

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

- ★ Formalism (New Criticism and Russian Formalism): close reading of the text itself, paying particular heed to its unifying tensions and analysis of internal form
- ★ Structuralism (Semiotics, Myth Criticism, and Narratology): the analysis of signs and codes within linguistic systems
- ★ Phenomenology (Reception Studies and Ethics): examines the relationship of the text to the reader and the world, for example, as meaningful action

What We Will Cover

Continued

- ★ Post-Structuralism (and Deconstruction): the analysis of a text's plays, slippages, and aporias of meaning
- ★ Psychoanalysis: the analysis of the conflicted psyche of the author, text, and culture
- ★ Marxism and Historical Studies: socio-economic historical and cultural analyses

What We Will Cover

Continued

- ★ **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.
- ★ **Ethnic Studies:** analyses of ethnic groups' (such as African-American or Hispanic-American literary history and aesthetic heritage as well as the social construction of racial identity

What We Will Cover

Concluded

- ★ Postcolonial Criticism: analyses of colonial ideology (oppression and othering) and postcolonial resistance.
- ★ Cognitive Criticism: analyses of texts from the perspective of cognitive science and evolutionary psychology
- ★ Ecocriticism: analyses of texts from the ecological, environmental, and natural perspective, focusing the relationship between animals, spaces, and humans

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Formalism: Liberal Humanism, Russian Criticism, New Criticism

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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.

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.

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

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)

Viktor Shklovsky

Russian Formalist

- ★ Distinguishes poetic and practical language via a literary work's defamiliarization techniques that challenge habitual ways of perceiving and using language, in order to allow the reader to see the verbal art object.
- ★ “Poetic speech is *formed speech*. Prose is ordinary speech. . . .” (Rivkin and Ryan 13)

Cleanth Brooks

New Critic

★ Argues that “the formalist critic is concerned primarily with the work itself” (Rivkin and Ryan 16), the “involvement” of ideas (19), and the literary quality of the text, rather than the author or reader

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**

Sean O'Sullivan

Formalist

- ★ Argues that “serialized television drama . . . is a poetic enterprise” that necessitates formal analysis of its discreet parts.
- ★ Counters the conventional view that a television season of continuous, serialized episodes is like a novel chapter, and instead suggests that the early twenty-first century uninterrupted thirteen-episode season is sonnet-sequence.

Herman Rapaport

Formalist

- ★ Explains how poetic devices (tropes, ellision, juxtaposition, analogy, allegory, emulation, imitation, prosody), poetic concepts (objective correlative), and poetic movements emphasizing formal experiment (Language Poetry, the New Sentence) teach readers to understand poetry

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Structuralism: Semiotics, Genre Criticism, Narratology, Interpretive Conventions

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Theory

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

Structure

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

Structural Linguistics

- ★ Founded by Ferdinand de Saussure, structural linguistics theorizes that an arbitrary, relational, and differential system of language mediates the human mind's experience of the world.
- ★ According to Saussure, semiology is “a science that studies the life of signs within society” and “linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology.”
- ★ The human mind creates language as a system to organize world.

Structural Anthropology

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

Practice

Four Kinds of Structuralist Criticism

- ★ I) Semiotics: While semiology is the science of sign systems, semiotics is the practice of analyzing sign systems--not just language, but objects, images, and behaviors--in literary and media studies of film, television, and pop culture, for example, Barthes' study of wrestling or soap ads

Practice

Genre Criticism

- ★2) Genre Criticism (also known as Myth or Archetypal Criticism): Classifies the structure and grammar of literary genres, for example, Northrup Frye's archetypes, mythos, and quests as well as Vladimir Propp's morphology of fairy tale actions and spheres of actions;

Practice

Narratology

- ★ 3) Narratology (also known as Narrative Theory): Analyzes the grammar, patterns, and formulas of narrative, for example, Aristotle's hamartia, anagorisis, and peripeteia; Vladimir Propp's morphology of fairy tale functions and spheres of actions (overlaps with genre criticism); and Gérard Genette's classification of the storytelling processes

Practice

Interpretive Conventions

- ★4) Interpretive Conventions: Analyzes the codes and conventions of reading and interpreting literature, for example, Jonathan Culler's literary competence and interpretive communities

Practice

Comparing the Interpretive Practices

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

Questions

Structuralists Pose

- ★ . . . how should the text be classified in terms of its genre?
- ★ . . . analyze the text's narrative operations. Can you speculate about the relationship between the text's "grammar" and that of similar texts?
- ★ . . . what rules or codes of interpretation must be internalized in order to "make sense" of the text?

Questions

Concluded

- ★ What are the semiotics of a given category of cultural phenomena, or “texts,” such as high school football games, television and/or magazine ads for a particular brand of perfume (or any other consumer product), or even media coverage of a historical event, such as Operation Desert Storm, an important legal case, or a presidential election campaign?...analyze the nonverbal messages sent by the “texts”
What is being communicated, and how exactly is it being communicated? (Lois Tyson *Today* 233)

Theorists

- ★ Ferdinand de Saussure, structural linguist
- ★ Claude Lévi-Strauss, structural anthropologist
- ★ Roland Barthes, semiotician
- ★ Michel Foucault, structuralist
- ★ David Herman, narratologist
- ★ Michael Newman, narratologist

Ferdinand de Saussure

Structural Linguistics

★As a structural linguist, Saussure theorizes that a signifier (sound or image) is only arbitrarily and conventionally related to a signified (concept). Language is a structure of mind that does not convey positivist reality, but rather evokes differential, relational value. Meaning exists in difference. Structural linguistics influences the conception of identity as differential and relational rather than positive and essential.

Ferdinand de Saussure

Concluded

- ★ While diachrony involves the linguistic system changing slowly over time, synchrony equates with taking a snapshot of the entire system at one point in time.
- ★ While a syntagmic relation is composed of linearly related units inside a particular discourse system, an associative relation involves analogously related units across multiple discourse systems.

Claude Lévi-Strauss

Structural Anthropology

★Applies Saussures theory of systematic language to myths, such as the Oedipus myth or the trickster, and finds that myths can be broken down to constituent units called mythemes. Bundles of relations among constituent units formulate a myth pattern, which consists of all the available variants. The purpose of myth is to overcome a logical contradiction, such as sex among blood relations or the god who is both good and evil.

