

## CHAPTER -III

### POST-STRUCTURALISM: ORIGIN, THEORY AND FUNCTIONS

*This module focuses on the difference between Structuralism and Post-structuralism approaches, assumptions and its detail on major concepts in the critical theories.*

#### 3.0. Preliminaries

#### 3.1. Origin and Development of Post-structuralism

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#### **3.0. Preliminaries:**

Post-structuralism stresses the interaction of reader and text as a productivity while structuralism sees the truth as being 'behind' or 'within' a text. In other words, Poststructuralism assumes that reading has lost its status as a passive consumption of a product to become performance. It can be stated that;

1. Post-structuralism is highly critical of the unity of the stable sign (the Saussurian view).
2. The new movement implies a shift from the signified to the signifier: and so there is a perpetual detour on the way to a truth that has lost any status or finality.

3. Post-Structuralists have produced critiques of the classical Cartesian conception of the unitary subject - the subject/author as originating consciousness, authority for meaning and truth.

It is argued that the human subject does not have a unified consciousness but is structured by language. Post-structuralism, in short, involves a critique of metaphysics, of the concepts of causality, of identity, of the subject, and of truth.

### **Post-structuralism is succession of Structuralism:**

Poststructuralism, as a general term for recent developments in literary theory and criticism, became common in the 1970s. Is the relation to Structuralism one of succession or supercession? - that is, do we see poststructuralism as simply later than its predecessor, or is it in some sense in advance? Both usages can be found; and poststructuralism covers so many practices that it is impossible to define. But it can be approached as a working through, in various fields of inquiry, of some implications of Deconstruction. Derrida's influential lecture on 'Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences' proposed a disruption in the very concept of structure as a stable system, mischievously quoting Lévi-Strauss against himself. The effects of deconstruction, though, were not confined to a critique of structuralism. They rather emphasized a methodological shift, a move away from explanation by origin, order by opposition, fixed or closed signification and the person as a unified subject. Recent Psychoanalysis, notably, that of Jacques Lacan, encouraged the latter move, and psychoanalytic criticism is one variety of poststructuralism. It can also be traced in cultural and ideological analysis like that of Michel Foucault or Gilles Deleuze, and in the feminism of Hélène Cixous or Luce Irigaray. Divergent accounts of the Reader, like Bloom's 'misreading', can be cited; so, of course, can the literary studies listed under Deconstruction. Roland Barthes's career shows the poststructural shift with particular emphasis, as in the sardonic opening of *S/Z*: 'There are said to be certain Buddhists whose ascetic practices enable them to see a whole landscape in a bean.' Such tidy encapsulation had been Barthes's own ambition in the mid-1960s, and it is precisely what poststructuralism rejects.

### **Post-structuralist' is a non- or even anti-name:**

"Post-structuralist' is a non- or even anti-name ... the name pins the writer down, makes it possible to speak species, and offers a bootstrap by which talk about the new theory can raise itself above talk about the old. But this name also begs the question of another, previous name: ...'structuralism' ... Structuralism offered criticism its last chance to make a science out of theorizing literature. Fortunately enough, it resulted in a cross-fertilization of disciplines this latest and spectacularly impotent offspring. Criticism after structuralism is impotent in so far as it is unable to produce further and greater structuralisms. There's not much science of the kind favoured by structuralism to be found nowadays. It is as though the literary structuralists represented the culmination and the grand finale of all previous attempts to produce a scientific theory of literature; in this case, no 'new structuralism' was possible. Perhaps 'fitz-structuralism more usefully describes what happened next; it hints, among other things, at both the dangerously over-productive parent and the contentiously illegitimate offspring. But even this seems too closely to confine, or even to exclude its subject. In the event we have the equally graphic 'post-structuralism', a term that seems not to name what we do in the present at all, but rather to re-name structuralism itself, as what we used to do in the past. It provides a post to which structuralism is then hitched, confining it by means of the shortest tether the language has to offer"

### **Definition:**

*"Post-structuralism is a body of work that followed in the wake of structuralism, and sought to understand a world irrevocably dissected into parts of systems, as in deconstruction."*

### **Features:**

Post-structuralists are most clearly distinct from their structuralist predecessors due to their rejection of structuralism's reductivist (reductivism - an art movement in sculpture and painting that began in the 1950s and emphasized extreme simplification of form and colour.) methodology. Instead, they pursue an infinite play of signifiers and do not attempt to impose, or privilege, one reading

of them over another. Suitably, within the discipline of post-structuralism there are few theories in agreement, but all take as their starting point a critique of structuralism. Post-structuralist investigations tend to be politically oriented, as many of them believe the world which we think, we inhabit is merely a social construct with different ideologies pushing for hegemony.

