

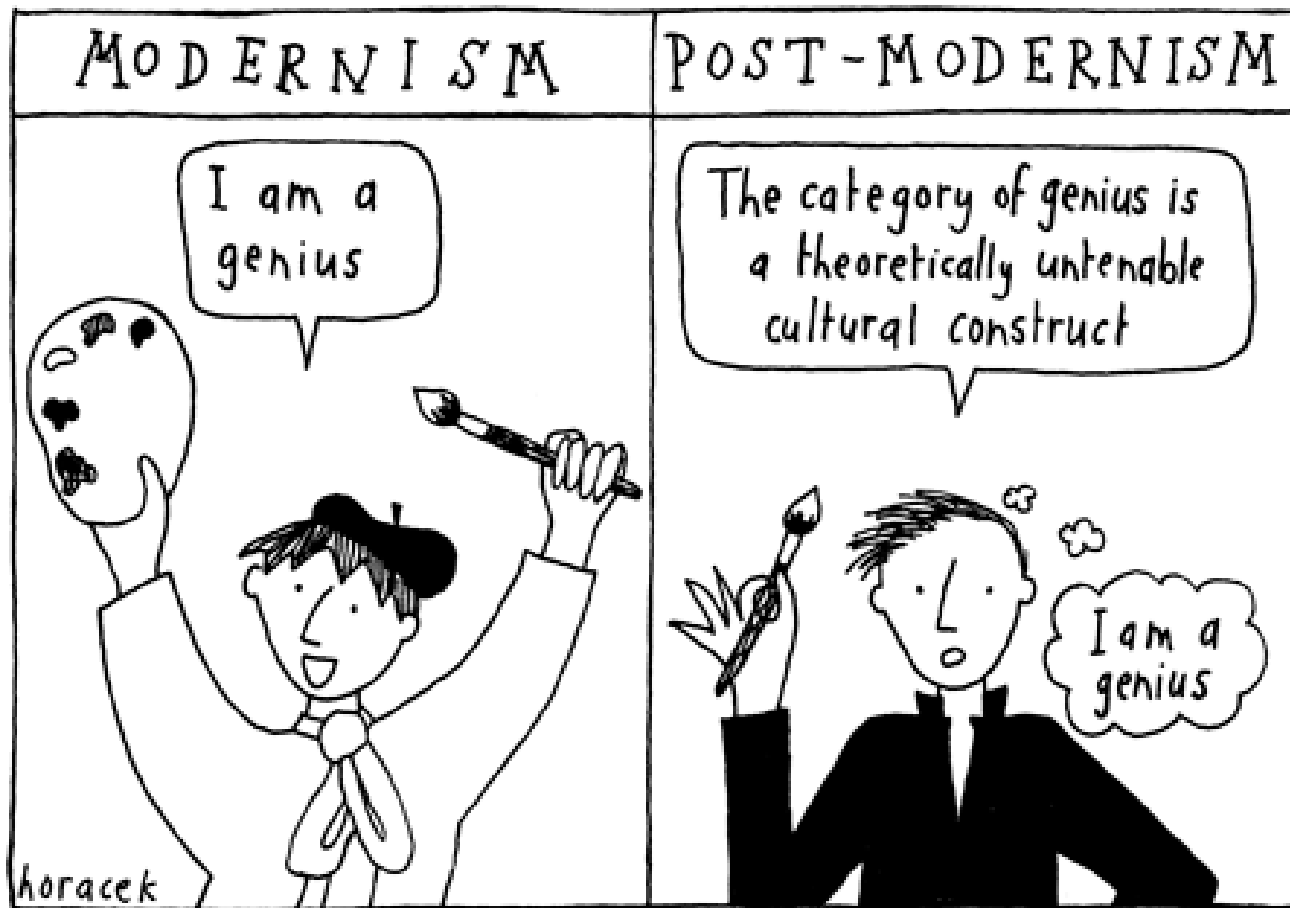
## SYSTEM LEVEL THEORY # 4

# Postmodernism and Feminist Theory



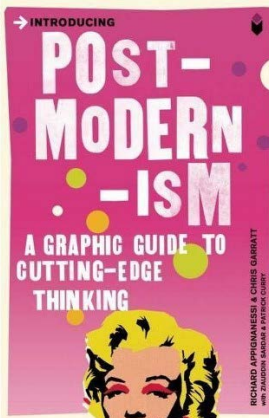
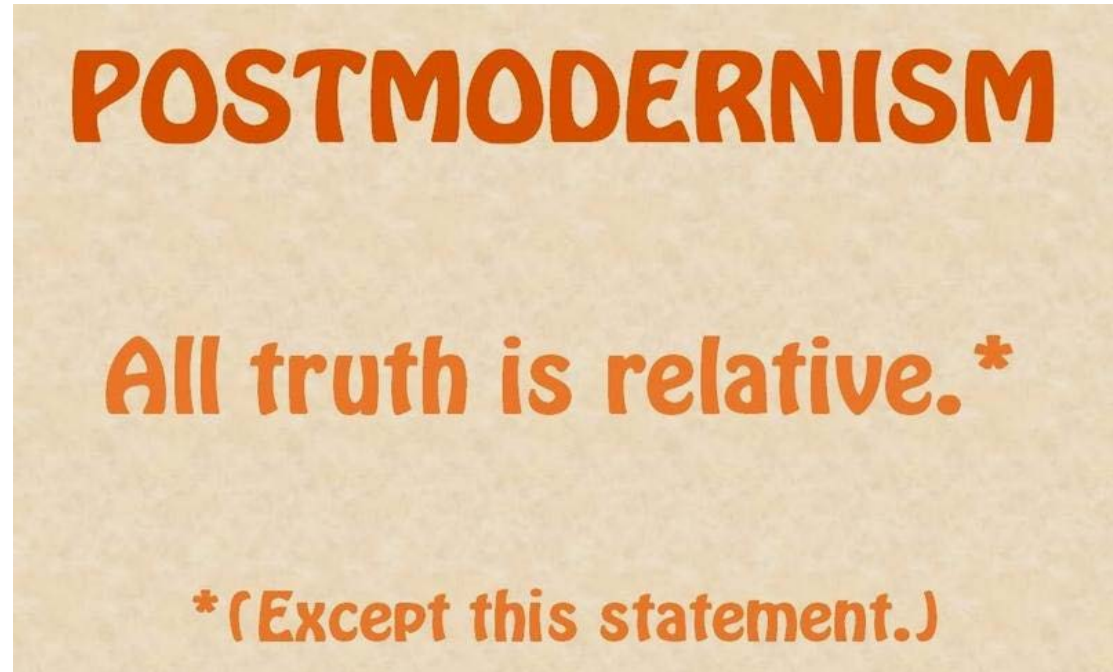
# POSTMODERNISM

The fourth and newest system-level theory of I.R. is known as **postmodernism**. This paradigm incorporates a rather diverse array of theories developed over the last 25 years, including **constructivism, feminism, critical theory, and poststructuralism**.



# POSTMODERNISM

Although these theories offer distinct views of I.R., they are united by their rejection of empirically based positivist traditions that are the cornerstone of the first three theories of I.R.



Postmodernism focuses primarily on the importance of *ideas and culture* in shaping our understanding of international politics...

