

Literature, Culture and Media
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Lecture – 15
Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction

Welcome dear participants to this final module of this week. After having established the directions in which postmodern criticism has developed, today we are going to discuss post structuralism and deconstruction. The structure of today's module is like this we would be introducing this idea of structuralism with Saussure's view of language.

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We would move onto post structuralism introducing it and also telling the differences between structuralism and post structuralism. We would also briefly discuss Derrida's main contribution to the development of the deconstruction idea and then towards the end we would also discuss a deconstructive reading of Hilda Doolittle's poem 'Oread'. We have seen that how during the postmodern is development,

the finality of modernist idea was rejected in favour of parallel and multiple truths. It also started a closer reading of the text and the textual reading is normally open to interpretation. So, what postmodern is had done was to establish the supremacy of the text over a reading of nature or phenomena from the perspective of a social scientist who was trying to fix up certain certainties.

The rational arguments find out what was the truth and the correct answer whereas in postmodernity we find that the texts became supreme.

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- Postmodernist methodology and epistemology is characterized by the relative eclipse of arguments about social-science modes of explanation, and a shift towards theories drawn from linguistics and literary studies.
 - Jane Kaplan, "Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and Deconstruction: Notes for Historians"
- Supremacy of Text (which is open to interpretation) over Nature (which is open to causal explanation) for understanding human, as well as, social behavior
- Objectivity is abandoned under enthusiasm for parallel/multiple truths

And therefore they were open to interpretation. Here I quote from Jane Kaplan who has said that "the postmodernist methodology and epistemological is characterized by the relative eclipse of arguments about social science modes of explanation". And it is also commented that there is a shift towards theories from linguistics and literary studies so shift towards linguistics and literary studies is seen in the postmodernist phenomena as we have been discussing during this week.

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Postmodernism and Post-structuralism

- Postmodernism covers a number of theoretical approaches developed since the late 1960s.
- Post-structuralist approaches known for their efforts to offer a critical analysis of normative concepts in classical philosophy:
 - Uses Linguistic theories (the review of language in theories of knowledge, Phenomenology and Hermeneutics).
 - Generally refers to a quintet of French theorists - Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Roland Barthes - who have major influence on structuralism in the 1980s.
- If structuralism relies upon the logic of language, post-structuralism reveals rhetoric as the subversive, poetic sub-conscious of that logic. (TV Reed)

Postmodernism is started to become popular during the sixties. The Post is structural approach also is known during that time for its efforts to offer the critical review of normative concepts in classical philosophy. The Post structural and approach also based on linguistic theories and in this approach we find that they try to look at the revaluation of language in terms of studying and understanding theories of knowledge phenomenology as well as hermeneutics also.

The development of the post- structuralist theory is normally referred to a quintet of French theorists and these are Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Kristeva, and Roland Barthes. These philosophers have had a major influence on the readings of the structuralist theories and the development of post structuralist theories in the eighties. It can be said that if a structuralist relies upon the logic of language, Post structuralist reveals rhetoric as the subversive poetic sub conscious of that logic.

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Postmodernism and Post-structuralism

- The quintet of theorists attempt to expose and problematize the metaphors and grand narratives which were the foundations of the modernist society and thought.
- Derrida – philosophy
- Foucault – historical writing and power
- Lacan – psychoanalysis
- Kristeva and Barthes – literary studies

The quintet also attempts to unveil and problematize the grand narratives on which the foundation of the modernist society and thought was laid. These philosophers have taken up different avenues for finding out the nature of their own theoretical expansion. For example, Derrida has talked a lot about the philosophy and its development, Foucault has majorly limited to writings in the historical context and power. Lacan has talked about psychoanalysis whereas Kristeva and Barthes have talked about literary and cultural studies

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- Barthes' concept of intertextuality and Derrida's *differance* (combination of difference and deference) provided the basis for a radical epistemology of language, linguistics and philosophy.
 - How language and abstract concepts do not allow us to ever gain certain knowledge
- Derrida argued that the conventional link between signifier and signified is slippery and fragile, thus meaning is not as fixed or certain as structuralism had maintained.
- Assumptions of Metaphysics:
 - Texts provide context.
 - Complete meaning of a word is 'present' in the speaker's mind, such that it can be transmitted without a significant slipping

Barthes' concept of intertextuality and Derrida's concept of difference which is a conjoined word combining two words difference and deference. So, these ideas provided the basis for radical epistemology about how language and abstract concepts do not allow us to ever gain certainty in terms of knowledge. Derrida also suggested that the conventional link between the signifier and signified is at best tenuous only.