Roland Barthes

Semiology and Semiotics

★As a semiotician (someone who practices interpretation of sign systems, as opposed to a semiologist who theorizes how sign systems function), Barthes does semiotic readings of sign systems, such as soap ads and photos of daily life around the world, based on the fact that such language-objects function within a larger mythic, metaphoric, or linguistic pattern.

Michel Foucault

Structuralism

- ★ The author's writing is neither the expression of self nor indicative of the author's interiority because the author is a function of discourse. She represents appropriation and property, culturally dependent value, discursive subject position, and plurality of selves. The author-function suggests that identity is formed by and subjected to the regulatory codes of discourse.

David Herman

Narratology

★Applying notions of structural linguistics to narrative, particularly diachronic investigation of narrative script use across time and synchronic investigation of script use across genres at the same time, David Herman finds that “Narrativity is a function of the pattern of script-activating cues in a sequence.”

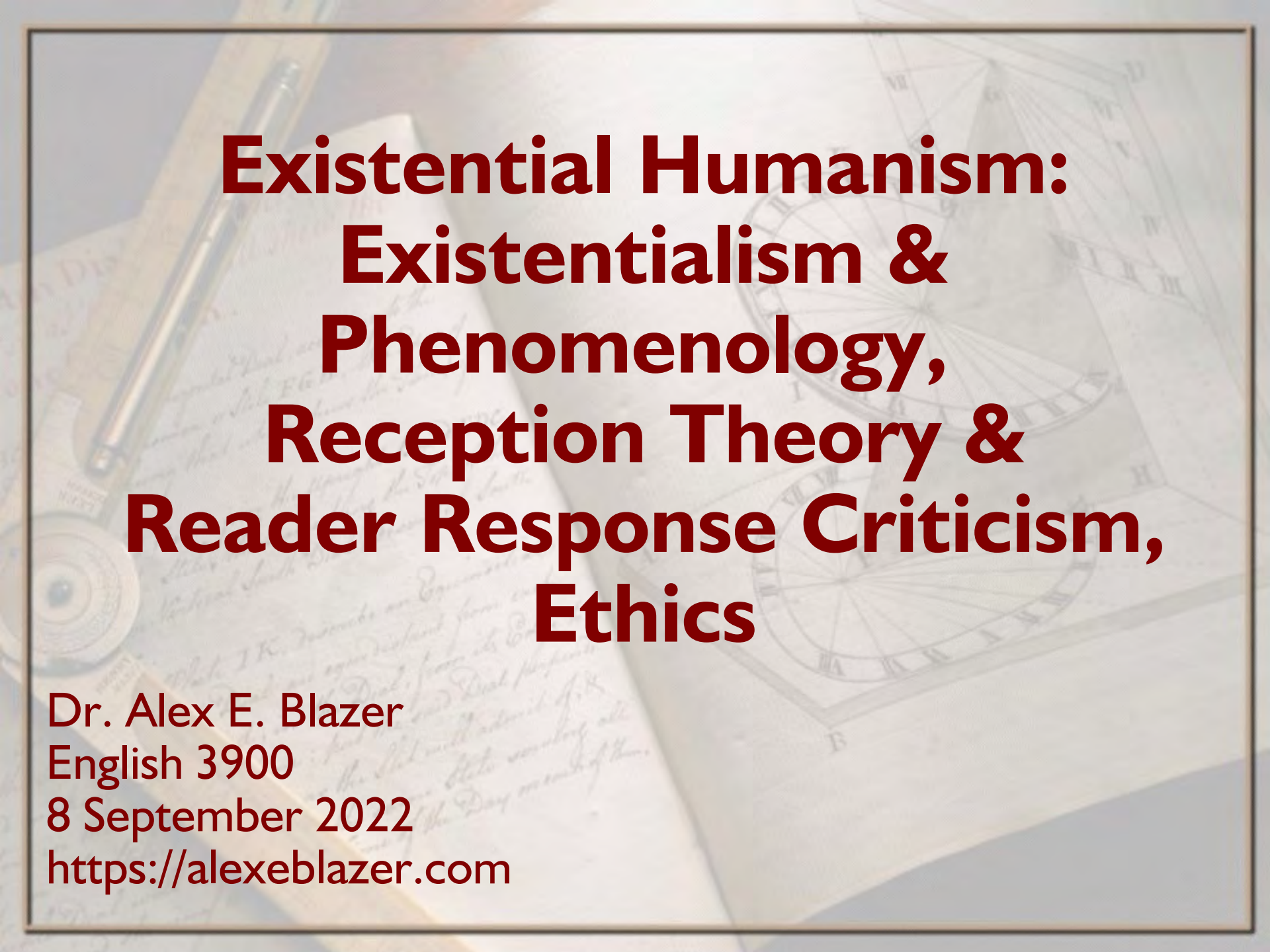
Michael Newman

Narratology

- ★ Michael Newman studies the range of narrative units from the micro level (beats) to the middle level (episodes) to the macro level (arcs) in order to develop a formula vocabulary for television narrative.

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Existential Humanism: Existentialism & Phenomenology, Reception Theory & Reader Response Criticism, Ethics

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Comparing the Theories

- ★ While *formalism* interprets meaning through a close analysis of the textual object,
- ★ While *structuralism* classifies texts using data from large systems,
- ★ *Existential humanism* examines the relations between author, text, and reader in terms of consciousness and leading an ethical existence in the world.

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.

Existentialism

Theory, Concluded

★ 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).

Phenomenology

Theory, Concluded

- ★ 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? How do the character's or characters' awareness(es) affect the portrait of consciousness in the text?

Phenomenology

Criticism, Concluded

★ 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.

Existential Phenomenology

Theory, Concluded

- ★ 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.

Existential Phenomenology

Criticism, Concluded

- ★ 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?

Reception Theory

Theory and Criticism

- ★ Just as the consciousness of the text must be considered by the phenomenological critic, the consciousness of the reader must be analyzed.
- ★ How does the work of art (literature or film) affect the audience's (reader's or viewer's) consciousness, and consciousness of the world?
- ★ How does the audience's (reader or viewer) actively participate in the construction of meaning of the text based upon their own experiences and world views?

