



# Interpretive Theory New Criticism to the Present

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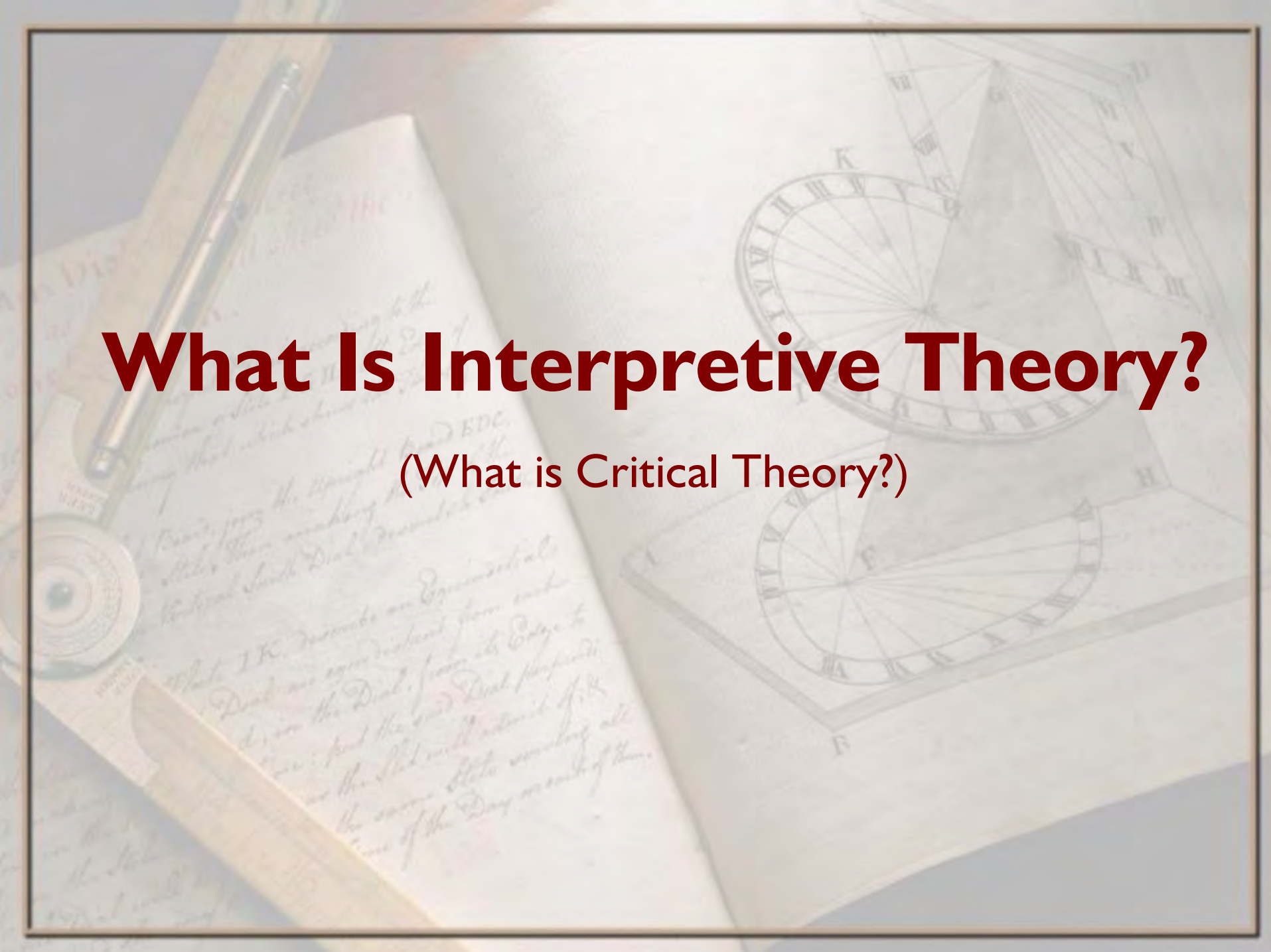
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# What Is Interpretive Theory?

