Study Material on Post-Structuralism

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Post-structuralism

Post-structuralism refers to the intellectual developments in continental philosophy and critical theory that were outcomes of twentieth-century French philosophy. The prefix "post" refers to the fact that many contributors such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva were former structuralists who, after abandoning structuralism, became quite critical of it. In direct contrast to structuralism's claims of culturally independent meaning, post-structuralists typically view culture as inseparable from meaning.

While post-structuralism is difficult to define or summarize, it can be broadly understood as a body of distinct reactions to structuralism. There are two main reasons for this difficulty. First, it rejects definitions that claim to have discovered absolute 'truths' or facts about the world. Second, very few people have willingly accepted the label 'post-structuralist'; rather, they have been labeled as such by others. Therefore no one has felt compelled to construct a 'manifesto' of post-structuralism. Thus the exact nature of post-structuralism and whether it can be considered a single philosophical movement is debated. It has been pointed out that the term is not widely used in Europe (where most supposedly "post-structuralist" theory originates) and that the concept of a post-structuralist theoretical paradigm is largely the invention of American academics and publishers.

What is shared is a suspicion of the universal structures that were the object of structuralist study. While post-structuralists still employ methods gleaned from structuralism, they no longer share the structuralists certainty in the ability to reveal the defining structures of society (Claude

Levi-Strauss), narrative (Vladimir Propp) or the mind (Sigmund Freud). Even linguistics, the basis for structuralism in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure has undergone a major revision since his time.

History

Post-structuralism emerged in France during the 1960s as an antinomian movement, critiquing structuralism. The period was marked by political anxiety, as students and workers alike rebelled against the state in May 1968, nearly causing the downfall of the French government. At the same time, however, the French communist party's (PCF) support of the oppressive policies of the USSR contributed to popular disillusionment with orthodox Marxism. As a result, there was increased interest in alternative radical philosophies, including feminism, western Marxism, phenomenology, and nihilism. These disparate perspectives, which Michel Foucault later labeled "subjugated knowledges," were all linked by being critical of dominant Western philosophy and culture. Post-structuralism offered a means of justifying these criticisms, by exposing the underlying assumptions of many Western norms.

Two key figures in the early post-structuralist movement were Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. In a 1966 lecture "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science", Jacques Derrida presented a thesis on an apparent rupture in intellectual life. Derrida interpreted this event as a "decentering" of the former intellectual cosmos. Instead of progress or divergence from an identified center, Derrida described this "event" as a kind of "play."

American roots

Some of the ideas of poststructuralism were anticipated by the philosophy of the school of New Criticism, a group of twentieth century literary critics who sought to read literary texts removed from historical or biographical contexts. New Criticism dominated American literary criticism during the forties, fifties and sixties. The crucial New Critical precept of the "Intentional Fallacy" declares that a poem does not belong to its author; rather, "it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it. The poem belongs to the public." William Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley wrote this in 1946, decades before Barthes' essay. ("The Intentional Fallacy." Sewanee Review 54 (1946): 468-488. Revised and republished in The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry. (University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3-18.) New Criticism differs significantly from Poststructuralism, however, in that it attempts to arrive at more authoritative interpretations of texts.

Derrida's lecture at Johns Hopkins

The occasional designation of post-structuralism as a movement can be tied to the fact that mounting criticism of structuralism became evident at approximately the same time that structuralism became a topic of interest in universities in the United States. This interest led to a 1966 conference at Johns Hopkins University that invited scholars who were thought to be

prominent structuralists, including Derrida, Barthes, and Jacques Lacan. Derrida's lecture at that conference, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences," often appears in collections as a manifesto against structuralism. Derrida's essay was one of the earliest to propose some theoretical limitations to structuralism, and to attempt to theorize on terms that were clearly no longer structuralist.

The element of "play" in the title of Derrida's essay is often erroneously taken to be "play" in a linguistic sense, based on a general tendency towards puns and humor, while social constructionism as developed in the later work of Michel Foucault is said to create a sense of strategic agency by laying bare the levers of historical change.

Structuralism vs. Post-structuralism

Post-structuralism may be understood as a critical response to the basic assumptions of structuralism. Structuralism was a fashionable movement in France in the 1950s and 1960s, that studied the underlying structures inherent in cultural products (such as texts), and utilizes analytical concepts from linguistics, psychology, anthropology and other fields to understand and interpret those structures. Although the structuralist movement fostered critical inquiry into these structures, it emphasized logical and scientific results. Many structuralists sought to integrate their work into pre-existing bodies of knowledge. This was observed in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure in linguistics, Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology, and many early twentieth-century psychologists.

The general assumptions of post-structuralism derive from critique of structuralist premises. Specifically, post-structuralism holds that the study of underlying structures is itself culturally conditioned and therefore subject to myriad biases and misinterpretations. To understand an object (e.g., one of the many meanings of a text), it is necessary to study both the object itself, and the systems of knowledge which were coordinated to produce the object. In this way, post-structuralism positions itself as a study of how knowledge is produced.

