Structuralism

Structuralism believes that the world is organized as structures. ‘Structures’ are forms made up of units that are arranged in a specific order. These units follow particular rules in the way they are organized or related to each other. Let us see how units are organized in a poem.

A poem is a structure constituted by units such as sounds, phrases, pauses, punctuation and words. Every unit is connected to every other unit. The poem is thus the result of all the units put together. In order to understand the poem's meaning we need to read all these component parts together and see how the images generated by the words hold together with the rhyme scheme, the sounds, the stops (punctuations). The meaning of the text is not confined to or generated by any one of these units—it is the result of all the units working together. A word in a poem makes sense because of its specific location in the poem and its relationship with the other words, images and sounds in the poem. This is the *structure* of the poem. Let us move beyond the poem now.

Literature is one system within a larger system of representation of culture. The system of culture includes other non- literary forms such as cinema, reportage, television, political speeches, myths and traditions. ‘Culture’ is a structure where these various forms exist in relation with each other. Meaning is generated when we understand the rules by which myth, literary texts and social behaviour are linked to each other.

Structuralism is interested in the relationship between the elements of a structure that results in meaning. Since it believes that meaning is the effect of the coming together of elements, it follows that if we understand the rules governing the relationship between elements we can decipher the processes of meaning-production. Structuralism is the study of structures of texts—film, novel, drama, poem, politics, sports—with specific attention to the rules, or grammar, of the elements.

> Structuralism looks at the relationships between the various elements within the self-contained, well-organized structure of a text in order to understand the ways (the grammar or rules) by which the text produces meaning. It focuses on the form of a text by looking at elements like voice, character, setting, and their combination.

According to Jonathan Culler, structuralism:

- is an attempt to describe the language of literature in linguistic terms so as to capture the distinctiveness of literary structures,
- is the development of a ‘narratology’ that identifies the constituents of a narrative and their various combinations,
- is an attempt to show how literary meaning depends upon the codes produced by prior

discourses of a culture,
- promotes analysis of the reader's role in producing meaning.

(Culler 1990: 80–81)

OPENING MOVES

THE LINGUISTIC TURN: SAUSSUREAN LINGUISTICS

Ferdinand de Saussure's 1915 work, *A Course in General Linguistics* (English translation in 1959), proposed that language was a system in which various components existed in relation to each other.

What Saussure was proposing was a radical rethinking of the nature of language. It is not enough to see how words acquire meaning over time (what is called a *diachronic study).* We need to see how words mean within a period and as part of a general system of language. This is the *synchronic study* where we look at words within the current state of the language and not at its history. This is now self-evident. When we listen to a sentence like 'The film star looks glamorous' we immediately understand what it means. We are not aware that any of those words had a different meaning before in history ('glamour' was in fact a term used to describe witches). We understand the meanings of the words as they are in use, as a part of the language system *today.*

Saussure makes three significant moves in his analysis of language. First of all, he divides language into two main components.

i. The *set of rules* by which we combine words into sentences, use certain words in certain ways, rules which are rarely altered and which all users of a language follow. This he termed *langue.*
ii. Everyday speech where we use words in *particular* contexts. This he called *parole.*

To use an example. *Langue* is like the mathematical tables. The tables are a system of rules and tools for use. The everyday calculations we do—from prices in shops to simple totaling—is an instance of *parole* where we employ the tables to get the calculations done. If *langue* is the system of rules and conventions that govern how we use words and meanings, *parole* is, then, *language in context.* In most cases we are not aware of the langue component; we use the system of conventions by habit, and are not always alert to the large structure of language in everyday use. Parole, therefore, is *live* language.

Then, in his second move, Saussure proposes a relational theory of language where

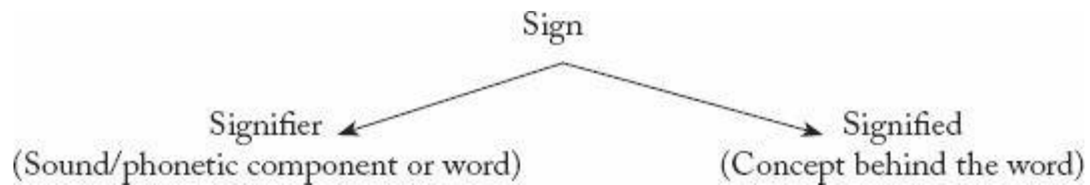
i. ‘words’ existed in relation to other words and
ii. the meaning of each word was dependent upon the meaning of other words.

Thus, meaning was the result of being able to recognize the *difference* between words—‘cat’ is ‘cat’ because it is *not* ‘bat’ or ‘hat’. It is different in terms of the sound produced and the way in which it is written. Meaning thus emerges in the difference or opposition between words. We work with binary or paired oppositions to make sense of words and sounds in speech. ‘Cat’, ‘bat’ and ‘hat’ are all words in the system of language: They are related to each other because they belong to the same system, and because they make sense only in being different from each other. We would not be able to recognize ‘cat’ as a unique word if we did not have other words from which it is different.

What we, therefore, have is a principle. This principle is the *structure* of language itself: that of difference and opposition. Language imposes its structure (the recognized difference between ‘cat’ and ‘hat’) whatever be the individual contexts in which the sounds or words are being used. We are aware of this system that makes conversation and understanding possible. We learn to use the differences that generate meaning.

Finally, Saussure's third move. Saussure suggests that words and their meanings are not ‘natural’ but created through repeated use and convention. The word ‘cat’ does not naturally refer to a four-legged furry animal of a particular kind with particular habits. The pronunciation or writing of the word does not invoke the animal. We have come to associate the name or word ‘cat’ to the animal through long use. There is no real relationship between the word and its meaning. Meaning is attributed through its use by a community of language-users. The animal cat does not declare its ‘catness’, we *attribute* the ‘catness’ to it by giving it a name. The cat might very well see itself as ‘man’ or ‘tiger’. But humans have given the name ‘cat’ to it, whatever the cat may think of itself. The word (or ‘signifier’) is connected to

the meaning or concept (the ‘signified’) in a purely *arbitrary* relationship. Together the signifier and signified constitute a *sign.*



For Saussure the sound was a material manifestation of the abstract concept. Words are signs that enable us to understand the concept or the object. Words are like a form of transport that takes you to the object or concept. They help us construct the concept in our mind.

We can now summarize the three principles regarding language that Saussure puts forward:

i. *Arbitrariness*: Words have no real connection to their meanings or the things they describe. The connections are established by convention.
ii. *Relationality*: Words make sense to us, or have ‘value’ (Saussure's term) for us in their *relationality*: in their difference from other words. Words are therefore related to each other in the form of difference and have no absolute value of their own. As we have seen above, every word is opposed to, different from another word, and meaning emerges in this *difference.*
iii. *Systematicity*: The structure of language, or the system, ensures that we recognize difference.

Later, Saussure's ideas about structures and rules were adopted by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss to analyse rituals, myths and kinships. This created the ‘discipline’ of structural anthropology.

