

Critical Approaches to Literature

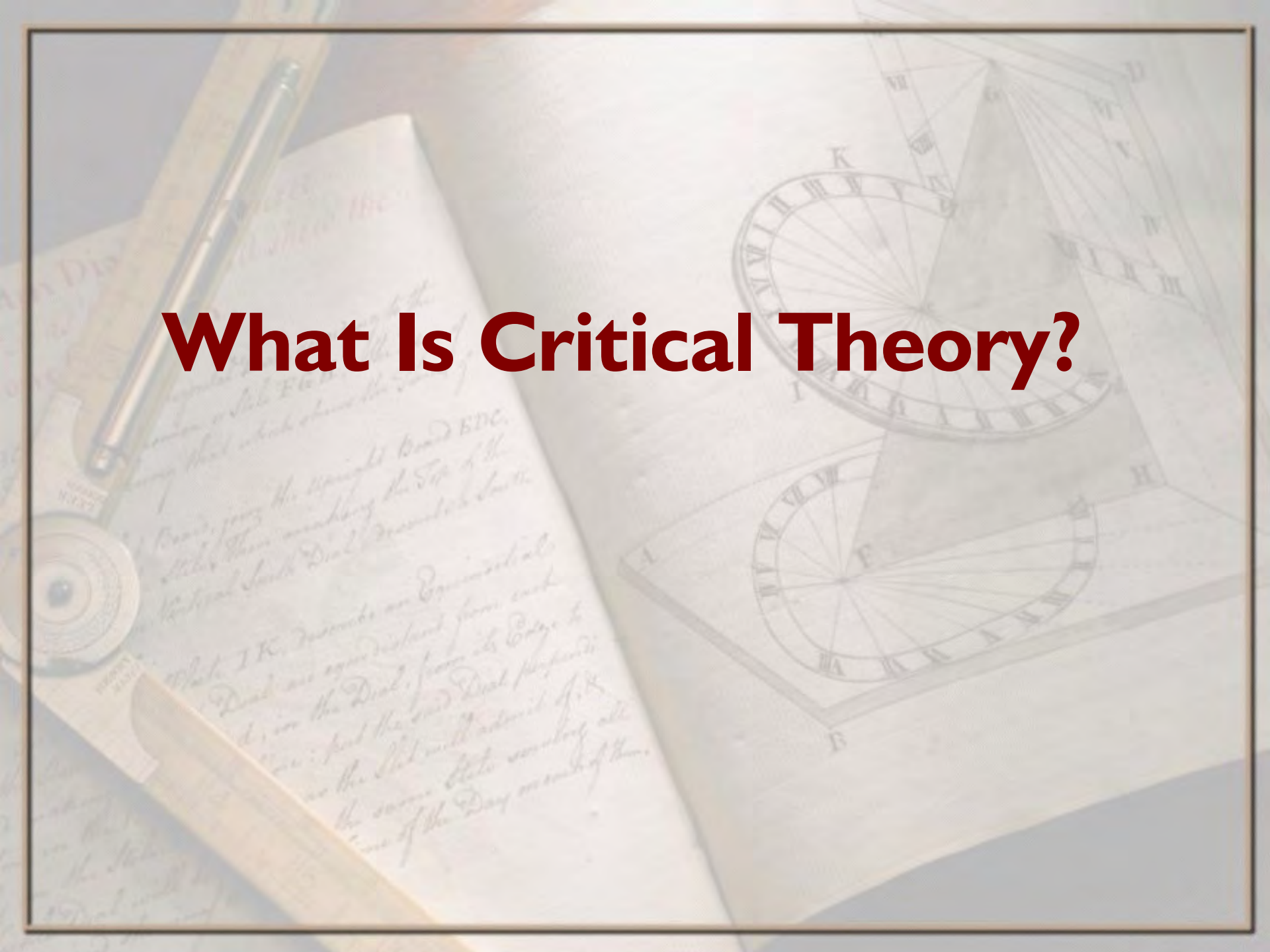
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English 3900

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What Is Critical Theory?



Criticism and Interpretation

- ★ Criticism is the act analyzing, evaluating, and judging the quality of a literary or artistic work.
- ★ Interpretation is explanation, explication, elucidation.
 - ★ Interpretation is the act of finding meaning in a work of art or literature.
- ★ Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation, originally the Bible, but now broadly defined to art and literature.
 - ★ Hermeneutics is interpretive theory.

Theory

- ★ “A coherent group of general propositions used as principles of explanation for a class of phenomena” (*Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*)
- ★ A proposed explanation
- ★ A system of rules, principles, and methods of art, as distinguished from practice
- ★ Theory is the act of contemplating disciplinary systems methodologically.

Literary Criticism vs Literary Theory

- ★ Literary criticism is a particular act of interpretation of a text.
 - ★ Literary criticism explains the text.
- ★ Literary theory is a hermeneutical method that proposes principles of textual analysis.
 - ★ Literary theory is *the* system that underpins a particular practice of criticism; literary theory systematizes literary criticism.

Critical Theory

- ★ Critical theory, as opposed to specifically literary theory, embodies the methodological analysis of culture in general. Literary analysis is one component of a larger analysis of media, politics and ideology, socio-economic positions, and other subjectifying apparatuses.
- ★ Because the theories we're learning about can be applied across disciplines (not just interpreting literature), I will refer to them as types of critical theory.