Reader Response Criticism

Theory

- ★ Reader Response Criticism examines the experience of reading, reading as meaning-making process, and the relationship between reader and text. There are five categories of reader-response theory: transactional, affective stylistics, subjective, psychological, and social.

Transactional Reader Response Criticism

Theory

- ★ Transactional Reader Response Criticism analyzes the meaning-making transaction between the printed text and the reader that produces the literary work. The text itself guides and determines the reading process. When there are gaps in the text, meaning is indeterminate (unclear or multiplicitous) and the reader must create her own interpretation.

Affective Stylistics

Theory

★ Affective Stylistics uses line-by-line close reading to analyze how the text affects the reader in the process of meaning. Meaning is what the text does to the reader.

Subjective Reader-Response Criticism

Theory

- ★ Subjective Reader Response Criticism looks at how the emotional and intellectual experience of reading the text produces a conceptual, symbolic literary work in the reader's mind. Interpretation explains and judges the reader's symbolic work, not the text itself because there is no literary work beyond readers' responses.

Psychological Reader-Response Criticism

Theory

- ★ Psychological Reader Response Criticism interprets what readers' interpretations reveal about themselves, about their unconscious fears and desires, not about the text. As such, this version of reader-response overlaps with psychoanalytical criticism that focuses on readers.

Social Reader- Response Criticism

Theory

- ★ **Social Reader Response Criticism examines interpretive communities, groups of people (like a class or a book-club) who share methods for interpreting texts. The individual act of interpretation is based on the values and questions the reader has learned from her interpretive community.**

Reader Response Criticism

Criticism, Continued

- ★ What does a phrase-by-phrase analysis of a short literary text, or of key portions of a longer text, tell us about the reading experience prestructured by (built into) that text? How does this analysis of what the text does to the reader differ from what the text “says” or “means”? In other words, how might the omission of the temporal experience of reading this text result in an incomplete idea of the text’s meaning?

Reader Response Criticism

Criticism, Continued

★ How might we interpret a literary text to show that the reader's response is, or is analogous to, the topic of the story? In other words, how is the text really about readers reading, and what exactly does it tell us about this topic? To simplify further, how is a particular kind of reading experience an important theme in the text? Of course, we must establish what reading experience is created by the text in order to show that the theme of the story is analogous to it. Then we must cite textual evidence to show that what happens in the world of the narrative mirrors the reader's situation decoding it.

Reader Response Criticism

Criticism, Continued

- ★ Drawing on a broad spectrum of thoroughly documented biographical data, what seems to be a given author's identity theme, and how does that theme express itself in the sum of his or her literary output?
- ★ What does the body of criticism published about a literary text suggest about the critics who interpreted that text and/or about the reading experience produced by that text? What does your analysis suggest about the ways in which the text is created by readers' interpretive strategies or by their psychological or ideological projections?

Reader Response Criticism

Criticism, Concluded

- ★ If you have the resources to do it, what can you learn about the role of readers' interpretive strategies or expectations, about the reading experience produced by a particular text, or about any other reading activity by conducting study using a group of real readers (for example, your students, classmates, or fellow book-club members)? (Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today* 180-1)

Ethics

Criticism

★ Not only is the act of creating a work of art (literature and film) an inherently ethical exercise that posits a system of values both inside the text (the theme of the text) and outside the text (the moral stance of the text in relation to the world) but also the act of interpretation, by readers/viewers in general and scholars/critics in particular, inherently involves ethical judgment. Both the act of creation and the act of interpretation constitute ethical deeds within the real world.

Immanuel Kant

Phenomenology

- ★ In “General Observations on Transcendental Aesthetic,” Kant distinguishes between *a priori* knowledge (“independent of experience...and senses” and *a posteriori* (empirical) knowledge.
- ★ Concluding that one can only know the world through a subjective consciousness that creates inner, mental representations based on appearances relative to and derived from external objects, . . .

Immanuel Kant

Phenomenology, Concluded

- ★ . . . Kant uses intellectual self-consciousness, as opposed to sense-based perception, to conceptualize an aesthetics of universal representation, in other words a kind of pure form, operating beyond particular, apparent, empirical objects.
- ★ Literary and film critics following Kant can thereby consider the text as composed of representations based on transcendental objects and ideas.

George Poulet

Phenomenology

- ★ 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.

Kathleen McCormick

Reception Theory

- ★ Surveys reception theory and argues, “If students come to inhabit a discursive space in which they recognize the constructed nature of both the texts they read and their responses to them, it will be possible for them to develop more historicized, self-reflective, and resistant readings of texts, and thus to become more active producers of meaning” (319-20).

Pierre Bourdieu

Reception Theory

- ★ Applies the concepts of ideological conditioning and class structures to the idea of literary taste and argues that, while one would assume that an individual's literary taste involves conscious intellectual classification of texts, literary taste actually consists of a subject's automatic response based on unconscious awareness of the social order.
- ★ Literary distinction is based not on aesthetics but rather the sociology of collective identity and an us/them mentality.

Pierre Bourdieu

Reception Theory, Concluded

- ★ Literary distinction is based not on aesthetics but rather the sociology of collective identity and an us/them mentality.
- ★ Building on structuralism, Bourdieu's reception theory calls for a “social semiology” which seeks to decipher meanings and bring to light the cognitive operations whereby agents produce and decipher them” (344).

Emmanuel Levinas

Phenomenology and Ethics

- ★ Opposing Saussure, who argues that language creates a differential relation, Levinas posits that language “breaks up the unity of the genus,” i.e., being or community via the word Other. While Saussure focuses on the structural relationship, Levinas emphasizes the separation of Self and Other.
- ★ In terms of ethics, the Other resists the Self’s murderous, possessive grasp and becomes infinitely incomprehensible.

Emmanuel Levinas

Phenomenology and Ethics, Concluded

- ★ In terms of literature, the author's text is an expression of the other's self relayed to the reader's self which does not give their signified self; however, paradoxically, the text is an authentic signifier of the other's self.
- ★ Since "language conditions thought" yet exists outside of consciousness, discourse in general and literary discourse in particular constitute a way to mediate, reasonably and ethically, Self and Other.

