

What Is Critical Theory?

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English 3900

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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 Will Cover

- ★ **New Criticism (and Russian Formalism):** close reading of the text itself, paying particular heed to its unifying tensions and analysis of internal form.
- ★ **Psychoanalysis:** the analysis of the psyche of the author, text, and culture
- ★ **Marxism (and Cultural Studies):** socio-economic historical and cultural analyses

What We Will Cover

Concluded

- ★ **Feminism and Gender Studies:** analyses based on the the agency of women in the patriarchy as well as socially constructed gender identity.
- ★ **Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Theory:** analyses of the politics and poetics, consciousness and unconsciousness of (queer) sexuality and identity.
- ★ **Postcolonialism:** analyses of colonial ideology (oppression and othering) and postcolonial resistance.

What We May Cover

Based on Student Group Selections

- ★ **Cognitive Criticism:** analyses of literature from the perspective of cognitive science and evolutionary psychology
- ★ **Existentialism and Phenomenology:** examines the self-conscious subjectivity and free choice of characters, creative writing as meaningful action, and the being of the literary work in the world.
- ★ **Reader-Response Criticism:** analyses based on the transactional, affective, subjective relationship between author, text, and reader.

What We May Cover

Continued

- ★ Post-Structuralism (and Deconstruction and Post-Modernism): the analysis of a text's plays, slippages, and aporias of meaning
- ★ Structuralism (and Semiotics and Narratology): the analysis of signs and codes within linguistic systems
- ★ African-American Criticism: analyses of African-American (literary/aesthetic) history and heritage and the social construction of racial identity

What We May Cover

Concluded

- ★ Ecocriticism: analyses of literature from the ecological, environmental, and natural perspective

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Formalist Criticism: Liberal Humanism, New Criticism, and Russian Formalism

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Liberal Humanism

- ★ Before the rise of theory in the 1970s, the study of literature was non-political and non-theoretical.
- ★ Now, those who study literature and espouse neither a political (Marxism, feminism, postcolonialism, etc.) nor a theoretical (poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, reader-response, etc.) critical approach are called liberal humanists.

Liberal Humanism

Tenets

- ★ Literature is timeless and significant,
- ★ Transcending socio-political, literary-historical, and autobiographical context,
- ★ Thereby necessitating close reading in isolation,
- ★ In order to determine the transcendental meaning of the text, which coincides with some essential aspect of human nature,
- ★ Determined by interpreting the meaning of the text's characters, who are individuals, i.e., transcendent subjects.

Liberal Humanism

Tenets, concluded

- ★ Literature enhances life
- ★ By unifying literary form with the content of human values
- ★ In a sincere, authentic manner
- ★ That shows rather than tells,
- ★ Thereby requiring a literary critic to mediate between the text and the reader.

New Criticism

- ★ Influenced by I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis's practical 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.

The Relationship

Between Liberal Humanism, New Criticism,
and Russian Formalism

★ Liberal Humanism values literature as timeless and transcendent; New Criticism constitutes the formalization and systematization of this in America during the 1930s and 1940s against the backdrop of non-political, non-theoretical liberal humanism; and Russian Formalism of the 1910s to 1930s is American New Criticism's Russian cousin.

The Question

That New Critics Pose

- ★ What single interpretation of the text best establishes its organic unity? In other words, how do the text's formal elements, and the multiple meanings those elements produce, all work together to support the theme, or overall meaning, of the work? Remember, a great work will have a theme of universal human significance. (Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today* 150)

John Crowe Ransom

New Critic

★ In “Criticism, Inc.” advocates for a scientific and systematic “business of criticism.”

Cleanth Brooks

New Critic

- ★ In “The Heresy of Paraphrase,” argues that paraphrasing the poem violates the meaning of the poem.
- ★ Advocates for analyzing the irony (the general incongruity of forces within the poem), the paradox (the poem makes contradictory statements), and the ambiguity (the multiplicity of connotive meaning within the poem). . . .

Cleanth Brooks

Concluded

- ★ After determining the irony, paradox, and ambiguity, argues that the formalist critic should look at how the poem resolves ironies, paradoxes, and ambiguities and achieves organic unity (the poem is an harmonic whole).
- ★ Believes that the structure of the poem is part of the meaning of the poem: “Form is content.”