Historical vs. descriptive view

Post-structuralists generally assert that post-structuralism is historical, and classify structuralism as descriptive. This terminology relates to linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between the views of historical (diachronic) and descriptive (synchronic) theories of language. From this basic distinction, post-structuralist studies often re-introduce the historical element to analyze descriptive, diachronic concepts. The re-introduction of the historical element serves to destabilize the fixed meanings applied by structuralist categories. Michel Foucault's works, such as Madness and Civilization, which examines the history and cultural attitudes about madness, is a good example of poststructuralist analysis.

Scholars between both movements

The uncertain distance between structuralism and post-structuralism is further blurred by the fact that scholars generally do not label themselves as post-structuralists. In some cases (e.g., Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes), scholars associated with structuralism became noteworthy in post-structuralism as well. Along with Lévi-Strauss, three of the most prominent post-structuralists were first counted among the so-called "Gang of Four" of structuralism par excellence: Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault. The works of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Julia Kristeva are also counted as prominent examples of post-structuralism.

Many of those who began from the perspective that texts could be interpreted based solely on the cultural and social structures came to believe that the reader's culture and society shared an equal part in the interpretation of a piece.

Death of the author

Though Barthes was originally a structuralist, during the 1960s he grew increasingly favorable to post-structuralist views. In 1968, Barthes published “The Death of the Author” in the American journal Aspen. The essay later appeared in an anthology of his essays, Image-Music-Text (1977), a book that also included "From Work to Text." In it he declared a metaphorical event: the "death" of the author as an authentic source of meaning for a given text. Barthes argued that any literary text has multiple meanings, and that the author was not the prime source of the work's semantic content. The "Death of the Author," Barthes maintained, was the "Birth of the Reader," as the source of the proliferation of meanings of the text.

In his essay, Barthes criticizes the reader's tendency to consider aspects of the author’s identity—his political views, historical context, religion, ethnicity, psychology, or other biographical or personal attributes—to distill meaning from his work. In this critical schematic, the experiences and biases of the author serve as its definitive “explanation.” For Barthes, this is a tidy, convenient method of reading and is sloppy and flawed: “To give a text an Author” and assign a single, corresponding interpretation to it “is to impose a limit on that text.” Readers must separate a literary work from its creator in order to liberate it from interpretive tyranny (a notion similar to Erich Auerbach’s discussion of narrative tyranny in Biblical parables), for each piece of writing contains multiple layers and meanings. In a famous quotation, Barthes draws an analogy between text and textiles, declaring that a “text is a tissue [or fabric] of quotations,” drawn from “innumerable centers of culture,” rather than from one, individual experience. The essential meaning of a work depends on the impressions of the reader, or community of readers as Stanley Fish would point out, rather than the “passions” or “tastes” of the writer; “a text’s unity lies not in its origins,” or its creator, “but in its destination,” or its audience.

No longer being the focus of creative influence, the author is merely a “scriptor” (a word Barthes uses expressly to disrupt the traditional continuity of power between the terms “author” and “authority”). The scriptor exists to produce but not to explain the work and “is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the

writing, [and] is not the subject with the book as predicate." Every work is "eternally written here and now," with each re-reading, because the "origin" of meaning lies exclusively in "language itself" and its impressions on the reader.

Barthes notes that the traditional critical approach to literature raises a thorny problem: how can we detect precisely what the writer intended? His answer is that we cannot. He introduces this notion in the epigraph to the essay, taken from Honoré de Balzac's story Sarrasine, in which a male protagonist mistakes a castrato for a woman and falls in love with her. When, in the passage, the character dotes over her perceived womanliness, Barthes challenges his own readers to determine both who is speaking, and what is said. "Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? … We can never know." Writing, "the destruction of every voice," defies adherence to a single interpretation or perspective.

Barthes's articulation of the death of the author is, however, the most radical and most drastic recognition of this severing of authority and authorship. Instead of discovering a "single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God)," readers of text discover that writing, in reality, constitutes "a multi-dimensional space," which cannot be "deciphered," only "disentangled." "Refusing to assign a 'secret,' ultimate meaning" to text "liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law." The implications of Barthes's radical vision of critical reading are indicative of the inherently political nature of this vision, which reverses the balance of authority and power between author and reader. Like the dethroning of a monarchy, the "death of the author" clears political space for the multi-voiced populace at large, ushering in the long-awaited "birth of the reader."

Michel Foucault also addresses the subject of the author in critical interpretation in a response to Barthes's death of the author theory. In his 1979 essay "What is an Author?," he argues for the term "author function," which essentially fills what some critics see as the void left by Barthes's theory.

Theory

General practices

Post-structural practices generally operate on some basic assumptions:

Post-structuralists hold that the concept of "self" as a singular and coherent entity is a fictional construct. Instead, an individual comprises conflicting tensions and knowledge claims (e.g., gender, class, profession, etc.). Therefore, to properly study a text a reader must understand how the work is related to his or her own personal concept of self. This self-perception plays a critical role in one's interpretation of meaning. While different thinkers' views on the self (or the subject)

vary, it is often said to be constituted by discourse(s). Lacan's account includes a psychoanalytic dimension, while Foucault stresses the effects of power on the self.