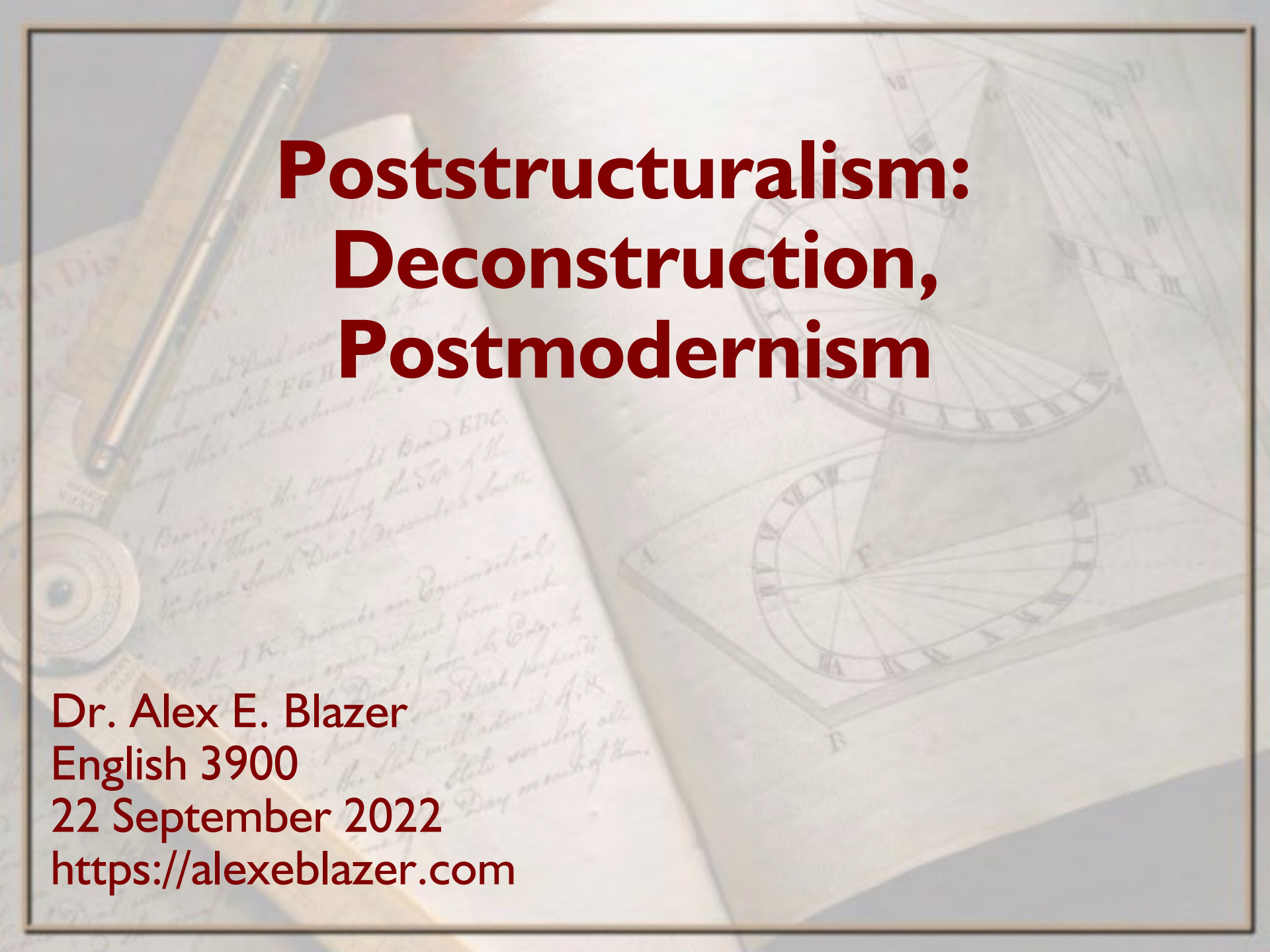
Martha Nussbaum

Ethics

- ★ To be a civic-minded citizen of a democracy who can make informed ethical decisions in one's particular community as well as the larger world, one "needs a knowledge of history and social fact," in other words, both an understanding of history and a sense of the narrative imagination that posits, through compassion, how human beings have treated one another and ideally should treat one another.

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Poststructuralism: Deconstruction, Postmodernism

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Roland Barthes

Structuralist

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

Roland Barthes

Poststructuralist

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

From Structuralism To Poststructuralism

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

Structuralism vs. Poststructuralism

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

Structuralism vs. Poststructuralism

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

Structuralism vs. Poststructuralism

The Underlying Structure

- ★ Although it recognizes the gradual shift of structures through diachrony, ultimately, structuralism analyzes the freeze-frame of the underlying system.

Structuralism vs. Poststructuralism

The Underlying Structure, concluded

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

Structuralism vs. Poststructuralism

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.

Structuralism vs. Poststructuralism

Identity, concluded

- ★ Poststructuralism witnesses the reemergence of the author and individual, but subjected to conflicted and contradictory language systems.
- ★ Derrida's decentered subject of discourse
- ★ Foucault's subject-positions derived from discourse
- ★ Lacan's subject exists only in relation to the Big Other

Structuralism vs. Poststructuralism

Criticism

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

Structuralism vs. Poststructuralism

Criticism, concluded

- ★ Poststructuralist criticism analyzes 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).

Structuralism vs. Poststructuralism

Criticism, concluded

- ★ Poststructuralist criticism examines 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 and New Historicism

- ★ Deconstruction is one version of poststructuralism, most associated with Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, that shows the play of meanings within the world and the work.
- ★ New Historicism, which we may cover later, is another subset of poststructuralism, most associated with Michel Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt, that shows the play of ideological power within individuals subjected to discourse.

Types of Poststructuralism

French Poststructuralist Feminism

- ★ French poststructuralist feminism, as exemplified by Hélène Cixous in her theory of *écriture féminine* (women's writing) blurs the play of the text with the pleasure of the body.