### **3.1. Origin and Development of Post Structuralism.**

Post structuralism evolved in the late 1960s as a critique of structuralist theory. The basis of post structuralist theories lies in the belief of the inadequacy of language. Jacques Derrida's theory of *difference* proposed that meaning is inherently unstable due to the play of signs within language. This is because that a signifier and a signified exist within language, which provides the meaning of the word or phrase. At its most basic level, the signifier may be the letters F-I-S-H, which provide the reader with the signified, the word FISH, which in turn provides a mental image of fish. However the reader's image of fish may vary from a live goldfish or shark to a freshly caught trout or rows of John Dory in a fishmonger's window. Thus, the interpretation that the reader lends to the signifiers within the text is based upon the reader's experiences. These experiences may be derived from prior knowledge, which the reader has previously attained whether it is from a book, film, television or whatever. Thus, inter-textuality is viewed by the post-structuralist as essential to the interpretation of the text, and as such exists as strength rather than a weakness.

Deconstruction, based on the work of Derrida aims to show that any and every text inevitably undermines its own claims to determine a definite meaning. Thus, the lack of meaning sabotages any attempts to form a definite conclusion within a text. This raises the concept of the lack of closure within the text. This in turn emphasized the role of the reader in the process of determining meaning in text, which led Roland Barthes to propose the four main points that comprise *The Death of the Author* (1968).

## **Poststructuralism and its theory:**

Poststructuralism is a way of understanding the world by studying the relationship between language and being. If poststructuralists are correct in their theoretical assumptions, then concepts (signifieds) and the words (signifiers) that we use to represent them are constantly shifting in meaning. Thus, language and our experience of the world are also dynamically moving in reaction to these meaning shifts. For example, just 10 years ago "webs" were associated with spiders; today almost everyone who hears the word thinks of the Internet and the web sites available for viewing.

A key tenet of poststructuralist thought concerns the idea of perspective. In brief, each individual occupies a unique position with respect to his/her environment. Our identity and worldview is generated by an interplay of forces that encourages us to interpret experiences based on our relationship to specific situations. Hence, for a working mother, one issue of concern might be affordable day-care or wage equity across gender lines.

## **When Did Poststructuralism "Begin"?**

In the late 1960s, just as structuralism was reaching its apex as an influential theory of language, along came a new wave of philosophers intent on subjecting it to a rigorous and sustained critique. Structuralism, an intellectual movement most readily associated with the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, examined cultural phenomena according to the underlying formal systems out of which those phenomena naturally spring. That is, both language and culture acquire meaning only insofar as they participate in a complex pool of structural relations.

This seemingly scientific view of language and culture posited a systemic "centre" that organized and sustained an entire structure. The historical attack against this central premise of structuralism is usually traced to a paper entitled "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," delivered by

Jacques Derrida to the International Colloquium at Johns Hopkins University in 1966. In his essay, later collected in his influential book *Writing and Difference* (1978), Derrida criticized the Western "logocentric" notion of an ever-active, transcendent centre or ground. Since language does in fact lack such a centre, say poststructuralist critics, language is therefore inherently unstable and fraught with ambiguity and "slippage," with the result that meaning is indeterminate.

## **What Is Poststructuralism?**

Poststructuralism, like its related second cousin postmodernism, is a slippery term for anyone to define. As a result, any basic outline such as this summary is by necessity extremely general and open to controversy by theorists (a phenomenon, by the way, that is inherent to poststructuralist thought). Nevertheless, poststructuralism is generally considered to include three main features or tenets:

### **1. The Dominance of Theory:**

In contemporary philosophy, it has become incumbent upon every critic to "theorize" every position and critical practice. In effect, "theory" has almost in and of itself become an independent field of study and research in the humanities, designating as it now does any account of whatever conditions determine all meaning and interpretation.

In addition, much of contemporary theory seeks to challenge, destabilize, and subvert the foundational assumptions and beliefs, which comprise all modes of discourse that make up western civilization. Because of this ongoing and at times rather stridently oppositional stance, poststructural criticism has been associated with an adversarial stance that often takes on the established institutional and political forces in American society. Among the many essays describing the rise and content of the field that today is called "theory," Terry Eagleton's fine study (1983) is the most accessible and the best introductory text.

