

English 216: Notes for Chapter 6

Chapter 6: Structuralism and Poststructuralism

Structuralism

- study of knowable underlying structure to all communication & social relation

Ferdinand de Saussure

- a theory of linguistics: **signs** = **signifier** (word or reference) + **signified** (object or referent)
- **relation**: meaning is conventional, resemblance is not involved
- **difference**: signs are recognizably not the same as other signs
- **syntagmatic** meaning: adding words/phrases (i.e., horizontal)
- **paradigmatic** meaning: substituting words/phrases (i.e., vertical)
- **langue**: underlying structure, grammar/syntax/vocabulary/pronunciation (homogenous)
- **parole**: individual expressions, language in use (heterogenous)
- **synchronic**: stable/fixed model of language (Saussure's approach)
- **diachronic**: changing/historically contingent model (not Saussure's approach)
- **semiotics/semiology**: application of Saussurean linguistics to everything
 - i.e., how everything became a "text" to be "read"

Lévi-Strauss on "myths"

- semiotics as applies to *anthropology*
- **myths**: instances of cultural expression; like parole as controlled by the langue

- **binaries:** mythical definitions via opposites, the “other” defines the “self”
- **magical resolution:** how binaries create a “world without contradictions”

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*

- (semiotics as applied to popular culture)
- **myths:** second-order signs, use signs as signifiers, “depoliticized speech”
- **naturalization:** hide ideological content by loading objects with myths
- **demystification:** reveal a myth’s construction (i.e., denaturalization)
- images with text attached
 - **relay:** when text amplifies the mythical meaning of an image
 - **anchorage:** when text fixes the mythical meaning of an image

Poststructuralism

- underlying system is an illusion, readers create “meaning” in the moment

Jacques Derrida and *différance*

- rejection of semiology’s *certainty*
- **différance:** words differ but also infinitely defer, there’s no ultimate signified
- **intertextuality:** traces of other texts are detectable in a given text
- **deconstruction:** signifier/signified relation is one of dominance
- political goal is to dismantle the system, not just invert dominance

Michel Foucault, discourse and power

- redefinition of power, introduction of possibility of resistance
- **discourse** (broad definition): a shared sub-language around a topic

- **discourse** (Foucault's definition): enables, constrains, and constitutes
 - **enable:** make communication possible
 - **constrain:** limit what's possible to communicate
 - **constitute:** creates subjects in the moment of speech (i.e., it reifies)
- **regimes of truth:** knowledge & power define "reality", resistance is entirely possible
 - **power:** productive, not inherently negative, it's just what produces reality
- **panopticon:** theoretical jail, inmates might be under surveillance at all times
 - **panopticism:** historical shift from punishment to discipline
 - **punishment:** spectacle of state power, usually violent
 - **discipline:** possibility of state surveillance, normalize behaviours