The meaning the author intended is secondary to the meaning that the reader perceives. Post-structuralism rejects the idea of a literary text having a single purpose, a single meaning or one singular existence. Instead, every individual reader creates a new and individual purpose, meaning, and existence for a given text. To step outside of literary theory, this position is generalizable to any situation where a subject perceives a sign. Meaning (or the signified, in Saussure's scheme, which is heavily presumed upon in post-structuralism as in structuralism) is constructed by an individual from a signifier. This is why the signified is said to 'slide' under the signifier, and explains the talk about the 'primacy of the signifier'.

A post-structuralist critic must be able to utilize a variety of perspectives to create a multifaceted interpretation of a text, even if these interpretations conflict with one another. It is particularly important to analyze how the meanings of a text shift in relation to certain variables, usually involving the identity of the reader.

Destabilized meaning

In the post-structuralist approach to textual analysis, the reader replaces the author as the primary subject of inquiry. This displacement is often referred to as the "destabilizing" or "decentering" of the author, though it has its greatest effect on the text itself. Without a central fixation on the author, post-structuralists examine other sources for meaning (e.g., readers, cultural norms, other literature, etc.). These alternative sources are never authoritative, and promise no consistency.

Deconstruction

A major theory associated with Structuralism was binary opposition. This theory proposed that there are certain theoretical and conceptual opposites, often arranged in a hierarchy, which structure a given text. Such binary pairs could include male/female, speech/writing, rational/emotional.

Post-structuralism rejects the notion of the essential quality of the dominant relation in the hierarchy, choosing rather to expose these relations and the dependency of the dominant term on its apparently subservient counterpart. The only way to properly understand these meanings is to deconstruct the assumptions and knowledge systems which produce the illusion of singular meaning.

A good example of this is a close reading of the Dylan Thomas poem, "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London," that incorporates the line "After the first death there is no other." A deconstructionist will view this as widely open: Since there is a "first death," there is the implication that there will be another, yet Thomas contradicts himself in the line by saying "there is no other." Deconstructionists assert that this shows "discontinuity" in the line. This

discontinuity points out that the language has a "slipperiness" which makes precise interpretation impossible. Meaning, therefore, is equally in the hands of the reader and the author.

Metalanguage

Although many may have felt the necessity to move beyond structuralism, there was clearly no consensus on how this was to occur. Much of the study of post-structuralism is based on the common critiques of structuralism. Roland Barthes is of great significance with respect to post-structuralist theory. In his work, Elements of Semiology (1967), he advanced the concept of the "metalanguage." A metalanguage is a systematized way of talking about concepts like meaning and grammar beyond the constraints of a traditional (first-order) language; in a metalanguage, symbols replace words and phrases. Insofar as one metalanguage is required for one explanation of first-order language, another may be required, so metalanguages may actually replace first-order languages. Barthes exposes how this structuralist system is regressive; orders of language rely upon a metalanguage by which it is explained, and therefore deconstruction itself is in danger of becoming a metalanguage, thus exposing all languages and discourse to scrutiny. Barthes' other works contributed deconstructive theories about texts.

Detailed discussion on some basic concepts related to Post-Structuralism keeping Deconstruction as the centre of interest:

The concept of Deconstruction was given by Derrida and to have a clear notion of it one must know the concept of Logocentrism.

Logocentrism: "Logocentrism" is a term coined by the German philosopher Ludwig Klages in the early 1900s. It refers to the tradition of Western science and philosophy that regards words and language as a fundamental expression of an external reality. It holds the logos as epistemologically superior and that there is an original, irreducible object which the logos represent. According to logocentrism, the logos is the ideal representation of the Platonic ideal.

This term refers to any system of thought which is founded on the stability and authority of Logos, the divine word. According to C.H.Dodd, Logos is both a thought and a word and the two are inseparable: the Logos in the word as determined by and conveying a meaning. In its simple meaning it can signify “statement”, “saying”, “discourse” or “science”.

In its ancient Greek philosophical and Judio-Christian meaning, the Logos referred both to the Word of God, which created the universe and to the rational order of creation itself.

It is in the spoken logos that language and reality ultimately coincide, in an identity that is invested with absolute authority, absolute origin and absolute purpose.

If we think of the orders of language and reality as follows, it is clear that one of the functions of the Logos is to preserve the stability and closure of entire system.

LOGOS

Language Reality

Signifier1(word) -------a------ Signified1(concept)-------b---------- object1

Signifier2(word) -------a------ Signified2(concept)-------b---------- object2

Signifier3(word) -------a------ Signified3(concept)-------b---------- object3

Signifier4(word) -------a------ Signified4(concept)-------b---------- object4

It is because the Logos holds together the orders of language and reality that the relation between signifier and signified i.e. relation 'a' is stable and fixed; so too is relation 'b', the connection between the sign as a whole and the object to which it refers in the world. The logos, thereby, authorizes an entire world view, sanctioned by a theological and philosophical system and by an entire political, religious and social order.