(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 which 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

(At least not explicitly)

- ★ Structuralism and Semiotics, the analysis of signs and codes within linguistic systems and literary conventions
- ★ Feminist Criticism, the analysis of the position of women within texts and women authors within the canon
- ★ Queer Theory, the analyses of ideological codes and sexual problematics

# What We Won't Cover

Continued

- ★ New Historicism and Cultural Studies, the interplay between literature and history writing and/or cultural analyses
- ★ Postcolonialism and African American Criticism, analyses of cultural othering and diasporas
- ★ Reader-Response Criticism, the relationships between readers and texts



# What We Will Cover

- ★ New Criticism, close reading of the text itself, paying particular heed to its unifying tensions
- ★ Poststructuralism and Deconstruction, the analysis of a literary text's plays of meaning within, against, and beyond established patterns and norms

# What We Will Cover

Continued

- ★ **Marxist Criticism**, socio-economic historical analyses of textual production and literary themes
- ★ **Psychoanalytic Criticism**, the analysis of the psyche of the text, author, reader, and culture
- ★ **Phenomenology and Existentialism**, the analysis of the ontological status and effects of literature



# The New Criticism

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# Theory and Practice

- ★ 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

# 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

# Cleanth Brooks

- ★ 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

# John Crowe Ransom

- ★ “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

# **William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley**

- ★ **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





# Poststructuralism

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# Structuralism

## Theory

In order to understand poststructuralism, we should know a bit about structuralism. 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.

# Structuralism

## 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.



# Structuralism

## 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.

# Structuralism

## 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.

# Structuralism

## 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.**



# Structuralism

## Practice

- ★ Whereas New Criticism looks at *what* a text means, 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.

# 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

- ★ 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
  - ★ Derrida's différance
  - ★ Foucault's discontinuous history

# 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.
- ★ Derrida's decentered subject of discourse
- ★ Lacan's subject exists only in relation to the Big Other
- ★ 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 is another subset of poststructuralism, most associated with Foucault and Butler, 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 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
- ★ Judith Butler: gender and performance studies
- ★ Paul de Man: deconstructive literary criticism
- ★ Jacques Derrida: deconstructive philosophy
- ★ 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 dissiminated 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 surveiled 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.

# Judith Butler

- ★ Judith Butler represents the gender and performance studies wing of poststructuralism, which applies 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.

# 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.



# 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.

# 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.



# Marxism and Marxist Literary Criticism

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# 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.



# 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 a text looking for formal tensions, content-driven ironies, aesthetic issues, and universal meanings, poststructuralists in general show the shifting of meaning, and deconstructionists in particular deconstruct binary hierarchies of meaning to reveal aporias and undecidable ideologies, 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.



# Marxist Literary 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 reality.

# 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.

# Antonio Gramsci

- ★ Argues that there are two kinds of intellectuals, the organic entrepreneur who seeks to disrupt power through real action (praxis) and the traditional academic, assimilated by the ruling class, who seeks to preserve historical continuity through idealism.
- ★ Articulates the idea of cultural “hegemony” which causes the masses to give “spontaneous consent” to the dominating groups rules.



# 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 one should “Always historicize!” by looking at a text from three concentric levels:
  - ★ First, political history, which considers the text as a symbolic act that offers a univocal, ideological statement.
  - ★ Second, society, which considers the text to be part of a larger discourse involving the dialectical and dialogical class struggle between ideology and reality.
  - ★ Third, history, which considers the text’s ideology of form by analyzing the genre, system, or mode of production from which it is derived in order to determine if it is historically revolutionary or simply regressive and reifying.

# Fredric Jameson

Concluded

★ 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.



# Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism

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# 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

# Practice

- ★ Whereas New Criticism closely reads and resolves the tensions inherent in the text itself, poststructuralism plays with shifting meaning, and Marxist literary criticism looks at the alienating effects of material, socioeconomic existence both inside and outside texts,
- ★ Psychoanalytic literary criticism looks at the psyche and 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



# 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.

# Existential Phenomenology

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# Existentialism

## Theory

Existentialism is a philosophy that regards the world to be absurd and cruel at worst and arbitrary and contingent at best. Therefore, the self that exists in the hostile or meaningless world is alienated and self-doubting at worst and self-conscious and self-created at best.