Normally it is slippery and fragile and therefore the meaning cannot be considered to be fixed as a structuralist arguments had provided to us. Derrida has also said that the text has a certain meaning within a context. So, this idea of the relation between the text and the context has become very important in the context of understanding Derrida's philosophy. He also says that the complete meaning of your word is present in the speaker's mind.

Such that it can be transmitted without a significant slipping this idea has been termed as metaphysics by Derrida.

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- Derrida explains how logocentric claims are made and justified.
 - Users of language attempt to overcome the limitations and circuitousness of signification by defining concepts not in terms of what they are, but through their difference from other things.
 - Suggested that logocentric claims to know the truth about how the world is (or how it should be) are derived from art, religion, science or a political dogma.
 - They operate through binaries privileging one pole of the opposition to the other—assigning to one term some greater value, while downgrading the other pole.

Derrida has suggested that the western thought has been dominated by logocentric claims these logocentric claims maybe derived from different aspects. For example, they may be derived from art or religion or science or political dogma but they are always presented in a binary. And in the binary a particular pole is always privileged over the other and therefore it is prescribed a greater value whereas it also downgrades or excludes the other pole.

So, the modernist version of thinking in terms of binary has been challenged by Derrida. He has also discussed how logocentric claims are normally made in justified he argued that one way users of language attempt to overcome the limitations and circularity of signification is to define concepts not in terms what they are but through their difference from other things.

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Structuralism

- Structuralism grew out of the need to schematize and organize the study of literature and literary history.
 - New Criticism is sometimes considered to be a pre-cursor.
- Structuralism is concerned with structures, and chiefly with examining the laws by which they work.
 - Different units of any system have meaning only in relation to one another.
- Like Formalism, it focusses on the form and does not consider the actual content of the text
 - As long as the structure of relations between the units is conserved, it does not matter which items one selects.

(Cf Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* 1996)

Structuralism is a theoretical paradigm grew out of the need to systematize the study of literature and literary history. It is also suggested at times that new critical approaches had also laid the foundations for structuralism. As the very name suggests is structuralism is concerned with the structures and more particularly with examining the gender laws by which they work. It is a believe that individuals unit of any system have meaning only by virtue of their relation

to one another, an individual unit does not have any meaning outside these relationships like for formalism. It has also concentrated and entirely on the form and does not consider the actual content of the text. For example, it is not concerned about the cultural interpretation or about the historical significance of a particular text. As long as I structure of relations between the units is preserved it does not matter which items you select.

You can take up a portion from an established piece of literature or you can also take a piece from say a newspaper report.

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- For structuralists, the literary value and merit of a text is irrelevant.
 - Doesn't matter whether a text is an example of great literature or not.
 - Indifferent to the cultural value of its object.
- Structuralist method is analytical, not evaluative.
- Structuralism rejects the 'obvious' meaning of the text; seeks to understand and isolate 'deep' structures within a text, which are not obvious on the surface.
 - Does not take the text at face value, but 'displaces' it into a quite different kind of object. (Eagleton 1996)

But the structuralist study would be analytical only and it would never be evaluative and therefore the cultural value of a particular piece of literature or a particular piece of writing has no meaning for the structuralist. They refuse the obvious meaning of the text something which is very apparent to a lay reader and seeks illustrate to isolate certain deepest structures within it which are not apparent on the surface.

It also does not take the text at the face value but displaces it into a quite different kind of object. The structuralist ideas where inspired by Saussure's writing.

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Saussure's view of Language

- Literary structuralism thrived in the 1960s as an attempt to apply to literature the methods and insights of the founder of modern structural linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure. (Eagleton)
- Influence of Sanskrit and other classical languages, thesis on Absolute Genitive case in the Rigveda, Leipzig University (1880)
- Most of classical structuralist concepts emerge from Saussure's lectures in Geneva between 1907 and 1911, which were published posthumously as *Course in General Linguistics* (1916).

