

Structuralism & Post-Structuralism

Cultural Theory and Popular Culture
J. Storey
Chapter 6

Media & Culture Presentation
Marianne DeMarco

STRUCTURALISM DEFINED

Structuralism is an approach to the human sciences that attempts to analyze a specific field as a complex system of interrelated parts. Structuralism states that human culture is to be understood as a system of signs.*

It began with the study of Linguistics.

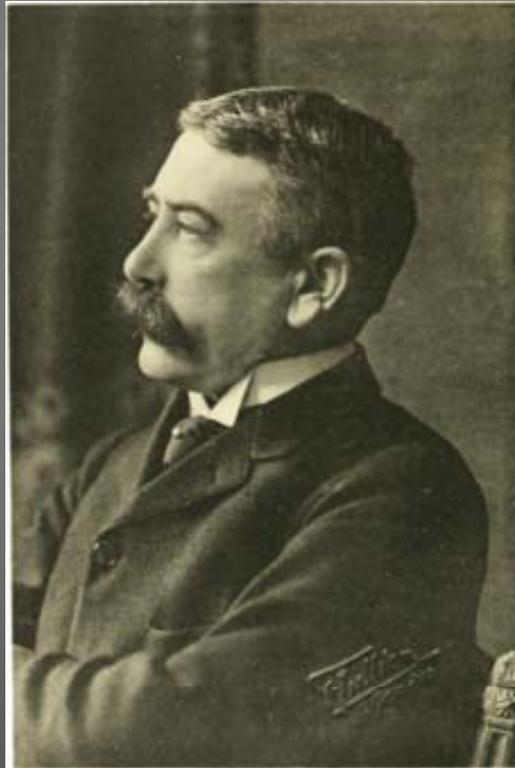
Eventually expanded and applied to the following fields of study:

- Sociology
- Anthropology
- Psychology
- Psychoanalysis
- Literary theory
- Architecture

The task of structuralism is to make explicit the rules and conventions (the structure) which govern the production of meaning.

*<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structuralism>

Ferdinand de Saussure



Ferdinand de Saussure

A Swiss theorist who established structuralism in the early 20th Century. *Course in Linguistics* is a book published posthumously based on notes from his former students.

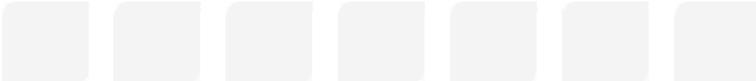
Structuralism takes two basic ideas from Saussure's work:

1. A concern with the underlying relations of texts and practices, "the grammar" which makes meaning possible.
2. The view that meaning is always the result of the interplay of relationships of selection and combination made possible by the underlying structure.

A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and proceeds to fire it at the other patrons.

'Why?' asks the confused, surviving waiter amidst the carnage, as the panda makes towards the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses it over his shoulder.

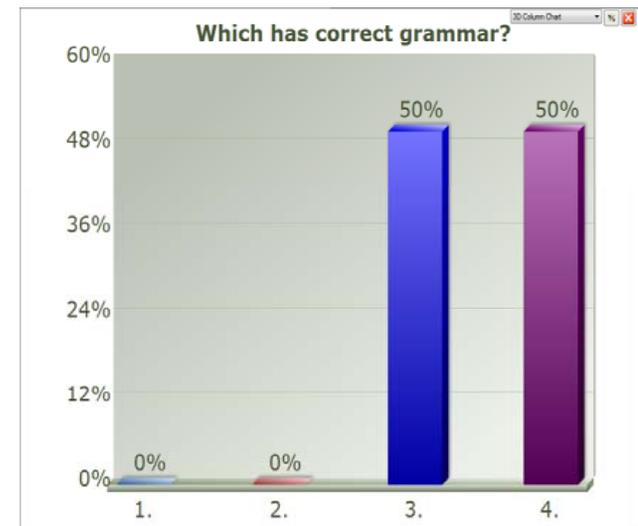
'Well, I'm a panda', he says, at the door. 'Look it up.'
The waiter turns to the relevant entry in the manual and, sure enough, finds an explanation. 'Panda. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots, and leaves.'



Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation
By Lynne Truss

Which has correct grammar?

1. July 4, 1776, is regarded as the birth date of American liberty.
2. July 1776 was one of the most eventful months in our history.
3. The Declaration of Independence was signed on 4 July 1776.
4. All of the above



Ferdinand de Saussure

Semiology - is the study of sign processes

- Meaning is the result of difference and relationships

Mainly focusing on dividing language:

- Parole - Speech or use of language
- Langue – underlying system of language

Consisting of two basic components:

- The signifier - the *sound pattern* of a word, spoken and mentally
- The signified - meaning of the word
- The two together make up – “The Sign”



- The word dog is the signifier
- There is nothing about the actual word that resembles an actual dog, the signified
- Saussure states that meaning is produced as a result of the difference and relationship

Ferdinand de Saussure

- Meaning is made in a process of combination and selection.
- Meaning is accumulated horizontally along the syntagmatic axis and vertically along the paradigmatic axis.
- Substitutions from the paradigmatic axis could alter meaning considerably.
- The language that we speak plays a significant role in shaping what constitutes our sense of reality.

Examples: Unuit – over 50 words to describe snow

Australian Aborigines – many words to describe the desert

Two groups of men in different colored costume. one red. the other in silver and maroon. moving at different speeds. In different directions. across a green surface. marked with white lines. They would notice that a white spherical projectile appeared to have some influence on the various patterns of cooperation and competition. They would also notice a man dressed in dark green. with a whistle which he blew to stop and start the combinations of play. They would also note that he appeared to be supported by two other men also dressed in dark green. one on either side of the main activity. each using a flag to support the limited authority of the man with the whistle. Finally. they would note the presence of two men. one at each end of the playing area. standing in front of partly netted structures.

What am I?

1. War
2. Soccer
3. A Ritual



Claude Lévi-Strauss & Will Wright

Strauss builds on Saussure but focuses on the unconscious foundations of primitive societies:

- Cooking
- Manners
- Modes of Dress
- Aesthetic Activity
- Cultural and Social Practices

Myths work like language – they only take meaning when combined in particular patterns.

Myths are stories we tell ourselves as a culture in order to banish contradictions and make the world understandable and therefore habitable; they attempt to put us at peace with ourselves and our existence.



Claude Lévi-Strauss & Will Wright

Will Wright uses Strauss' structuralist methodology to analyze Hollywood Westerns.

There are three types of Westerns:

1. The Classic Western
2. The Transition Theme Western
3. The Professional Western

The Classic Western

1. The hero enters a social group.
2. The hero is unknown to the society.
3. The hero is revealed to have an exceptional ability.
4. The society recognizes a difference between themselves and the hero: the hero is given a special status.
5. The society does not completely accept the hero.
6. There is a conflict of interests between the villains and the society.
7. The villains are stronger than the society: the society is weak.
8. There is a strong friendship or respect between the hero and a villain.
9. The villains threaten the society.
10. The hero avoids involvement in the conflict.
11. The villains endanger a friend of the hero.
12. The hero fights the villains.
13. The hero defeats the villains.
14. The society is safe.
15. The society accepts the hero.
16. The hero loses or gives up his special status

••••• Transition Theme Western •••••

- Bridge between the classic Western, the form which dominated the 1930s, the 1940s and most of the 1950s and the professional Western, the form, which dominated the 1960s and 1970s.
- The binary oppositions are reversed, and we see the hero outside society struggling against a strong, but corrupt and corrupting civilization

••••• The Professional Western •••••

Structuring oppositions in the “professional” Western

Hero	Society
Outside society	Inside Society
Good	Bad
Weak	Strong
Wilderness	Civilization

Dances with Wolves

The Classic
Western

The hero and
society are
aligned in
opposition to
the villains
outside society

Transitional
Western

A bridge
between the
two forms of
westerns

The Professional
Western

Hero outside
society
struggling
against a
strong corrupt
civilization

Mythologies

Roland Barthes

Mythologies

- A collection of essays on French popular culture
- By myth he means ideology understood as a body of ideas and practices, which by actively promoting the values and interests of dominant groups in society, defend the prevailing structures of power.
- Barthes uses the terms Primary Substitution (denotation) and Secondary Substitution (connotation)
- Using the dog example: the sign dog is the primary signification. The secondary level of the signified dog = an unpleasant human being.