If nothing is absolute or guaranteed, then everything is possible and the human being is forced to be free, to exist without essence— to experience and to live, to act in the world, to create himself and his possibilities.



# Existentialism

## Criticism

Existentialist criticism interprets *either* how estranged characters confront the radically contingent and harsh realities of existence *or* the work's theme about said existence.

Do characters fail, flail, or flee in the face of the cruel void, or do they self-consciously define themselves and the conditions of their existence as they traverse the meaningless world? What does the work say about how to be, to exist, to live in the world?

# Phenomenology

## Theory

Phenomenology is the study of how the outside, objective world of reality is understood by the mind. While some theorize that one's consciousness actively projects ideas onto the world (idealism), others argue that consciousness passively observes objective reality (empiricism). Either way, epistemology (how we know) determines ontology (who we are as beings).

The subject's consciousness exists in relationship with the world. For some, that relationship is reciprocal while for others that relationship is not. Either way, like existentialism, the key to phenomenology is the subject's relationship with the world.

# Phenomenology

## Criticism

Phenomenological criticism examines the work of literature as a transactional consciousness, a dialogical or dialectical intermediary between the consciousnesses of the writer and the reader.

What experience of the world does the text convey to the reader? Is it the author's reality or her imagination? Is it an artistic and autonomous world of literature?

Does the text repeat the experience of the author to the reader, or does it transform that experience into a form of literary consciousness sprung from but ultimately separate from the author?



# Existential Phenomenology

## Theory

Existential phenomenology combines existentialism's alienated self-creation in the meaningless world with phenomenology's interest in the consciousness of subject/object relations. However, while phenomenology places epistemology prior to ontology, existential phenomenology puts being before knowledge.

The self is conscious of the world's arbitrariness, becomes self-conscious of its own lack, and then either flees into the abyss or fights to be free by actively creating artistic phenomenon that change the conditions of existence.

# Existential Phenomenology

## Criticism

Critics who employ existential phenomenology ask how the work of literature not only exists as a statement that reveals the underlying ontology of the world but also creates an artistic, conscious thing that serves as the author's purposeful and significant action within the real world.

What is the ontological value of the work of literature in existence? What does the work do to illuminate and/or change the consciousness of our existential condition, of our being-in-the-world?

# Theorists



- ★ Wolfgang Iser
- ★ Georges Poulet
- ★ Martin Heidegger
- ★ Jean-Paul Sartre
- ★ Simone de Beauvoir



# Wolfgang Iser

- ★ Theorizes that interpretation is structured by the interaction between text and reader. The text has regulatory codes that guide interpretation, but they are fragmented and dissolved within the work. More importantly, the blanks in the text drive the interaction and thus interpretation, which is constantly being revised as the reader gains new information from the continually expanding field of the text.

# George Poulet

★ Employs a phenomenological approach and argues that the reader, in the act of reading, becomes a vehicle for another consciousness, the author's. During the act of reading, the reader alternately shares his consciousness with another and becomes that other. The job of the critic is to find the subject that organized the literary object.

# Martin Heidegger

★ Argues that language gathers being and, therefore, although the human is *not* created by language the being *is* spoken by language. The language, the speech, which reveals being purely is poetry, is literature. The poetic imagination enunciates the relationship of being-in-the-world. While language in general bids the world to come near, the poem in particular calls the world into being through an act of disclosure.



# Jean-Paul Sartre

★ Argues that writing constitutes an appeal to the other and the world for recognition and freedom. Reading, on the other hand, is the faithful completion of the writer's creation. The literary word is a transcendent creation between writer and reader. Taken together, writing and reading form a dialectic of freedom and responsibility.

# Simone de Beauvoir

★ Argues that woman is conceived as a mysterious myth, a falsely essentialized object, an absolute Other, who cannot exist in reciprocal relationship with the the existentially free man whose self is defined by his experience. Instead, she argues that both women and men should be thought of as existents whose subjectivity is comprised of their actions and should relate to one another as free, experiential selves.