In terms of literary and cultural criticism, Saussure's structural theory of language provides particular insights and approaches as follows:

- It suggests that content in a poem, a film or a play is dependent upon the form in which the themes are expressed.
- The effect of a poem or a film is the result of an effective combination of elements that have been arranged in a particular way.
- Following from the above two we can say that there is *no content without form.*
- Content is a function of form.
- It is possible to uncover the basic principles of organization (or grammar) of a film or a poem.
- The grammar is the structure of the poem, and follows specific rules that function like language, based on opposition, difference and relationality.
- Culture itself has an underlying organization or structure where different elements are combined to generate meaning.

Saussure proposed that the link between the word/sound (signifier) and concept (signified) is based on the difference between sounds and our ability to distinguish between them, the relationship between sounds (a relationship of difference) and is purely arbitrary (where the sound/word does not describe the object, but is assumed to do so by convention and repeated use).

Roman Jakobson and Metaphor-Metonymy

Jakobson worked with aphasics, people with an inability to use language without difficulty. Observing the way aphasics use and understand ordinary speech, Jakobson developed a theory of language use. Jakobson argued that there are two major rhetorical figures: metaphor and metonymy. Both are figures of *equivalence* because they *substitute* a new term that is believed to be an equivalent for the main/original term. Let us use an example to understand what Jakobson termed the metaphoric and metonymic poles.

We often declare that on our roads the 'traffic crawls along'. Now 'crawl' is a term used to describe the relatively slow movement of creatures, like worms, snakes and insects, that stop and go, stop and go, inspecting various things on the way. How does it describe the vehicular movement on the road? What the image does is to posit an equivalence between the pattern of movement of the vehicles with that of the insects. It assumes a *similarity* between the two. We could have picked 'bustles' or 'races' or 'goes', but we selected 'crawls' from this *vertical* list of possible descriptives because we think the movement of vehicles is *akin* to that of the insects. What we have, therefore, is a term that provides a *metaphor* for the vehicular movement. It is possible to visualize vehicular movement as the movement of insects through this metaphor. We have *substituted* insects for cars and vehicles. Metaphor is an act of substitution through *selection* and *association*, in this case the association or analogy between the movements of cars and insects.

Another form of language use is metonymy. Metonymy is when a part is substituted for the whole. For example, we say, 'the orders were issued by Rashtrapati Bhavan'. Now, the building, that is, Rashtrapati Bhavan does not issue orders. It is the President of India, who lives in the Bhavan, who issues orders. Here the building is taken to be the equivalent of its resident by the principle of contiguity. One word is placed next to another as being contiguous. Here we choose a word that is seen as adjacent to another. This is the principle of *combination.*

Selection and combination are the two ways of language operation. We can select any word from a storehouse of words, and then use these words in combination to generate a sentence. As an example, we can look at the following sentence.

I live in a	house cave shell

Now, we *select* the word house from a list of possible words. This list is a *vertical paradigm* of options where, technically, the sentence makes perfect sense even if we were to pick ‘shell’ or ‘cave’: ‘I live in a shell’ is *not* a wrong sentence. Selection from the paradigm enables metaphor: We can use ‘shell’ as a metaphor for ‘house’. We can describe a dark house as a ‘cave’. Just as we selected ‘crawl’ as a metaphoric equivalent of vehicular movement along roads, we can use ‘shell’ as a metaphoric equivalent for the ‘house’.

Having picked words we need to organize the sentence. In the above instance we selected words from a vertical list of possible words. Here we have to *combine* the selected words in a *horizontal* sequence so that they make sense.

I house in a live
Or
Live a house in I

These are both options in terms of sequence or *syntagm.* But for the sentence to make sense we need to order the selected words in a different sequence: ‘I live in a house.’

Language thus works on the dual principles of selection and combination.

Poetic language, for Jakobson, uses *both* selection and combination in order to produce equivalence. Let's go back to my first example. We *select* ‘crawl’ from a list that includes ‘goes’, ‘races’ and ‘bustles’ and *combine* it with ‘traffic’. What we have is a poetic formulation: we have a *symbol* for the slow moving traffic on the roads. We have, in effect, produced a poetic symbol through a process of selection and combination where the usual description (‘slow traffic’ or ‘traffic congestion’ or ‘traffic jam’ has *not* been used). We have defamiliarized the description by providing an unusual poetic

symbol—we converted vehicles into insects (i.e., provided a *metaphor* for vehicles).

As we can see Jakobson suggests a special use of language here. Now, the point is that ordinary, everyday language is used to communicate meaning, and poetry is only a special and unusual mode of communication. Or, in this case, the *aesthetic* function is greater than the communicative function of language. This is precisely what makes the language 'poetic' or 'literary'.

Jakobson argued that all meaning in poetic language is the result of a *metonymic* combination (syntagm, the horizontal organization as a sentence) and *metaphoric* selection (paradigm, the choice of one term from a collection of terms). In communication the meaning of the message is based on which of the six elements—code, address, addressee, message, contact, context—is dominant.

As we can see, structuralism is based on the formula for meaning-generation embedded in a text's form and language. Structuralism's interest in words, their combinations and meanings leads it to examine the text at various levels as follows:

- that of the *text*—where we look at the arrangement of words, the rules of combination;
- that of the *genre*—where we see a poem as an example of the genre of poetry itself, and compare the present case with that of the others;
- that of *culture* itself—where we see literary texts as part of a larger cultural text that includes film, television, sport, and other such phenomena.

Structuralism is also interested, since it draws upon Saussure's notions of language, in *signs* that constitute language and meaning. A specific branch of structuralism that developed modes of analysing signs is semiotics.

STRUCTURALISM AND NARRATIVE THEORY

For purposes of literary and cultural analysis, we can define narrative as

- the act of representation using signs in particular sequences so that we construct specific notions of reality, self and the world,
- our construction and interpretation of the world through the use of words, sounds, figures, gestures and relations,
- intrinsically linked to language (since, as we have already noted, sounds, words, gestures are all signs, or language).

In the twentieth century, structuralism generated some of the most rigorous analyses of narrative and its forms. In what follows, we look at a few of the most important theorists of narrative. The study of narrative is called narratology, a term often used interchangeably with 'poetics'.

A term that is often used to describe the language of narrative, and has come to occupy centre stage in almost every theory today is 'discourse'. Discourse traditionally meant *spoken* or *written presentation.* It is what we read or listen to. In the case of structuralism this is the sense in which 'discourse' is used.

Now, after poststructuralism it refers to the language used in *social* practice. That is, discourse now refers to the functional as well social, political and ideological aspects of language—something we shall explore in the chapter on poststructuralism.

RUSSIAN FORMALISM AND THE POETICS OF FICTION

As we have already noted, the Russian Formalists were more interested in the language of poetry. In their later work, however, critics like Vladimir Propp, Viktor Shklovsky and, much later, Tzvetan Todorov explored narrative structure in fiction. More contemporary narratologists like Gérard Genette also build on the structuralism of the Russian Formalists as they refine their study of prose narratives.

The Folktale

Vladimir Propp's analysis of the folktale is a classic example of structuralist criticism at work. Propp argued that every character in a folktale's plot had a specific function. This in itself is hardly new: We know after structuralism that a plot is the consequence of many elements in relation with each other. What was fascinating about Propp's analysis is that he is able to locate a mere seven key performers, who create seven spheres of action. That is, all fairy tales can be reduced to a set of seven characters who generate the entire plot through their various relationships.