What We Won't Cover

- ★ Feminist Criticism and Gender Studies, the analysis of the subject positions of women and gender within texts as well as the status of women authors within the canon
- ★ New Historicism, the interplay between literature and history writing
- ★ Reader-Response Criticism, the triangular relationships between writers, texts, and readers
- ★ Phenomenology and Existentialism, the analysis of the ontological status and worldly effects of literature

What We Will Cover

- ★ New Criticism (and Formalism), close reading of the text itself, paying particular heed to its unifying tensions and analysis of internal form.
- ★ Structuralism (and Semiotics and Narratology), the analysis of signs and codes within linguistic systems
- ★ Post-Structuralism (and Deconstruction and Post-Modernism), the analysis of a text's plays, slippages, and aporias of meaning

What We Will Cover

Continued

- ★ Psychoanalysis, the analysis of the psyche of the author, text, and culture
- ★ Marxism (and Cultural Studies), socio-economic historical and cultural analyses
- ★ Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Theory, analyses of the politics and poetics, consciousness and unconsciousness of (queer) sexuality and identity
- ★ African American Criticism, analyses of African American (literary/aesthetic) history and heritage and the social construction of racial identity

What We Will Cover

Concluded

- ★ Postcolonialism, analyses of colonial ideology (oppression and othering) and postcolonial resistance
- ★ Ecocriticism, analyses of literature from the ecological, environmental, and natural perspective
- ★ Cognitive Criticism, analyses of literature from the perspective of cognitive science and evolutionary psychology



New Criticism And Russian Formalism

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New Criticism

- ★ Eschews philological, biographical, and historical criticism
- ★ Strives to create an objective, formalist criticism that finds meaning in “the text itself”
- ★ Advocates close reading that analyzes tension and complexity of formal structure and meaning via ambiguity, irony, and paradox
- ★ Resolves tensions of text into harmonious organic unity that engenders a universal theme

Russian Formalism

- ★ Considers the text to be an autonomous object.
- ★ Studies literary (as opposed to practical or conventional) language and the internal operations of works of literature, be they either narrative form in fiction or sound structure in poetry.
- ★ Literature evolves not because of external history but through revolutions of literary language.

T. S. Eliot

- ★ *Technically, Eliot is not a New Critic, but he is considered a chief influence*
- ★ Tradition: the individual poet/poem must be considered within the context of literary history
- ★ Impersonality/Depersonalization: the poet/poem does not express a romantic self/feeling, but rather builds on ideas within the tradition
- ★ Dissociation of Sensibility: poetry should not sever thought from feeling, but rather constitute a complex analysis of thought united with feeling

John Crowe Ransom

New Critic

- ★ “Criticism, Inc.”: the scientific and systematic “business of criticism”
- ★ Aesthetic distance: the poet should write with a certain objective, critical detachment, akin to Eliot’s impersonality

Cleanth Brooks

New Critic

- ★ Heresy of paraphrase: paraphrasing the poem violates the meaning of the poem
- ★ Organic unity: the poem is an harmonic whole
- ★ Irony: general incongruity of forces within the poem

Cleanth Brooks

Continued

- ★ Paradox: the poem makes contradictory statements that are harmonized into a whole
- ★ Ambiguity: multiplicity of connotive meaning
- ★ “Form is content”: the structure of the poem is part of the meaning of the poem

William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley

New Critics

- ★ **Intentional fallacy:** the error of taking the author's intent for the meaning of the work
- ★ **Affective fallacy:** the error of taking a work's emotional effect for its meaning
- ★ **Affective criticism:** criticism that romantically looks at psychological effects of the work
- ★ **Cognitive criticism:** criticism that classically and objectively looks at the work

Boris Eichenbaum

Russian Formalist

- ★ Poetic Sound: Formalism distinguishes conventional, practical language from autonomous, literary language.
- ★ Literary Devices: Formalism emphasizes the techniques of fiction (plot and structure) and poetry (meter, rhythm) and analyze how they form-ally function within the work.
- ★ Literary Evolution: Literature changes as forms change.



Structuralism and Semiotics

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Theory

Structuralism is a multidisciplinary endeavor, particularly in the fields of linguistics, anthropology, and literary studies, that seeks to determine how surface phenomena such as linguistic signs, social norms, and literary conventions are tied to an underlying, governing system, which itself corresponds to the organizing systems of the human mind. Structuralism is a human, social science.

Structure

- ★ A structure is a whole system, complete unto itself with internal regulations that provide stability yet allow for transformation of the system.
- ★ Examples of structures include language or sign systems, mating rituals, and narrative conventions.

Structural Linguistics

- ★ Founded by Ferdinand de Saussure, structural linguistics theorizes that an arbitrary, relational, and differential system of language mediates the human mind's experience of the world.
- ★ The human mind creates language as a system to organize world.

Structural Anthropology

- ★ Founded by Claude Lévi-Strauss, structural anthropology looks at the codes of social life.
- ★ Lévi-Strauss in particular looked at cultural myths, called mythemes, that transcend cultures, and therefore suggests a common human experience of, for instance, ritual codes and incest taboos.

