

## Session Nine Lecture Notes: Sex, Desire, & Fragmentation

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21L.435/CMS.840 - At the Limit: Violence in Contemporary Representation

Two Areas: Narrative Terms; Interpellation/Hailing

(1) Narrative (b/c of complex form; and have several questions on it for today)

Organization of the narrative (what's the story?) /distinction between story and plot

**Story versus Plot**—address the issue of What gaps do we fill in ourselves?

Story = pattern of actions as they unfold in chronological order  
(cause and effect chain in time and space) (the REAL LIFE level)  
→ this is an imaginary construct that the reader/viewer creates

Plot = artistic organization (or disorganization, even distortion) of this  
causal-chronological order of events (the TEXTUAL narrative level)

**Anachronies:** forms of discordance between two temporal orders—order of events in a story and order they are presented in the plot (e.g. flashforwards, flashbacks)

Narrative “does not simply mirror what happens; it explores and devises what can happen. It does not merely recount changes of state, it constitutes and interprets them as signifying parts of signifying wholes. [. . .] [N]arrative deciphers time [. . .] and illuminates temporality and humans as temporal beings.” (Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*)

\* Interesting in light of other forms of decipherment and understanding here: dissection, exploration, confession, revelation, etc.

(2) Interpellation (Althusser)

**Louis Althusser** was a French Marxist philosopher. Althusser was a longtime member - although sometimes a strong critic - of the French Communist Party. Althusser is commonly referred to as a Structural Marxist, although his relationship to other schools of French structuralism is not a simple affiliation and he was critical of many aspects of structuralism. Althusser's life was marked by periods of intense mental illness. During one of his bouts, he killed his wife.

Althusser's version of Marxism emphasized that ideology (way that power is naturalized) worked through social practices: power was not about state repression, but about how people made seemingly normal everyday choices: so ideology works through desires, choices, preferences, judgments, etc. We think that we're independent autonomous subjects but for Althusser, a complex collection of factors shapes almost everything we do and choose and believe. Social practices shape the individual: not the other way around.

His critique of Marxism was that it had focused too much on Repressive State Apparatus (Heads of State, government, police, courts, army etc.). Rather, for Althusser, the way in which these desires and values are produced in subjects is through ideological practices and institutions – which he called “Ideological State Apparatuses” – the family, the media, religion, and for him most importantly (relevant to you) the university, the education system. This is how ideology is produced and passed down. Each of these “ISAs” disseminates ideas: we learn what it is to be a “good student,” a “good daughter,” a “good Catholic” and this disciplines and produces the subject.

Now, I bring this up for a specific reason: the means by which ideology works is what Althusser called “**hailing**” (or **interpellation**)... imagine you’re walking down the street and a policeman shouts “HEY YOU!”

You hear this, and you respond by turning around: at this moment, Althusser argues, you’ve been transformed into a subject: you have constituted yourself as a subject of the law and you respond in a certain way. Even if this recognition is a fundamental mis-recognition (you have nothing to be guilty about, you’ve broken no laws), you’ve still been interpellated into a conventional set of disciplinary boundaries governing police, law, guilt, and order. **At the moment you turn you’re head, you’ve been made into a subject.**

I bring all this up for this reason: **Consider whether this text hails us (produces us as a subject through the form of a call). That call is the confession.** Form of the novel is one of confession—form of fantasies, form of the letter, to reader; we are positioned as reader of letter and we receive the confession (no way to read the text w/o being in that position)... does it hail us, involve us in its world as the hearer of the confession? Is there any way to read the text that does not “answer” that call? What is the impact of that? What kind of subject are we made to be? And where do those moments formally occur? Just something to keep in mind throughout class, but especially in relation to Bruno’s question....

LOOK AT OPENING PAGES of *Frisk* -- language of film/close-up p. 3-4 – doll/blotch; language of film grammar (coverage)

**Insufficiency of language; p. 5-6,** “other stuff,” “something,” “virtually, probably, whatever, what’s-her-name, blur” ; and **Vagueness:** “Whatever” “etc.” “blah”

→ **indeterminate meaning/knowledge and form (blurriness)**

Hole/void (face, eyes as balls, anus) – p. 20, looking into the anus

## ***QUESTIONS / DISCUSSION***

[Language of film/fragmentation/blur – lack of reaction; chapter titles]

NB: moments that are seen as “**unsayable**”, **moments where language is insufficient to describe the situation.** Some examples of this are the use of ellipses and the constant use of the word “**weird.**” The fragmentation in the novel seems to be an extension of this **insufficiency of language**, especially the constant focus on individual body parts rather than the person as a

whole. What is the effect of using a novel, which is a collection of words, to depict situations that cannot be expressed through language?

**TITLE** — Frisk: to search for something concealed (mode of inquiry) but also to frolic (play), as in “frisky”, which also has sexual connotations / p. 100

→ Etym. Frisk, 1500s, to dance, frolic, from *lively* (vs. deathly, here)

→ but also related to “frig”/to move restlessly/variant of frisk; euphemism “to fuck”, related to “to masturbate” (late 1600s; “frigging”... )

[Body/information/knowledge]

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