Here is Propp's list:

1. hero
2. false hero
3. villain
4. donor or provider
5. helper
6. princess and her father
7. despatcher

Now, Propp also identified 31 functions to be found in every folktale. These are absentation, interdiction, violation, reconnaissance, delivery, trickery, complicity, villainy and lack, mediation, counteraction, departure, first function of donor, hero's reaction, receipt of magic agent, spatial transference, struggle, branding, victory, liquidation, return, pursuit, rescue, unrecognized, unfounded claims, difficult task, solution, recognition, exposure, transfiguration, punishment, wedding (from Chandler 2003: 94– 95).

The folktale is thus reducible to this set of functions created by the seven performers. It is important to realize here that the number of spheres of action is finite even when the number of characters is infinite. That is, whatever be the number of characters, they all combine in specific ways to generate the plot.

STRUCTURALIST NARRATOLOGY

The study of narrative was greatly facilitated by structuralism. It systematized the study of plot, character, symbol and provided a formula for narratives, as seen in the work of Propp (above).

One of the earliest practitioners of structuralist narratology was A. J. Greimas, whose work in *Semantique Structurale* (1966, *Structural Semantics)* built upon Saussure's idea of binary oppositions to develop what has been called *structural semiotics* (semiotics is the study of signs).

Structural Semiotics

Greimas paid close attention to the way in which oppositions help us organize meaning. He suggested that there are semantic units that work in opposition. He termed these 'semes', and argued that meaning emerges in the contrast between semes. Some common semes would be:

light–dark
up–down
male–female

This binary opposition is the *primary structure of all meaning-production* (meaning-production is technically called *signification*, a term used with perhaps alarming regularity in literary theory today). It is possible that we see the paired opposites or semes as positive and negative, where one element is the negative component of the pair: dark as the negative of light, female as the negative of male. This aspect of a negated component of entity would be discussed extensively by poststructuralism and feminism.

Roland Barthes and His Codes

Barthes is an interesting figure in literary theory because he is located at the intersection of structuralism and poststructuralism. His early work is inspired by structuralist ideas and later works on the 'death of the author' gesture at his post-structuralist sympathies.

Barthes in his *The Structural Analysis of Narrative* (1977) and *S/Z* (1970) developed a detailed model of narrative. Like the structuralists, Barthes believed that one can break up a narrative into its constituent elements and discover how they combine with each other. Reading a short story by Balzac, Barthes identified 561 units of meaning, or what he called 'lexias'. Barthes proposed (and here the parallels with Propp and Greimas must be evident to us) that we could organize the lexias into five main groups, all working in combination in a narrative. That is, the five groups, or *codes* as he called them, are the narrative's modes of organizing the units so that meaning is generated. These codes, argued Barthes, are common to all narratives.

1. *Proairetic Code*: This is the most visible aspect of a narrative, and refers to the *sequence* in which the events of a story unfold. It is often a temporal sequence: This happened and *then* this happened. This code governs our *expectations* of a narrative: If this happened, then this must certainly happen.
2. *Hermeneutic Code*: This is the code that informs our *interpretation* and the questions we ask of the narrative: What happened? How? Why? By Whom?
3. *Cultural Code*: This is the code that narratives assume we all share. Cultural codes are those elements of common knowledge that we share as a community and therefore do not require a glossary. This can be medical, literary or even symbolic knowledge. An example would be a narrative that uses a sentence like 'during the Raj things were very different'. Most Indians would immediately understand the term *Raj* without any glossary or explanation. It is the cultural code in the

narrative.

4. *Semic Code*: This is the code that draws upon, like in the cultural code, a common set of stereotypes that are self-descriptive and self-evident. When, for example, we see a man in white clothes and wearing a Gandhi cap, we know immediately that he is a politician. The stereotype is well in place for all readers and, therefore, does not require explanation. On the other hand, like the cultural code, semic codes require explanations to a person coming from outside the community.
5. *Symbolic Code*: This is very similar to the semic code. It extends beyond the immediate icon or stereotype to refer to something larger. For example, a horror film thrives on the images of darkness. A shot of the moon and treetops (or streets) automatically functions as a code for night (this is the semic code). But, because we are aware of the significance of night in horror films (and here we are drawing upon our previous experience of such films), we expect something dangerous or evil to happen. This shifts the code from the *semic* where we understand it is night from the signs of moon and empty streets to the *symbolic* where we know that something evil is about to happen. We move beyond the ordinary day/night semic code to a notion of good/bad that is equivalent to or corresponds to day/night in a process of semantic expansion (that is, the meaning of day and night is expanded to mean good and evil respectively). We have invested the day/night pair the symbolic meanings of good/bad.

Barthes sees every narrative as being composed of lexias that are organized in the form of five main codes: the proairetic (about sequence of a narrative), the hermeneutic (interpretative), cultural (common knowledge), semic (stereotypes) and symbolic (semantic and symbolic expansion of semic codes).

Poststructuralism and Deconstruction

Structuralism, as we have seen, developed a model of reading texts and cultural artifacts. Structuralist narrative theory, for example, generated schemes for reading novels and poetry, unpacking the elements that constituted the text's meaning. While it was a rigorous and thorough textual analysis that paid close attention to language and form, it was also rather formulaic. The attempt in structuralism was to seek an order, a structure, to novels, menus, poetry, music and visual texts. It sought grids and patterns, schemes and plots, always assuming that the text would yield its meaning once we unravel its 'core' elements.

In the 1960s, literary critics and philosophers began to rebel against what they saw as a restrictive and limited critical practice of viewing the world. Emerging in the context of civilian unrest (all the major French philosophers and thinkers of the latter half of the twentieth century were associated, in some form or the other, with the 1968 student rebellions in Paris) and geopolitical disasters like the Vietnam war, poststructuralism was the expression of a sense of disillusionment—with the nation-state, with philosophies of emancipation and with critical thinking itself. It emerged as a rupture, a shift away from what the prominent thinkers saw as the formulaic, ordered work of structuralism.

Roland Barthes' later work moved away from his structuralist phase, and he was one of the first to start speaking of the 'openness' of texts, the text's connections with other texts and the reader's role in the production of meaning. The writings of Jacques Derrida in the mid-1960s appeared in English in the form of conference papers, with his first complete book, *Of*

Grammatology, appearing in 1976 (translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak). From the early-1970s through the 1980s and 1990s, the work of Derrida, the historian of ideas, Michel Foucault, the philosophers Jean- François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the Marxist literary critic Frederic Jameson, the semiotician-psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, Spivak's own work, that of postmodernists, Slavoj Žižek, Jean Baudrillard and feminists like Judith Butler created a movement in literary criticism, media studies and philosophy. Poststructuralism thus has close contiguities— both thematic and contextual—with postmodernism. Poststructuralism has been one of the most influential movements in philosophy and critical theory in the twentieth century, and helped the rise of new forms of thinking in the social sciences seen in the work of James Clifford, Clifford Geertz, Michael Taussig (anthropology), James Der Derian (political theory), Bruno Latour (social studies of science) and New Historicists (literary criticism).

OPENING MOVES

THE DISCURSIVE TURN: MICHEL FOUCAULT

Michel Foucault, Professor of the History of the Systems of Thought, developed what he called the 'archaeology of the human sciences' in which he studied the rise of the forms of knowledge, the classificatory mechanisms of knowledge and the rules by which knowledge was collected, archived and disseminated. Foucault's interest lay in unpacking the underlying structures of thinking in the various fields of knowledge because, he argued, these structures conditioned and constructed

- the process of inquiry (knowledge-gathering),
- the very nature of the object (about which knowledge is being gathered), and the
- possibilities of using and distributing this knowledge.