## **2. The Decentring of the Subject:**

Poststructural critics have called into question the very existence of the human "subject" or "self" posited by "humanism." The traditional view of individuals in society privileges the individual's coherent identity endowed with initiative, singular will, and purposefulness. However, this traditionalist concept is no longer seen as tenable in a poststructuralist view of human subjectivity. By way of contrast, the poststructural subject or self is seen to be incoherent, disunified, and in effect "decentred," so that depending upon the commentator a human being is described as, for example, a mere conveyor of unconscious mainstream ideologies, or as simply a "site" in which various cultural constructs and "discursive formations" created and sustained by the structures of power in a given social environment play themselves out. Some of the most important early essays signalling the turn to such a view of human subjectivity, and in particular of authorship, also appeared in the late 1960s, including influential works by theorists like Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes.

## **3. The Fundamental Importance of the Reader:**

With the destabilizing or decentring of the author and in more general terms of language as a system, the reader or interpreter has become the focal point of much poststructural theorizing. The traditional notion of a literary "work" that has some sort of objective, singular existence and meaning all its own has been rejected and translated into the more common contemporary category of "text," a concept that suggests the centrality of the reader and the decentred nature of the written product itself. According to "deconstruction," a theoretical approach to written texts that is largely an offshoot of poststructural theory, any text comprises a chain of signifiers which appears to evoke a singular meaning, but which upon investigation can be shown to contradict itself and thus, "deconstruct" whatever meaning it can be said to contain. In the most extreme forms of deconstruction, meaning is fully indeterminate, and any claim to understand and interpret objectively and completely a given text is merely an illusory "effect."

### **3.2. Post-structuralism and Poststructuralists:**

Post-structuralism is a body of work that followed in the wake of structuralism, and sought to understand a world irrevocably dissected into parts of systems, as in deconstruction. Post-structuralists are most clearly distinct from their structuralist predecessors due to their rejection of structuralism's reductivist methodology. Instead, they pursue an infinite play of signifiers and do not attempt to impose, or privilege, one reading of them over another. Appropriately, within the discipline of post-structuralism there are few theories in agreement, but all take as their starting point a critique of structuralism. Post-structuralist investigations tend to be politically oriented, as many of them believe the world we think we inhabit is merely a social construct with different ideologies pushing for hegemony.

Structuralism was, really, begun in the 1960's and 1970's, and though it still has its die-hard fans, it has been replaced in the academy by post-structuralism. Post-structuralism has an interesting historical beginning in the student uprisings at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1968.

It also comes as a result of some important moments in political history (the dawn of "second wave" feminism in the U.S. and parts of Europe, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement in the U.S.) For many folks, post-structuralism begins with Jacques Derrida, who adapts notion of Saussure's "difference" and changes it into "differance" (with some wacky French accents)--which Derrida calls a combination of "difference" plus "deferral".

#### **Why Post-structuralism is 'post' (Modified, Next to.. ) not post:**

“Post-structuralism is not ‘post’ in the sense of having killed Structuralism off, it is ‘post’ only in the sense of coming after and of seeking to extend Structuralism in its rightful direction.”

### 3.3. Post-structuralism and Post-modernism:

Poststructuralists seek to prove that what a text *claims* to say and what it actually says are two different things, whereas structuralists assume that they can understand the meaning of a text by studying its structural codes. Prior to Post-structuralism or deconstruction, most theories maintained that the meaning of a text *could* be found. They held modernist views regarding the world, which were later challenged by poststructuralists, deconstruction and postmodernism.

**Modernism or enlightenment views:** Stemming from René Descartes's;

*“I think therefore I am.”*

It sees that reason is the best guide in our lives and that could lead us to a better life. Modern theories see that objective reality is like a map that can be read clearly.

#### **Postmodernism:**

Truth is subjective. Truth is relative. Truth is a creation of minds of humanity. Postmodern theorists argue that modernism was built on a belief in an external point of reference (God, science, reason, etc), but since there is not only one point of reference, there is not only one truth, and thus, there is no ultimate reality. 1960s thinkers, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Richard Rorty that challenged the modernist belief in objective reality.

In a culture and during a time when rapid change is the norm and old values, standards, and categories seem to have little relevance, the notion that there are modes of thought and expression that transcend the modern and mark a new age of postmodernism has proved to be useful to critics and creators of the arts, as well as to contemporary scholars in the social sciences and philosophy.