Semiotics

- ★ **Semiology** is the science of signs.
- ★ **Semiotics**, as initially practiced by Roland Barthes, is the practice of analyzing sign systems, not just language, but objects, images, and behaviors; therefore, semiotics opens itself up to literary and media studies of film, television, and pop culture.

Practice

Comparing the Interpretive Practices

- ★ Whereas New Criticism looks at *what* a text means in terms of the relationship between form and content,
- ★ Structuralist criticism looks at *how* a text means in terms of an underlying system, be it literary writing or reading convention.
- ★ Structuralism does not evaluate meaning or theme, it analyzes the structures that undergird the work and our understanding of it.

Practice

Three Versions of Structuralist Criticism

- ★ 1) **Genre Study:** Examines the structure and grammar of literary genres, for example Northrup Frye's archetypes, mythos, and quests.
- ★ 2) **Narratology:** Analyzes the narrative theory of grammar, patterns, and formulas that underlies a literary work.
- ★ 3) **Interpretive Conventions:** Analyzes the codes and conventions of reading and interpreting literature, for example literary competence and interpretive communities.

Theorists

- ★ Ferdinand de Saussure, structural linguist
- ★ Roman Jakobson, structuralist linguist
- ★ Northrop Frye, archetypal and genre criticism
- ★ Tzvetan Todorov, narratologist
- ★ Roland Barthes, semiotician

Ferdinand de Saussure

★As a structural linguist, Saussure theorizes that a signifier (sound or image) is only arbitrarily and conventionally related to a signified concept. Language is a structure of mind that does not convey positivist reality, but rather evokes relational value. Meaning exists in difference.

Roman Jakobson

★ Jakobson applies Saussure's ideas of synchrony (freeze frame of the system) and diachrony (slow change) to literary studies and argues that the structure of a work depends on its function. He differentiates the referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and poetic functions, stating that the poetic function performs the message for its own sake and the verbal artwork is a complex, overdetermined structure whose signs are palpable.

Northrop Frye

★ Frye looks for the central informing powers, i.e., myths or archetypes, that underlie all literature and finds them in the heroic quest and the seasonal cycles. He categorizes literary genres according to the seasons: spring romance, summer comedy, autumn tragedy, and winter satire. Rather than making value judgments about literature, Frye simply finds patterns, systematic structures.

Tzvetan Todorov

★ Todorov considers New Criticism to be internal to the work and Marxism/Psychoanalysis to be external; however, structuralist criticism is neither internal nor external because its object is literary discourse rather than particular literary texts. His narrative analysis finds structural patterns that underly large groups of texts.

Roland Barthes

- ★ Does semiotic readings of such things as soap ads and campaign photos.
- ★ Argues that the idea of a modern author (an individual with a single voice to express through her mastery of language) is dead because the codes and conventions of language and literature master the writer.



Poststructuralism and Deconstruction

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Roland Barthes

Structuralist and Semiotician

- ★ In *Mythologies*, does semiotic readings of such things as soap ads and campaign photos.
- ★ In “The Death of the Author,” argues that the idea of a modern author (an individual with a single voice to express through her mastery of language) is dead because the codes of language master and the conventions of literary discourse overpower the writer.

Roland Barthes

Poststructuralist

★ In “From Work to Text,” differentiates between thinking of a literary object as a relatively self-contained literary work that is built by an author (the “father”) on underlying structural(ist) patterns, on the one hand, and conceiving of literature as a field of texts always already in process, part of a playful and active discursive movement without origin or end, on the other.

From Structuralism To Poststructuralism

- ★ Whereas structuralism valorized only the underlying system and codes of literature while decidedly excommunicating the writer, the reader, and meaning from the literary process,
- ★ Poststructuralism seeks the destruction of codes, systems, and structures in order to find a place for the writer, the reader, and the meaning of the text.

Structuralism vs. Poststructuralism

★ Like structuralism, poststructuralism is interdisciplinary. In terms of what we have studied or will study, Lacanian psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and the New Historicism are versions of poststructuralism.

Structuralism vs. Poststructuralism

- ★ Structuralism and poststructuralism differ in three key areas:
 - ★ The underlying structure,
 - ★ Identity,
 - ★ And literary criticism.

The Underlying Structure

- ★ Structuralism analyzes the freeze-frame of the underlying system.
- ★ Poststructuralism analyzes *langue* in motion, the social context of codes: unfrozen, in human history, and reintegrated into time.
 - ★ Lacan's metonymy of desire (psychoanalysis)
 - ★ Derrida's différance (deconstruction)
 - ★ Foucault's discontinuous history (New Historicism)

Identity

- ★ Structuralism discusses the system only, not individual authors and not individual people.
- ★ The author is dead, replaced by myths and archetypes and the structural analysis of narrative.
- ★ The individual is nil, superceded by the discursive system.
- ★ Poststructuralism witnesses the reemergence of the author and individual, but subjected to language systems.
- ★ Lacan's subject exists only in relation to the Big Other
- ★ Derrida's decentered subject of discourse
- ★ Foucault's subject-positions derived from discourse

Literary Criticism

- ★ Structuralism analyzes how a text means in terms of underlying systems and structure, such as archetypes, genres, and narrative formulas.
- ★ Poststructuralism analyzes the shifting identities of the characters and the purposively playful meaning of the text.