# POSTMODERNISM

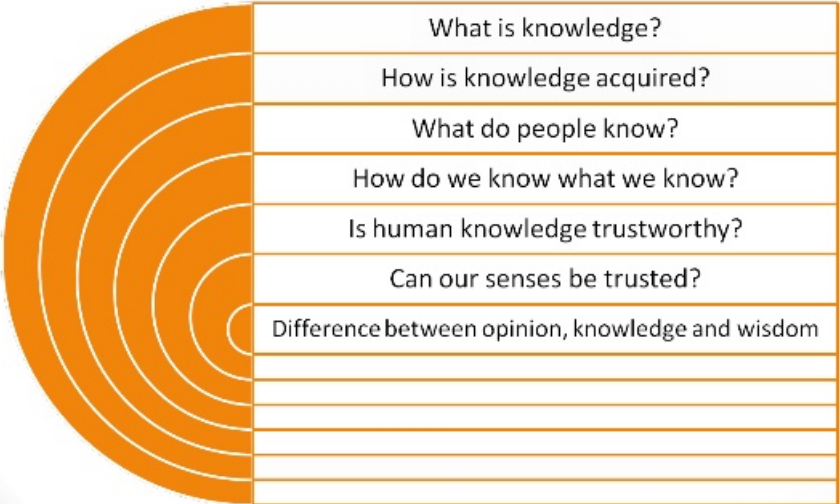
At the root of the argument between **postmodernism** and mainstream I.R. theory is a difference over *epistemology*, which is the study of the origin, nature, and limits of human knowledge.



# POSTMODERNISM

**Traditional theorists of I.R. (realists, liberals, class system theorists) believe that it is possible to acquire *objective* knowledge of the world....**

## Epistemological Questions



What is knowledge?
How is knowledge acquired?
What do people know?
How do we know what we know?
Is human knowledge trustworthy?
Can our senses be trusted?
Difference between opinion, knowledge and wisdom

But can we?

# POSTMODERNISM

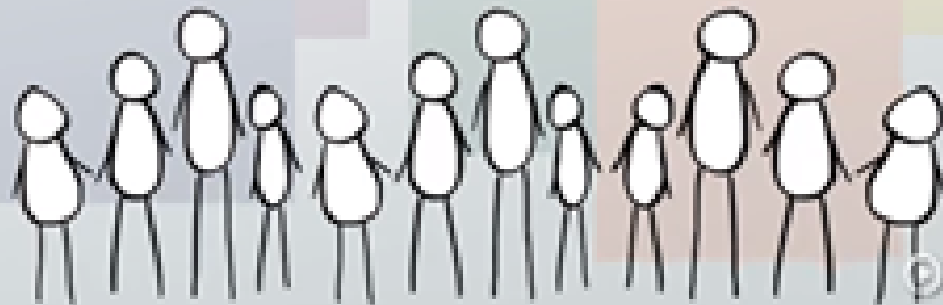
**Postmodernists** reject *positivism*, which is a philosophical movement characterized by an emphasis upon science and scientific method as the only dependable sources of knowledge.

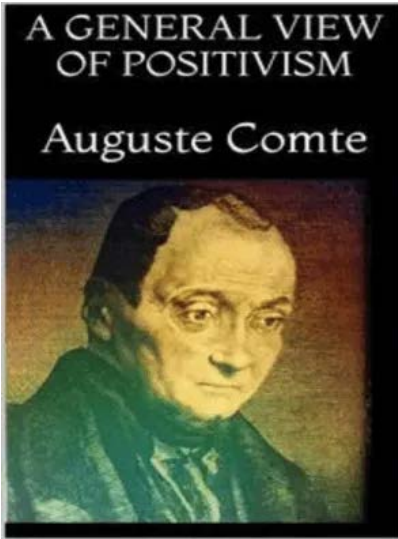
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## Positivism

*approach to the study of society that relies specifically on scientific evidence, such as experiments and statistics, to reveal a true nature of how society operates*

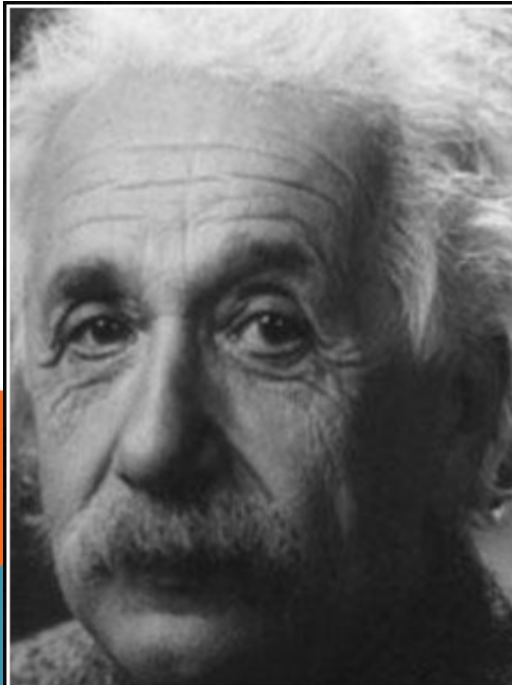
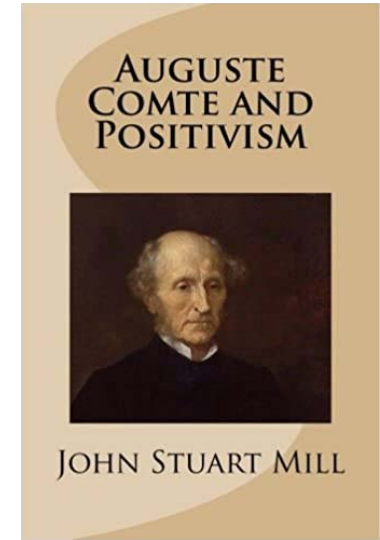
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# POSTMODERNISM

**Postmodernists** question the validity of *positivist epistemology*. Thus, the **postmodernist** critique of conventional I.R. theory can be divided into three basic parts:



I am not a positivist. Positivism states that what cannot be observed does not exist. This conception is scientifically indefensible, for it is impossible to make valid affirmations of what people 'can' or 'cannot' observe. One would have to say 'only what we observe exists,' which is obviously false.

— *Albert Einstein* —

AZ QUOTES

# POSTMODERNISM

The first part involves *hermeneutics* and its effect on theory development. **Hermeneutics** is the study of how we interpret, explain, and draw meaning from language.