Mythologies

- Images rarely appear without the accompaniment of a linguistic text of one kind or another
- Accompanying text controls the production connotations in the image. Image does not illustrate text.
- Text produces an entirely new signified which is retroactively projected on to the image
- What makes the move from denotation to connotation possible is the store of social knowledge upon which the reader is able to draw when he or she reads the image



Example of French Imperiality

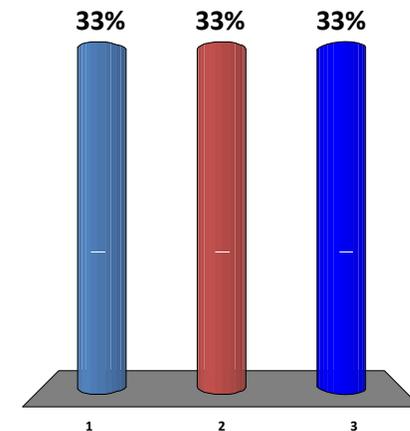
An alibi for French Imperiality

Very Presence of French Imperiality



Which caption goes with this photo?

1. On a hot summer day in 1947, these spectators watch the final moments of a tense baseball game. Some fans are yelling in disapproval at the umpire because they don't like a call he made.
2. Entertainer Paul Robeson sings to laborers working at the racially integrated Moore Shipyards in Oakland, California, on September 21, 1942.
3. A mournful crowd gathers to watch the funeral procession of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. drive past.



Post-Structuralism

JACQUES DERRIDA



JACQUES DERRIDA

- Derrida adds to Saussure “meaning is always deferred, never fully present.”
- Binary opposition is never a simple structural relation. It is always a relation of power, in which one term is in a position of dominance with regard to the other
- Example: Black and White

JACQUES DERRIDA

- Derrida deconstructs the binary opposition between speech and writing.
- Jean Jacques Rousseau – speech is the natural way to express thought and writing is a dangerous supplement
- Derrida writing is both an addition and a substitute for speech.

DISCOURSE & POWER

Michael Foucault & Edward Said

Discourses work in 3 ways

They enable

They constrain

They constitute

Academic
Disciplines

Game of
Sports

Language

Example: Language is a discourse. It enables us to speak. It constrains what we say, It constitutes us as speaking subjects

Moreover, what we think of as our 'selves' is the internalization of a multiplicity of discourses. In other words, all the things we are, are enabled, constrained and constituted in discourses.



Foucault (1981) charts the development of the discursive formation of sexuality.

He tracks the discourse of sexuality through a series of discursive domains: medicine, demography, psychiatry, pedagogy, social work, criminology, governmental.

The Victorian invention of sexuality did not just produce knowledge about sexuality, it sought to produce power over sexuality

Power produces reality; through discourses it produces the 'truths' we live by



Edward Said (1985), in one of the founding texts of post-colonial theory, shows how a Western discourse on the Orient - 'Orientalism' - has constructed a 'knowledge' of the East and a body of 'power-knowledge' relations articulated in the interests of the 'power' of the West

Orientalism is the term he uses to describe the relationship between Europe and the Orient, in particular, the way 'the Orient has helped to define Europe its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience

Hollywood's Vietnam War is in many ways a classic example of a particular form of Orientalism.

In this way Hollywood - together with other discursive practices, songs, novels, TV serials. etc. - has succeeded in producing a very powerful discourse on Vietnam

The End End