Poststructuralist Literary Criticism

- ★ Analyze the fluctuating and shifting, non-essential and non-substantial, destabiliz-ed/-ing and performative subject-positions of the characters with respect to the various discursive networks to which they are subject(ed).
- ★ Analyze the paradoxes and the play, the contradictions and the shifts, the undecidability and the aporia of meaning within the text.
- ★ Meaning and “Truth” are suspected, debunked, dispelled, questioned, destabilized, contingent and situated rather than transcendent and absolute.

Types of Poststructuralism

- ★ Deconstruction is one version of poststructuralism, most associated with Derrida and de Man, that shows the play of meanings within the world and the work.
- ★ Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today* and Ross Murfin's "What Is Deconstruction?" focus exclusively on deconstruction and do not discuss the larger theory of poststructuralism. Deconstruction is a subset of poststructuralism; do not confuse one for the other.

Types of Poststructuralism

Concluded

- ★ New Historicism, which we'll cover separately later) is another subset of poststructuralism, most associated with Foucault and Greenblatt, that shows the play of ideological power within individuals subjected to discourse.
- ★ Other versions of poststructuralism include Baudrillard's hyperreality (the deconstruction of the image vs reality hierarchy) and French feminist Cixous's *écriture féminine* (the play of the text become the pleasure of the body).

Deconstruction

Deconstructing Language

- ★ Due to the everyday, practical, and conventional use of language, we think language is a stable structure, but it is actually a slippery, endlessly deferring play of the chain of signifiers that never arrives at the signified, especially in literature.
- ★ Deconstruction thus attends to the ironies and ambiguities valorized by New Criticism, but it does not seek to resolve tensions into an harmonious, universal, meaningful theme.

Deconstruction

Deconstructing the World

★ After showing language's instabilities, deconstruction turned to the foundations of being: by deconstructing language, deconstruction disrupts logocentrism, the ground of Western thought. Absolute and transcendental metaphysics give way to decentered and disseminated discourse.

Deconstruction

Deconstructing Identity

- ★ Just as language and belief are destabilized, so too is identity. There are neither *a priori* nor innate organizing principles; rather identity is subject to (thus the term “subjectivity”) the decentered, unstable, shifting play of language and discourse systems.
- ★ Deconstruction does not discount structuralism's belief in an underlying system of human thought, but it shows how this system is as playful and prone to slippage as the language/discourse system, which it believes produces subjectivity.

Deconstruction

Deconstructing Literature

- ★ Deconstruction either 1) analyzes how the meaning of the text is ultimately undecidable because the conflicts and contradictions within the text produces conflicting and contradictory interpretations (again, this method is the exact opposite of how New Critics seek to expose and then resolve the tensions of the text). . . .

Deconstruction

Deconstructing Literature, continued

★Or 2) analyzes how the text paradoxically privileges both terms of the binary oppositions that structures it or, similarly, how the privileged position ceaselessly slips back and forth between terms, without being resolved.

Poststructuralist Theorists

- ★ Michel Foucault: New Historicism
- ★ Jacques Derrida: deconstructive philosophy
- ★ Paul de Man: deconstructive literary criticism
- ★ J. L. Austin: philosophy of language
- ★ Judith Butler: gender and performance studies
- ★ Jean Baudrillard: hyperreality
- ★ Hélène Cixous: *écriture féminine*

Michel Foucault

- ★ Michel Foucault represents the New Historical wing of poststructuralism, which examines discontinuous history and subjective power politics.
- ★ After structuralism focused on structure at the expense of authors, Foucault reintegrates the author into literary studies, but with this caveat: the author is a function of discourse.

Michel Foucault

Continued

★ Foucault argues that the project of the penal school, which trains and disciplines inmates, has been diffused and disseminated into our culture, thus creating a penal society. Incarceration and behavior modification exist at all levels of society, including various institutions, laws, social networks, and other systems which work together to surveil the citizenry like a panopticon. Identity is produced by, subject to, and surveilled by the structures of the society.

Michel Foucault

Concluded

★ Foucault theorizes that the repression of sexual language causes a proliferation of sexual language; prohibition paradoxically yields transgressive permissiveness. As subjectivity becomes analyzed and regulated by discourse, a perverse pleasure of power penetrates discourse.

Jacques Derrida

- ★ Jacques Derrida represents the philosophical deconstruction wing of deconstruction, which unravels metaphysical hierarchies and decenters knowledge of the world.
- ★ Derrida argues that writing defies science because it cannot be measured. Writing is undecidable, exorbitant, and supplemental. Signs, words, and writing exist in question as an unclosable knowledge that renders inconclusive meaning.

Jacques Derrida

Continued

★ Using a major theme of Plato's *The Phaedrus*, which asserts that writing signals both the absence of the presence of the speaker and the death of truth, Derrida argues that writing constitutes a serious game or play of meaning that subtly supplants signification and exceeds truth in its very dissemination.

Paul de Man

- ★ Paul de Man represents the literary deconstruction wing of poststructuralism, which unravels binary hierarchies and reveals the indeterminacy of meaning within literary texts.
- ★ De Man aligns semiology with the formal grammar of literature and rhetoric with the figurative, persuasive tropes of literature. He argues that literary texts deconstruct themselves because literary writing pushes the contradiction and conflict between the rhetorical and semiological within itself to the extreme.