In other words, Foucault saw scientific inquiry as an exercise in power where the physician, the scientist and the psychiatrist constructed a particular condition as diseased, an object to be investigated, and knowledge about it to be carefully controlled by certain authorities. Knowledge is constructed, organized, shared and used through particular forms of speech, writing and language—or what is called *discourse.* Discourse is the context of speech, representation, knowledge and understanding. It defines what can be said, studied and the processes of doing so. It is the *context in which meaning itself is produced.* To take a simplistic analogy: In the court of law, emotions and emotional responses to questions cannot be taken as answers. The court insists that the defendant or the accused answer the questions, and not with tears, laughter or anger. The discourse of the law in the court relies upon what it sees as 'evidence', logic and rational argumentation rather than angry outbursts or hysteria. Similarly, in the case of science, it is not adequate to say 'I believe this to be true'. The discourse of science asks for empirical, demonstrable proof that it is true.

Foucault's originality lay in discerning the underlying structures of power that informed 'neutral' scientific inquiries. He argued that some sections of the population were classified as sick, criminal, mad so that they could be placed under surveillance and 'observed' by particular kinds of authorities. This surveillance was coded as a *discourse*, a terrain of thought, a system of knowledge, a particular kind of language that allowed some things to be said and disallowed

some others. Thus,

- the priest used the *discourse of religion*, of sin and salvation in order to preach particular norms of behaviour in domains like marriage, sexuality, family and charity,
- the physician used the *discourse of sickness* and health in order to proscribe particular kinds of lifestyles (excessive eating, for example),
- the psychiatrist constructed particular kinds of behaviour as ‘deviant’ through a *discourse of rationality.*

Foucault's major contribution has been to show how these discourses condition people's lives and inform their thinking. By focusing on power as central to the human condition, Foucault was able to argue that human relations, science, institutions are all caught up in a struggle for power, and discourse is a terrain on which this struggle is carried out. The person/institution that controls discourse also controls the subjects in those discourses.

> Foucault underscored the discursive basis of power, social relations and institutions by showing how the so-called ‘objective’ disciplines like the sciences relied upon underlying assumptions about the object to be investigated, used particular forms of language and thought in order to talk about this object, and eventually constructed an institution around the object for its study and control.

This argument has been best used by the twentieth-century feminisms, which have shown how the *discourses* of patriarchy (with the representation of the pure woman, the seductive woman, the hysterical woman, the vulnerable woman) have been *institutionalized* in the uneven structures of marriage, education, religion, the law, history, literature, science and politics. Foucault's argument helped them show how discourse has material consequences for people, and that discourses construct and legitimize unequal power relations. Every discourse has an object, a language, an authority-figure who uses this language to describe/classify the object and a corrective mechanism that draws upon the description and classification. Here are a few examples of how discourse works in Foucault's kind of analysis:

- The vagrant was the *object* constructed in a *discourse of economics* as a non- productive, itinerant ‘body’ by the *authority-figure* of the economist/social commentator, and whose ‘deviance’ (non-employment) was corrected through the *institution* of either forced employment or charity.
- The immoral individual or sinner was the *object* constructed in a *discourse of religion* (with its elements of sin, salvation, virtue, punishment, purgatory and hell) by the *authority-figure* of the priest, and whose ‘deviant’ morality was *corrected* through penitence, confession and religious rituals (say, fasting) recommended/ordered and sometimes even implemented (for example, branding of witches) by the religious authority, the church.
- The criminal was the *object* constructed in a *discourse of the law* that classified actions as right or wrong, by the *authority-figure* of the court/judge, and whose deviant behaviour was corrected through the institution of the prison.

Foucault's work, adapted in the twentieth-century cultural theory and criticism, has shown how

- the sections of society have been subjugated through particular discourses; specific
- institutional forms of control were created to ensure that these sections remained subjugated;
- popular and other representations (arts, literature) controlled the images of these sections;
- these images in turn naturalized the difference and subjugation of particular sections;
- these discursive processes justified and led to the installation of 'corrective' mechanisms—institutions—to keep the sections controlled;
- the discourse and institutional structures combined to give power to particular classes/authorities.

These discourses are thus a manifestation of the will-to-power where structures of power in society retain their power over the marginal and the subordinates through the creation and control of particular discourses.

THE DECONSTRUCTIVE TURN: BARTHES AND DERRIDA

While Foucault's work involved detailing the structures of power and their discourses, Roland Barthes' later writings began to make the first moves in rebelling against structuralist readings of texts.

Barthes began by suggesting a different view of the text. He argued that texts can be either 'readerly' or 'writerly'. A *readerly text* was one that left the reader with nothing to do—it explained, explicated, described everything. It controlled meaning and the reader was a mere passive recipient of meaning. A *writerly text*, on the other hand, was one where the reader had an active role to play. The text teased, hid, offered clues to the reader to decode. In other words, Barthes was proposing that meaning was not embedded within the *text* but within the *reader* who derived meaning from the textual process. As he puts it in 'The Death of the Author', 'The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination' (2003 [1968]: 150).

Barthes suggested that a *work* is a physical object that occupies shelf space and is carried in the hand. A *text*, on the other hand, is a process in language. 'Text' here begins to

- mean a series of linguistic processes that are decoded by the reader,

- assume the ‘structure’ of narrative negotiations between the language (of the text) and the reader.

As Barthes puts it in ‘From Work to Text’: ‘the *text is experienced only as an activity of production*’ (1978:156–57, emphasis in original). In addition, Barthes sees the author as the controlling authority that prevents a work from becoming a text. As long as we assume that the author carries and owns the meaning of a poem or novel, it will remain a *work*, and not become a *text.*
Barthes writes:

> The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author “confiding in us”. (2003 [1968]: 147)

Thus, a work becomes a text when the reader refuses authorial authority. In Barthes’ famous formulation: ‘the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author’ (150).
Barthes then proposed that these negotiations are, by definition, endless.
This is so because every text is ‘open’, an endless series of signifiers that refer to other signifiers and other texts rather than point to any definite conclusive meaning. The reader's task—and pleasure—is in playing with the text's endless games of signification. Barthes further proposed that this play is not necessarily controlled by the author. The author-centre as authority, as the controller of meaning, is dead and the meaning of a text lies somewhere in the play between the narrative and the reader. The play and its pleasure arise from the fact that every text is plural in its meaning—it refers to, echoes, parallels, quarrels with, reflects and borrows from other texts. Play is not rational or hierarchic, but random, repeatable differently and endless. For Barthes, therefore,

- the text is plural,
- the text is open to other texts in an endless series of intertextual operations (what Barthes terms ‘a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture’, 149),
- the author is ‘dead’ and is therefore no more the sole authority over a text's meaning,
- the ‘pleasures’ of a text lie in the process of playing the narrative.

With these moves Barthes has put in place a different view of textuality itself —arguing for an openness and endlessness of meaning-making and narrative process.