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**

T. S. Eliot

Liberal Humanist

- ★ *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

F. R. Leavis

Liberal Humanist

- ★ *Although some consider Leavis a New Critic because of his practical criticism, his version of formalism includes life and society in a way that exceeds New Criticism focus on the text itself.*
- ★ **Art and Life:** Great writers not only change the possibilities of the forms of art, thereby establishing the literary tradition, but also the awareness of the possibilities of life. They “satis[fy] the rival claims of life and art” both by innovating in form and method and by being alive to the spirit of the age.

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Psychoanalytic Criticism

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Psychoanalytic Criticism

Applies Psychoanalytic Theory

- ★ While the formalism approaches (Liberal Humanism, New Criticism, Russian Formalism) focuses on the meaning derived from the literary text itself, the psychoanalytic approach applies psychoanalysis and focuses on psychological issues of literature and is derived from psychoanalytic theory.

Classical Theory

Freudianism

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, of which it disavows the reality, 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

Neo-Freudianism

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 such as her primary caregiver or her reflection in a mirror, 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

Symbolic Order

★ 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 the castrated loss and subsequent desire for fullness.

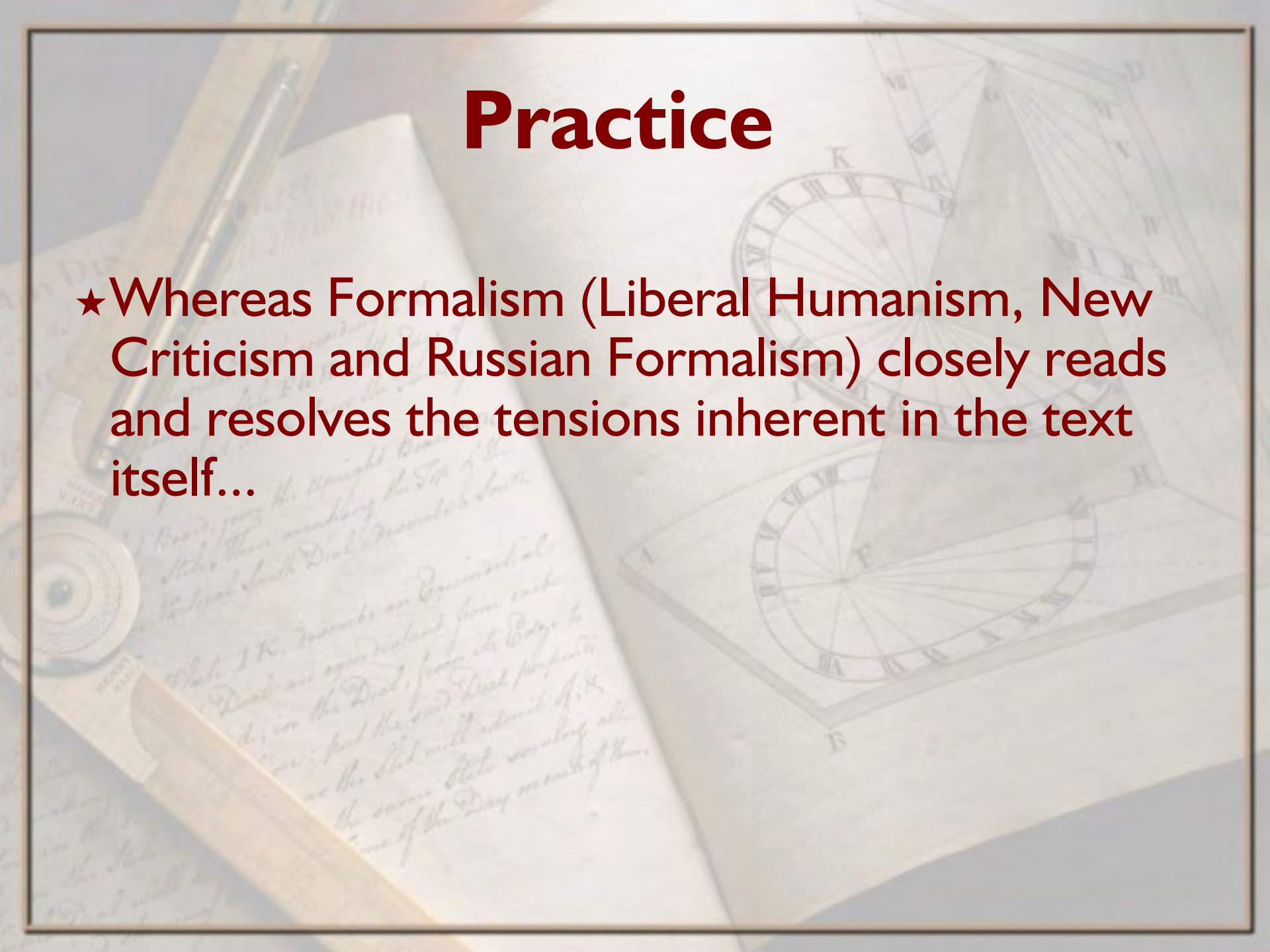
Lacanian Psychoanalysis

The Real

- ★ 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 Symbolic meaning and bereft of Imaginary being.

Practice

★ Whereas Formalism (Liberal Humanism, New Criticism and Russian Formalism) closely reads and resolves the tensions inherent in the text itself...



Practice

Concluded

- ★ Psychoanalytic literary criticism, using the principles of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, looks at the unconscious psyche as well as the anxieties and desires of a literary text's
 - ★ Narrators or Characters
 - ★ Author or Culture
 - ★ Form or Genre
 - ★ Reader or Society

Theorists

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

Sigmund Freud

From *The Interpretation of Dreams*

- ★ 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

From “The Uncanny”

★ 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 (for instance by looking at dolls; refer also to the uncanny valley in contemporary animation).

Sigmund Freud

“Fetishism”

- ★ 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

From *The Anxiety of Influence*

★ 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

“The Mirror Stage”

- ★ 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

“The Signification of the Phallus”

- ★ 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

From *Revolution in Poetic Language*

★ 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

From A Thousand Plateaus

- ★ Argue that books should be read as plateaus of unrestrained and (contra Freud's Oedipal complex) 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