J. L. Austin

★ Building on linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist understanding of *langue* (the system of language) and *parole* (the individual utterance), the poststructuralist Austin argues that performative utterances, rather than describing reality, bring states of being into existence. If our reality consists of rhetorical force, then the binary opposition true/false is effectively deconstructed.

Judith Butler

- ★ Judith Butler represents the gender and performance studies wing of poststructuralism, which applies Austin's understanding of performative utterances as well as Foucauldian concepts of disciplinary power to the performance of gender identity.
- ★ Butler argues that identity is an effect of discursive power, and gender is a performative act, a discourse written on the body first by culture and then by the subject herself.

Jean Baudrillard

★ Jean Baudrillard, in a version of deconstruction which unravels the opposition between signifying image and signified reality, argues that postmodern culture renders a state of hyperreality. Baudrillard asserts that we live in a culture of endless mediation, images, and signs, which have neither underlying substance nor referential reality. Instead, only simulacra and simulations exist.

Hélène Cixous

★Hélène Cixous, in a version of deconstruction which renders the gender binary a fiction, argues for *l'écriture féminine* that vibrantly overflows with meaning as it writes beyond the bounds of the phallogocentric machine. The writing of the body liberates the self from the boundaries of symbolic logic.



Psychoanalysis

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Classical Theory

Psychoanalysis, as inaugurated by Sigmund Freud, analyzes the psyche, which, according to the theory, is a site of irrational and unconscious conflict between primal desires and traumatic realities. The following slides represent the core of Freud's theory regarding models of psyche, unconscious and repression, pleasure and reality, sexuality, basic disorders, and symptom and cure.

Repression and the Unconscious

- ★ Two interrelated concepts underly all of Freud's work
 - ★ Repression: the procedure by which the conflicts and realities which the psyche cannot rationally deal with are put out of one's conscious, waking mind
 - ★ Unconscious: the part of the psyche into which conflicts and traumas are repressed

Two Models of Psyche

I. Id/Ego/Superego

- ★ Id (it): instinct or drive, the bodily and biological basis of all psychic processes
 - ★ Most id drives like sex are repressed; however, the id does not equal the unconscious.
- ★ Ego (I): the self, which originally develops out of the id, but is tested by reality and influenced by people in reality
 - ★ The ego manages the demands of 1) the libido and id, 2) external reality, and 3) super-ego.
 - ★ Overwhelmed by super-ego or reality, the ego represses prohibited drives or trauma.

I. Id/Ego/Super-ego

Concluded

★ Ego, continued

★ Anxiety and psychic unrest signal the breakdown of the ego's management of its various relations.

★ Super-ego (over-I): family and societal influences, voice of authority

★ The super-ego represents the ideal of higher humanity (you ought to be like this--like your father) and the reaction-formation against prohibition (you may not be like this--like your father).

★ Paradoxically, the super-ego's prohibitive idealism can give pleasure; thus the libido can become fused to its own negation, causing neurotic desire, for instance.

Two Models of Psyche

2. Unconscious/Pre-conscious/Conscious

- ★ Unconscious: the site of conflict and trauma, what one has repressed, what one cannot know without analytical help (It's not that one doesn't know she is obsessively washing her hands, but rather that she can't explain why)
- ★ Pre-conscious: what one is not thinking, but could if one chose to (short and long-term memory)
- ★ Conscious: what one is presently aware of

Pleasure and Reality

- ★ Pleasure principle: originally simply a tension derived from a unsatisfied drive of an erogenous zone, but as the psyche develops memory and fantasy, pleasure is coded into non-genital action of primary process, imagination, dreamwork, and wish-fulfillment
- ★ Reality principle: the secondary process thought of reason and judgment which rivals and supersedes the pleasure principle, thereby installing the unconscious of repressed desires

Pleasure and Reality

Continued

- ★ Eros vs Thanatos: undergirding the pleasure and reality principles, which exist in the order of the ego, are primal instincts, which exist in the irrational realm of the id.
- ★ Eros: the life instinct, pleasure derived from creation, love and affection
- ★ Thanatos: the death instinct, pleasure derived from (self-)destruction, hate and aggression

Pleasure and Reality

Concluded

- ★ Art: a reconciliation between pleasure and reality principles, a sublime working through of Eros and Thanatos.
- ★ Sublimation: the fulfillment of basic bodily drives via transformation into something “better,” civilized and artistic

Sexuality

- ★ Freud theorizes that humans pass through four stages of sexuality as they grow from infants to sexually active adults.
- ★ These stages seek to 1) localize desire from polymorphous perversity to genital pleasure and 2) transfer auto-erotic pleasure to others in the cause of heterosexual reproduction.
- ★ If a conflict or trauma in one of these stages is not resolved, then neurosis, psychosis, or perversity could result.