## HERMENEUTICS

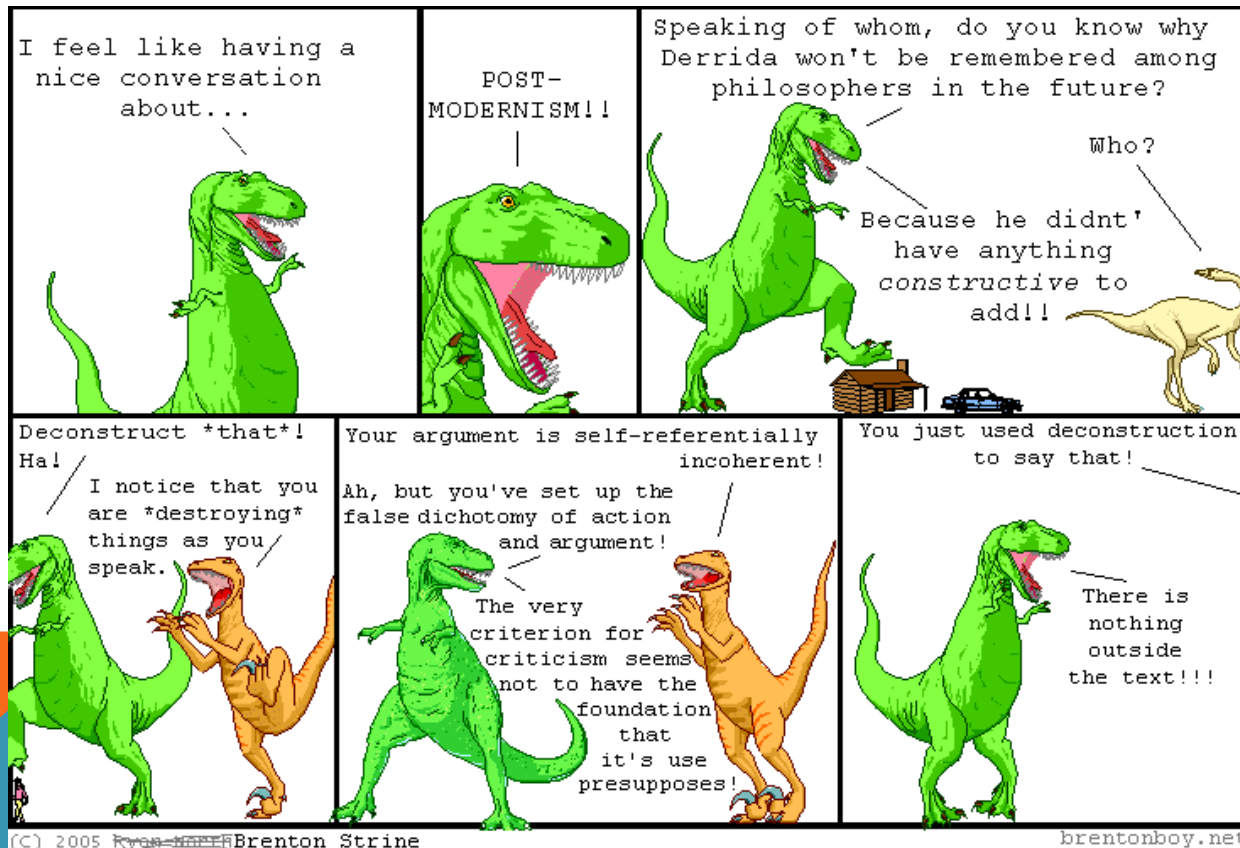
- Hermeneutics is the theory of text interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts.
- Hermeneutic as a singular noun refers to a single particular method or strand of interpretation.
- Modern Hermeneutics includes both verbal and non-verbal texts.



For example, how does one interpret “realism”?

# POSTMODERNISM

Secondly, many **postmodernists** argue that there is no such thing as objective, value-free theory. Theory is merely the product of our perception of reality.



Hmmm....one of the criticisms of postmodernism!

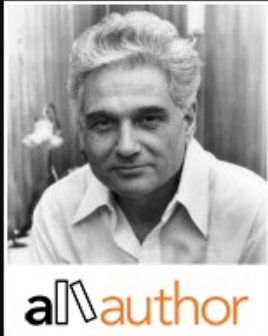
# POSTMODERNISM

Third, **postmodernists'** uncertainty about the objectivity of language and the ability of theorists to produce value-neutral theory caused them to search for alternative ways to interpret IR theory.



# POSTMODERNISM

**Deconstruction** is a theory about language and literature that **postmodernists** adapted to analyze theories of I.R. It is an analytical method that seeks to take apart, or “deconstruct” verbal and written language in search of the hidden meanings implanted inside (sometimes called “reversing hierarchies”).



We are all mediators, translators.

-Jacques Derrida

# POSTMODERNISM

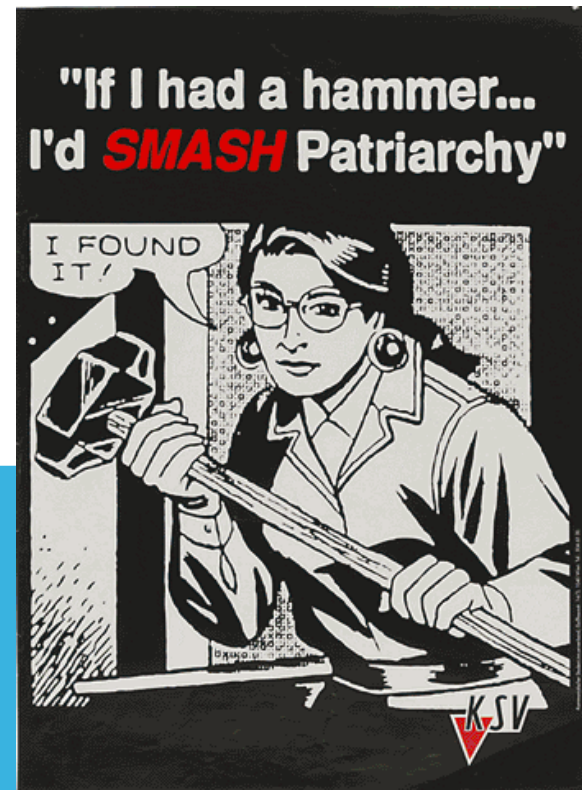
## The Two Main Branches of Postmodernism

### Constructivism

#### Constructivism in I.R.



### Feminism



# POSTMODERNISM

The first branch of **postmodernism** is called **constructivism**, a theory based on the claim that our understanding of reality is socially “constructed.” **Constructivists** place great attention on the role of ideas and beliefs in shaping our understanding of the world.

## MARCH MADNESS

THE US WILL NOT  
TOLERATE STATES  
THAT BRUTALLY KILL  
THEIR OWN PEOPLE!



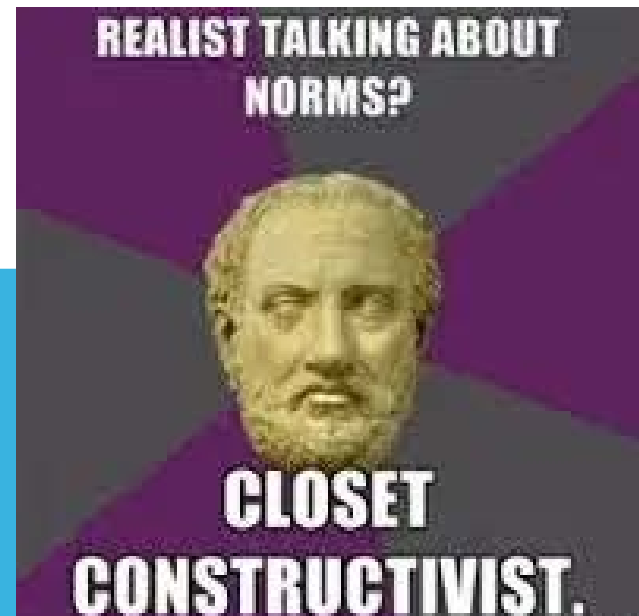
UNLESS, OF COURSE,  
THEY HAPPEN TO BE  
RICH AND IMPORTANT  
ALLIES OF OURS!