“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”

★ 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

“The Hitchcockian Blot”

★ Argues how the films of Alfred Hitchcock feature meaningless stains, or “remainder[s] of the real,” that stick out and provide surplus knowledge that does not fit within the Symbolic Order, thus shifting the film from (symbolic) reality to the traumatic Real in which we encounter the threatening gaze of the other and the piece of the Real.

Kelly Oliver

“Witnessing and Testimony”

- ★ Defines the subject as a dynamic between subject position (one’s specific social and historical perspective) and subjectivity (the social effects that create one’s unconscious psyche) and argues that the subject is ethically responsible for not only one’s actions but also the effects of one’s emotions and unconscious on others.

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Marxist Criticism And Cultural Studies

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English 3900

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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
- ★ The two basic classes in classical Marxism:
 - ★ 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

Class

Continued

- ★ In contemporary America, the classes are more complicated than the bourgeoisie and the proletariat:
- ★ Lower class, lower-middle class, middle class, upper-middle class, upper class
- ★ Working class, middle class, affluent professional, executive elite (from Jean Anyon)
- ★ Working poor
- ★ Intellectual class (from Antonio Gramsci)
- ★ The 99% and the 1% (2012 presidential election)
- ★ Essential workers (2020 coronavirus pandemic)

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
- ★ **Capital:** Money used to make more money, either by purchasing goods or labor to make goods and selling for profit
- ★ **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 world (for example, 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

Commodity Value

★ Three Types of Value

- ★ Use Value: the utilitarian value of a commodity based on its use (the value of an iPhone to an individual user)
- ★ Exchange Value: the market value of a commodity based on its raw material, labor, and production costs (the value of an iPhone based on design, material, labor, production, and shipping costs)
- ★ Sign Exchange Value: the value of a commodity based on its status (the value of an iPhone based on the coolness, hipness, and hype of Apple iDevices)

Commodification

- ★ **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
- ★ **Reification:** the alienating way that commodification reduces social relations, ideas, and people to things

Ideology and Consciousness

- ★ Ideology: in classical Marxism, 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, in contemporary Marxism, the term has come to mean (because of Althusser) 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, and consumerism.

Ideology and Consciousness

Continued

- ★ Interpellation: from Althusser, the ideological and economic system reproduces itself by implicitly hailing us as subjects who passively and unconsciously support the dominant social assumptions
- ★ 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 to and subsequent withdrawal from the world.