Jacques Derrida, often associated with the ‘movement’ in philosophy known as ‘deconstruction’, is arguably one of the most elusive, controversial and influential figures in Western intellectual history. His work has spanned philosophy, literature, the law, political theory and social theory. Obsessed with the functioning of language, Derrida's mode of writing is playful, elliptical and sometimes obscure. However, the point is that *the way he makes his arguments is the argument itself*, a degree of self-reflexivity that is not seen in contemporary writing.

Derrida's early work built upon the Saussurean notions of language and signification (discussed in Chapter 1), but took them to radical extremes. Derrida argued that if the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary and all language is relational then the process of ‘reading’ is a movement from one signifier to another. We can never come to the ‘end’ of signification and discover *the* meaning because when we get to the end we are faced not with the signified but with yet another signifier. Every signifier refers to other words/signifiers in an endless postponement—deference—of meaning. We never arrive; we only travel along the path of meaning-making. Thus, in order to explain the word ‘cat’ we use further terms like ‘animal’, ‘organism’, ‘whiskers’, ‘tail’—more signifiers along the chain of signification. There is no ‘final’ signified because even that signified will consist of more words (signifiers).

Every signifier, argued Derrida, is made up of an *absence.* Building on Saussure's assumption that meaning is the result of difference (cat is different from bat, hat, fat…), Derrida suggests that every word carries within it the words that we are aware of as being different. Every signifier is a series of differences from other signifiers, all of those are the *absences* that constitute this one for us. ‘Cat’ is ‘produced’ because fat, hat and bat are absent, but these absences are crucial because without them we would not know ‘cat’.
This means the meaning of ‘cat’ is the result of absence rather than mere

presence of difference. Meaning, ironically, depends as much on the absence of other words as on the presence of ‘cat’.

> Derrida's chief contribution has been to show how language is fundamentally slippery, based on self-contradictory, unfinalizable conditions of difference and deference. His arguments have focused on the need to pay closer attention to the way in which meanings are produced temporarily rather than with any finality, through contradictions and ambivalence, and have consistently rebelled against any ‘authoritative’ or authoritarian meaning.

What Derrida achieved with these twin moves—of meaning as based on *difference* and absent presences, and as perpetually *deferred*—was a radical rethinking of the very process of language use. Writing and language, he announced, was *différance*: a term that combines *difference* and *deference* (postponement). We shall return to the significance of this term later. All writing is this *différance*, and a study of this *différance* is what Derrida famously termed ‘grammatology’.

Derrida's deconstructive turn must be read alongside that of Barthes’. What these two thinkers did was to provide a very significant shift in the way we think of language. Both suggested

- the endless play in language and literary texts,
- the unreliability of any meaning,
- the openness of texts,
- the instability of language,
- the unfinalizability of any meaning or text,
- the relationships between words, meanings and texts as intrinsic to meaning rather than the words themselves.

Deconstructive criticism would build on these themes of unfinalizability, deference, relationality to show how a text can subvert its own stated

philosophical or literary assumptions because it refers to and is open to

i. a different reading,
ii. another text that rather than reinforce its argument might subvert it,
iii. revisions even as it states its meanings in unambiguous terms.

Deconstruction, if we seek a simple methodology in its practice, is thus interested in how texts

- break down,
- defeat their stated aims and purposes,
- rely on false or unsustainable oppositions,
- make use of figurative (i.e., literary or metaphoric) language even when trying to be empirical,
- reverse their own arguments,
- depend on other texts/signs,
- conceal arguments that are the very opposite of what they ostensibly show.

If structuralism was interested in how meaning is produced and texts work, deconstruction is interested in the contradictions that resist meaning, in how texts do not work but deconstruct themselves.

PHONOCENTRISM, LOGOCENTRISM AND THE 'METAPHYSICS OF PRESENCE'

Deconstructive thinking in Derrida begins by worrying about the distinction posed in linguistics and culture between speech and writing (Derrida is reading Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss here). Speech is privileged because it is seen as more authentic, since it happens only with a speaking person. Writing is treated as artificial, and as suggesting death, loss and unreliability since writing can exist independent of—after the life of—the writer. Thus, speech is taken to mean presence (of the speaker) and writing to mean absence. Writing is, therefore, about absences and thus less privileged in this scheme.

Derrida termed this privileging of speech over writing, *phonocentrism.*
Speech is privileged because it seems to have an 'essence': the speaker. Listeners assume the speaker embodies the truth of what is being said because the speaker is *present.* In fact, Derrida proposes, notions of truth are dependent upon this idea of a centre ('logos'), core and essence. This is what he terms *logocentrism*, or the 'metaphysics of presence', where the core or the presence is seen as being 'truth'. Derrida sees the entire canon of Western philosophy as rooted in this metaphysics, in its search for a core meaning, in its privileging of presence and rejection of absence and difference. God functions, he argues, as a sort of core truth, a 'transcendental signified'. This is where, Western philosophy assumes, all truth originates. Derridean deconstruction's first move is, therefore, to reject this emphasis on centres, origins and essences.

Phonocentrism is a term Derrida uses to describe the privileging of speech over writing in Western thought, a privileging based on the assumption that because speech implies a speaking presence, it is more authentic. *Logocentrism* is the term he uses to describe the assumption and quest for a core, an essence, truth and centre. 'Logos', or the final meaning is believed to vest in God, whom Derrida terms a transcendental signified—a signified that explains and culminates the very process of signification.

Derrida proposed that absence is the *always present* condition of inevitable death. The sign (or writing) is iterable, repeatable in the absence not only of the writer-speaker but also in the absence of the listener-reader. Iteration is the possibility of *citation*—to quote, repeat, re-write—of texts. Derrida writes: 'It [written communication] must be repeatable—iterable—in the absolute absence of the addressee or the empirically determinable entirety of addresses' (1982: 315). What Derrida is arguing here is that what applies to the addresser-speaker (absence) also applies equally to the addressee-listener.

Writing is seen as an extra, an *addition* to speech, something that is used as a *sign* when the presence of the speaker is not possible. This locates writing as extra, an addendum, and, therefore, subordinate to speech in the hierarchy speech/writing. Derrida terms this the logic of the *supplement.*

THE SUPPLEMENT AND DIFFÉRANCE

The supplement is *différance.* Derrida proposes, following Saussure, that signs cannot ever refer to the things themselves (there is no connection between the thing and the word used to describe the thing. The relation established is arbitrary and through convention). Signs are, therefore, incomplete, and require something else to complete its sense. Supplement is this necessary completion. It is signifier that is *extra.* But Derrida argues that the signifier is also what completes. It is extra (and therefore unnecessary)

but also necessary for completion. It is *both* necessity and excess. It can substitute (in the example given above, a sign is a *substitute* for the actual living presence of the speaker) or supplant. The signifier is needed because it tells us that there is a presence (assumed to be the signified) that is *not* here now. In other words, a sign is indicative of an *absent presence* because it *shows* (stands in for) *something that is not here, but makes us alert to the fact that something is not here.* This makes the sign invaluable because it alerts us to signification itself. Derrida typically plays with this double meaning of excess and necessity to show how 'supplement' is unstable and undecidable. The supplement is the *signifier.*

Derrida's deconstructive move is to show how we seek to go from the supplement to the 'core', the main meaning. We wish, in other words, to move *from* the signifier *to* the signified. Without a signifier there would not be a signified. Hence, the signifier is integral to the signified, and the signifier indicates that a signified is at hand, though deferred. The signifier gestures at this absent presence of the signified, and without the signifier we would not know there is ever a signified. Derrida ponders over the consequence of the pursuit beyond the supplement: 'One wishes to go back from the supplement to the source: one must recognize that there is supplement at the source' (2002[1976]: 304). This simply means we start a process that will not end.