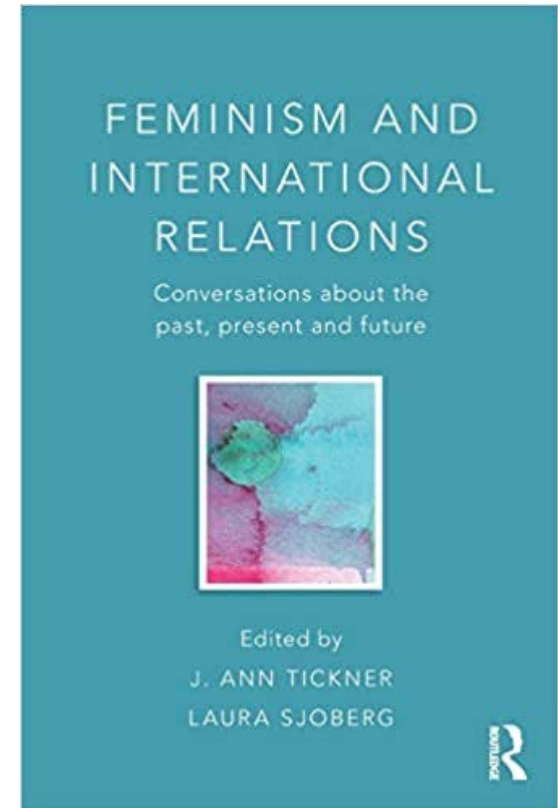
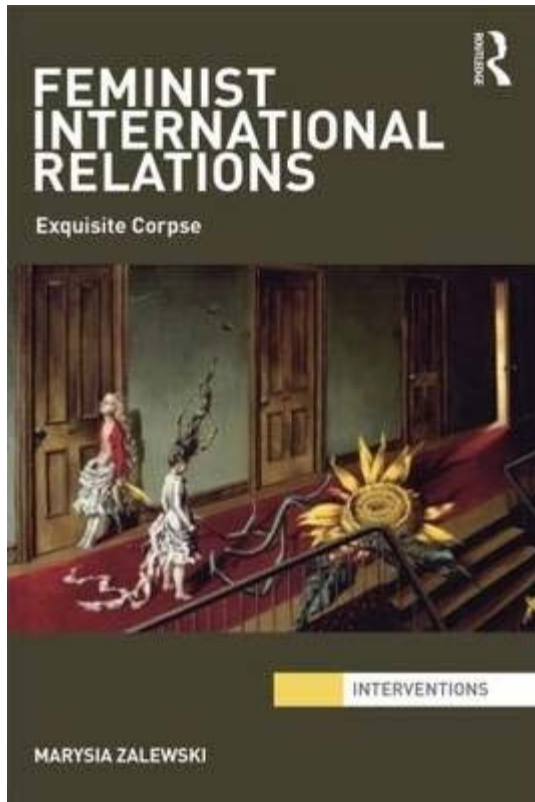
# POSTMODERNISM



**Social construction** is the study of how people's identities, values, and ideas are defined by their group affiliations.



# POSTMODERNISM



The second branch of postmodernism is known as feminism.

# POSTMODERNISM



A key component of **feminist theory** is its questioning of the validity of the distribution of power, a key component in the behavior of and relations between states as the system currently stands.

# POSTMODERNISM

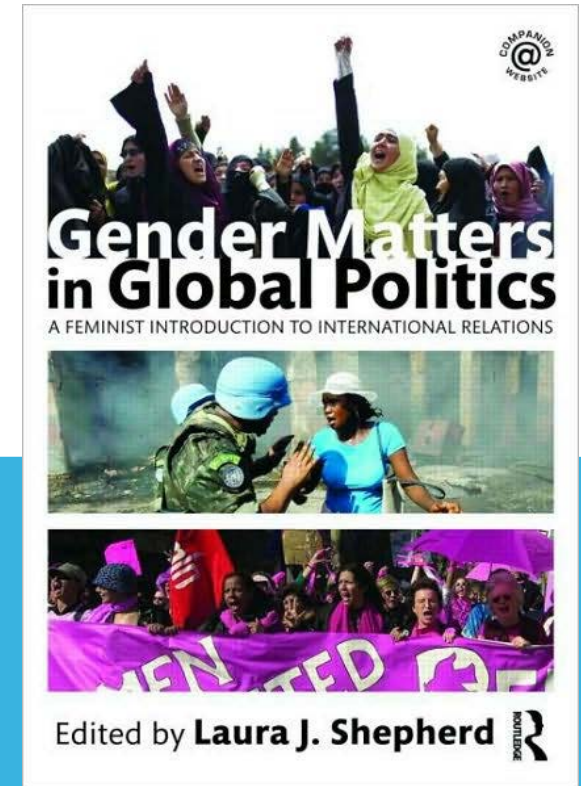
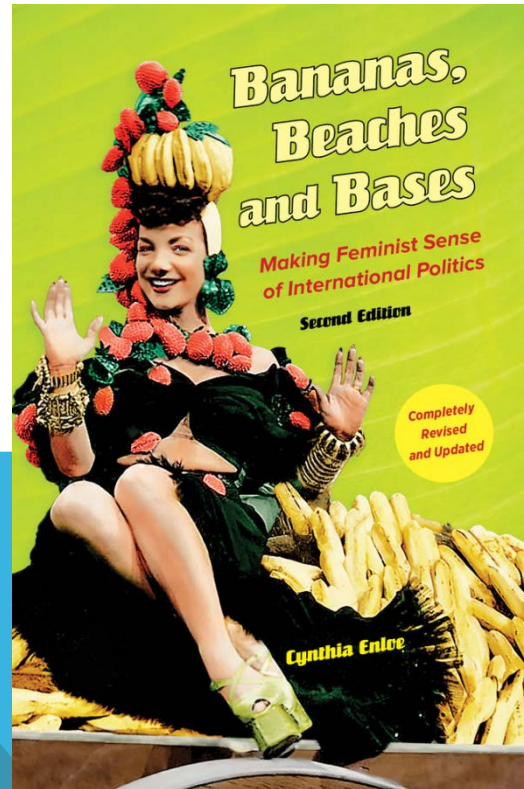
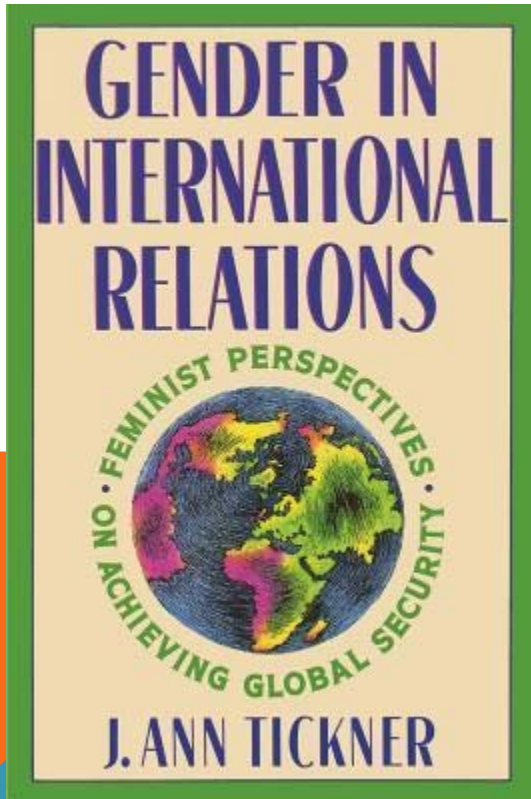
**Feminist postmodernists** emphasize the social construction of *gender roles* and their impact on the structure of society and international relations.