Ideology and Consciousness

Concluded

- ★ Hegemony (from Antonio Gramsci): domination of one social class over others through the use of cultural power and influence that creates the consent of the masses
- ★ Organic Intellectuals: leaders who rise from within the masses to use civil society to speak for the people
- ★ 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

Marxist Literary Criticism

While New Critics closely read the text to find its universal theme, and

While psychoanalytic critics interpret the unconscious conflicts of the psyche of the author, characters, readers, and culture,

Marxist literary critics approach a text as detached scholars examining economic and class issues both inside and outside of the text, cultural advocates revealing the text's ideological or revolutionary forces, and/or both.

Marxist Literary Criticism

Inside the Text

- ★ The objective 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 supportive Marxist critic interprets how the work of literature *either* exposes and challenges *or* manifests and reifies class ideology.

Marxist Literary Criticism

Outside the Text

- ★ The objective Marxist critic looks “outside” the text at the author’s class, the literary genre and period, the readers’ social assumptions, and the literary form’s politics to determine how the class of text derives from and/or reifies its society’s dominant mode of production.
- ★ The supportive Marxist 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.

Marxist Criticism

Theorists

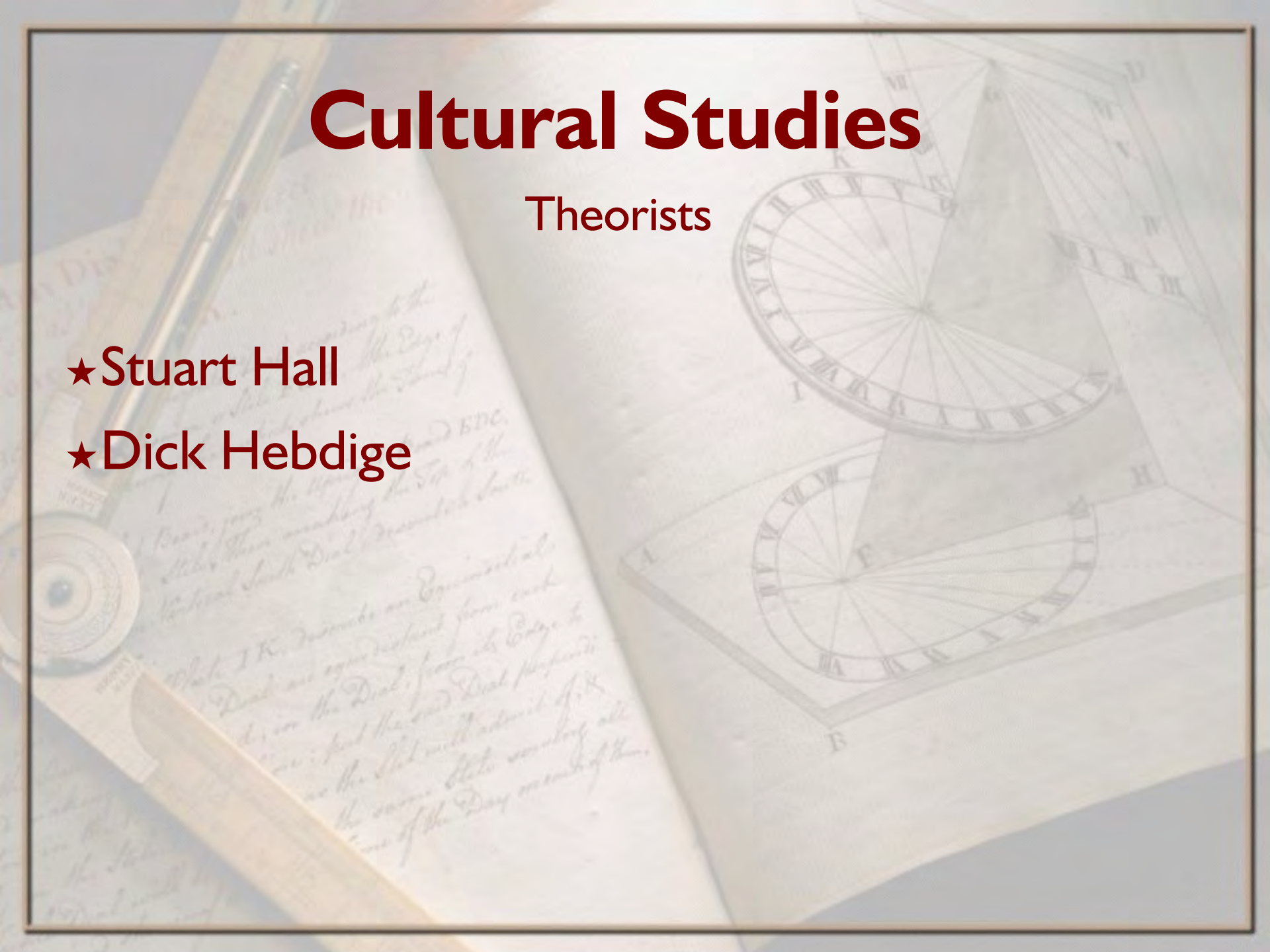
- ★ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels
- ★ Terry Eagleton
- ★ György (Georg) Lukács [lou-KOTCH]
- ★ Walter Benjamin [ben-yeh-MEEN]
- ★ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno
- ★ Raymond Williams
- ★ Fredric Jameson
- ★ Louis Althusser [ALT-whos-sair]