Types of Poststructuralism

Postmodernism

- ★ Postmodernism, which encompasses both a literary movement and a critical methodology, cares little for Reason, Truth, Progress, and Everyday Reality (Jürgen Habermas); instead values little narratives and decentered subjects over metanarratives and transcendental subjects (Jean-François Lyotard); and deconstructs the image/reality hierarchical binary opposition with the idea of hyperreality (Jean Baudrillard).

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 attends to the textual 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 Texts

- ★ There are three methods of deconstructionist criticism.
- ★ **Undecidability:** The first method analyzes how the meaning of the text is ultimately undecidable because the conflicts and contradictions within the text produce conflicting and contradictory interpretations because writing is a field of difference without identity. This method is the exact opposite of how New Critics seek to expose and then resolve the tensions of the text into an organic unity and universal theme.

Deconstruction

Criticism, continued

- ★ Deconstruction of hierarchical binary oppositions: The second method analyzes how the literary or filmic text paradoxically privileges both terms of the hierarchical binary oppositions that structure it or, similarly, how the privileged position ceaselessly slips back and forth between terms, without being resolved.

Deconstruction

Criticism, concluded

- ★ **Deconstruction of textual stability:** The third method of deconstructionist criticism does a close reading of the text's verbal contradictions, finds the textual faultlines that break the unity of the text, and reveals the linguistic unreliability of the text to mean what it says.

Postmodernism

Culture and Movement

- ★ Postmodern culture, inaugurated by the Bomb, encompasses new kinds of wars (cold, culture, drugs, terrorism), multinational late capitalism (the shift from manufacturing to information, networking, and image consumption), and multicultural/identity politics.
- ★ Postmodern literature and film, the movement from the 1960s to the 2000s, emphasizes artifice and irony.

Postmodernism

Criticism

★ Postmodern criticism is a subset of poststructuralism that values suspensive irony and shifting, self-reflexive meaning in postmodern literature, film, and culture.

Postmodernism

Movement: Belief, concluded

- ★ Postmodernist literature and film attempt neither to play off of grand narratives nor to search for absolute Truths.
- ★ Instead, the movement seeks to *either* create little narratives and little truths that result in qualified beliefs, self-conscious themes, and linguistic/literary games *or* portray worlds without meaning.

Postmodernism

Movement: Form

- ★ Experimentation with conventional form is no longer avant-garde and radical, as in modernism, but is now rather normal in postmodernism.
- ★ As postmodern cultural existence becomes eclectic, laissez faire, and hyperreal,
- ★ Postmodern literature and film lose linearity and coherence and revel in the open and playful and idiosyncratic mixing of forms, genres, disciplines, and systems all within one work. (Modernist collage gives way to postmodernist bricolage.)

Postmodernism

Movement: Representation

- ★ The crisis of representation is a mainstay, as in modernism, but with this twist:
- ★ Postmodernist literature does *not* believe there is a real 'real' to represent, for everything is an image or text, reality is socially constructed.
- ★ Therefore, postmodernist literature is self-reflective, self-reflexive, and self-conscious.
- ★ It often reveals its own artificiality and textuality in various metafictional and intertextual turns.
- ★ Characters are hybridized or fragmented, shifting or multiplicitous, incohesive or inchoate.

Postmodernism

Movement: High and Low

- ★ There is no battle between high and low, as in modernism.
- ★ Instead, postmodernism blurs boundaries.
 - ★ Just as postmodernist critics write on the elite *and* the popular culture, postmodernist literature and film blend high *and* low forms in a playful dance of arcane *and* mass consumption. Some would argue that the low is campily sublimated into the high.

Postmodernism

Movement: Subjectivity

- ★ In the postmodern world, there remains no modernist lament over the fragmentation of self and world; nor is there a desire to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.
- ★ Rather, postmodernists revel in socially constructed realities and multiplicitous, shifting subjectivities.
- ★ Any self-cohesion is merely a tentative suturing of signification.
- ★ Postmodern literature thematizes the play of *the* self in *a* constant process of sociocultural construction.

Postmodernism

Criticism

- ★ Postmodernist critics interpret postmodern literature and film through poststructuralist means,
 - ★ Especially literature that exemplifies shifting postmodern identities and the disappearance of reality,
 - ★ Utilizes parody, pastiche, and intertextuality to such an extent that external reality falls away,
 - ★ Leaving an endless play of irony, and
 - ★ Blurring the distinction between high and low art.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Existentialist precursor to Poststructuralism

- ★ Argues that there is no truth but only representations of truth that are mastered by convention and considered true.
- ★ Argues that reality is a fiction, in the sense that our symbolic representations have attained mastery over material reality to the point of seeming metaphysical.
- ★ Although we desire metaphysical truth, reality is differential and truth is contingent.

Gilles Deleuze

Poststructuralist

- ★ Noting the paradoxical simultaneity of being pulled and actively moving in multiple directions at once, argues that identity is infinitely in process.
- ★ Argues against Platonic notions of idea and form, which suggest a transcendental relationship between signifier and signified, and instead finds that representations are simultaneously copies and simulacra.

Jacques Derrida

Deconstructionist

- ★ Writing is undecidable, exorbitant, and supplemental. Signs, words, and writing exist in question as an unclosable knowledge that renders inconclusive meaning.
- ★ *Différance* not only means to differ but also to defer. Derrida employs both Saussure's structuralist view of differential signification and a poststructuralism view that that meaning is always deferred. The signified is always absent because only signifiers are present.

Jacques Derrida

Concluded

★ *Supplément* not only means substitute but also addition/supplant. Supplementarity involves the chain of signifiers substituting for other signifiers, but never arriving at meaning; they are just adding to process of signification. Writing is under author's control, but also beyond author's control.

Barbara Johnson

Deconstructionist

★ Surveying poststructuralists such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Derrida argues that writing is a process that subverts closure and scatters significance along a chain of signifiers, which both conveys and obscures meaning as it endlessly defers and supplements signification.

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Jacques Derrida From *Of Grammatology*

Dr. Alex E. Blazer

English 3900

16 February 2017

<https://alexablazer.com>

The Playfulness of Language

Good Morning America, 16 February 2012

George Stephanopolos: Do you believe that the President is a Christian and citizen?

Michelle Bachman: You have to take the President at his word.