Now if the Logos is removed from the picture, the entire order will become destabilized; historically, of course, this disintegration does not happen all at once but takes centuries. Various groups might give various meaning to a word that a general consensus is lost. There will be an endless substitution. Derrida attributes the name of "Metaphor" to this endless substitution of one signifier for another.

(Perhaps, because of the continuously changing approach of the society for the acceptance of Logos) In describing or attempting to understand our world, we can no longer use 'literal language', i.e. language that actually describes the object or reality, we can only use metaphor, and hence, language in its very nature is metaphorical.

Plato's form, Aristotle's substance, Hegel's absolute idea, modern concepts such as freedom and democracy – Derrida calls them 'transcendental signifieds' or concepts invested with absolute authority (Logos). An important endeavor of deconstruction is to show the operation of Logocentrism in all of its forms, and to bring back these various transcendental signifieds within the province of language and textuality, within the province of their relatability with other concepts.

Hence, in one sense, the most fundamental project of deconstruction is to reinstate language within the connection of the various terms that have continuously dominated Western thoughts: the connection between thought and reality, self and world, subject and object. In deconstruction all these terms are not viewed as already existing prior to language. Rather all are linguistic to begin with: they are enabled by language, thought takes place in, and is made possible by, language.

According to deconstruction theorists, it is a notion of language as a system of relations; (partly influenced by Saussure) the terms which are related have no semantic value outside the network

of relations in which they subsist. Also implicit in this view of language is the arbitrary and conventional nature of the sign: there is no natural connection between the sign "table" and an actual table in the world. Equally arbitrary and conventional is the connection between the signifier "table" and the concept of "table" to which it points.

There is no "truth" or "reality" which stands outside or behind language. "Truth" is a relation of linguistic terms, and reality is a construct, ultimately religious, social, political and economic, but always of language, of various linguistic registers.

Derrida's much quoted statement reads, "There is nothing outside the text", means precisely this: that the aforementioned features of language, which together comprise "textuality", are all-embracing, it governs all interpretative operations. There is no history outside language or textuality: history itself is a linguistic and textual construct.

At its deepest level, the insistence on viewing language (as a system of relations and differences) as lying at the core of any worldview, issues a challenge to the notion of identity: a notion installed at the heart of Western metaphysics since Aristotle. Identity, whether of the human self or of the objects in the world, is no longer viewed as having a stable, fixed or pre-given essence – dependent on variety of contexts. Hence a deconstructive analysis tends to prioritize language and linguistic operations in analyzing texts and contexts.

Binary Opposites: unraveling and undermining of certain opposites

What Is Binary Opposition?

A light switch is either on or off; in a sports match, a team either wins or loses; water is either hot or cold; something in relation to something else can be left or right, up or down, in or out. These are opposites – concepts that can't exist together. Binary opposition is a key concept in structuralism, a theory of sociology, anthropology and linguistics that states that all elements of human culture can only be understood in relation to one another and how they function within a larger system or the overall environment. We often encounter binary oppositions in cultural studies when exploring the relationships between different groups of people, for instance: upper-class and lower-class or disabled and non-disabled. On the surface, these seem like mere identifying labels, but what makes them binary opposites is the notion that they cannot coexist. The problem with a system of binary opposites is that it creates boundaries between groups of people and leads to prejudice and discrimination. One group may fear or consider the opposite group a threat, referred to as the 'other'. The use of binary opposition in literature is a system that authors use to explore differences between groups of individuals, such as cultural, class or gender differences. Authors may explore the gray area between the two groups and what can result from those perceived differences.

Example 1: Harry Potter

In the Harry Potter series, there are two major groups: the magical community and non-magical community. However, there are two sets of people who don't fit clearly into either category;

these are the muggle-borns and half-bloods. The evil wizard Lord Voldemort believes that the only people who should be a part of the magical community are the pure bloods, who come from a long line of full-blooded witches and wizards with no muggle blood. Lord Voldemort and his followers create a binary system in which the pure-blooded wizards would dominate and persecute anyone not purely magical, whether muggle-born, half-blood or muggle. He and his followers use dark magic to ostracize, torture and sometimes even kill these individuals out of fear that they would take over the wizarding world. Using this binary system of pure blood vs non pure blood, J.K. Rowling shows her readers the dangers of creating such categorizations within society.

Consider this image of a poster for the movie Order of the Phoenix. It features Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort and states 'Only one can survive,' reinforcing the idea of binary opposition between these two characters and what they represent.

Example 2: Dr. Jekyll ; Mr. Hyde

Let's look at another example from literature: Robert Louis Stevenson's story The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

In this story, Dr. Henry Jekyll experiments with a potion that changes his appearance and personality from a kindly doctor to an ugly, brutish form (Mr. Hyde), who is rude and immoral. He appears to be completely independent of Jekyll, though he inhabits the same body; he has a different address, looks and sounds different and wears different clothes. Realizing the impact of Hyde on his life, Jekyll struggles with this 'other' self, but eventually commits suicide and is found in the form of Hyde, but wearing Jekyll's clothes.