The repeatability of the sign, Derrida proposes, is in fact *common* to both speech and writing. If signs are by definition iterable (citable, repeatable), then there is no end to repetition. In other word signs—written or spoken— can be repeated anywhere anytime. When I use the term 'Derrida' here, or in my class, I am not really concerned with where it was first used. I only know that one can use the term in various contexts and people will still understand that I am speaking of a French philosopher. Both writing and speaking depend on the function of the sign's iterability—we can use the same words in different contexts to suit our need of the moment and not worry about where the word comes from or what it has meant before. All forms of language, Derrida shows, are based on this fact of iterability, whether in speech or in writing. Hence, the privileging of speech over writing is false.

Derrida uses the term ‘writing’ to therefore include both spoken and written forms, in order to emphasize that *speech is a form of writing*.

This argument illustrates a basic feature of deconstructive ‘method’: to analyse a hierarchy, to reverse it and to show how the elements of the hierarchy are constitutive of each other. Thus, speech and writing are not opposing terms or binaries but rather, each contains the other.

In literary and cultural theory, Derrida's arguments about texts have been particularly influential, and to these we shall now turn.

‘THERE IS NO OUTSIDE-TEXT’

‘Text’ requires a clearer explication in Derrida.

i. ‘Text’ is not restricted by a book's margins or binding.
ii. A text overruns, spills over its borders. The end of the ‘book’ is not the end of ‘writing’.
iii. Every text carries ‘traces’ of other texts (recall here the notion of intertextuality).
iv. Every text is, therefore, a network of other texts, from which it differs.

The world, constructed through and in language takes on a *textualized* form, based on difference, deference and multiplicity. There is no reality outside the game of language, of language as difference and open.

Since language is inherently unstable (due to its arbitrariness, traces, absences and deferment) we cannot come to a definite meaning about reality or identity. All we have as reality is a system of shifting signifiers, difference and openness, full of ambiguity, absences, traces of other texts. This notion of reality being located within writing—or text—leads Derrida to declare: *‘there is no outside-text.’*[1] Derrida is proposing that everything takes on a *textualized* form (of difference and deference), but also that texts are *politicized.* Derrida's translator and commentator, Geoffrey Bennington, writes: ‘“Text” is not quite an extension of a familiar concept, but a displacement or reinscription of it. Text in general is any system of marks, traces, referrals…’ (2001 [1989]: 217). Derrida's definitions of texts are worth citing in some detail:

> All those boundaries that form the running border of what used to be called a text, of what we once thought this word would identify, i.e., the supposed end and beginning of a work, the unity of a corpus, the title, the margins, the signatures, the referential realm outside the frame, and so forth. What has happened … is a sort of overrun that spoils all these boundaries and divisions and forces us to extend the accredited concept, the dominant notion of a "text" … *that is no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces.* (1979: 81–4, emphasis added)

Derrida elaborated what he meant some years later:

> "There is no outside-the-text" signifies that one never accedes to a text without some relation to its contextual opening that a context is not made up only of what is so trivially called a text, that is, the words of a book or the more or less biodegradable paper document in a library. If one does not understand this initial transformations of the concepts of text … [and] context, one understands nothing about nothing of … deconstruction. (1989: 841)

Derrida here proposes that history, politics, economics, reality itself is based on difference. And difference, as he had argued, is the basis of writing. What Derrida suggests is that all these domains take the form of writing, of texts. Bennington writes:

> Deconstruction does not have a place for language over here, and a world over there to which it refers … There is no essential difference between language and the world, the one as subject, the other as object. There are traces. (2001 [1989]: 218)

Texts are undecidables. Later critics have theorized about textuality as being different from 'text'. Textuality is what constitutes the text in particular ways. This involves interpretive acts, contexts and the knowledge produced through the text. Textuality is the process of reading the text. To put it differently: A text is the *object* that is read, and textuality is the *act* of reading/interpretation (Edward Said, the postcolonial critic, called textuality a 'practice', 1978b: 703). This reading reveals the slippages of language.
Derrida writes:

> [T]he reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. This relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of

> shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that critical should produce. (2002: 158)

Textuality—the process of reading—is what *constitutes* the text (the parallels with Barthes' 'work' and 'text' are to be noted here). But this process of reading is undecidable, infinite and open because we always bring other textualities into our reading. And this means, because textualities are open and undecidable, texts are also rendered open and infinite.

BINARIES, REVERSALS AND DECONSTRUCTIVE READING

Deconstruction is interested in the hierarchic binaries set up within texts. These could be: man/woman, speech/writing, white/black, inside/outside, full/empty, identity/difference, light/dark, presence/absence, similarity/difference. In each of these binaries, one term is privileged over the other. A deconstructive reading would show how, even when a text appears to privilege one term over the other (say, inside over outside), the text's logic of rhetoric reveals that there can be no inside without the outside. In other words, deconstruction shows how the less privileged term is central to the dominant term. By showing this centrality deconstruction reverses the hierarchy, for if the inside can exist only if there is an outside it means that the outside is the dominant element. In its next stage, deconstruction destabilizes this reversed hierarchy too. It questions the *new* hierarchy and thus leaves even the displaced one unstable. Thus, the text remains

unresolvable where neither term is privileged, and where both terms are privileged—a situation termed 'aporia'. Let us take as an example, a painting as a text and deconstruct it.

i. The painting is the figure in the centre of the canvas.
ii. It is bounded by a frame.
iii. When we talk about/look at a painting we only observe the figure in the centre. We do not talk about the *frame.*
iv. Thus, the painting privileges the figure *over* the frame. In the binary figure/frame, the first is the privileged term.
v. But then, the figure is made possible because the frame limits it. Without the frame the figure would escape borders, endlessly proliferating. The frame also distinguishes it from the surroundings. It marks the painting itself as separate from the wall on which it hangs. Thus, the painting and the figure exist as unique pieces of art on the wall precisely *because* the frame isolates it as such.
vi. This means the frame is central to the figure. It is privileged over the figure because there cannot be a figure without the frame. With this the hierarchic binary of figure over frame has been reversed.
vii. Once we establish that the frame is important, we can then see how the frame participates *in* the figure. It is included within the painting as a boundary, the figure assumes that the border exists and contains it. The frame limits our vision when we trace the painting with our eyes, the signature of the artist is placed in a particular position vis-à-vis both the figure and the frame, and so on. Without the figure the frame would be without any value, just an empty square. It is the figure that bestows a quality *to* the frame, as something that contains a special feature (the figure). In other words, the frame comes into the painting even as the figure extends toward the frame and we cannot treat the frame as privileged over that of the figure because the figure is what marks the frame as the frame *of* something.
viii. With this move deconstruction shows how neither frame nor figure and both frame and figure are constitutive of each other. That neither can be privileged. This is undecidability of the painting.