Cultural Studies

Theorists

★ Stuart Hall

★ Dick Hebdige



Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

★ From *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: In capitalist production, the worker is estranged from the object of her labor and “sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities.” Two classes develop, property-owners and propertyless workers.

Marx and Engels

Continued

★ From *German Ideology*: Ideologies such as morality, religion, and metaphysics disregard the actual means of production and social relations of men and create a false consciousness of history and real life.

Marx and Engels

Continued

★ From “The Communist Manifesto”: Describe the transformation from feudalism to capitalism via the rise of the bourgeoisie who “agglomerated production, and ...concentrated property in a few hands” and then theorize the rise of the proletariat, “the modern working class” *against* the bourgeoisie, and concludes with an ideal list of social goals for advanced, communist countries, including abolition of private property and State-owned means of production, that will cause class distinctions to disappear.

Marx and Engels

Continued

- ★ From *Grundrisse*: Art forms are based on historical stages of social development. Contemporary art must grow up and speak to the current social conditions.

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.”

Terry Eagleton

★ Argues that the literary text is the active product of the social relations between the general mode of production and the literary mode of production, as well as the relations among general ideology, authorial ideology, and aesthetic ideology.

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.

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.

Raymond Williams

- ★ Argues that “social being determines consciousness” and the superstructure, defined as “a related range of cultural practices,” including as art and literature, reflects and mediates the base.
- ★ Argues that art and literature can be either residual (traces of the previous, dominant social formation) or emergent (alternative or oppositional to the dominant culture).

Fredric Jameson

- ★ Argues that, because historical and ideologically influenced interpretations of literary texts inform current interpretation, the understanding of literary texts require both literary analysis of narrative and ideological analysis of representation, history, and cultural production.
- ★ Argues that the literary text is an unconscious politically symbolic act in society that is transmitted through sign systems that are linked to modes of production, or what he terms the ideology of form.

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.

Stuart Hall

★ Argues that Cultural Studies derives from Foucault's idea of discourse studies and coincides with the disintegration of vulgar Marxism and the rise of contemporary, ideology and hegemony-oriented Marxism): Cultural Studies puts Marxist theory into cultural practice by examining “culture, ideology, language, the symbolic,” “the political nature of representation itself,” and “power--politics, race, class, and gender, subjugation, domination, exclusion, marginality, Otherness, etc.”

Dick Hebdige

★ Argues that subcultures violate the codes of the dominant culture and “represent symbolic challenges to a symbolic order” and then their own created subcultural signs of Otherness are either trivialized or commodified by the dominant culture.

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Feminism and Gender Studies

Dr. Alex E. Blazer

English 3900

8 October 2020

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Comparing the Theories

- ★ While New Criticism closely reads the organic unity that composes the universal theme of the text,
- ★ While psychoanalysis interprets the unconscious conflicts of character, author, and reader,
- ★ While Marxism looks at the relationship between socioeconomic reality and ideology in advance of productive and conscious change,

Comparing the Theories

Continued

- ★ Feminism criticizes patriarchal ideology in literature and advocates for women's shared creative and communal valorization, and
- ★ Gender Studies deconstructs essential and hierarchical gender oppositions and sees gender as a cultural performative practice.

Patriarchy

★ Patriarchal ideology blinds both women and men to the unequal yet equally debilitating socially constructed realities of gendered experience that not only conserve male power but also oppress, objectify, and other women through traditional, hierarchical, and binary gender roles.