Stevenson uses the character of Jekyll/Hyde to explore the binary opposites of good and evil, but more importantly, that gray area between good and evil. Jekyll represents the good in human nature, while Hyde represents the evil. Both, however, exist in one man's body and struggle against each other. The struggle between these binary opposites can be said to represent the struggle within each of us between good and evil, reminding us that however hard we might try, we cannot truly compartmentalize the two; most often human nature is neither exclusively good nor exclusively evil. We try to separate ourselves from the evil because we fear it, but the potential for it exists in human nature, even if not always active.

Derrida on Binary Opposites: (from the perspective of a deconstruction theorist)

While this prioritization of language is the fundamental form of deconstruction's exhibition and undermining of logocentrism, deconstructive analysis enlists other strategies and terms toward the same general endeavor. One of these strategies is the unraveling and undermining of certain oppositions which have enjoyed a privileged place in Western metaphysics. Derrida points out that oppositions, such as those between intellect and sense, soul and body, master and slave, male and female, inside and outside, center and margin, do not represent a state of equivalence between two terms. Rather, each of these oppositions is a "violent hierarchy" in which one term has been conventionally subordinated, in gestures that embody a host of religious, social, and political valencies. Intellect, for example, has usually been superordinated over sense; soul has

been exalted above body; male has been defined as superior in numerous respects to female. Derrida's project is not simply to reverse these hierarchies, for such a procedure would remain imprisoned within the framework of binary oppositional thinking represented by those hierarchies. Rather, he attempts to show that these hierarchies represent privileged relationships, relationships that have been lifted above any possible engagement with, and answerability to, the network of concepts in general.
Perhaps the most significant opposition treated by Derrida, an opposition which comprehends many of the other hierarchies, is that between speech and writing. According to Derrida, Western philosophy has privileged speech over writing, viewing speech as embodying an immediate presence of meaning, and writing as a mere substitute or secondary representation of the spoken word. Speech implies, as will be seen shortly, an immediate connection with the Logos, a direct relation to that which sanctions and constrains it; while writing threatens to depart from the Logos, the living source of speech and authority, and to assert its independence.

Differance:

Derrida imputes a meaning to "writing" that far exceeds the notion of "graphic signifier" or "inscription" of letters and words. For him, "writing" designates the totality of what makes inscription possible: all of the differences by which language is constituted. Writing refers to the diffusion of identity (of self, object, signifier, signified) through a vast network of relations and differences. Writing expresses the movement of difference itself. Indeed, it is in an attempt to subvert the conventional priority of speech over writing that Derrida both extends the meaning of "writing" and coins a term that many regard as central to his thought: différance. The significance of this term derives partly from Saussure's concept of "difference" as the constituting principle of language: a term is defined by what it is not, by its differences from other terms. Also, however, Derrida incorporates into his term an ambivalence in the French word différer, which can mean both "to differ" and "to defer" in time. Hence Derrida adds a temporal dimension to the notion of difference. Moreover, the substitution of a for e in the word différance cannot be heard in French: it is a silent displacement that can only be discerned in writing, as if to counter the superior value previously accorded to speech. The terms that recur in Derrida's texts – their meanings often changing according to contexts – are usually related to the extended significance that Derrida accords to "writing." Such terms include "trace," "supplement," "text," "presence," "absence," and "play."

Deconstruction takes on Logocentrism:

Logocentrism, then, is sanctioned and structured in a multitude of ways, all of which are called into question by deconstruction. The privileging of speech over writing, for example, has perpetuated what Derrida calls a "metaphysics of presence," a systematization of thought and interpretation that relies on the stability and self-presence of meaning, effecting a closure and disabling any "free play" of thought which might threaten or question the overall structure. Another way of explaining the term "metaphysics of presence" might be as follows: conventionally, philosophers have made a distinction between the "thisness" or haecceity of an entity and its "whatness" or quiddity. The term "whatness" refers to the content of something, while "thisness" refers to the fact that it exists in a particular place and time. A metaphysics of "presence" would be a metaphysics of complete self-identity: an entity's content is viewed as

coinciding completely with its existence. For example, an isolated entity such as a piece of chalk would be regarded as having its meaning completely within itself, completely in its immediate "presence." Even if the rest of the world did not exist, we could say what the piece of chalk was, what its function and constitution were. Such absolute self-containment of meaning must be sanctioned by a higher authority, a Logos or transcendental signified, which ensured that all things in the world had specific and designated meanings. If, however, we were to challenge such a "metaphysics of presence," we might argue that in fact the meaning of the chalk does not coincide with, and is not confinable within, its immediate existence; that its meaning and purpose actually lie in relations that extend far beyond its immediate existence; its meaning would depend, for example, upon the concept of a "blackboard" on which it was designed to write; in turn, the relationship of chalk and blackboard derives its meaning from increasingly broader contexts, such as a classroom, an institution of learning, associated industries and technologies, as well as political and educational programs. Hence the meaning of "chalk" would extend through a vast network of relations far beyond the actual isolated existence of that item; moreover, its meaning would be viewed as relative to a given social and cultural framework, rather than sanctioned by the presence of a Logos. In this sense, the chalk is not self-identical since its identity is dispersed through its relations with numerous other objects and concepts. Viewed in this light, "chalk" is not a name for a self-subsistent, self-enclosed entity; rather, it names the provisional focal point of a complex set of relations.

