

Dear Students,

Today in class we reviewed the basics of narrative analysis and explored how it might be used in the example of *The Salt March*, a short children's story about the history of Indian independence presented by BookBox. Following this, we briefly discussed some key periods, features, and theories associated with various feminist movements. These included a history of feminism in American, including the first, second, and third waves and some general classifications of feminist theory, such as *Liberal Feminism*, *Socialist Feminism*, and *Difference Feminism*.

Following this review of narrative analysis and introduction of feminism as a perspective for exploring gender in popular culture, I introduced some basic principles for Marxist economic determinism. Remember, the reason we're discussing Freud, Marx, and McLuhan is because they present deterministic theories which are important for comprehending contemporary work in the field of Cultural Studies. Some theorists reject these determinisms and others change or adapt them, but they should not be dismissed simply because of their age and *especially* not because of their origin.

Some basic principles of Marxism include the following:

Materialism: The idea that the conditions of our lives are determined by material production and the social and economic relationships that it creates. Marx wrote that "The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness (Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*).

Base & Superstructure: Base elements include the materials and relations essential to the industrial production necessary for a society to sustain itself (e.g. mines, quarries, oil-rigs, power plants, factories, labor markets, natural resources, etc.). Superstructure elements include the social institutions which serve to naturalize and reinforce the relationships created by the base elements (e.g. schools, churches, museums, theaters, and ...media institutions).

Class Conflict: Economic class is determined by *ownership*. Capitalists own the means of production and use it to enrich themselves while workers sell their labor to survive. In Marxist theory the terms "bourgeoisie" (owner) and "proletariat" (worker) are also commonly used. The test to determine whether you are an owner or a worker is simple: If you need a job to support yourself, you're a worker. If your primary source of income is from investment dividends, you're an owner.

Surplus Value: Surplus value is equal to the difference between what workers are paid to produce a product and what the product is ultimately sold for on the market. For Marx, this markup is the basis for the claim of exploitation that forms the moral foundation of Marxism. The worker is exploited because he/she is forced to sell his/her labor as a commodity on the open market for a value that is less (most often far less) than what it is worth.

Alienation & Consumption:

Commodification of labor (i.e. the transaction of labor on the free market) changes the activity of work from something that expresses the identity and individuality of the worker into something anonymous that is forced upon the worker and serves as a basic contingency of his or her survival. Because work no longer fulfills identity needs, workers turn to the consumption of fetish products to construct identity. (Marx perceived of commodities as a fetish which obscured the truth about economic relations.)

Ideology & False Consciousness: Ideology is a narrative used to understand the world. Marx's idea of "false consciousness" is simply the ideology of the ruling class (i.e. capitalist owners) that has been adopted by the working class (i.e. proletariat workers). False consciousness is a view of economic reality as being "natural" and not historical. It is the "common sense" notion that the present reality is the only one that's possible. Specifically, Marx writes:

"The ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the dominant *material* force in society is at the same time its dominant *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that in consequence the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are, in general, subject to it."

Hegemony: The resonance between false consciousness and real experience. Hegemony is the mechanisms by which the working class is persuaded of the justice of their own oppression. Antonio Gramsci coined the term and defined hegemony as:

"agreement from the majority of a society for the 'picture of life' that is represented by those in power. The values, both moral and political, involved in this agreement will be largely those of the ruling class. The ideology comes to be seen as evident "common sense" by the majority of people. It becomes "natural" to think like that."

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Marxism and neo-Marxism is important to Cultural Studies for providing a way to understand how media serve to reinforce and perpetuate the economic power structure that privileges the dominant groups in a society.