Modernism, in current usage, is a movement that began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and attempted to reject or profoundly modify the received wisdom about the proper shapes, subjects, and perceptions of the arts. The products of

modernism were eventually subjected to the same kinds of formalist criticism that had been applied to earlier "isms" in the arts. In response, some thinkers -- particularly the French philosophers Jacques Derrida and Jean Francois Lyotard -- began to question the justifications for authoritative statements on meaning or significance in the arts. Lyotard claimed that the work of the postmodern creator is not governed by pre-established rules and cannot be judged according to given categories. In effect, both writers questioned the basis for authority and offered, instead, a world of many competing and equal ideas and "isms." The term postmodernism began to be widely used in the late 1960s, at first to describe new styles of architecture, where its influence could easily be seen. Postmodern architects rejected the tenets of the International Style and found their inspiration in an eclectic mix of previous architectural movements.

Similar changes were taking place in other arts and in other academic fields. A wide-ranging eclecticism, a tendency toward parody and self-reference, and a relativism that refuses to distinguish good from mediocre or new from outmoded marks the work of postmodernist writers (Thomas Pynchon, for example), artists (Nancy Graves), musicians (John Cage), filmmakers (Quentin Tarantino), theatre directors (Robert Wilson), and the many others who today are labelled postmodernist.

### **Postmodernism and Post-structuralism:**

Post-structuralism and deconstruction can be seen as the theoretical formulations of the post-modern condition. (Jones, 1998) As suggested by Bertens, postmodernism rises from literary-critical origins in the 1950s to a level of global conceptualization in the 1980s. For this reason, although many associate postmodernism with the French post-structuralists (or deconstructionists) such as Derrida, some insist on the distinction between postmodernism and post-structuralism (or deconstructionism) due to the fact that postmodernism has its origin in America in 1950s. The merge of originally American postmodernism with French post-structuralism took place in 1970s. Some suggests that this merge was marked by Lyotard's *La Condition postmodern* published in 1979 because he

as a French post-structuralist adopted the term postmodern in his book. Bertens suggests that two moments within the post-structuralist postmodernism can be distinguished. In late 1970s, Barthes and Derrida, two French prominent figures from the linguistic circle, attacked on foundationalist notions of language and representation. Barthes's 'The death of the author' and Derrida's attack on representation in itself as political act characterize the first moment. (Tribe, 1993)

In sum, the postmodern worldview includes many post-structuralist positions. But Barthes, Derrida, Foucault and other post-structuralists have not defined themselves as theorists of postmodernism. In fact, many of them have rarely used the term 'postmodern' in their theories. Perhaps, one exception is Lyotard, the only post-structuralist who has played a major role in theorizing the postmodern.

However, the impact of these post-structuralists on the redefinition of postmodernism is significant. On the theoretical level, the post-structuralist practices appeared in all humanities in late 1970s, first in the field of literary criticism and then in the course of 1980s, have filtered into and affected a large number of disciplines, in which their intellectual premises are usually simply called postmodern or postmodernist. Therefore, to some critics there is no need to distinguish between post-structuralism and postmodernism.

Thus, 'post'-structuralism is, in fact, heavily dependent upon structuralism, and it is not so much a move beyond as a move *through* its logic. Derrida, whose texts are most closely associated with this shift, puts the point succinctly, and offers us a convenient description of the emergence of this movement and its donning force in the 1960s, especially around 1968: At that time, structuralism was dominant. '**Deconstruction**'\* seemed to be going in the same direction since the word signified a certain attention to structures (which themselves are neither simply ideas, nor forms, nor syntheses, nor systems). To deconstruct was also a structuralist gesture or in any case one that announced a certain need for a structuralist problematic. But it was also an anti-structuralist gesture, and its

fortune rests in part on this ambiguity. Structures were to be undone, decomposed, disedimented.

**\*Deconstruction:**

*“A Deconstruction reading is a reading which analyses the specificity of a text’s critical difference from itself.”*

*“Deconstruction can perhaps best be described as a theory of reading which aims to understand the logic of opposition with texts.”*

*(A Dictionary of Critical Theory, London: Blackwell-1996)*

Deconstruction differs from a simple critique. It is not, Derrida insists, a method, or even a critical activity. 'It is not an analysis in particular, because the dismantling of structure is not a regression towards a *simple element*, towards an *indissoluble origin*. These values, like that of analysis, are also philosophised subject to deconstruction' (Derrida 1988, 3). 'The movements of *differance* cannot be controlled or introduced by the critic, they can only be followed or brought out - it is *not* the function of a subject, a critical genre. It is more a property of texts, of structuring, of bringing out "a relation of the work to itself ' (Derrida 1984).