It flourished in the first half of the 20th century as an attempt to apply to literature the methods and insights of the founder of modern structural linguistics particularly Ferdinand de Saussure. It is an interesting point that among other subjects Saussure had been an avid scholar of Sanskrit. As a scholar he had Sanskrit as well as other classical language and in 1880 the thesis which was awarded to him

by the Leipzig University was on the use of absolute genitive case in the Rig Veda. So it is a very important aspect for us to understand that the linguistic traditions of Sanskrit learning have also influenced the way modern structuralist ideas have flourished in the world. Most of the classical structuralist notions emerge from sources lectures in Geneva which he had delivered between 1907 and 1911.

These lectures were published posthumously in 1916 under the name of *A Course in General Linguistics*.

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- Saussure viewed language as a system of signs, which was to be studied 'synchronically' rather than 'diachronically'.
 - Each sign was seen as being made up of a 'signifier' (a sound-image; or its graphic equivalent), and a 'signified' (the concept/meaning).
 - Eg., the three black marks c – a – t are a signifier which suggest the signified 'cat' in the mind of a person familiar with the English language
 - Thus, the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary: there is no intrinsic reason why these three marks (c-a-t) should mean 'cat', apart from cultural/historical convention.

Saussure viewed language as a system of science which was to be studied synchronically rather than diachronically. He also suggested that each sign has to be seen as being made up of a signifier which is sound image or its graphic equivalent and the signified which is the concept or the meaning. He further illustrates it and says that the 3 independent black marks which he refers to as c, a and t are a signifier which evoke the signified cat in the mind of a person

who has knowledge of the English language however the relation between the signifier and signified is an arbitrary one. There is no inherent reason except perhaps the cultural and historical convention to understand that these marks should mean cat and should relate to a particular picture in the mind of a language speaker. Therefore, he suggests that the relationship between the sign and the referent that means the sign and what it refers to is absolutely arbitrary.

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- The relation between the sign and what it refers to (what Saussure calls the 'referent') is thus arbitrary.
 - Each sign in the system has meaning only by virtue of its difference from other signs.
 - 'Cat' has meaning not 'in itself, but because it is not 'cap' or 'cad' or 'bat'. It does not matter how the signifier alters, as long as it preserves its difference from all the other signifiers. (Eagleton)
 - Saussure: 'In the linguistic system, there are only differences'
 - Circular process— Meaning is scattered along the whole chain of signifiers; 'it cannot be easily nailed down, it is never fully present in any one sign alone, but is rather a kind of constant flickering of presence and absence together.' (Terry Eagleton 1996)

Each sign in the system has meaning also only by virtue of its difference from the others. For example, cat has meaning not in itself but because it is say not cap or cad or bat. It does not matter how the signifier alters as long as it preserves its different from the are all other signifiers and here I quote from Saussure he says in the linguistic system there are only differences. Meaning is not mysteriously imminent in sign but it is functional.

The results of its difference from other science in generates automatically a circular process what is the same now maybe a referent if we take it further and therefore meaning is not fixed. It cannot be nailed down but it is a scattered and dispersed along the whole chain of signifiers and it has never fully present in any one sign alone. But it is a rather a kind of constant flickering of presence and absence together.

Howsoever they structuralist also maintain that there is a definite link between the sign and referent. Saussure was more concerned with length, the objective is director of science.

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- Saussure was more concerned with **langue**—the objective structure of language which makes speech possible.
- Believed that linguistics should not be concerned with **parole** – the actual speech, or what people actually say/mean.
- Saussure's "discovery of the internal structure of the linguistic sign differentiated the sign both from mere acoustic 'things'... and from mental processes" (Eagleton)
- Structuralism separated the sign from the referent; post-structuralism goes a step ahead: it divides the signifier from the signified.

Which made his speech possible and he also believed that the linguistics should not be really too much concern with parole, what he makes the name which he used for the actual speech or what people actually said or meant. Still Saussure contribution is very important because he discovered the internal structure of the linguistic sign and also differentiated this linguistic sign from its mere acoustic aspects.

And also from the mental processes with which it was earlier confused. If structuralism divided the sign from the reference we find that the post structuralism goes a step further and it divides the signifier from the signified. Post-Structuralism is basically a response to the structuralist like Ferdinand de Saussure also to the writings of

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Post-structuralism—An Introduction

- Inaugurates a critical discussion with structuralists, such as Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), and the Russian formalists.
- Among the most important representatives of post-structuralist philosophy are:
 - Jacques Derrida (1930–2004),
 - Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995),
 - Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998),
 - Jacques Lacan (1901–1981),
 - Michel Foucault (1926–1984),
 - Slavoj Žižek
 - US: Richard Rorty (1931–2007) and Judith Butler
- Changed the shape of critical inquiry in the areas of philosophy of language, ethics, neopragmatism, literary theory, and gender studies.