## Feminist International Relations Theory

- Feminist Postmodernism
  - All inquiry is biased by the questions asked, the assumptions made, and the way evidence is interpreted
  - Claims about truth are socially constructed

# POSTMODERNISM

**Feminist theorists** often use the term **androcentric** (male-centered) to describe the idea that mainstream theories of I.R. (particularly **realism**) ignore alternative viewpoints and instead, rely on essentially masculine interpretations of world affairs.



# POSTMODERNISM

## The Components of Postmodernism



# POSTMODERNISM

## Focus of Analysis

Social construction and impact of ideas, discourse, group identities, and gender on international relations.

### Post- Modernism III

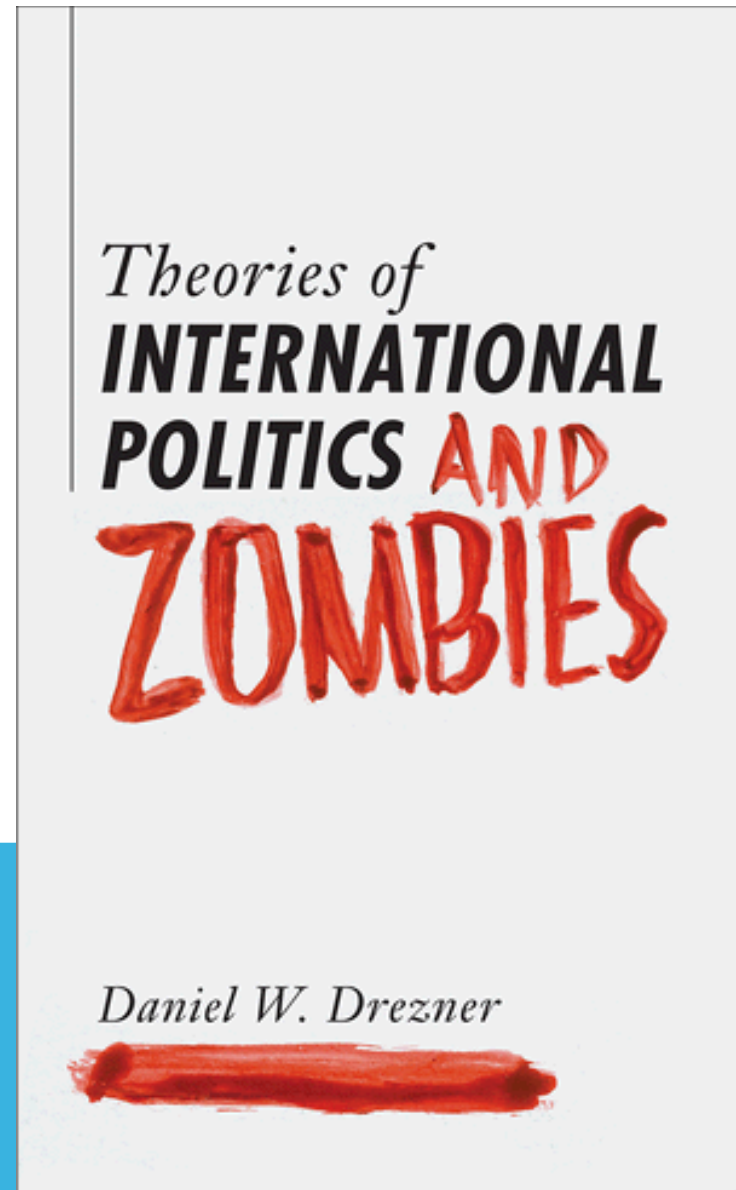
- **Post-modern** approaches have been accused of being 'too theoretical' and not concerned with the 'real world'. They reply, however, that in the social world there is no such thing as the 'real' world in the sense of a reality that is not interpreted by us.
- **Cynthia Weber: International Relations Theory. A critical introduction (2001)**
- **Jim George: Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations (1994)**

# POSTMODERNISM

## View of Human Nature

A product of cultural and social circumstances;

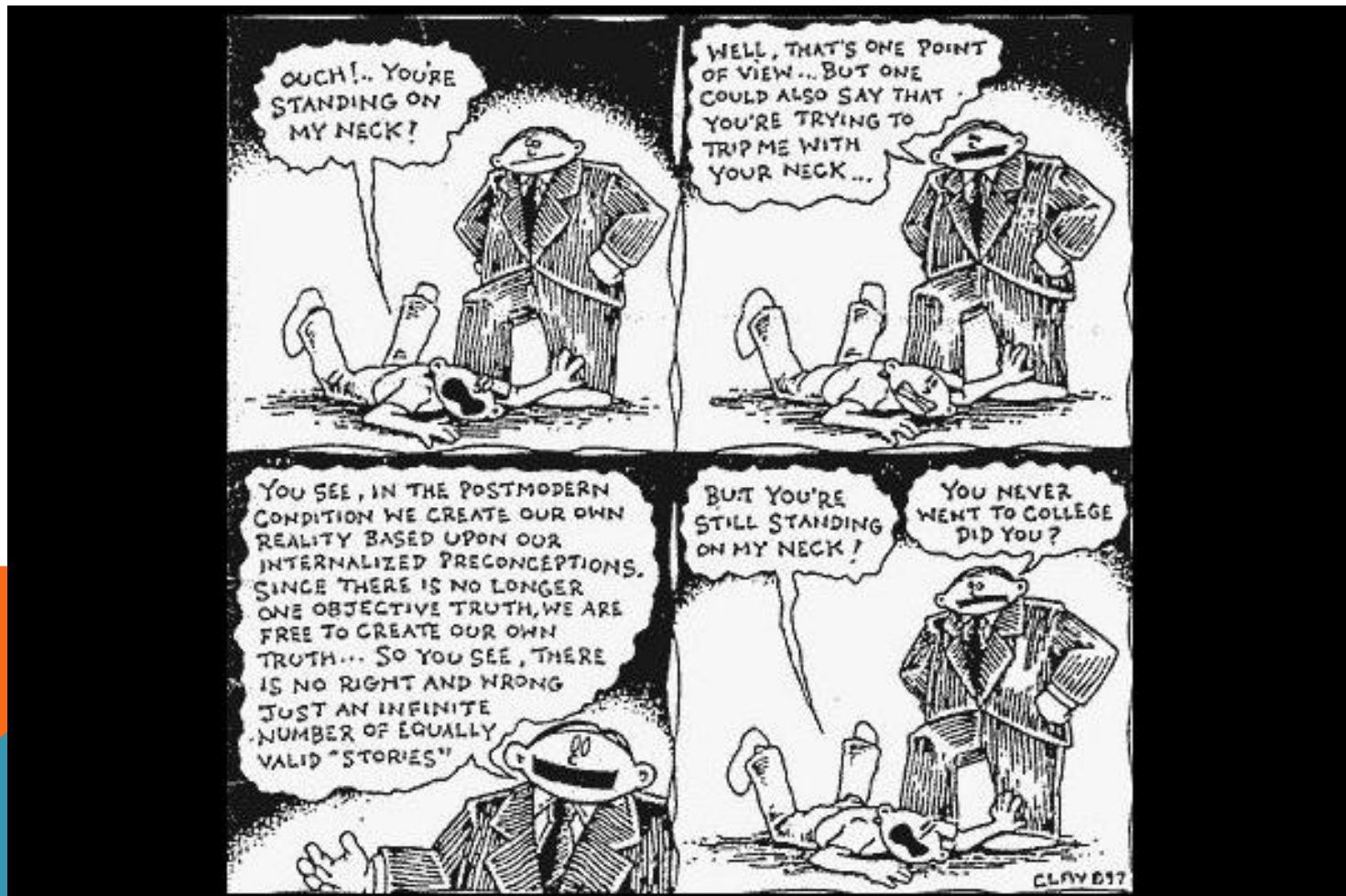
Constantly changing and evolving.