From Feminism

★ All feminists believe that

- ★ 1) Women are oppressed and
- ★ 2) othered (objectified and marginalized) by
- ★ 3) patriarchy, which is ensconced--established and concealed--in Western civilization, and that
- ★ 4) culture, not biology, determines gender, and that
- ★ 5) literature portrays gender issues, and

★ And all feminists

- ★ 6) are activists for gender equality

To Feminisms

- ★ However, different feminists focus on different aspects of and assert different causes of gender disparity.
- ★ For the purposes of this lecture, there are three broad types of feminism:
 - ★ Anglo-American,
 - ★ French, which includes materialist and psychoanalytic feminisms, and
 - ★ Multicultural

Anglo-American Feminism

- ★ The Anglo-American branch of feminism is less theoretically oriented, like liberal humanism, and focuses on the portrayal of women in literature and advocates for equality, rights, and status.

French Feminism

- ★ The French branch of feminism is more theoretically oriented (particularly applying post-structuralist psychoanalysis, cultural materialism, and New Historicism) and focuses on how language, representation, and psyches in literary texts are derived from gendered social/ideological power relations.

Materialist Feminism

★ Like Marxism, materialist feminism looks at consciousness constructed from life, reality. While Marxism focuses on class struggle, materialist feminism analyzes how the patriarchy oppresses women by controlling economic conditions, for instance, how division of labor within the family leads to woman being othered-locally by the family and culturally by the patriarchal institutions. With no shared collective experience, history, or tradition, women's bodies are objectified and their labor is appropriated.

Psychoanalytic Feminism

★ Following Lacan, psychoanalytic feminism theorizes the relationship between the (patriarchal) symbolic order of language and psychosexual existence. Psychoanalytic feminism looks at patriarchal binary thought (such as active/passive, self/other, head/heart, culture/nature, sun/moon), phallogocentrism (privileging the male phallus in the construction of meaning), and the male gaze (the male subject looks at the female object of desire).

Psychoanalytic Feminism

- ★ Two possible ways of resisting patriarchal language are
 - ★ 1) *Écriture féminine*: Following Hélène Cixous, language and literature, written from the body rather than the mind, that undermines patriarchal binary thinking by being fluid and associative and joyous and liberating.
 - ★ 2) Semiotic Language: Following Julia Kristeva, originating in the semiotic chora of bodily drives as opposed to the symbolic language of words and meanings, semiotic language breaks the boundaries of the social machine by virtue of being outside the predetermined binary oppositions of symbolic (male) logic.

Multicultural Feminism

- ★ While liberal feminism focuses on female equality, materialist feminism focuses on patriarchal socioeconomic conditions, and psychoanalytic feminism focuses on the consequences of the phallogocentric psyche, multicultural feminism charts the intersection of ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation, and other cultural factors, for instance by combining feminism with African American criticism or Chicana criticism, lesbian or Marxist criticism.

Gender Studies

★ Though technically not feminism because it does not advocate political change, gender studies' deconstruction of the fixed, binary, hierarchical gender oppositions (male/female, sex/gender) reveals a performative and decentered fluidity of gender identity and sexuality that coincides with feminist readings and goals.

Feminist Literary Criticism

★ Similar to how Marxist literary criticism analyzes how the work reinforces or resists capitalist ideology, feminist literary criticism examines how the text reifies or undermines patriarchal ideological operations, how it creates or portrays a female community, how it encompasses an intersection of forces (race, class, etc) acting on gender, how it portrays or establishes women's creativity, consciousness, and literary tradition, how its style of writing is gendered, and how it is received or rejected by its culture based on gender issues.

Theorists

- ★ Monique Wittig: Materialist Feminism
- ★ Kimberlé Crenshaw: Black and Multicultural Feminism
- ★ Judith Butler: Gender Studies

Monique Wittig

“One Is Not Born a Woman”

- ★ Criticizes biological essentialist views of sex and gender from a Marxist standpoint that believes women are an oppressed political class subjected to history
- ★ However, from a materialist feminist standpoint, also brings individual subjectivity to women by criticizing the myth of woman used by Marxism.
- ★ And employs lesbianianism as a social model that allows women to live freely by destroying heterosexuality as social system.

Kimberlé Crenshaw

“Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”

- ★ Argues how “Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender.”
- ★ Argues against the compartmentalization of marginalized peoples and for the intersection of gender and race (and other identities such as sexual orientation and class) in order to create both a systematic critique of the dominant view and a unifying political action.