Let's summarize. In a typical deconstructive reading of texts what we see is a three-part movement in the analysis:

i. A text proposes a literal meaning and a hierarchy.
ii. The deconstructive reading reveals a figural meaning and reverses the hierarchy.
iii. It then displaces even the reversed hierarchy, leaving the text open, neither here nor there.[2]

POSTSTRUCTURALISM, SIMULATION AND THE POSTMODERN

In the writings of Baudrillard, Deleuze-Guattari and Lyotard we see a strong poststructuralist stance: a distrust of finalizable meaning, a resistance to authoritarian discourses, an emphasis on play, possibilities and contingency (the 'here and now' rather than 'forever') and a focus on the tension between the real and the imitation. Mostly associated with postmodern cultural theory and practices, these thinkers have, however, extended the concerns of poststructuralism about signs, meaning and contexts of meaning-production. Terry Eagleton provides a succinct definition of postmodernity and postmodernism as an intellectual 'movement'. He calls postmodernity,'a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation', and goes on to list the features of postmodernist art and culture, which according to him are characteristically '[d]epthless, decentred, ungrounded, self- reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic, pluralistic … which blurs the difference between 'high' and 'popular' culture, as well as between art and everyday experience' (1996: vii).

Postmodernism is a philosophical and cultural theory that rejects totalizing narratives in favour of partial, fragmented and incomplete ones, and questions the idea that there is any 'real' beyond representations. It argues that images and signs constitute our only reality because signs now refer not to reality but to other signs in the age of the hyperreal. It also rejects elite culture, and its practitioners in art and literature seek to mix high culture with the low. Postmodernism is suspicious of 'truth' and focuses on the production of truth in language and narrative.

JEAN BAUDRILLARD, THE HYPERREAL AND SIMULATION

Baudrillard's notion of 'simulacra' is linked to the idea of 'hyper-reality'. Baudrillard's interest lies in structures like Disney World, television and photography where, he suggests, we are so caught up in the image and its copies that we have no access to any reality beyond the image itself. The representation, i.e., the image, 'bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum' (Baudrillard 2003: 405). What we see in Disney is a glossy, glamourized visual representation of something whose original we will never know. The use of Raja Ravi Verma's paintings in calendars, of Picasso and other artists in mass/popular cultural forms popularizes these 'great' works of art. However, our only access to these great works is through the copy or imitation where we will never see the original. In other words, for us the copy is, serves as, becomes the original. Copies and further reproductions of the great works are made from these copies. What we thus have are *copies of copies*, like Che Guevara T-shirts, or Nike's swoosh on locally manufactured products, each of which is 'cloned' or copied from an earlier copy. Postmodernity is characterized by the endless circulation of the copies.

Signs are not exchanged for objects or even meaning (which is the traditional function of signs; they stood in for objects, were symbols for the objects), 'never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference' (2003: 404).

Thus, the image, the copy and the photograph constitute our knowledge of reality because we cannot know anything other than the image. This is simulation, where the process of image-making and the copies and the reflection are more important than the 'real' because there is no real.

Baudrillard writes: 'There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared' (2003: 405).

We cannot distinguish between the real and the copy any more. Thus, the reality of a war for us is the image, the visual that appears on our screen. The image-making of the war itself is so realistic—with the superior technology, the embedded journalists—that it takes on the appearance of cinema. When the WTC towers fell, one of the comments recorded was: 'It is like

Independence Day'. The comment suggests that the only way we can apprehend and approach the horrific event is by comparing it to cinematic scenarios of disaster. The very language of horror is cinematic, and our access to the reality of WTC is via a movie image. The only way we can make sense of Mumbai 26/11 is through televised images that seem to echo/double/parallel commando action films. Our 'knowledge' of commando action on 26/11 is based on a simulation of it that we have seen in films.

> Simulation is the norm of postmodernity, according to Baudrillard. We live in an age saturated with images, maps, models and signs that have become ends in themselves, and for which we have never known originals. Thus, we only have signs without an external reality, copies without originals. We cannot distinguish between real and artifice any longer because there is no 'real' we can recognize: We only know the image of the real.

What Baudrillard is painstakingly developing here is a theory of representation. He suggests that nothing exists outside representation. The *hyperreal* is this world of simulations and excessive 'signs', and is the only real world we will ever know. We do not consume objects but the signs of that object. This is what he terms 'implosion', the collapse of meaning in the age of empty signs, or signs without referents for us to connect to. Every sign merely refers us to other *signs.*

Baudrillard attributes this simulation culture to the excessive influence of the media, especially television and screen cultures. We see the world only through this media, our appraisal and interpretation of reality is influenced by films, media representations and images of such a reality (embodied in the comment that WTC was like *Independence Day*: There is no way of grasping reality except through the media images circulating about it. Responses to Mumbai 26/11 recorded opinions like 'we have only seen people dressed up

as commandos on film screens, and we now see real commandos do real work.') He also links it to urban capitalism, where capitalist strategies involve concealing the inequalities of society behind images of production, prosperity and efficiency. Consumer capitalism takes this a step further where we can only know the finished product, but will never know where the product comes from, the processes of production or distribution. Thus, we consume a mango drink, even though, it is more than likely that we in urban India may never see a mango plantation or even a mango tree. Our 'knowledge' of the mango is only through the sign or representations of the mango on the bottle. This is our only reality because, in consumer capitalism with differentiated production, outsourcing and scattered markets, products are not local, and we do not attach a history, culture or specific practice (of say, growing mangoes, the smell in the marketplace) to that product.

GILLES DELEUZE AND SIMULACRA

Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* (1994) extends Baudrillard's notion of simulacra but also contests it. Baudrillard, we have seen, proposes that there is no possibility of distinguishing between the real and the virtual, the original and the copy. Deleuze argues that this is a false dichotomy because, very simply, the *original is itself a copy.* The actual or real building is based on the *idea* of a building, an *image* in the builder's eye or mind. For us to recognize the building we need to have a *prior image* of a building. Thus, Deleuze sees the actual as actual-virtual, where everything 'real' has the potential to become virtual, to produce its own images.

Deleuze is here responding to Plato's argument that there exists a true model (the ideal) of which we see copies. Further, Plato distinguishes between good and bad copies. The good copy is what Plato termed 'eikon' and the bad copy was 'phantasma', or simulacrum. 'Eikon', or a 'good' copy, is one that possesses an 'inner' resemblance to the original model, whereas in a phantasm/simulacrum there is only a superficial resemblance to the ideal.

Deleuze argues that Plato finds simulacra frightening because they have no fixed identity. Their identity is slippery, ephemeral and illusory. They resemble the original, but that resemblance is itself illusory and minimal. In

other words, simulacra refers to a condition where the illusion is all there is, lacking depth or 'inner' essence that recalls the original.

Deleuze's shift was in treating the actual or real as possessing the ability to become virtual. He argued that we cannot discern the virtual *potential* in any building or anything real, *until it has become an image.* That is, the potential of the real to become 'virtual' is *not* visible to us when we see the building.

We can realize this only when we see the *image* (photograph, cinematic image). This process of actual-virtual, of the inherent potential for all real to become virtual is what Deleuze calls simulation. Simulacrum is the power of anything (actual) to become something else, to become an image, to be other than the actual. In other words, simulacrum is the *power of the actual to become virtual.*

LYOTARD AND THE POSTMODERN

One of the most influential theories that arose in the latter half of the twentieth century was developed by Jean-François Lyotard. Often described as postmodernism, Lyotard's work has influenced numerous thinkers in social sciences, philosophy and literary criticism.