- 1) I do not believe that the President is a Christian and citizen.
- 2) You [GS] have to take President at his word, I [MB] do not.
- 3) You [everyone] have to take the President at his word [because patriotism demands your belief in your President].
- 4) You [not I] have to take the President at his word [because he's not my legitimate President].

The Playfulness of Language

Concluded

- 5) I take the President at his word.
- 6) I do not take the President at his word.
- 7) The President's word is truthful.
- 8) The President's word is false.
- 9) No one else can know another person's true, innermost faith because it cannot be spoken in words, therefore I take the President at his word.
- 10) No one else can know another person's true, innermost faith because it cannot be spoken in words, therefore the President's word is meaningless.

Lesson: Conventional language (all language) is both radically playful and utterly ambiguous.

The Playfulness of Literature

Margaret Atwood's "You Fit into Me"

You fit into me

[Literally, sexual;

Figuratively, expression of intimacy and of love]

The Playfulness of Literature

Continued

Like a hook into an eye

[Literally, a hook and eye latch;

Figuratively, expression of functionality in the sexual and emotional relationship]

The Playfulness of Literature

Continued

a fish hook

[Literally, sexual/genital dysfunction;

Figuratively, expression of displeasure, of being painfully emotionally if not violently abusively coupled]

The Playfulness of Literature

Continued

an open eye

[Literally, sexual penetration;

Figuratively, expression of emotional and/or physical pain]

The Playfulness of Literature

Concluded

Should the poem be read as a normal relationship falling apart?

Or, should the poem be read as a relationship deteriorating into emotional abuse? Or physical abuse? Or sexual abuse?

Or, should the poem be read as a statement of sexual incompatibility between dysfunctional lovers?

Or, should the poem be read as a general statement about the cycles of love and resentment in any relationship?

The Deconstruction

Of Hierarchical Binary Oppositions

Derrida deconstructs hierarchical binary oppositions, i.e., he

- 1) illustrates how one term in the dichotomy is privileged over the other,
- 2) demonstrates how the privileged term is also deprivileged by the other term, which itself is also privileged, and
- 3) explores the perpetually unstable meaning of the binary opposition.

Deconstruction

Continued

★ Derrida deconstructs

- ★ speech/writing via grammatology
- ★ absence/presence via language
- ★ literature/philosophy via literary language
- ★ literature/criticism via deconstruction which is both interpretive method and literary work
- ★ signifier/signified via supplément and différance

Deconstruction

Concluded

★ Derrida deconstructs

- ★ philosophy/nonphilosophy (philosophy vs reality) via exorbitant (there is nothing outside the text)
- ★ cure/poison via the pharmakon
- ★ writing/memory
- ★ alethia-truth/lethia-forgetting
- ★ life/death via the ghost-writer

Grammatology

Definition

- ★ **grammatology: the writing of speech**
- ★ **but also the science of writing**
 - ★ **but writing defies science because it can't be measured**
 - ★ **because the undecidability, exorbitance, supplementarity, différence of the signs, words, and writing in question,**
 - ★ **leading to an unclosable knowledge and an inconclusive meaning**
- ★ **grammar is not a closed system as in Saussure's/Frye's versions of linguistic/literary structuralism, but a field of in process textuality as in Barths' "From Work to Text"**

Exergue

Definition

★ exergue: the space below the device on a coin or medal, sometimes separated from the field by a line; Derrida uses this to suggest the sliding of the (“inner”) signified meaning beneath the representational line/image of the (“outer”) signifier (1688)

Exergue

Quotation

“Perhaps patient meditation and painstaking investigation on and around what is still provisionally called writing, far from falling short of a science of writing or of hastily dismissing it by some obscurantist reaction, letting it rather develop its positivity as far as possible, are the wanders of a way of thinking that is faithful and attentive to the ineluctable world of the future which proclaims itself as present, beyond the closure of knowledge. The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, presented, as a sort of monstrosity. For that future world and for that within it which will have put into question the values of sign, word, and writing, for that which guides our future anterior, there is as yet no exergue.” (1690-1)

Ethnocentrism

Definition

★ethnocentrism: We think Western culture is exceptional...because our Western phonetic writing is the most advanced and superior to all other kinds of writing...because the Western word approximates how it's pronounced (1689)

Logocentrism

Definition

- ★ logocentrism: the belief that spoken language is superior to written language (1689)
- ★ logos: the word, speech, presence, truth, reason
- ★ We think that spoken language provides the immediate truth, but it is nonetheless composed of mediating signifiers.
- ★ The history of Western metaphysics is not actual being and truth but rather an illusion or representation of presence. (1689)

Metaphysics

Definition

- ★ metaphysics: the branch of philosophy that treats of first principles, includes ontology and cosmology, and is intimately connected with epistemology
- ★ Derrida is deconstructing being and knowledge
- ★ by showing how grammar and writing substitutes presence for absence in a neverending chain of signification (the presence of being is a representational illusion; all we know is the signifier (or rather the chain of) not the signified concept-thing

Transcendental Signified

- ★transcendental signified: for Derrida, absolute meaning must be an illusion because writing means différance and supplementarity
- ★language escapes and destroys presence, i.e., the metaphysical stability of meaning; language is the absence of presence
- ★I speak and write, therefore I am not

Différance

Definition

- ★ **différance**: to differ, but also to defer
- ★ Derrida's coinage includes both the Saussure/structuralist view of signification (language as an arbitrary, differential system; the sign as the unification of signifier and signified)
- ★ And also the poststructuralist view that meaning is always deferred (the signified is always already absent because only signifiers are present)

The Exorbitant

Definition and Passage

- ★ the exorbitant (1691): exceeding the bounds of custom, propriety, or reason, especially in amount or extent; highly excessive
- ★ Derrida plays with the root of the word, “orb,” to suggest that meaning exceeds the “orb” or center of any signifier, any work, any text
- ★ “To exceed the metaphysical orb is an attempt to get out of the orbit (orbita), to think the entirety of the classical conceptual oppositions... being produced as a truth at the moment when the value of truth is shattered” (1695)

Supplément

Definition and Passage

- ★ **supplément (1691):** a substitute, but also an addition and a supplanting
- ★ **supplementarity:** chain of signifiers substituting for other signifiers, but never arriving at meaning, just adding to process of signification
- ★ **“The play of substitution fills and marks a determined lack.” (1691):** There are no signifieds, there is only the play of signifiers, words, representations.