What is Deconstructive Reading?

A deconstructive reading of a text, then, as practiced by Derrida, will be a multifaceted project: in general, it will attempt to display logocentric operations in the text, by focusing on a close reading of the text's language, its use of presuppositions or transcendental signifieds, its reliance on binary oppositions, its self-contradictions, its *aporiai* or points of conceptual impasse, and the ways in which it effects closure and resists free play. Hence deconstruction, true to its name (which derives from Heidegger's term *Destruktion*), will examine all of the features that went into the *construction* of text, down to its very foundations. Derrida has been criticized for his lack of clarity, his oblique and refractive style: his adherents have argued that his engagement with the history of Western thought is not one of mere confrontation but necessarily one of inevitable complicity (where he is obliged to use the very terms he impugns) as well as of critique. This dual gesture must necessarily entail play on words, convolution of language that accommodates its fluid nature, and divergence from conventional norms of essayistic writing. It might also be argued that the very form of his texts, not merely their content, is integral to his overall project. Derrida has conducted deconstructive readings of numerous major thinkers, including Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, Freud, Husserl, Lévi-Strauss, and Saussure.

Deconstructivism is a tenet of postmodernism; a subset. The term postmodern is more broad-reaching - it applies to a cultural and social movement in fine arts, literature, architecture, and music starting around the middle of the 20th century, whereas deconstructivism typically applies only to literature.

Hyperreality

simulacrum
NOUN
simulacra *(plural noun)*
an image or representation of someone or something.
synonyms: likeness · painting · drawing · picture · portrait · illustration · sketch · diagram · artist's impression · image · model · figure · figurine · statue · statuette · bust · head · effigy · icon · reproduction

simulation
NOUN
imitation of a situation or process.·

What is Hyperreality

Hyperreality is a concept that is defined by the inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality. It describes how the line between real and fake is blurred, particularly in post modern societies where technology is highly advanced. As such, what our mind defines as 'real' in this world can be 'hyperreal' due to the various types of multimedia that can radically alter or fabricate an original event or experience.

THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

Reality bites! A phrase to often used to describe the bitter truth of life. It's not something we want to accept but let's face it; my childhood dreams of becoming a professional sports star are long extinguished. I'm not tall enough, big enough, fast enough, strong enough, and the list goes on. That's the reality of it all. Though this is not everyone's reality. So what is it really? In philosophy, reality is the state of things that actually exist, rather than they may appear or might be imagined. For many of us reality may be getting a job, paying bills, and to be crude, for all of us, the certainty of death. It is not something that we want to face, even though we are repetitively told we must. These are the harsh realities of life.

So why not escape reality, and save ourselves from this dull, distressing life and escape to somewhere that is more exciting, more beautiful, more inspiring, more terrifying, and generally more interesting than what we encounter in everyday life. Well, the fact is, we do just that. We engage in simulations of reality each day, and we do so by choice. For example, dining out at an Italian restaurant we not only enjoy the food but also engage ourselves in the theme of the evening. The interior design with the wall paintings, the dimmed lighting, the smell of garlic and even the waiter with a profuse moustache add to the feeling that we are in Italy when we are not. Thus demonstrating a simulation of reality. These simulations are continuously surrounding us more and more in the growing pop culture of today, to such an extent that whole fake cities and worlds have been constructed, such as Las Vegas and Disneyland, that are designed to represent reality, allowing a person to exist temporarily in a world outside of what is real. Everything inside these areas are simulations of reality, nothing is real, and people are led to believe that everyone is playing along in these fantasy worlds, adding to a dream like feeling. They are

created to look absolutely realistic, thus allowing it to be more desirable for people to buy into these realities. But it is all a façade to mask its true existence as nothing more than a set of equipment and apparatus designed to bring imagination and fiction to what is called real.

Simulations of reality not only exist in these 'fairytale' like places but all around us, in everyday life. It can be seen in the current cultural condition of consumerism where the reliance on sign value is paramount. Take the 'Levi' brand for example, where by wearing these jeans one may be perceived as fashionable or sexy. Or how a Rolex watch can be used to indicate one's wealth. However, the jeans and the watch itself have little actual value, but rather the status symbol associated with it is how we derive its value. Through the advertisement of different brands, our consciousness is tricked into believing that additional value needs to be assigned according to the simulation of reality that certain products have associated. In addition to this, other examples exist such as McDonald's 'M' arches symbol, which promises to us endless amounts of identical food from the store, but in reality, the 'M' represents nothing at all. It can be seen that these examples add to our replicated world, to such an extent that we seek simulated stimuli over the original that they were designed to represent. One could argue that we live in a world where everything is a copy and nothing is real.