Sexuality

Continued

- ★ 1) oral, in which the mouth is the site of satisfaction,
- ★ 2) sadistic-anal, in which biting and excretion afford pleasure,
- ★ 3) phallic, in which the child undergoes the Oedipal complex of desire for the mother, rivalry with the father, and appropriate super-ego guilt taught through castration anxiety which causes the child to desire others outside the family; and the period of sexual latency which follows
 - ★ (Note: just because you don't remember your Oedipal complex doesn't mean it didn't happen. You were a toddler, and guilt veils or represses memory.)
- ★ 4) genital, green light for heterosexual reproduction

Three Basic Disorders

- ★ **Neurosis:** overwhelmed by reality and super-ego, the ego flees reality by suppressing id, desire, conflict, or trauma it cannot manage
- ★ **Psychosis:** with no support from the super-ego, the ego forecloses upon and remodels reality according to unchecked id, desire, conflict, or trauma
- ★ **Perversion:** due to a founding trauma which it disavows the reality of, the ego gives up real sexual pleasure for a symbolic substitute

Symptom and Cure

- ★ Everyone represses, but those for whom the unconscious causes debilitating suffering seek treatment with a psychoanalyst.
- ★ Symptom: manifest expression of unconscious conflict or trauma, a return of the repressed in somatic and agential form
- ★ Talking cure: the purpose of psychoanalysis is to reveal to the conscious mind through analytical discourse the unconscious underlying symptoms
- ★ Active Reversal: once an analysand realizes her unconscious conflicts, she can consciously seek to reverse them through new ways of being toward self, others, and the world

Lacanian Psychoanalysis

Three Orders or Realms

★ **Imaginary:** Initiated by the Mirror Stage in which the infant, feeling fragmented and inchoate, derives a sense of self and wholeness by looking at an image, the Imaginary Order constitutes the pre-verbal realm of images in which the child feels complete and unified with the Desire of the Mother.

Lacanian Psychoanalysis

Continued

★ Symbolic Order: Inaugurated by the Name-of-the-Father, i.e., the father's prohibition in language ("No") that breaks the dyadic bond of child and mother, the Symbolic Order is the realm of metonymic desire for the other, for the subject is always searching for the little lost object of desire, *objet petit a*, but only discovers a chain of signifying representations of it in the Big Other, the social rituals, cultural rules, and language system that...

Lacanian Psychoanalysis

Symbolic Order, continued

- ★...can only offer symbolic substitutes for the (primal maternal) presence which it lacks because it lost it via its entrance into language. The Symbolic Order splits the subject into conscious language and unconscious trauma over loss and desire for fullness.

Lacanian Psychoanalysis

Concluded

★ Real: Alternatively, that realm which exists beyond or outside both Imaginary being and Symbolic meaning; or that moment of subjective destitution in which one sees through the chain of signifiers of the Symbolic Order and the ideology of the Big Other and is traumatized by the hollow kernel of nothingness, deprived of meaning and bereft of being.

Practice

- ★ Whereas New Criticism closely reads and resolves the tensions inherent in the text itself...
- ★ Whereas Structuralism and Semiotics find the text's underling narrative grammars, genre conventions, or sign systems, universal patterns...
- ★ Whereas Poststructuralism and Deconstruction expose the shift and playfulness that renders the text's meaning undecidable...

Practice

Concluded

- ★ Psychoanalytic literary criticism, using the principles of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, looks at the looks at the psyche and the psychological anxieties and issues of a literary text's
 - ★ Characters
 - ★ Author or Culture
 - ★ Reader or Society

Theorists

- ★ Sigmund Freud
- ★ Harold Bloom
- ★ Jacques Lacan
- ★ Julia Kristeva
- ★ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari
- ★ Laura Mulvey
- ★ Slavoj Žižek

Sigmund Freud

- ★ Argues that dreams are a substitutive thought-process which rework memories and experiences from either 1) the id as disguised expressions of repressed wish-fulfillment or 2) the ego as problem-solving expressions of deep-rooted or everyday life conflicts and traumas.
- ★ Dreams may be interpreted by breaking down the manifest content, which operates according to rules of condensation and displacement as well as conditions of representability and intelligibility, in order to glean the latent content of what the dream really means.

Sigmund Freud

Continued

★ Dreams, continued

- ★ The goal of dream interpretation is to work through rational, conscious secondary process thought to know the irrational, unconscious primary process thought that undergirds it.
- ★ Argues that the uncanny constitutes a familiar yet unconscious knowledge (for instance, of death and mortality), which had been concealed and repressed but which is now returning.

Sigmund Freud

Concluded

- ★ Argues that fetishism stems from a sexual trauma which is paradoxically recognized but disavowed such that sexual pleasure becomes confused with, if not wholly dependent upon, a symbolic substitute.
- ★ For example, the child recognizes his mother's castration but disavows it. Consequently, his sexuality unconsciously focuses on and develops around a memory just prior to the castration event, for instance, looking down at his mother's shoes before he looked up at her (castrated) genitals.

Harold Bloom

★ Defines the anxiety of influence as the recognition that one's poetic identity is in peril because his poetry is belated and secondary to his poetic forefathers'. Poetic history is read as a Freudian family romance in which the strong poet not only wrestles with his rival father but also unconsciously mis-interprets and re-vises his father's poetry in order to generate what he thinks is his own utterly original creation.

Jacques Lacan

★ Argues that the ego is created in the mirror stage when the infant, who is uncoordinated and inchoate, looks at a caregiver or mirror and internalizes that coherent image as the support structure of his identity, thus inaugurating the self as a fictional, alien, and othered ideal construct designed to contain formlessness and the self's primary desire to live up to the demands of the (Other) man in the mirror.