Judith Butler

From *Gender Trouble*

★ Using gender parody in the example of drag, argues that there is no proper, natural, inherent gender; instead, gender is a cultural inscription on the body, i.e., a social construct, that is naturalized and reproduced by “imitation for which there is no original,” in other words, gender is a performance of conventional practices.

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Lesbian Criticism, Gay Criticism, and Queer Theory

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20 October 2020

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Theory

General

★ Just as Marxism and feminism look at the status of class and women under capitalism and patriarchy, lesbian, gay, and queer theory examines the standing of lesbian, gay, and nonstraight people in homophobic, heterosexist, and/or heteronormative society, in other words, in a culture where fear and/or institutional othering of gays is the ideological and compulsory norm.

Theory

Continued

★ Just as Cultural Studies and Gender Studies are related to Marxism and Feminism in their interest in examining ideological networks but do not necessarily advocate a political agenda regarding class and gender, Queer Theory is often more philosophical than political regarding the subject of sexuality.

Lesbian Criticism

Theory

- ★ Like feminist criticism, lesbian criticism advocates for the political and literary empowerment of women--specifically lesbians--over against patriarchal and heterosexist power.
- ★ A lesbian can be defined as *either* a woman whose sexuality exists on a continuum of sexual desire for women *or* as a woman who identifies with women.

Lesbian Criticism

Practice

- ★ Lesbian literary critics analyze
 - ★ 1) the lesbian subtextual coding of supposedly straight stories,
 - ★ 2) the work of lesbian authors,
 - ★ 3) female homosociality or women-identified women in heterosexual texts, and
 - ★ 4) the lesbian literary tradition.

Gay Criticism

Theory

★ Just as lesbianism is often defined on a continuum, so too is gay homosexuality. While lesbianism looks at either the axis of sexuality or the axis of homosociality, gay criticism examines either the axis of sexuality or the axis of culture via the gay sensibility, existing outside the mainstream culture, for instance, through campy artifice and theatricality.

Gay Criticism

Practice

- ★ Like lesbian criticism, gay criticism interprets
 - ★ 1) gay poetics,
 - ★ 2) gay coding of straight texts,
 - ★ 3) the gay literary tradition,
 - ★ 4) the gay sensibility in literature,
 - ★ 5) sexual/gender politics, and
 - ★ 6) heterosexual/-ist ideology.

Queer Theory

★ Just as gender studies theorizes a continuum of gender constructions beyond the traditional two (by deconstructing the hierarchical binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity), queer theory deconstructs the heterosexual/homosexual opposition to show how sexuality is not only unstable and fluid but also subject to shifting social constructions. Queer theory looks at sexuality that transgresses or exceeds the typical heterosexual/homosexual poles.

Theorists

- ★ Adrienne Rich, lesbian criticism
- ★ Judith Jack Halberstam, gender studies and queer theory
- ★ Gayle Rubin, queer theory
- ★ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, queer theory

Adrienne Rich

From “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”

- ★ Argues that the patriarchy deems lesbian experience as deviant or renders lesbian experience invisible through the ideological practices of compulsory heterosexuality, which assumes women to be heterosexual, sexually available to men, and in sexual service of men.
- ★ Advocates woman-centered relationships to separate from and resist male domination.

Judith Jack Halberstam

From *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire* and from *Epistemology of the Closet*

- ★ Uses a queer methodology, defined as a “combination of textual criticism, ethnography, historical survey, archival research, and the production of taxonomies” that is “disloyal to conventional disciplinary methods,” to unlink masculinity from white male bodies; show a pluralistic, alternative masculinities, including gay, bisexual, female, transgender, black, Asian, and Latino masculinities; and reveal the complexity of gender binarism.

Gayle Rubin

From “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality”

- ★ Argues that sexuality is a social construct produced by institutional regulation and cultural repression and affected by a ideological value system of sex negativity
- ★ Distinguishes between gender and sexuality, and between gender oppression and sexual oppression, between feminism and sexual pluralism.

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner

“Sex in Public”

- ★ Find that sex is mediated by publics, criticize the hegemonic heteronormativity of the heterosexual monoculture, and offer an alternative through queer publics.
- ★ Distinguish between sex and intimacy, criticize the privatization of intimacy in general and criminalization of nonstandard intimacy in particular, and argue for a destigmatization of intimacy through a collective queer transformation of social norms.