Claude Levi b Strauss in anthropology and also to a certain extent a response to the Russian formalism like Jacobson. Among the most important representatives of post – structuralism philosophy are as we have already talked about them Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Lyotard, Lacan Foucault. Zizek and his school and in the USA we find that Judith Butler and Richard Rorty were working in this direction.

These post- structurist and philosopher change the shape of critical inquiry in the areas of philosophy of language and they also influence literary theory gender theories ethical interpretation as well as neo pragmatism. Post- structurist say the theories of the structuralists as based on philosophy of language and anthropology.

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- Poststructuralists see structuralist theories as based on philosophy of language (Saussure) and anthropology (Lévi-Strauss) and they apply these insights to a broad range of topics and radicalize some of structuralism's premises.
- Post-structuralists differ among themselves in their specific approaches: may proceed historically, hermeneutically, on the basis of discourse analysis, or may merge critical theory with psychoanalysis.
- Commonality:
 - Linguistic understandings
 - The influence of phenomenology as found in the works of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976).

And they also have apply their insights to a wider range of topics and radicalise some of the premises which were put forward by this structuralist. At the same time, we find that there is a lot of difference among the post structuralists themselves also they are not exactly duplicating each others ideas. But some of them move historically or hermeneutically some of them may based their ideas on discourse analysis.

Or may also merge critical theory with psycho-analysis. Despite all these differences we find that at least there are two premises which are common in his post - structuralists arguments. First is the understandings about the way language functions and we attach meanings to language. The second is that all of them were influenced by phenomenology particularly as found in the works of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.

The implication of the post- structuralist philosophy convinced the people that language is a much less stable affair. Then the classical structuralists had initially considered.

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- The implication of poststructuralist theory is that language is a much less stable system than the classical structuralists had assumed.
- Instead of being a well-defined, stable structure containing symmetrical units of signifiers and signifieds, it is more like a sprawling web of signifiers and signifieds.
 - Constant exchange and transmission of units; none of the units is absolutely definable and where everything is caught up and traced through by everything else.
- This seriously undermines certain traditional theories of meaning.

It is not a well defined or clearly demarcated structure containing symmetrical units of signifier and signified without any doubt. But it is more like a sprawling web where the meeting cannot be fixed. According to the post- structuralist there is a constant interchange in circulation of elements where none of these elements is absolutely definable and where everything is caught up in trace through by everything else.

So, in a way we can say that the introduction of the postmodernist fluidity and flux into the structuralist arguments resulted into a post- structuralist theory.

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Jacques Derrida

- French Algerian-born philosopher (July 15, 1930 – October 9, 2004)
- Founder of Deconstruction
- Major figure associated with Post-structuralism
- Important writings: *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Human Sciences"

At this point it is important to discuss Derrida and his basic philosophy. We find that he is not only a major figure associated with the post structuralist argument but he is also considered to be the founder of deconstruction. In order to understand deconstruction, we also have to understand the exact meaning of the term coined by him that is difference. As we have already seen difference is a combination of two different verbs.

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Major concepts

- Derrida coined the term *différance*— to defer, to differ— to refer to this quality of meaning in language.
- Language is only a chains of signifiers; Not a union of signifiers and signified.
- Our mental life consists not of concepts—not of solid, stable meanings— but of a transitory, repetitively changing play of signifiers.
- In Derrida's words, what we take to be meaning is really only the mental *trace* left behind by the play of signifiers.
- According to Derrida language has two important characteristics:
 - Its play of signifiers continually defers, or postpones, meaning.
 - The meaning it seems to suggest is the result of the differences by which we differentiate one signifier from another.

To defer and to differ, that means this there is a quality of differing as well as the quality of difference whenever we refer to the quality of meaning in language he says that language is only a chain of signifier. It does not consist of the Union of signifier and signified as claimed by the structuralist philosophers. It also means that the concepts which we hold dear to us are not solid and stable meaning concepts.

But these concepts are also fleeting and there is a continual interplay of signifiers. He also says that what we understand to be meaning is really only the mental trace left behind by the play of signifiers and therefore he says that there are two important characteristics of language which we have to understand. First that it is play of signifiers continually defer or postpone meaning. This is the first part of this word difference.