Supplément

Another Passage

“...there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references....And thus to infinity, for we have read, in the text, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like ‘real mother’ name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence.” (1692)

Supplément

Another Passage

“...the indefinite process of supplementarity has always already infiltrated presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self. Representation in the abyss of presence is not an accident of presence; the desire of presence is, on the contrary, born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation, etc. The supplement itself is quite exorbitnant, in every sense of the word.” (1696)

Supplément

Concluded

- ★ “And what we call production is necessarily a text, the system of a writing and of a reading which we know is ordered around its own blind spot.” (1697)
- ★ The center of the literary work is a hole, an abyss.
- ★ Although we cannot know the essential, core meaning of the text, we can interpret the multiplicitous literary productions circling and in play.

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Psychoanalytic Criticism

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4 October 2022

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Comparing the Theories

- ★ While formalism (Liberal Humanism, New Criticism, Russian Formalism) *analyzes* the meaning of the text based on a close reading of the text itself,
- ★ While structuralism (semiotics, genre criticism, narratology, interpretive conventions) *classifies* the text based on sign systems, genre rules, narrative formula, and interpretive codes,

Comparing the Theories

Continued

- ★ While existential humanism (existentialism and phenomenology, reader response and reception theory, ethics) *reflects upon* the conscious and experiential relationships among the author, text, reader, and the world,
- ★ While poststructuralism (deconstruction and postmodernism) determines the *play* of textual meaning,

Comparing the Theories

Concluded

★ Psychoanalytic criticism *psychoanalyzes* the author, the text, and the reader.

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

Sexuality

Concluded

- ★ Freud's theory of sexuality has been criticized for being limited by the heteronormative views of the time period.
- ★ However, some gay and transgender psychoanalytic theorists have reread Freud to emphasize the belief that, "there is no 'normal' sexuality. The drive does not have any predetermined or inborn object besides satisfaction, which is why Freud insisted on the ubiquity of perversions. . . . 'perversions' were not considered as deviations but a universal structure that is neither unnatural nor morbid. In fact, they are the foundation of 'normal' sexuality." (Patricia Gherovici, *Transgender Psychoanalysis* 67).

Three Basic Disorders

- ★ Since everyone's psyche is conflicted, Freud believes there is no normal functioning psyche; rather, every psyche is structured by disorder.
- ★ 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, Concluded

- ★ ...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

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

Practice

Continued

- ★ **Author or Culture:** How does the author's unconscious psychobiography contribute to the creation and meaning of the text? How does the culture's repressed wishes and fears contribute to the creation and meaning of the text?
- ★ **Narrators or Characters:** Psychoanalyze the narrators or characters in terms of conflicts between id, ego, and superego; Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real; or sexuality and family history.

Practice

Concluded

- ★ **Form or Genre:** How do the conflicts and conventions of the text's form or genre speak to psychoanalytic issues such as desire, pleasure, and reality?
- ★ **Reader or Society:** What does the reader's interpretation of the text convey about their psyches? What does the society's taste and distaste in certain texts say about their conscious and unconscious pleasures.
- ★ The above is not an exhaustive list of questions.

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

Sigmund Freud

Concluded

- ★ Argues that subjects emotionally bond with other subjects through a process of identification, such as in the Oedipal complex when a boy identifies with his father as his ideal.
- ★ Sometimes the ego identifies with an object in a neurotic manner that introjects the desired object into the ego; in such situations, object-choice has regressed to object identification.

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.

D. W. Winnicott

- ★ Argues that babies use transitional objects like blankets and dolls that are, from the babies' perspective, neither inside themselves nor outside themselves, to help them adapt to external reality.
- ★ Distortions and maladaptatives of transitional objects can lead to addiction, fetishism, and pseudologia fantastica and thieving.
- ★ Suggests that transitional phenomena in children can help us adults understand artistic creativity.

Lisa Hinrichsen

- ★ Connects contemporary trauma studies, which in part define trauma in a Freudian manner as an external assault on the psyche that breaks the internal workings of the ego and raise defense mechanism such as denial and and dissociation, first to post-structuralist aesthetics of narrative disruption and representability crisis, and second to traumatized historical collective memory of the racial and economic violence of the U.S. South depicted in its literature.

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Historical Criticism: Marxist Criticism, New Historicism, and Cultural Materialism

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English 3900

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Reviewing the -isms

- ★ *Formalism* emphasizes the meaningful form of the text object.
- ★ *Existential humanism* focuses on the consciousness(es) involved in the text object.
- ★ *Structuralism* concentrates on classifying structures underlying multiple text objects.
- ★ *Poststructuralism* illustrates the fluctuating meaning of the text object.

Reviewing the -isms

Concluded

- ★ *Psychoanalytic Criticism* examines the conflicted psyche(s) involved in the text object.
- ★ *Historical Criticism* analyzes the socioeconomic political struggles involved in the text object.

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%

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 iPad 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 iPad 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 iPad 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,
- ★ While psychoanalytic critics interpret how the unconscious conflicts of the psyche influence the author, characters, or readers of the text,
- ★ Marxist literary critics approach a text either as detached scholars examining economic and class issues both inside and outside of the text or as cultural advocates revealing the text's ideological or revolutionary forces, or as 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.

New Historicism

Theory

- ★ Like Marxism, New Historicism is interested in the ideological apparatuses and power structures of society and history; unlike Marxism, it does not focus on economics and class, it does not believe in a dialectical view of history, and it does not advocate for a particular economic/political goal like communism.

New Historicism

Theory

- ★ Unlike traditional historical study, New Historicism does not believe objective analysis of linear, causal, progressive history is possible; rather history is a discontinuous narrative--filled with competing discourses and ideologies--that is interpreted by the current culture to fulfill ideological needs.

New Historicism

Literary Criticism

★ New Historicism interprets the literary and filmic text as a cultural artifact that embodies the conflicted discourses and opposing ideologies of its time. The critic not only incorporates into her analysis the documented conversations of the time but also exposes their ideological concerns--as well as her own position within history.