This is particularly true in our technologically advanced post-modern society, where simulations of reality are becoming ever more authentic that we can no longer distinguish between what is real and what is not. Real life examples of this can be drawn by pointing to the concept of mediated reality that attempts to alter one's view of reality through the use of computers and other technological equipment. This interactive technology may allow us to alter our surrounding landscape to a way that we see as more living. As this phenomenon becomes ever more prevalent we may begin to accept these simulated versions of a reality, to such an extent that the simulated version is more valuable and has more meaning to us than the original. This state of being refers to the condition of hyperreality where one's ability of consciousness to distinguish reality to a simulation of reality is no longer inherent to oneself.

JEAN BAUDRILLARD

Jean Baudrillard was a French sociologist, philosopher and cultural theorists whose work is most closely tied with post-structuralism and early post modernism, through which the idea of hyperreality has been shaped.

Baudrillard's early semiotic study found that today's consumer society exists as a large network of signs and symbols that need to be decoded. It is form this that he formed the basis for the work, *Simulacra and Simulation*, which furthered this idea that our current society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs, and that human experience is a simulation of reality. Here, Baudrillard recounts a story by Jorges Luis Borges that tells of imperial mapmakers who makes a map so large and detailed that it covers the whole empire, existing in a one-to-one relationship with the territory underlying it. It is a perfect replica of the empire, and so the citizens of the empire now take the map, or the simulacrum of the empire, for the real empire. The map eventually begins to fray and tatter, but the real territory under the map has turned to desert and all that is left is the frayed map as a simulacrum of reality.

In our culture, Baudrillard argues that we take 'maps' of reality television and film as more real

than our actual lives. These simulacra or hyperreal copies precede our lives, such that our television friends may seem more ‘alive’ to us than the real person playing that character. He also began studying how media affected our perception of reality and the world. Here he found that in a post-modern media-laden society we encounter “the death of the real”, where one lives in a hyperreal realm by connecting more and more deeply with things like television sitcoms, music videos, virtual reality games or Disneyland, things that have come to simulate reality. He argues that in a post-modern culture dominated by TV, films, the Internet and media all that exists are simulations of reality, which aren’t any more or less ‘real’ than the reality they simulate.

As such, Baudrillard points to the process of simulation in which representations of things come to replace the things being represented, and that the representations become more important than the ‘real thing’. The massed collection of these simulations has resulted in the condition of hyperreality, where we only experience prepared realities such as edited war footage or reality TV and the distinction between the ‘real’ and simulations has collapsed.

UMBERTO ECO

Travels in Hyperreality

Travels In Hyperreality is an essay written by the Italian theorist of simulation, Umberto Eco. It is a paper that describes his trip to America where he obtained firsthand experiences of imitations and replicas that were displayed in attractions such as museums and theme parks. Eco talks about Disneyland which he believes are created to be “absolutely realistic”. He also describes the contemporary culture as one that is full of re-creations and themed environments. He believes that this culture is full of realistic fabrications, aimed at creating something that is better than real. Underneath all this is the attempt to increase sales and gain profits.

Eco explains the notion of the "the Absolute Fake,” where imitations aren’t just a reproduction of reality, but an attempt at improving on it. He says that in comparison to these hyperrealistic models, reality can be disappointing. Eco describes that hyperreality results in **“**the **completely real”** becoming “identified with the **completely fake**.”

Daniel Boorstin

'THE IMAGE: A GUIDE TO PSEUDO-EVENTS'

Daniel Boorstin (1914 - 2004) was an American historian, professor, attorney and writer.
His 1961 book **The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events** in American is an early description of aspects of American life that were later termed hyperreality and postmodernity. In The Image, Boorstin describes shifts in American culture — mainly due to advertising — where the reproduction or simulation of an event becomes more important or "real" than the event itself. He goes on to coin the term ‘pseudo-event’ which describes events or activities that serve little to no purpose other than to be reproduced through advertisements or other forms of publicity. A news

conference, a photo-op, a movie premiere, an award ceremony, even a presidential debate — all these are staged, in his analysis, simply to get media attention or, to get attention for attention's sake.

America, according to Boorstin, was threatened by "the menace of unreality," which was infiltrating society, and replacing the authentic with the contrived. He claimed that America was living in an "age of contrivance," in which illusions and fabrications had become a dominant force in society. Just as there were now counterfeit events, i.e. “pseudo-events” so, he said, there were also counterfeit people - celebrities - whose identities were being staged and scripted, to create illusions that often had no relationship to any underlying reality. Everywhere Boorstin looked from journalism, heroism, travel, art, even human aspiration — he believed that the eternal verities that had once governed life had given way to something cheap and phony: a facsimile of life.

1. Of journalism, he would say, "More and more news events become dramatic performances in which 'men in the news' simply act out more or less well their prepared script."
2. Of heroism, he would say that it had been replaced by celebrity, which he famously described as "a person who is known for his well-knownness."
3. Even the tourism industry, which had once offered adventure seekers a passport to reality, now insulated travelers from the places they were visiting, and, instead, provided "artificial products," in which "picturesque natives fashion(ed) papier-mâché images of themselves," for tourists who expected to see scenes out of the movies. Of travel, he would say that tourists increasingly demanded experiences that would "become bland and unsurprising reproductions of what the image-flooded tourist knew was there all the time." He believes that tourism is just the same reproduced events of the same sites with the same people, only with different languages.