And then he also says that the meaning it seems to have is the result of the differences by which we distinguished one signifier from another.

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- His theories decenter Western Metaphysics and philosophy.
- Critiques Western philosophy as a logocentric initiative which creates hierarchies of binary oppositions, influencing every aspect of cognition.
 - Deconstruction exposes the hollowness of binary systems.
- It attacks the metaphysical belief in some ultimate 'word', presence, essence, truth or reality– as the basis of all thought, language, knowledge and experience.
- Deconstructionists argue that Western philosophy has desired for the sign which will give meaning to all signs – the 'transcendental signifier' – and for the anchoring, unquestionable meaning to which all the signs can be seen to point (Eagleton)
 - Such as the God, the Idea, the World Spirit, the Self, substance, matter etc.

This idea by Derrida decentered western metaphysics and philosophy. Derrida has in a way critiqued the western philosophy as a logocentric enterprise which is created by the hierarchies of binary oppositions influencing every aspect of cognition. We have already discussed how binaries give priority to a particular interpretation and also push the second part of the pool the second binary into oblivion.

But beyond that Derrida also believes that the western philosophy has always advocated some ultimate world presents as since our truth or reality which according to it acts as the foundation of all thought language and experience. It may be the idea of the God, it may be the word spirit the self substance matter or whatever other name may be given to it.

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- Derrida argues that if these concepts (God, Truth, Idea) attempt to act as the foundation of the entire system of thought and language:
 - They must themselves exist beyond that system, unblemished by the play of linguistic differences.
 - It cannot be caught up in the very languages which they attempt to order and anchor
 - It must be anterior to these discourses—existed before they did.
 - It must be a meaning, but not like any other meaning just a product of a play of difference. It must figure rather as the meaning of meanings. (Eagleton)
- He argues that the web-like intricacy of a language based on endless linguistic play and difference suggests that such an enterprise is futile by its very nature. (Eagleton)

But that it is considered by the western philosophy as the Derrida claims that each of these concepts hopes to found our whole system of thought and language. And therefore if it is beyond our system of thought and language then it must also be beyond the linguistic systems. It cannot be implicated in the very languages which it attempts to order in anchor. Somehow it is beyond these language experiments.

It has to be somehow anterior to these discourses which is according to the Derrida is not a possibility and therefore he argues that the web like complexity of language which is based on in finite linguistically and difference reveals that such as search by its very nature is ultimately a futile exercise.

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Deconstruction

- Deconstruction believes that the text is not a unified, stable, logical whole.
 - Encourages close reading of texts in order to establish that any given text has irreconcilably opposing and differing meanings.
 - Breaks the structure from within the structure.
- As J. Hillis Miller, the preeminent American deconstructionist, has explained in an essay entitled *Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure* (1976):
 - "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock but thin air."

The idea of deconstruction which has a reason from these ideas is influenced mainly by Derrida and it also means that the text is not a unified and logical whole. It encourages a close reading of text in order to demonstrate that any given text has irreconcilably opposing in different meetings. It also breaks the structure from within the structure. However, the common understanding that deconstruction is a dismantling of the structure of it text is not exactly correct. Infact deconstruction wants to demonstrate the text is already dismantled itself, it is apparently solid ground is no rock but thin air and therefore the binaries which exist within the text. The other context which exist within the text ultimately help us to understand the particular meaning is being continually dismantled and it is being continually deconstructed. So, deconstruction is the name which has been given to the critical operation.

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- 'Deconstruction', in the words of Eagleton, is 'the name given to the critical operation by which binary oppositions can be partly undermined, or by which they can be shown partly to undermine each other in the process of textual meaning.'
- Eagleton argues that Structuralism was contented if it could fashion a text into binary oppositions (high/low, light/dark, Nature/ Culture and so on) and reveal the logic of the deep structures in texts.
 - But Deconstruction tries to show how such oppositions can be deceived into overturning or collapsing themselves.

By which binary oppositions can be partly undermined or by which they can be shown partly to undermine each other in the process of textual reading. We can say that whereas the structuralist concept was satisfied if it could look at the binary oppositions which were present in a text. For example, the binaries of high and low, light and dark, nature verses culture etc. So the structuralist thinkers was satisfied.

By defining these binary oppositions and exposing the logical of their working but the idea of deconstruction has gone a step ahead and wants to show that how such oppositions in order to hold themselves in place or sometimes betrayed into inverting or collapsing themselves.