**Jacques Derrida** (1930) used Saussure's insights to develop **Deconstruction**, a perspective that focuses on the lack of a truth "out there" or at the **centre** to provide meaning. He showed how all-western philosophical systems are dependent on a centre (God, the self, the unconscious). But structuralism had shown that the centre is a fiction, merely another signified that has no being beyond language. Furthermore, Derrida focused on the binary pairs that make meaning, arguing that rather than being polar opposites, each was dependent on the other for meaning and (we might say) existence. (Hence one deconstructs the polarity of the binary terms.) He also showed how in all binaries, one of the terms was always subordinated to the other (man/woman, good/evil). To describe how meaning is produced, Derrida developed the term *différance*, meaning to differ and to defer. He focused in particular on the binary speech / writing, in which speech has been seen to provide a guarantee of **subjectivity** and **presence** in the history of philosophy and linguistics (someone has to do the speaking). Alternatively, writing is

about absence, the absence of the speaker and what is signified by the written signifiers. Derrida calls the privileging of speech and presence **logocentrism**.

**Poststructuralism** rejected the theory that one could map the structure of a language or culture. Rather, meaning is constantly slipping from one sign to the next. Signifiers do not produce signifieds; they merely produce an **endless chain of signifiers**--hence my need to find a signifier from another semiotic system to represent the tree above. In that example, the signifier tree did not produce the signified but merely another signifier. Language works like a dictionary where, when you look up a word, you get other words that provide meaning. If you keep looking up those words, you'll ultimately come back to the word you started with.

**Edward Said** (1935-2003) used poststructuralist ideas to analyse **Orientalism**, the study of the Orient by academics of the West. He showed how the academics and their disciplines constructed an object of study that had very little to do with the East. The theories inspired by Saussure's linguistic theory have influenced every academic discipline because they all bear on **epistemology** or what can be known. If knowledge is relationship, a product of societies, the medium of power, then academic endeavour is not about the discovery of truth but rather its construction. Furthermore, the methodologies we employ in our various academic endeavours are undermined by the insights of poststructuralism. What is the relationship between the academic and the object of study? In what way can we know that object; is it available to us at all? What can we know about the past? What does it mean to interpret or analyse a work of literature? How do we choose what works to study? What is the role of the aesthetic in either art history or literary study? How is the canon of literature or art produced? How do we decide what is "good" or "beautiful"? Can there be any fixed standards of value at all if meaning is a product of arbitrary relationship and difference?

### **Post structuralism's influence on Marxism:**

Poststructuralism has also influenced **materialist theory or Marxism** by providing a way of understanding **ideology** and showing how important it is to the

maintenance of any economic system. The union of poststructuralist and materialist theory produced **cultural theories** and **cultural studies**, including, in literature, **new historicism** and **cultural materialism**, in which the goal is to understand cultures as both **material** and **discursive**. In such theories, everything can be a **text** (a Semiotic system), everything can be "read." But no one kind of text is privileged over another. All texts are literary in a sense, as they are all produced in what we might call a self-conscious manner. On the other hand, no self produces any text; there is no **authorial intention**; language speaks through all of us, even the most "intentional" author.

The influence of Poststructuralism, particularly in its union with materialism, is what has produced the "**cultural turn**" in the social sciences and humanities. And cultural criticism tends to be interdisciplinary, as the questions it asks cannot be answered from within the old disciplinary boundaries. Anyway, disciplines themselves have been called into question by the Foucaultian critique of discourses. We understand them as **social constructs** rather than as **taxonomies** that arise from the nature of things.