Cultural Materialism

Part of the Historical Criticism Family

- ★ Theorists who think of Cultural Materialism as political often pair it with Marxism; those who conceive of it as cultural pair it with New Historicism; many Cultural Materialist theorists themselves define it as its own theory.
- ★ Marxism, New Historicism, and Cultural Materialism are in the same family of historical criticisms.

Cultural Materialism

Similarities with Marxism and New Historicism

- ★ Akin to the poststructuralist, ideological version of Marxism as represented by Louis Althusser as well as discursive power structure version of New Historicism as represented by Michael Foucault, cultural materialism examines the underlying ideology of culture.

Cultural Materialism

Different Emphasis from Marxism

- ★ While classical Marxism is interested in the conflict between the capitalists and the proletariat, cultural materialism looks at all forms of culture (from high to middle to low) and uses Marxism, feminism, and other political theories to oppose the status quo and to advocate for the oppressed.

Cultural Materialism

Different Emphasis from New Historicism

- ★ While New Historicism emphasizes the restraints of the system, resulting in political pessimism, cultural materialism emphasizes points of resistance, resulting in political optimism.

Cultural Materialism

Literary Criticism

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

Karl Marx

★ 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.

Karl Marx

Continued

★ From *The German Ideology*: Human consciousness is derived from material activities and social relations of human beings. 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.

Walter Benjamin

★ Criticizes historicism that mythologizes history as universal (not of particular classes) and making symbolic progress, and advocates for an historical materialist conception of history that sees history as a dangerous, if not revolutionary, struggle of the oppressed classes against the ruling classes who would exploit the myths of history to conserve their power.

Pierre Bourdieu

- ★ Defines *habitus* as “a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures,” or dispositions, that not only unconsciously limit free will (freedom is conditioned on the habits of mind) through inertia and convention but also reproduce social structures without the need of rule of law because revolutionary thought is impossible.
- ★ Defines hysteresis as “the incapacity to think,” to reflect upon historical crises of the past and act on historical opportunities to change the present and future.

Louis Althusser

- ★ Defines ideology as “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”
- ★ Argues that Ideological State Apparatuses interpellate individuals as subjects (with illusory understanding of their lives) so that external, repressive power is unnecessary because subjects submit freely to the State and accept their subjugation.

Michel Foucault

★ Argues that modern societal institutions deploy techniques of biopower to administer, regulate, and discipline bodies, for instance in the area of sex and sexuality. Institutions dominate and control subjectivity through the use of power-knowledge, in which power shapes knowledge in order to reproduce itself, similar to Bourdieu's idea of *habitus* and Althusser's idea of ideological state apparatuses.

Giorgio Agamben

- ★ Employs Foucault's idea of biopower to argue the paradoxical idea that modern democracy subjects human beings even as it abstractly calls for their freedom and happiness.
- ★ Proffers the paradox that the sovereign, i.e., the State, exists both inside and outside the law and, further, inclusion and exclusion, such that guilt does not transgress against the law but rather signifies the effective force of state power.

Louis Montrose

- ★ Associates New Historicism with cultural poetics, cultural materialism, feminism, and poststructuralist Marxism.
- ★ Sees New Historicism blurring literary and historical interpretation, text and context; and reads individual characters and authors within the context of social and literary background.
- ★ Argues that history is discursively constructed and our interpretation of it is ideologically positioned, yet, unlike Foucault, sees a path of resistance to social control due to the contradictions among the discourses, networks, and ideologies that we are subject to.

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Gender Criticism: Feminist Criticism, Gender Studies, Lesbian and Gay Criticism, and Queer Theory

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Comparing the Theories

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

Comparing the Theories

Continued

- ★ Gender Criticism examines the status of women and LGBTQ+ people in particular and the role of gender and sexuality in general.
- ★ Feminist criticism interrogates patriarchal ideology in literature and advocates for women's shared creative and communal valorization,
- ★ Gender Studies deconstructs essential and hierarchical gender oppositions and sees gender as a cultural performative practice,

Comparing the Theories

Concluded

- ★ Lesbian Criticism and Gay Criticism interrogate heteronormative ideology in literature and advocate for lesbian communities and gay poetics, respectively, and
- ★ Queer Theory deconstructs the hierarchical heterosexual/homosexual opposition and sees sexuality as fluid.

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.

Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Theory

★ 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.

Gayle Rubin

- ★ Builds on Marx and Engels' concepts of labor and surplus value as well Lévi-Strauss's myth criticism of kinships and gifts in order to examine the sex/gender system that socially organizes sex and reproduction, effectively exchanges women between men via marriage, and produces obligatory heterosexuality and gender roles.

Adrienne Rich

- ★ 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.

Hélène Cixous

★ Hélène Cixous, in a feminist version of deconstruction that 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.

Judith Butler

★ 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 an excessive performance of conventional practices which produces the illusion of inner depth and self.

Interpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan

- ★ Coin the term “transnational” to describe fluid sexual identities in a postmodern diaspora beyond national borders around the globe.
- ★ Seek to unify the typically segmented spheres of study, e.g., psychoanalysis, American studies, postcolonialism, globalism, in a transnational study of sexuality.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty

★ As a Marxist, internationalist/globalist, and liberal feminist, conceptualizes the intersection of class, gender, race, and nationality (especially immigrant status) regarding how global capitalism's systems of exploitation and domination femininize women's labor and render it invisible.

Jasbir Puar

- ★ Relates intersectional feminism, which notes how social categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality interact, with the posthuman intersections of the body and technology and Deleuzian assemblage and deterritorialization theory to show how identity is a process of intersectional assemblage.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

- ★ Illustrates the instability of the homosexual/heterosexual hierarchical binary opposition and decenters the sexual system.
- ★ Distinguishes between gender and sexuality by observing how sexuality is ambiguous and exceeds object choice.

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner

- ★ 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.
- ★ Find that sex is mediated by publics, criticize the hegemonic heteronormativity of the heterosexual monoculture, and offer an alternative through queer publics.

Jóse Esteban Muñoz

★ In his queer utopian hermeneutics built on gay pragmatics, Muñoz imagines an ecstatic horizon in the hopeful future, without anxiousness and fear, beyond identity politics, with improved social relations, freedom, and pleasure.

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