# POSTMODERNISM

## Behavior of States

Driven by beliefs, norms, and social identities.



# POSTMODERNISM

## Goals of Postmodernism

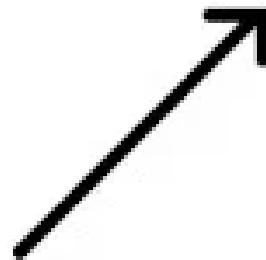
**Broaden the agenda of international relations theory;**

**Expose the power relationships of contemporary discourse in global politics.**

PREMODERN



MODERN



POSTMODERN



"Because God put it there and that's the way it's always been."

"Onwards and upwards with inevitable progress!"

"Bllppppggghljsdlkfjowejfalsk djflksdjflksjldljl;aldfkjl;::;df"

# POSTMODERNISM

# Key Concepts



# POSTMODERNISM

## Key Concepts

### Androcentric

Describes the idea that traditional theories of international relations (particularly **realism**) ignore alternative viewpoints and instead, rely on essentially *masculine* interpretations of world affairs.

"I don't wear the pants, but I buy 'em, and...  
**Lee**  
1947 models are here"

Like a lot of wives, I buy my husband's work clothes and I'm glad to get all the extra value features in the new 1947 models. That makes Lee Work Clothes an outstanding...  
Making them last is partly my job and it's up to me to wash them, so I know all about long wear... and getting the most for my money. That's why I insist on LEE work clothes. My husband has some good reasons for demanding Lee, too... better appearance, good fitting comfort, and features... plenty of pockets in the right places, form-fitting overall bib, and a dozen others.

It's no surprise to us that, for 8 straight years, Lee has won in a nation-wide preference poll... or that Lee leads the next brand by 6 to 1. Lee gets our vote every time, for long wear, comfort, features and economy.

And here's a tip: To get every penny of value out of Lee Work Clothes, buy at least three outfits at a time... and rotate them. That way they'll be cooler to wash, and they last longer.

Wholesale sales survey conducted by a participating magazine publisher in the country. "The Best of America" (1947 survey). For full details consult the full report issued by the publisher.

**THERE'S A LEE FOR EVERY JOB!**

Lee Riders (Cowboy Pants)    Lee Matched Shirts and Pants

Lee Trousers    Lee Boy's Riders and Overalls    Lee Soft Denim Bermuda

Buy LEE Work Clothes at Leading Stores Coast-to-Coast

**Lee**  
Highest Quality WORK CLOTHES

THE H. D. LEE COMPANY, Inc.  
Selling in U.S.A., Canada, Mexico, South America, Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand

THE WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF UNION-MADE WORK CLOTHES



# POSTMODERNISM

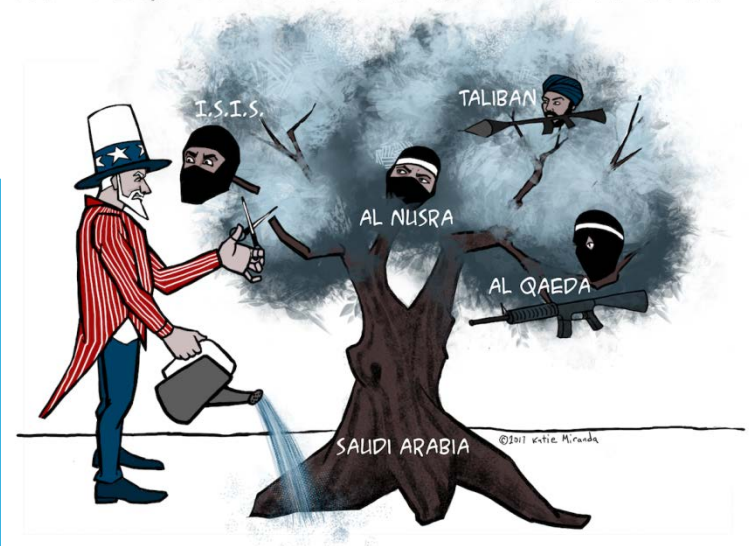
## Key Concepts

### Constructivism

A **postmodern theory** of international relations that is based on the claim that our understanding of reality is socially constructed. **Constructivists** place great attention on the role of ideas and beliefs in shaping our understanding of the world. They emphasize the identities and interests of individuals and states and the ways in which those preferences are socially constructed.



*U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST*



# POSTMODERNISM

## Key Concepts

### Deconstruction

A theory about language and literature developed in the 1970s that **postmodernists** have adapted to analyze theories of international relations. **Deconstruction** is an analytical method that seeks to take apart or “deconstruct” verbal and written language in search of the hidden meanings inside.



# POSTMODERNISM

## Key Concepts

### Epistemology

The study of the origin, nature, and limits of human knowledge.



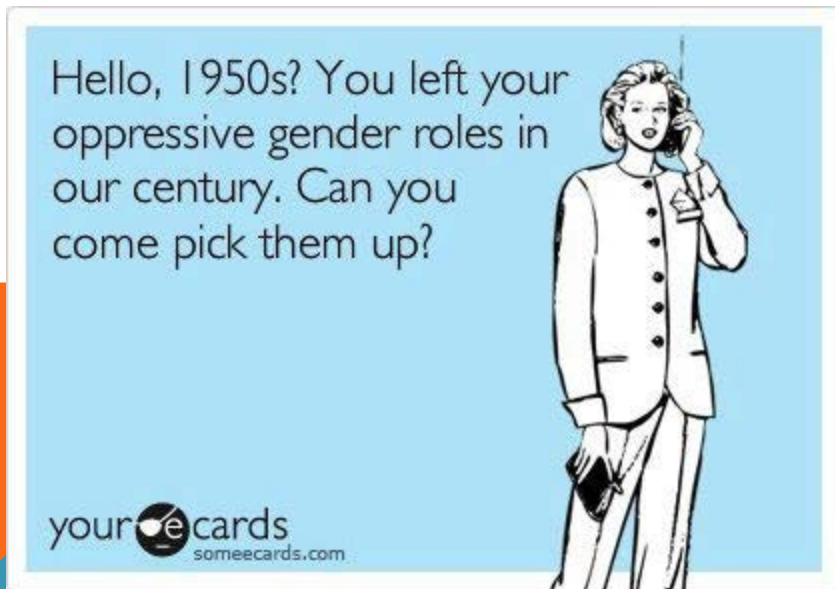
# POSTMODERNISM

## Key Concepts

### Gender / Gender Roles

Encompasses the social and cultural distinctions, as well as differences in traditional roles, between the two sexes, not simply clinical or biological classifications.

The jobs, tasks, and activities that are traditionally associated to either men or women as a group.