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- Derrida argues that in Western culture, people have a habit of thinking and expressing their thoughts in terms of binary oppositions
 - White/black, masculine/feminine, cause/effect, conscious/unconscious, presence/absence, speech/writing
- Derrida suggests these oppositions are organized in terms of a hierarchy:
 - The western culture views one term as positive/superior and another is seen as negative/inferior.
- Through deconstruction, Derrida aims to obliterate the boundary between binary oppositions—to do so in such a way that the hierarchy implicit in binary operations is undermined and challenged.

Derrida who had coined this idea of the deconstruction as well as the term has argued that the western culture which is based on binaries is ultimately to be challenged because whenever we look at the boundaries set by the binary opposition our cognition of things and our thinking also our knowledge also becomes limited. So by deconstruction he aims to erase the boundary between binary oppositions and to do so in such a way

that the hierarchy which is implied by the oppositions is also thrown into question. So Derrida concept of deconstruction has opened up new possibilities of interpretation as well as far as literary texts are concerned.

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- In Derrida's view, there is "no one meaning" does not mean that there is no meaning at all.
 - We can figure out whether statements are true or false within the contexts of science or magazine profiles.
 - But as Derrida remarks, it does not mean that we are unfettered of responsibility to say what we think we mean.
- 'It does mean that we can never know all there is to know about a sentence attributed to Aristotle, about our existence, about what is good, even about the words we are saying – all of which will always remain open to interpretation and reinterpretation.' (Eagleton)
- Deconstructive criticism shows how texts subvert and challenge their own dominant systems of logic and meaning.

There are certain other statements by Derrida which are sometimes misunderstood for example when he says that there is no one meaning, it does not mean that there is no meaning to a particular text. According to Derrida the context becomes important to understand what meaning has been suggested but it does not mean that we are freed of responsibility to try as hard as we can to say that the newer meanings may also be possible.

He also wants to suggest by this a statement that a sentence or a particular code or a particular text which is attributed to Aristotle or anybody else, for example, would always be open to different interpretations. It does not say anything in a final manner ever but the newer

interpretations are always possible because the binaries can always be questioned. So, in a way deconstructive practices shows how takes subvert their own ruling systems of logic.

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- For example, woman is the opposite, the 'other' of man: she is non-man, imperfect man—given a negative value in relation to the male.
- But man is what he is only by virtue of constantly closing off this other or opposite;
 - Has to constantly define himself in antithesis to woman— his entire identity is implicated and held precarious in the very act by which he attempts to assert his unique, autonomous existence.
- Woman is not just an other in the sense of something beyond his understanding, but an other closely related to him as the image of what he is not, and therefore as an indispensable reminder of what he is.

(Eagleton 1996)

And here we find that a particular example which I am a giving over here is given in the context of how the term woman is to be understood and deconstructed. This example I have taken from Terry Eagleton for example a woman is the opposite. The other of man she is non- man defective man assigned a chiefly negative value in relation to the male first principle but equally as Eagleton has written

“Men is what he is only by virtue of shutting out this other opposite defining himself as an antithesis to it and his whole identity therefore is caught up and put at risk in the very gesture by which he seeks to assert his unique existence, his autonomous existence”. At the same time, we would have to understand that in this game plan woman is not just another in the sense of something beyond his skin.

But in other intimately related to him as the image of what he is not and therefore as an essential reminder of what he is. So, as post - structuralists theory deconstruction sees all rating is a complex historical cultural.

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- Deconstruction is a poststructuralist theory
 - ‘Sees all writing as a complex historical, cultural process rooted in the relations of texts to each other and in the institutions and conventions of writing.’ (Eagleton)
- Human knowledge is not as manageable or as conclusive as Western philosophy and metaphysics would have us believe
 - Language operates in elusive and contradictory ways – certainty will always escape us.

Process which is rooted in the relations of texts to each other as well as in the institutions and conventions of writing. It has also suggested that human knowledge is neither as controllable nor as convincing as western thought has always suggested it to be and it also suggests that language operates in a very subtle manner. It can also be acting in a very contradictory manner and therefore the certainty of meaning would always elude us and the text would always be open to different in your interpretations.