Lyotard begins with a simple enough idea. In the age of computers and multinational corporations, new modes of knowledge emerge, over which the state or any dominant ideology may have little or no control. Knowledge becomes a commodity whose acquisition leads to power. The status of knowledge changes because the nature of acquiring it, storing it and disseminating it changes. This is 'postmodernity'. Lyotard argued that identity and the sense of self of a culture is based on the knowledge generated and codified about this culture—either by itself or by others. We exist within language and representations: as names, as affiliations and as descriptive categories. As Lyotard puts it in a move that anticipates the work of poststructuralists, 'the human child is already positioned as the referent of a story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he will inevitably chart his course' (2004: 15). This 'positioning' is the location of the child, his identity and self within a body of knowledge. Lyotard then proposes that this body of knowledge is, in fact, an organization of narratives. Every body is

located within narrative because narrative is the ‘quintessential form of customary knowledge’ (19). It is therefore important to see what *kinds* of narratives any culture produces about itself. A country's history, for example, that showcases the achievements of its ‘great’ men and women, or the narrative of progress in any culture constitute such an organization of the nation through narratives. In India, for instance, a history book that maps India's progress from various dynasties to a republic would be the production of a body of knowledge in a particular kind of narrative. The cliché ‘unity in diversity’ is a narrative where we suggest that India is a pluralistic, multicultural society. These narratives and clichés are not neutral bodies of knowledge—they are politically significant because they create and disseminate ways of thinking and identities.

Lyotard argues in his classic work, *The Postmodern Condition*, that no philosophy or political theory—or narrative—can be totalizing. Thus, Marxism's idea of class conflict and emancipation, Hegel's ‘spirit’ of History, Freud's repressive psychosis are totalizing perspectives, and give very little space for alternative views of the world. These could be speculative narratives (about the march of history, for example) or they could be emancipatory narratives (such as the one about the right of man to pursue happiness—the narrative that inspires the American War of Independence).

In postmodernity, argued Lyotard, we can perceive a ‘resistance to grand narratives’ (what he famously called ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’, xxiv). There is no credibility left for any such ‘grand’ narratives because they have revealed themselves to be oppressive and homogenizing, and because we have seen them to be representations rather than absolute truths.

Instead of these grand and totalizing narratives we have small, local, heterogeneous narratives. Postmodern thinking opts for the fragmented, the anecdotal, the liminal and the marginalized. It celebrates the contingent and the fluid over the fixed stability of totalizing theories.

Lyotard inaugurated the key theoretical note in postmodernism when he characterized it as a resistance to grand narratives, and focused on the

marginal, the liminal and the fragmented, arguing against totalizing systems of thought.

History writing is one of the most important forms of narrative in any culture. Lyotard argues that in an age when grand narratives have collapsed we cannot anymore study a ‘universal history’ because that would mean ignoring the peripheries in favour of a unified account. Events such as the Holocaust upset the grand narratives of modernity, argues Lyotard, and thus suggest that universal histories are simply untenable. Events unassimilable to grand narratives are what tell us about the necessarily incomplete nature of all narrative.

By rejecting totalizing narratives, postmodernism resists any homogenized explanations or theorizing. Notions of ‘truth’ within any such narrative, argues postmodernism, are exercises in power and seek to homogenize differences in order to create a sense of harmonious truth. In actuality, such ‘truths’ conceal difference, prevent resistance and gloss over the minor and the marginal.

Postmodernism overlaps with poststructuralism in its emphasis on language and the idea that meaning is unfinalizable. Like poststructuralism, it calls for a greater attention to *strategies of representation* rather than the final meaning of such representations. As we have seen in the case of Baudrillard, postmodernism focuses on the modes of meaning-production without seeking the ‘truth’ or the ‘real’ behind the production. It argues that we can only know the images and the representation, and not the reality beneath it, if any. That is, like poststructuralism, postmodernism also believes in the discursive and linguistic construction of reality and truth: *Nothing exists outside language.*

Here Lyotard proposes that scientific knowledge cannot exist outside of narrative, even though science has always presented itself as beyond narrative. Thus, knowledge itself demands a narrative form. Lyotard expands the notion of narrative to include history, science, social theory, in addition to

the literary narratives. Scientific statements, he argues, are presented in particular kinds of narrative, and every narrative follows the conventions of that discipline. Thus, the narrative of science appropriates the language, or the discourse, of empiricism, proof, methodology (in the 1990s Bruno Latour in a series of innovative works would argue for scientific discourse as including narratives, and science itself as involving 'actors' such as the laboratory, administration and the humans).

In literary and cultural theory, postmodernism's greatest contribution has been to collapse the distinction between high and low (or mass) culture.
Postmodernism treats the shopping mall, the advertisement poster, the bumper sticker, graffiti and Shakespeare as equally important, even it they belong to distinct genres. Genre-mixing and collapsing categories are favourite postmodern devices. Postmodern authors like Márquez, Rushdie, Barthelme, Barth often embody postmodern views in that the sense of play (for example, non-linear, circumlocutous narrative styles), the mix of genres, the rich mix of street culture with 'high' culture like Shakespeare are features of their works. In each case the author shows how we cannot take any one form of thought or one genre as distinctive because every genre partakes of the other. Postmodernism is, therefore, characterized by

- a refusal to accept any system of thought or theory as universal;
- a preference for fragmentation over unity, dispersion over linear order, the anecdote over the epic;
- the blurring of boundaries between 'high' and 'low' culture; a
- sense of playfulness, contingency and self-reflexivity;
- an interest in the surface, the image and the copy rather in the depth, the reality and the original;
- a fascination with the strategies of representation rather than the 'truth' of/behind the representation;
- an emphasis on the discourse, the language and the narrative rather than on the reality these supposedly convey;
- a desire for flows, shifts, multiplicities rather than order, organization and tyrannical coherence.

SUBJECT AND SUBJECTIVITY IN POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Foucault, Derrida and deconstruction have had profound influences on and resonance in cultural theory, psychoanalysis and literary studies. Foucault demonstrated how the subject—the sick, the insane, the child, the criminal— is constituted within discourse. Foucault's work might be seen as the epitome of the poststructuralist theory of the subject. In this poststructuralist view

- the subject is not a coherent self;
- the subject does not contain an essence;
- subjects insert themselves into roles and subject-positions already available to them in discourses;
- therefore, the subject is constructed within discourses—which bestow upon her/him, an identity, a name, a gender—such as biology, medicine, law, history, science and arts;
- the subject is never a stable entity, it is constantly reconstituted within discourses.

What poststructuralism proposes is that the subject is a social construction— there is no 'innate' or natural self that can exist outside of discourses. *Biology as discourse* constructs a material body-subject of nerves, blood vessels, the various organs and disease. The *law as discourse* constructs the human as one who has rights and responsibilities. *History as discourse* constructs the human as one who has followed a particular trajectory in what history terms 'evolution' or 'development'. *Psychology, philosophy* and *psychoanalysis as discourses* construct the human psyche and self as a set of values, behavioural patterns, predispositions and eccentricities. These discourses operate through *language.*