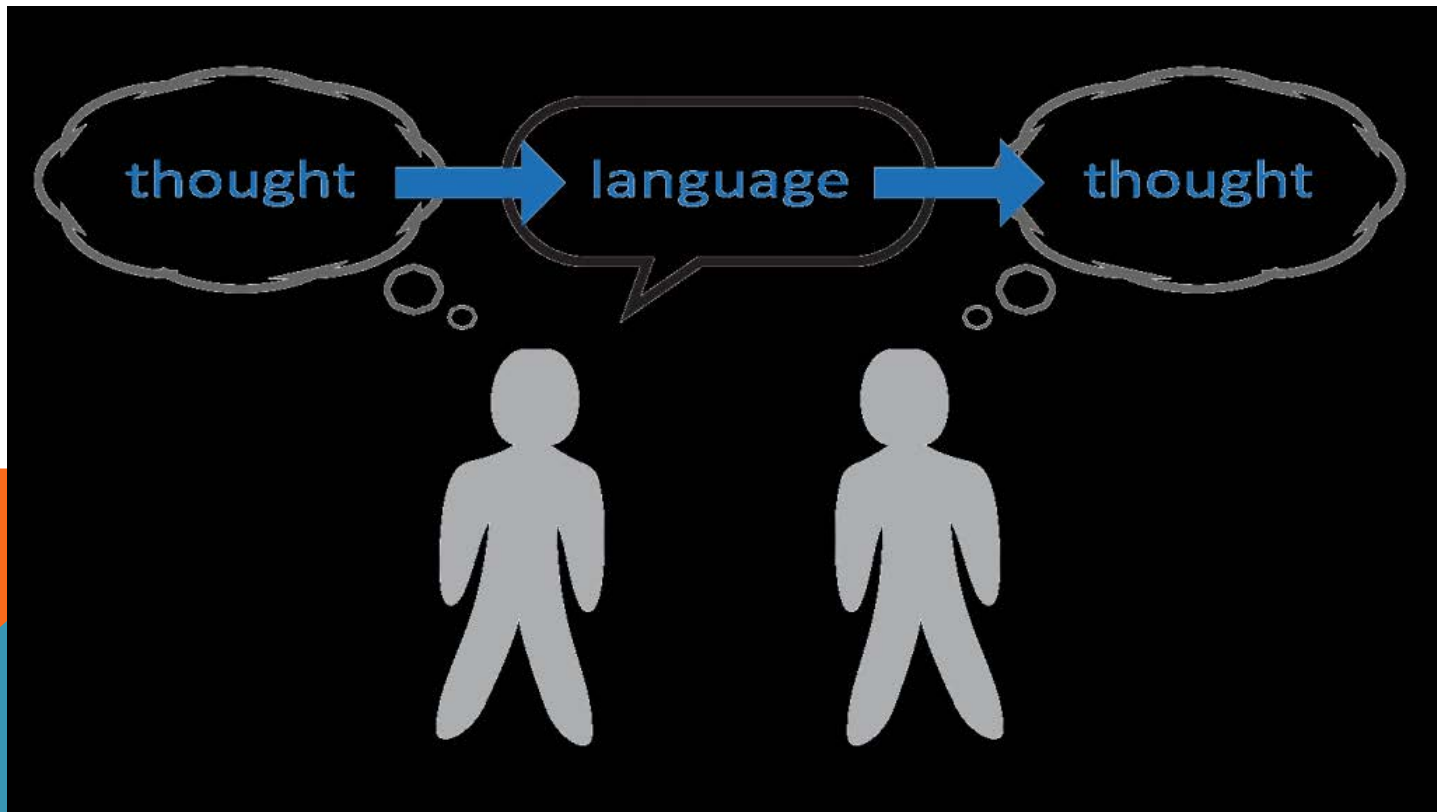


# POSTMODERNISM

## Key Concepts

### Hermeneutics

The study of how we interpret, explain, and draw meaning from language.



# POSTMODERNISM

## Positivist epistemology

- Application of *natural science methods* to social science research
- *Phenomenalism*: knowledge via the senses
- *Deductivism*: theory testing
- *Inductivism*: theory building
- *Objective*, value-free researcher
- Distinction between *scientific* and *normative* statements

page 28

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Bryman: *Social Research Methods*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition

## Key Concepts

### Positivism

A philosophical movement characterized by an emphasis upon science and scientific method as the only dependable sources of knowledge. **Positivists** believe that reliable knowledge can only be acquired through experimental investigation and empirical observation.

Traditional I.R. theory (**realism, liberal theory, class system theory**) is based on positivist epistemology

# POSTMODERNISM

## Key Concepts

### Postmodernism

The name of the paradigm that incorporates the following theories: **constructivism, feminism, critical theory, and poststructuralism**. **Postmodernism** asserts that it is impossible to construct an objective or unbiased theory of international relations and instead spotlights how our understanding of I.R. is shaped by our beliefs and social identities. **Postmodernists** believe that reality is shaped by perception and that knowledge is highly *subjective*.

# POSTMODERNISM

## Key Concepts

### Social Constructivism

The study of how people's identities, values, and ideas are developed by their group affiliations.

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS MAJORS**

		
What my Family Thinks I Do	What my Friends Think I Do	What Society Thinks I Do
		
What Hard Sciences Majors Think I Do	What I Think I Do	What I Actually Do

# POSTMODERNISM

## Key Concepts

### Subtext

A hidden, underlying meaning or interpretation that can presumably be discerned by close examination of the words and phrases chosen by the author.

#### **Text**

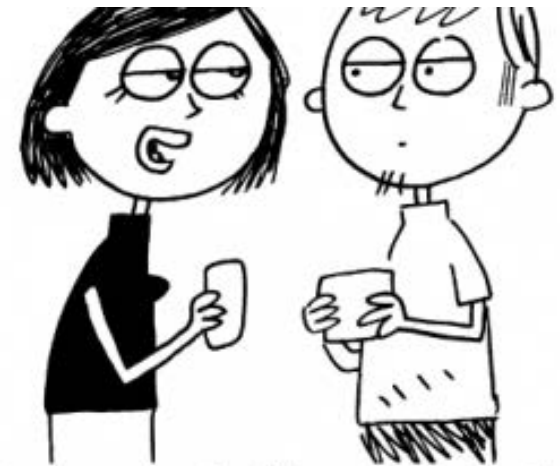
- What is visible/readable, i.e., what information is provided by the source?

#### **Context**

- What was going on during the time period? What background information do you have that helps explain the information found in the source?

#### **Subtext**

- What is between the lines? Ask questions about the following:
  - Author: Who created the source, and what do we know about that person?
  - Audience: For whom was the source created?
  - Reason: Why was this source produced when it was?



“You got my text...but did you get my *subtext*?”

**POSTMODERNISM**

**Critiques of  
Postmodernism  
and Feminism**



# POSTMODERNISM

## Critiques of Postmodernism

Criticism of  
postmodernist theory  
centers on three major  
problems. First,  
postmodernism rejects  
the positivist  
underpinnings of  
mainstream I.R. theory  
but doesn't present  
any clear alternative  
with which to replace  
it...