### 3.4. Derrida: Contribution to Post-Structuralism.

#### Jacques Derrida: Brief summary of Saussure's study of language:

*"Language is a system of rules that govern every aspect of language, up to the smallest units, or the **Phonemes**."*

*(Ferdinand de Saussure)*

These rules are the **langue**, which can be found by analysing the many instances of **parole** or individual speech utterances. Words are distinguishable by an aspect of **difference**, like the difference between the **phonemes** (tip differs from dip in the phonemes t and d) Older versions of linguistics saw language to be mimetic, mimicking the outside world. Saussure asserted that the **linguistic sign** is made of **signifier** (word) and **signified** (concept) whose relation to each other is **arbitrary** and **linear** (relational, conventional, based on its relation or difference from other words do not on any innate quality it has)

### **Biographical Details and Work of Jacques Derrida (1930):**

In the spirit of his celebrated dictum that "there is nothing outside the text," Jacques Derrida long resisted the publication of information about his life. For seventeen years (1962-1979) he even refused to have a personal photograph accompany his texts. However, his fame as the founder of what came to be called "deconstruction" led him to provide biographical "scraps."

Born in 1930 near Algiers, Jacques Derrida as a Jew was forced to leave school in 1942 until the Free French repealed Vichy racial laws. At nineteen, he moved to Paris to prepare for the *École Normale Supérieure*, where he subsequently studied and taught philosophy. Though his first published work (1962)--about Husserl's essay on geometry--won a philosophical prize, Derrida was not widely known until 1966. At a conference on France's new structuralism at Johns Hopkins University, Derrida gave a paper--"Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"--that daringly exposed contradictions in the thought of structuralism's leading figure, Lévi-Strauss. Derrida's critique became one of the important building blocks in what came to be called "poststructuralism."

### **Derrida's Critical Work: Post-structuralism**

Derrida continued his critique, publishing no less than three books showing how structuralist positions refuted their own theses. The books--*Of Grammatology*; *Writing and Difference*; and *Speech and Phenomena* (as the titles were translated)--created a storm of philosophical debate in France. In these works, Derrida showed how his critique went beyond structuralism and attacked the enterprise of philosophy itself. "Deconstruction," as Derrida's approach in these works was now called, claimed that the very nature of a written text--of every traditional text and not just the structuralist's--undermines itself. To "deconstruct" a text, then, is to dismantle inherent hierarchical systems of thought,

to seek out unregarded details, to find the "margins" of the text, where there are new possibilities of interpretation.

In 1972, Derrida published three additional works, translated as *Dissemination*, *Margins of Philosophy*, and *Positions*, which continued to influence poststructuralism in the 1970s. As Derrida's fame grew, he accepted a visiting professorship first at Yale University, and then at the University of California in Irvine. In the 1980s, Derrida gave himself to political causes such as the abolition of apartheid. He also became actively interested in architecture, which he regarded as the last bastion of metaphysics. He helped architect Peter Eisenman design a garden in Paris that explores the relationship between centre and periphery. Born on the periphery of colonial France, on the margin of Algiers, as a marginalized Jew, Derrida constantly examined the philosophical relation between margin and centre (and often employed language that is only marginally understandable).

### **Basic Thought of Derrida:**

Derrida believes that Western philosophy is built upon a "Metaphysics of Presence": upon, that is to say, the idea that there is an origin of knowledge from which "truth" can be made present. Philosophy has always seen itself as the arbiter of reason, the discipline that adjudicates what is and is not. Forms of writing other than philosophical discourse, such as poetic or literary writing, have been judged inferior, and removed from the truth. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida calls this positing of a centre that can situate certainty *logocentrism*. Philosophy thinks it can talk about "meaning" through a language unsullied by the imprecision of metaphors. *Au Contraire!* Philosophical discourse is not privileged in any way, and any attempt to explain what "meaning" *means* will self-destruct. Put more precisely, the signifiers of language systems cannot refer to a transcendental *signified* originating in the mind of the speaker because the "signified" is itself created by the conventional, and hence arbitrary, signifiers of language. Signifiers therefore merely refer to other signifiers (e.g., words refer only to other words). The "meaning" is always deferred and Presence is never actually present. Signifiers attain significance only in their differences from each

other (the signifier "cat" is neither "cap" nor "car") or in what they define themselves against ("to be asleep" is understood in contrast to "to be awake").

To highlight the ambiguities of language, Derrida coined the word "*différance*." In French, this word sounds no different from the French word "*différence*," which comes from the verb "*différer*," meaning both "to differ" and "to defer." Whereas the definition of *différence* reminds us that signifiers defer meaning as they differ both from their referents and from each other, the written word *différance* calls attention in a striking way to the limitations of the spoken word. The spoken word can establish no aural distinction between *différence* and *différance*. Derrida thus, calls into question the traditional privileging of speech over writing, which goes back at least as far as Plato. For example, in the *Phaedrus*, Plato had placed writing as one step further removed than speaking from Ideal Form. Derrida shows, however, that even as Plato sought to place speech closer to the source of meaning, he could not keep writing out of his system. At one point in the *Phaedrus*, Plato states that speech "is *written* in the soul of the listener" (emphasis added).

