — post-modern opinion of this concept varies, depending on the type of narrative under discussion. Post-modernists severely criticize meta-narratives, global world views, mastercodes. Meta-narratives are modern and assume the validity of their own truth claims, however,

mini-narratives, micro-narratives, local narratives, traditional narratives are just stories that make no truth claims and are therefore more acceptable to post-modernists.

paralogism, paralogical — refers to the unknown, what is admittedly false knowledge. But for post-modernists it can also refer to those practices that “exploit the destabilization of the language games of Truth” in order to point to how little we really know, how much what we do know is pure linguistic convention of an arbitrary character (Smith 1988: xxiii; Lyotard 1984: 60).

pastiche — a free-floating, crazy-quilt, collage, hodgepodge patchwork of ideas or views. It includes elements of opposites such as old and new. It denies regularity, logic, or symmetry; it glories in contradiction and confusion.

performativity — modern criteria by which judgment is made on the basis of pragmatic performance or outcome (“capacity, efficiency, control,” according to Behabib 1984: 105). It is not acceptable to most post-modernists (Lyotard 1984) who understand it as an extension of modern faith in reason. Post-modernists argue that performativity discourages diversity and autonomy, flexibility and openness.

phonocentric — Derrida, a post-modernist, argues that modern analysis focuses on speaking and the oral text. He criticizes this tendency to attribute special status to the spoken word and labels it phonocentric. Derrida contends that the written word is superior to the spoken (Derrida 1981: 24). Post-modernists are antiphonocentrist (Berman 1990: 14).

privileged — to give special attention or attribute priority to an argument, a person, an event, or a text. Post-modernists oppose privileging any specific perspective.

project — organized, formal, modern ventures or activities. It implies having a strategy; a game plan, a design, a self-justifying, often hidden goal. Modern political parties, for example, have “projects.” For post-modernists this is a term of criticism.

le quotidiens — daily life analysis or everyday life focus. Post-modernists see it as a positive alternative to global theory.

reader — observer. Post-modernism is reader-oriented and gives readers the power of interpreting a text that, in modern terms, belonged to the author. Post-modern readers are dramatically empowered.

readably text, “visible” (French term) — a modern text that is written with the intention of communicating a specific, precise message. It assumes a passive reader that merely takes in the message (Barthes 1970; 1979: 77). The writer’s role is one of representation, that is, representing reality. Compare “writerly text.”

reading — understanding, interpretation. In post-modern terms one speaks of “my reading,” “your reading,” or “a reading,” without reflecting on the adequacy, the validity of said reading.

re-present — the underlying assumption of modern representation that it is possible to present something over again, to replace one object (concept, person, place, or time) with another, without loss of content or violation of intention. The post-modernists say this is impossible.

rhetoric — in the modern sense denotes “artificial eloquence” as opposed to serious, rigorous, scientific discourse. But for post-modernists it is taken in its more classical definition to mean oratory; the artful presentation of ideas that play with symbols and the construction of meaning in an open text that has no design or intention of imposing a hegemonic view or of insisting on its own superiority.

simulacrum — a copy of a copy for which there is no original (Baudrillard 1983c; Elgin 1984: 877–79.) No distinction can remain between the real and the model.

site or space — not merely geographic location; places that cannot be defined, necessarily determined. It may also refer to opportunities. Sometimes it alludes to the topic or problem being studied.

story, storytelling — see narrative; an explanation that makes no truth claims but admits to being the teller’s point of view based only on his or her experience. Traditional, local narratives are stories.

subjectivity — post-modernists use this term to refer to an emphasis on the subject as a focus of social analysis. The post-modernists criticize subjectivity. Post-modernists do not employ this word in its modern sense of philosophical relativism or tentativeness or the opposite of objectivity.

text — all phenomenon, all events. Post-modernists consider everything a text.

totalizing — assumes a totality, a total view. By extension this rejects other perspectives. Post-modernists criticize totalizing theories.

wise — the modern conception of the author’s perspective. Post-modernists question the attribution of privilege or special status to any voice, authors, or a specific person or perspectives. The “public” voice, however, is more acceptable to post-modernists because it democratizes rhetoric, makes discourse broadly understandable, and at the same time subverts “its own expert culture” (Agger 1990: 214).

writerly text, “scriptible” (French term) — a post-modern text that is written to be rewritten by the reader with every reading. This open text invites interpretation and re-interpretation (Barthes 1970; 1979: 77; Jefferson 1982: 100–101). The reader’s role is that of production, construction. Compare “readerly text.”