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- Thus, post-structuralism, is a style of thought which embraces the deconstructive operations of Derrida, the work of the French historian Michel Foucault, the writings of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and of the feminist philosopher and critic Julia Kristeva. (Eagleton)

Thus post-structuralism is a style of thought which embraces the deconstructive operations of Derrida, the work of the French historian Michel Foucault, the writings of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and the feminist philosopher and critic Julia Kristeva. When we

have to deconstruct the text we have to look at certain aspects as we have discussed earlier deconstruction is not denial of a meaning.

But let us say it has to see how the binaries are placed so that the text is open to different interpretations and within the texts these binaries are acting against each other so when we have to deconstruct the text we have to begin from a position of scepticism.

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How to deconstruct a text

- Proceed from a position of skepticism—Do not search for authorial intention or what you think the text is trying to say.
 - Overturn common logic and assumptions to find multiplicity of meanings.
 - Do not privilege one meaning over the other. Identify cultural biases or hierarchical oppositions at work in the text. Deconstruction involves turning inside out the logic of binary oppositions.
 - Analyze sentence structure to look for ways in which the text betrays its own logic. Look for gaps and aporias.
 - Analyze the tone, sentence structure and stylistics in tandem with each other.
 - Play with possible meanings and look for alternative interpretations.
 - Deconstruction is not about destroying meaning. It is about accepting that meaning is a function of both difference and deference. So, adopt a reading strategy that treats meaning as contingent and fluid.
 - Avoid the fallacy of looking for a transcendental signifier and signified. Treat the text as a web of signifiers.
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Instead of searching for an authorial intention or for a cultural interpretation as it was routinely done we have to begin with a sense of skepticism and also look at this possibility of finding multiplicity of meanings. One should not be guided by the common logic or the most significant interpretation or the interpretation which has always been accepted by people to be there. But we have to be open to the possibility of multiplicity of meanings.

At the same time while we are aware that multiple meanings are there we are not to privilege one particular meaning over the other. We have to identify the biases which may be there for example the cultural biases the political biases or at the same time the hierarchical oppositions which are at work in the given text. Deconstruction also involves questioning the logical binary oppositions.

At the same time, we have to look at the sentence structure to find out in which ways the text has betrayed its own logic. We have to look for the gaps and the aporias which may be there. We have to analyze the tone the sentence structure and the stylistics in combination with each other to find out how within the text the logic is being betrayed and challenged. So, in a way a deconstructive reading would involve playing with the possible meanings.

And looking for alternate interpretations. We also have to remember that deconstruction is not about destroying meaning. It is about accepting that meaning is a function of both difference and deference. So, one has to adopt a reading strategy that treats meaning as contingent and fluid and one also has to avoid the fallacy of looking for transcendental signifier and signified. So, in a way the text becomes a wave of signifiers which is open to immense possibilities

of interpretations and in which no particular interpretation has to be given more significance in comparison to the other. In the next 2 slides I have given a deconstructive reading of Hilda Doolittle poem 'Oread'. Hilda doolittle poem is a very popular example and you would find it quoted in different places in different sources also. So, this is a poem which is often understood as one which is already deconstructed itself.

(Refer Slide Time: 29:05)

Deconstructive reading of Hilda Doolittle's poem, "Oread"

- Whirl up, sea -
Whirl your pointed pines,
Splash your great pines
On our rocks,
Hurl your green over us,
Cover us with your pools of fir.
- 'Oread' is a poem which has already deconstructed itself. The title 'Oread' means 'Prayer'. The title creates a certain expectation in the mind of the reader, but the poem immediately thwarts that expectation. Instead of being an address to a god or a heavenly being, the poem addresses the sea—the world of nature.
- Even if one assumes that it's an invocation to the power of nature, one assumes that it's either a call for help or a celebration of the divinity in nature—the cyclical aspect of nature—the generative and nurturing power of nature. But the language of the poem revels in precarity, violence and destructive power of nature.

The title itself contains and creates a certain expectation as far as the reader are concerned but the poem immediately parts this expectation. As far as the meaning is concerned. We find that the

meanings can also become problematic we do not understand whether the language of the poem reveals and precarity violence and destructive power of nature. So, these aspects become important because the reader does not become clear

whether the poem wants to invoke the sea or the forest in the detailing of these slides you will find how the meaning has been deconstructed as a part of the poem. So, this particular illustration is helpful whenever we have to look at a particular passage from any literary text to find out the possible ways in which the deconstruction of meaning can be traced. So, in this week we have covered different aspects related with postmodernist philosophy.

In the next week, we will begin with a discussion of feminist and gender theories with you.
Thank you.