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Postcolonial Criticism

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Postcolonialism

Theory

★ Postcolonialism brings together Marxism's concept of ideology, feminism's idea of woman as othered by patriarchal culture, and New Historicism and Cultural Studies' approach to cultural discourse to show how colonial cultures not only have been subjugated by imperialist discourse but also have been interpellated by the colonizers' ideology that alienates, others, and ultimately unhomes and hybridizes their sense of self--even after political imperialism has ceased.

Colonized Peoples

- ★ While Marxism emphasizes class conflict between those in power and those who aren't, and feminism illustrates patriarchal power, postcolonialism focuses on how colonized people are economically, politically, and culturally dominated (aka, cultural imperialism) such that they no longer feel at home in their native land and often have to give up their mother tongue (and much of their cultural heritage) upon being forced to use the colonizers' language. Colonial subjects have been interpellated by colonialist ideology to unconsciously yet nonetheless willingly subjugate themselves because they now conceive of themselves as inferior to the colonizers--a demonic, exotic, or oriental other rather than a self.

Colonized Peoples

Continued

★ The First World refers to Britain, Europe, and the United States; the Second World to white Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa; the Third World to developing nations in India, Africa, and South America, and Asia; and the Fourth World to indigenous populations like Australian aborigines and Native Americans surrounded by white nations. Postcolonialism looks at Third and Fourth World populations politically and culturally imperialized by First and Second World nations.

Postcolonial Literature

- ★ Postcolonial literature explores
 - ★ the natives' encounter with the colonizers,
 - ★ the outsiders' journey into the native wilderness, colonial othering and oppression,
 - ★ political liberation and self-definition,
 - ★ the reclamation or return of the native, pre-colonial past,
 - ★ the tension with colonizers' language and culture,
 - ★ the reconstruction of native cultural identity, and/or
 - ★ the construction of cultural hybridity, i.e. a double consciousness of the native and imperialist cultures.

Postcolonial Literature

Continued

- ★ Postcolonial literatures evolve through three stages.
 - ★ They adopt the colonizers' language and culture, for instance European literary genres and models.
 - ★ They adapt the colonizers' forms to their people's subject matter.
 - ★ They become adept in their hybrid literary forms and become culturally independent.

Postcolonial Criticism

★ Just as Marxism raises class consciousness and advocates for economic justice by questioning if the work of literature critiques or indulges in capitalist ideology, postcolonial literary criticism raises colonial consciousness and asks if the work of literature participates in colonialist or anticolonialist ideology.

Postcolonial Criticism

Continued

- ★ How does the the work of literature portray colonial domination, postcolonial identity, and cultural resistance?
- ★ Does it condone or criticize othering?
- ★ How does it portray cultural hybridity and polyvalency?
- ★ More broadly, does it participate in Eurocentrism that assumes European and American culture is the universal against which other cultures are foils?

Theorists

- ★ Chinua Achebe
- ★ Franz Fanon
- ★ Edward Said
- ★ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak



Chinua Achebe

"An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*"

- ★ Questions Western blindness to African humanity.
- ★ Condemns Joseph Conrad's Eurocentric racism that others Africans by negating their civilization and mythologizing Africans as immoral, mysterious, and/or exotic.
- ★ Criticizes "bleeding- heart" liberalism that would portray Africans as little brothers or inferior kin who require white, Western help.
- ★ Calls for scholars to psychoanalyze Conrad's (and Western critics) need to project his (and their) racist needs and imagination onto African characters and setting.

Frantz Fanon

From *The Wretched of the Earth*

- ★ Argues that colonial domination not only oppresses and impoverishes the people of a nation but also inhibits the nation's culture.
- ★ Advocates for colonized people to create a literature of combat that fights for their existence as a nation.
- ★ Articulates that the struggle for liberation will shatter the old culture and create a new culture.

Edward Said

From *Orientalism*

★ Argues that the relationship between the West and the East is one of power that places the West in a position of superiority, and that Western cultural, intellectual, and political hegemony dominates the East and produces an Eastern knowledge and history through a system of stereotypical and mythological representations.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

From A Critique of Postcolonial Reason

- ★ Answers the questions she herself poses, “Can the subaltern speak?” and “Can the subaltern (as woman) speak?” by suggesting, first, that masculine-imperialist ideological domination itself creates those questions, and second, that a failure of communication, which is subject to ideology, prevents the subaltern as female from being heard or read.
- ★ Subaltern studies creates a space for communication by highlighting epistemic and social differences.

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