Why Boorstin's believes in Hyperreality...

Boorstin's premature definition of hyperreality which he deemed as 'pseudo-events' exists for several reasons. He believes that people have a diabolical need to leave reality. Boorstin thinks people have developed the need for drama and attention. By having dramatic and news worthy stories and unrealistic people as us, our 'heroes' help to create attention.

Mikhail Epstein

Mikhail Epstein is one of Russia's leading cultural theorists, who believe that there is no ultimate reality. Epstein is also a publicist for Russian postmodernism who argued for the deep historical roots of Russian postmodernism as the issue of 'truth' has been the main focus. This issue has been raised after the collapse of the Soviet empire – an empire that relied for its existence on the maintenance of a complex and elaborate system of lies, producing an effect that Epstein aptly named, 'Soviet hyperreality'. Epstein regards the notion of 'true reality' as a 'realistic fallacy,' asserting that hyperreality is 'neither truthful nor false but consists of ideas that become reality for millions of people.'

Epstein has identified the substitution of reality by a 'system of secondary stimuli intended to produce a **sense** of reality' as operating in postmodern cultural production in Russia. He argues that such cultural 'presentations' are a typical '**simulacra**' (extending from Baudrillard's view on hyperreality) which do not claim to be verifiable. Hence, it cannot be reproached as deceptive. Epstein further supports Baudrillard's view that simulations and mass media have the power to displace the real, summarizing the effect of hyperreality:

"On the face of it, mass communication technology appears to capture reality in all its minutest details. But on that advanced level of penetration into the facts, the technical and visual means themselves construct a reality of another order, which has been called 'hyperreality.' This 'hyperreality' is a **phantasmic creation** of the means of mass communication, but as such it emerges as a more authentic, exact, **real** reality than the one we perceive in the life around us."

Bird's eye view:

Post-Structuralism is a late 20th Century movement in philosophy and literary criticism, which is difficult to summarize but which generally defines itself in its opposition to the popular Structuralism movement which preceded it in 1950s and 1960s France. It is closely related to Post-Modernism, although the two concepts are not synonymous.

In the Post-Structuralist approach to textual analysis, the reader replaces the author as the primary subject of inquiry and, without a central fixation on the author, Post-Structuralists

examine other sources for meaning (e.g., readers, cultural norms, other literature, etc), which are therefore never authoritative, and promise no consistency. A reader's culture and society, then, share at least an equal part in the interpretation of a piece to the cultural and social circumstances of the author.

Some of the key assumptions underlying Post-Structuralism include:

- The concept of "self" as a singular and coherent entity is a fictional construct, and an individual rather comprises conflicting tensions and knowledge claims (e.g. gender, class, profession, etc). The interpretation of meaning of a text is therefore dependent on a reader's own personal concept of self.
- An author's intended meaning (although the author's own identity as a stable "self" with a single, discernible "intent" is also a fictional construct) is secondary to the meaning that the reader perceives, and a literary text (or, indeed, any situation where a subject perceives a sign) has no single purpose, meaning or existence.
- It is necessary to utilize a variety of perspectives to create a multi-faceted interpretation of a text, even if these interpretations conflict with one another.

Post-Structuralism emerged in France during the 1960s, a period of political turmoil, rebellion and disillusionment with traditional values, accompanied by a resurgence of interest in Feminism, Western Marxism, Phenomenology and Nihilism. Many prominent Post-Structuralists (generally labeled as such by others rather than by themselves), such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes (1915 - 1980), were initially Structuralists but later came to explicitly reject most of Structuralism's claims, particularly its notion of the fixity of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, but also the overall grandness of the theory, which seemed to promise everything and yet not quite to deliver.

In his 1966 lecture *"Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science"*, Jacques Derrida (a key figure in the early Post-Structuralist movement, although he later founded the Deconstructionism movement), was one of the first to propose some theoretical limitations to Structuralism, and identified an apparent de-stabilizing or de-centering in intellectual life (referring to the displacement of the author of a text as having greatest effect on a text itself, in favor of the various readers of the text), which came to be known as Post-Structuralism.

Roland Barthes (1915 - 1980), originally a confirmed Structuralist, published his *"The Death of the Author"* in 1968, in which he argued that any literary text has multiple meanings, and that the author was not the prime source of the work's semantic content. In his 1967 work *"Elements of Semiology"*, he also advanced the concept of the metalanguage, a systematized way of talking about concepts like meaning and grammar beyond the constraints of traditional (first-order) language.

Other notable Post-Structuralists include Gilles Deleuze (1925 - 1995), Julia Kristeva (1941 -), Umberto Eco (1932 - 2016), Jean Baudrillard (1929 - 2007) and Judith Butler (1956 -).

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