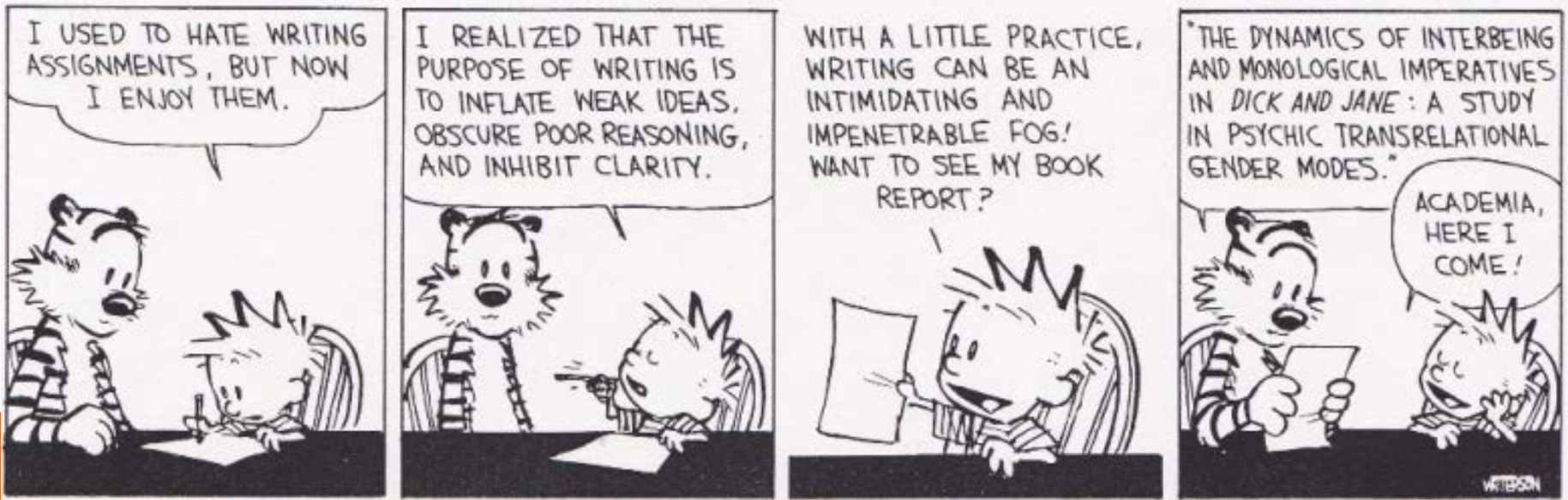
## POSTMODERNISM

But officer, you're really not getting this postmodernism thing. Look, I realize their truth might be I don't have an account in that bank. But you see, they can't say that because, to me, the truth is that I actually do.


# POSTMODERNISM

## Critiques of Postmodernism

Second, **postmodernism** is merely a critique of traditional I.R. theory and nothing more...



# POSTMODERNISM



Do you even have any clue as to what Marxism actually is?

Marxism is scientific socialism based on a materialist analysis of the historical development of society as driven by class antagonisms

Postmodernism is a bourgeois idealistic rejection of science, objective reality, and the very idea of historical progress.

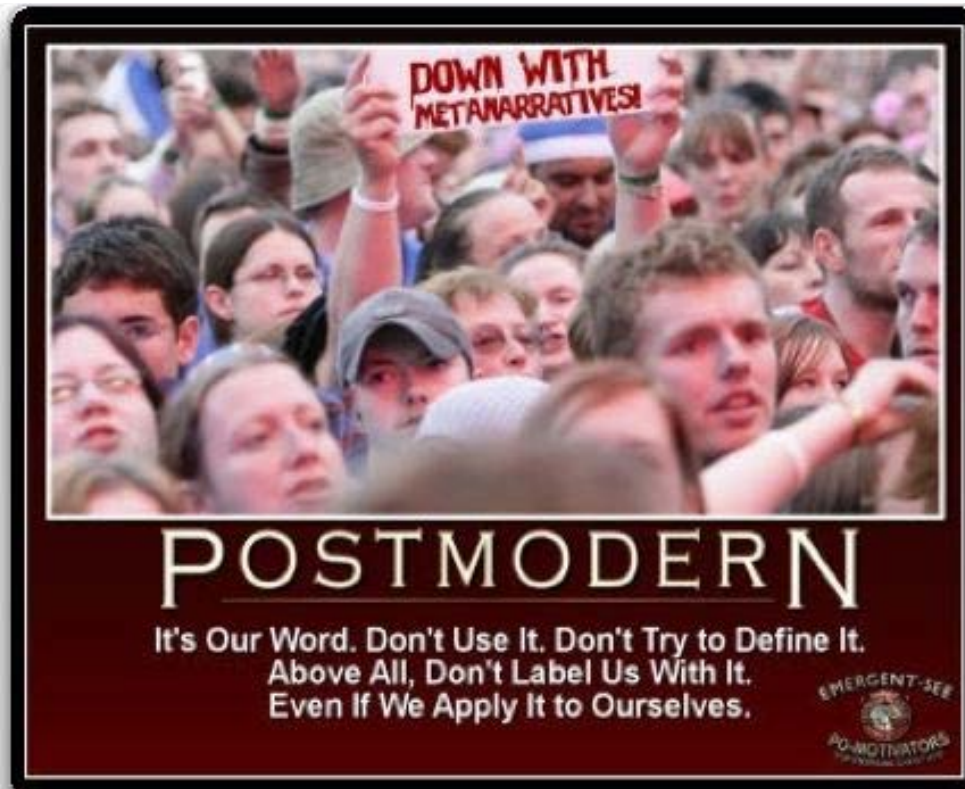
## Critiques of Postmodernism

Third, many mainstream I.R. theorists question the intellectual rigor of **postmodernists** who shun mainstream social science methodology and rely solely on non-falsifiable assertions regarding the nature and course of international relations.

# POSTMODERNISM

## Critiques of Postmodernism

Finally, the **postmodernist** emphasis on the social construction of reality and the lack of objective truths leads many to wonder whether **postmodernism** is simply an anti-intellectual exercise that leads us nowhere.



# POSTMODERNISM

## Critiques of Postmodernism



### Just Kidding...

20

- Alan Sokal submitted the piece *Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity* to the journal “*Social Texts*” in November of 1994 and it was published in a special spring-summer issue in 1996.
- But the whole paper was a joke...
- The paper basically claimed that gravity was socially constructed and that quantum gravity has specific political implications.

# POSTMODERNISM

## Critiques of Feminism

A major criticism of the **feminist** paradigm is its failure to provide a comprehensive theoretical construct for analyzing international relations.



Has feminism made us all more conscious? I think it has. Feminist critiques of anthropological masculine bias have been quite important, and they have increased my sensitivity to that kind of issue

— Clifford Geertz —

# POSTMODERNISM

## Critiques of Feminism

As a prescriptive theory, **feminism** falls into the trap of focusing too much of its efforts on how the situation in world politics, and the study of world politics, might be changed.



# POSTMODERNISM

## Critiques of Feminism

Are **feminists** guilty of relying on their own stereotypes of gender characteristics? By using selective characterizations – women are more cooperative and peaceful, while men are more violent and aggressive – **feminist theorists** risk reinforcing the same gender stereotyping they are trying to overcome.



## WOMEN IN IR (1)

- Liberal feminists are skeptical of difference feminists' critiques of realism.
  - They believe that when women are allowed to participate in IR, they play the game basically the same way men do, with similar results.

# POSTMODERNISM

## Critiques of Feminism

Larger forces, (human nature, disparities of wealth and power, anarchic world system, to name just a few) shape behavior of various actors on the world stage irrespective of gender.