Jacques Lacan

Continued

- ★ Argues that the subject is a slave of language. After the mirror stage which forms an imaginary, dyadic relationship between mother and child, the child is forced into the symbolic order of the father's and society's language, which represses his original ontological relationship with the world of his mother into the unconscious.
- ★ Consequently, the subject desires to reconstitute his primal way of being, but cannot because language can only represent, it cannot realize. Desire becomes an neverending chain of metonymy.

Jacques Lacan

Concluded

- ★ Argues that the phallus is not the real penis, but rather a signifying symbol of power, wholeness, and presence which everyone desires to possess because everyone feels castrated after their entry into the patriarchal symbolic, which severs their imaginary maternal relationship.
- ★ Although everyone wants to appear to have and to be the phallus because of the power it entails, no one really has it because it is just a signifier which slips through our grasp.

Julia Kristeva

★ Argues that poetry constitutes a revolutionary breakthrough of the chora, the maternal non-expressive totality of drives which precedes figuration and underlies signification, into the symbolic, the patriarchal realm of relational and representational,thetic and ideational language. The resulting semiotic engenders figuration marked by the unconscious.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

- ★ Argue for a minor literature that deterritorializes the major literature's boundaries of meaning and then enriches it from within.
- ★ Argue that books should be read as plateaus of unrestrained and unbounded, deterritorialized and destratified desire that neither rests nor climaxes, but simply becomes and flows.
- ★ Meaning is rhizomatic; it breaks free of the bounded root system and flies into an a-centered, non-hierarchical, non-signifying, root network that shatters linear unity and semantic meaning.

Laura Mulvey

★ Argues that narrative film gives pleasure to audiences, male and female alike, by influencing them to narcissistically identify with male heroes and voyeuristically turn women characters into fetishistic objects of the male desirous gaze.

Slavoj Žižek

★ Argues that courtly love is a masochistic, masked performance scripted and authorized by the man who plays the slave to the master Lady, who is not only an ideal Other but an inaccessible thing that functions as a “black hole” around which the subject’s desire is structured,” thereby demonstrating how desire constitutes an infinite postponement and impossible detour.



Marxism and Cultural Studies

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Marxism

Theory

Marxism, named after economic, political, and cultural philosopher Karl Marx, is a school of thought that examines how politically endorsed economic systems structure societies (organized communities) and cultures (the beliefs and values of communities).

Society

According to Marxism, societies are composed of two elements.

- ★ **Base: economics**

- ★ the material modes of production

- ★ **Superstructure: sociopolitical ideology**

- ★ the culture such as education, philosophy, religion, government, arts, and science

Class

Within a society, people are divided into classes.

- ★ (Socio-)economic class: a group of people categorized by a particular relationship to economic and social power, i.e., its relationship to the base and superstructure
- ★ bourgeoisie: in a capitalist system, those who own and control the base and implement the superstructure
- ★ proletariat: in a capitalist system, those who manage (but neither own nor control) the base and are programmed by the superstructure

Types of Societies

Marxism predominantly looks at three kinds of societies.

- ★ **Capitalism:** a free-market economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods
- ★ The bourgeoisie own the capital while the proletariat hire their bodies for wages (wage labor).

Types of Societies

Continued

- ★ **Socialism:** the stage after the proletarian revolution when a society is changing from capitalism to communism
- ★ The people control the means of production and operate it based on fairness rather than free-market.

Types of Societies

Concluded

- ★ **Communism:** the political theory in which all property and wealth is owned in a classless society by all the members of a community
- ★ Although the former Soviet Union and the present China and Cuba, for example, call themselves communist, they are oligarchies (government by a small group of people) and dictatorships (government by one ruler).
- ★ Although communism is the goal of Marxism, many, Marxists included, consider it a utopian dream, and instead focus on achieving at least class consciousness in the culture and socialism in the government at best.

The Dialectical Materialist View of History

- ★ Materialism: focus on the physical and worldly wealth and possessions, based on the belief that the mind follows the body
- ★ History: study of the past and how the past progresses into the present and future

Dialectical Materialism

Concluded

- ★ Dialectic: the progressive process by which two opposing thoughts, thesis and antithesis, become combined in a unified whole or synthesis
- ★ Dialectical materialism: the historical process by which opposing forces such as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat or the material reality and a culture's consciousness of its material reality perpetually struggle to bring about a justly organized and self-reflective society
- ★ Praxis: method by which theory is put into practice

Ideology and Consciousness

- ★ Ideology: originally and generically, a belief system brought about by cultural conditioning that portrays arbitrary structures of existence as natural and innate ways of being, such as capitalist ideology or Marxist ideology
- ★ However, after Althusser, the term has come to mean in many instances how the culture blinds an oppressed class to its material conditions of existence by erecting an illusion; common ideologies that operate in the service of American capitalism and those who hold power under capitalism are the American dream, patriotism, religion, individualism, consumerism.

Ideology and Consciousness

Continued

- ★ Alienation: originally from Marx, meaning the estrangement from one's own labor
- ★ However, the term now also suggests the estrangement from self and society, and the feeling of not belonging and subsequent withdrawal from the world.

Ideology and Consciousness

Continued

- ★ **Commodification:** treating objects and people for their economic or social status rather than for their aesthetic or human value
- ★ **Commodification of Desire:** humanity's wants and needs become entangled in conspicuous consumption and commodity fetish such that the ruling class does not need to physically oppress the classes that are under them if those classes purposefully sacrifice themselves as wage-slaves in order to acquire the stuff that the ideology programmed them to fixate on

Ideology and Consciousness

Concluded

- ★ **Class consciousness:** awareness of the (alienating and commodified) socioeconomic conditions of one's class
- ★ **False consciousness:** the lack of awareness or ideological illusions of one's conditions of existence

The Goal of Marxism

The goal of Marxist theory is to use a dialectical materialist view of history to reveal the ideologically constructed false consciousness of the alienated and commodified classes (both bourgeoisie and proletariat, or upper- middle-, and lowerclasses) in order that the socioeconomic conditions of existence be changed toward communist ends.

Marxist Literary Criticism

Whereas New Critics closely read the text to find its universal theme...While structuralist critics examine the structure of literary genres, the grammar of narrative patterns, or the literary conventions of reading...Whereas poststructuralist critics revel in the shifting, paradoxical, and playful meanings of the work...While psychoanalytic critics interpret the unconscious conflicts of the psyche, Marxist literary critics approach a text in two ways, which can be applied singularly or simultaneously.

Marxist Literary Criticism

Continued

- ★ The Marxist critic looks “inside” the content of the text (for example, at the character and plot) for issues, ideas, and themes relating to the materialist history of capitalist socioeconomic class struggle.
- ★ The critic interprets how the work of literature *either* exposes and challenges *or* manifests and reifies class ideology.

Marxist Literary Criticism

Concluded

- ★ The Marxist critic looks “outside” the text at the level of form (at the genre, period, or movement of the work) and oftentimes at general types of texts, to determine how the class of text derives from and/or reifies its society’s dominant mode of production and/or superstructure.
- ★ First, the critic evaluates whether the form employs realism or experimentation, and then she evaluates whether the realist or experimental form serves ideological or revolutionary ends.

Cultural Studies

Theory

★Akin to the poststructuralist version of Marxism as represented by Louis Althusser, cultural criticism examines the underlying ideology of culture. Unlike classical Marxism which is interested in the conflict between the capitalists and the proletariat, cultural studies focuses on the tension between high/superior and low/inferior culture, an opposition blurred by popular culture, and uses Marxism, feminism, and other political theories to advocate for the oppressed.

Cultural Studies

Criticism

- ★ Cultural criticism examines the enculturated behavior and value systems as well as the social structures and social understanding invoked by the literary work in not only its characters but also its readers; and it often looks at the experience of the culturally marginalized.

Marxism

Theorists

- ★ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels
- ★ G. W. F. Hegel
- ★ Antonio Gramsci
- ★ Louis Althusser [ALT-whos-sair]
- ★ Pierre Macherey

Marxism

Theorists

- ★ Leon Trotsky
- ★ György (Georg) Lukács [lou-KOTCH]
- ★ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno
- ★ Walter Benjamin [ben-yeh-MEEN]
- ★ Antonio Gramsci [GRAWM-shee]
- ★ Louis Althusser [ALT-whos-sair]
- ★ Fredric Jameson

Leon Trotsky

- ★ Argues for a criticism, which is scientific like Formalism and socially progressive like Futurism, but which does not get lost in the abstract world of autonomous and pure bourgeois art that is disconnected from the real social conditions of the world.
- ★ Argues that artistic progress should not be governmentally controlled, like Socialist Realism, but rather will occur as part of dialectical history because human imagination is tied to economic

György (Georg) Lukács

- ★ Argues that there are three kinds of literature: 1) anti-realist or pseudo-realist, 2) avant-garde or modern(ist), and 3) realism.
- ★ While 1) and 2) eschew reality, only “creative” realism portrays a “totality” of complex yet unified reality that supports the dialectic materialist critique of alienation as the fact of life under capitalism by cutting beneath the “appearance” of life and arriving at its true “essence.”

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno

- ★ Argue how the business of mass culture and art as entertainment suppresses individualized consciousness, eradicates consumer imagination, and programs audiences to become types who experience pleasure only in its prepackaged, canned form--on film.
- ★ Such taming of the masses makes them socio-, politico-, and economically complacent.

Walter Benjamin

★ Argues that the change in the capitalist technological base transforms the superstructure, in particular that the introduction of mechanical reproduction and the move from painting to photography and film causes the exclusive cult of ritualized yet apperceptive and critical value of artistic aura to be supplanted by exhibition value designed for distracting and entertaining mass appeal.

Louis Althusser

- ★ Argues that art should not only observe an internal distance from but also reveal ideology, by which he means the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.
- ★ Argues that Ideological State Apparatuses interpellate individuals as subjects so that external, repressive power is unnecessary because subjects submit freely to the State and accept their subjugation.

Fredric Jameson

★ Argues that postmodernism constitutes a reaction to high modernism that blurs high and mass culture, supplants parody with pastiche, and loses a sense of bourgeois subjectivity, accessible history, and material space.

Cultural Studies

Theorists

★ Stuart Hall

★ Dick Hebdige