Not only are the **signifier** arbitrary and relational but also the **signified**, and these two elements are interchangeable. (In "I filled the glass with milk", glass is a **signifier** for the **signified** that is a container of some sort. In "I filled the container with glass" the **signified** container becomes a **signifier**)

### **The discourse of philosophy is merely literary medicine: Derrida**

This is just one example of how Derrida repeatedly exposes the repressed figures of speech in even the most systematic of thinkers. According to Derrida, all systems of thought contain "traces" of that which they define themselves against. Thus, whereas many philosophers have thought literature merely sugarcoated philosophy, Derrida has reversed this hierarchy to say that the discourse of philosophy is merely literary medicine--an assumption that is hard for many to swallow. For Derrida, all writing is reduced (or elevated) to the same level, with no privileging of one genre as more "meaning-ful" than another. This

may explain why deconstruction--with its close reading of texts to unearth language working against itself--made its greatest impact in literature, rather than in philosophy.

### **Derrida and binaries:**

Derrida concludes by claiming that the inversion of the hierarchy--speech over writing, like that of philosophy over literature--is part of his deconstruction of binaries that have moulded the tradition of Western metaphysics. Philosophy has continually worked with pairs in which the first term was seen as the origin or foundation for the second: truth/fiction, reality/appearance, thought/language, signified/signifier, centre/margin, male/female, objective/subjective, essential/inessential. Derrida does not want merely to invert these polarities to create a new counter system. Instead he "destabilizes" these pairings to show that any privileging of one term over the other is an arbitrary construction, usually politically motivated, which must be deconstructed. As he says, "Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the no conceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated."

### **Derrida's writings and Conceptual order:**

But what about Derrida's writings themselves--do they not represent a conceptual order, an attempt to communicate "meaning"? Derrida goes to great pains to avoid the systemization of his own thought, constantly inventing new terms to destabilize his readers' sense that they understand his "philosophy." In the meantime, although he works to expose the failures of language to make present meaning, he acknowledges that, since language is all we have, he must situate himself inside a system even as he is breaking it apart. He signals this paradox, or *aporia*, of language by borrowing a technique from Heidegger, who simultaneously included and deleted the word being in his works by placing an X

over it. Derrida crosses out certain metaphysically loaded words, putting them "under erasure." He asserts the inadequacy of a signifier like nature to have a definitive meaning, while also acknowledging that thought cannot operate without the term. Derrida demonstrates that his own writing--like everyone else's--is not innocent, that it cannot become a coherent theoretical system corresponding to reality. Derrida has therefore been called a nihilist. His defenders, however, call this accusation inaccurate. Derrida never denies the existence of an Absolute; he only asserts the impossibility of putting the Absolute into words.

### **3.5. Post-Structuralism and Assumptions:**

The following criticism, comments or annotations are intended to suggest and one can expect these remarks to modify, add to, contest, and otherwise can work with.

Post-structuralism is not a school, but a group of approaches motivated by some common understandings, not all of which will necessarily be shared by every practitioner. Post-structuralism is not a theory but a set of theoretical positions, which have at their core a self-reflexive discourse that is aware of the tentativeness, the slipperiness, the ambiguity and the complex interrelations of texts and meanings. There may be some sharp differences about what 'post-structuralism' includes; one can see a substantial ideological component, which others may not, for instance.

Post-structuralism is, as the name suggests, consequent upon Structuralism, with which movement one should have some familiarity in order to understand post-structuralism.

#### **There follow some of assumptions of post-structural thought:**

- 1. Post-structuralism is marked by a rejection of totalising, essentialist, foundationalist concepts.** A **totalising** concept puts all phenomena under one explanatory concept (e.g. it's the will of God) an **essentialist** concept

suggests that there is a reality which exists independent of, beneath or beyond, language and ideology -- that there is such a thing as 'the feminine', for instance, or 'truth' or 'beauty' a **foundationalist** concept suggests that signifying systems are stable and unproblematic representations of a world of fact which is isomorphic with human thought.

2. **Post-structuralism contests the concept** of 'man' as developed by enlightenment thought and idealist philosophy. Rather than holding as in the enlightenment view that 'individuals', are sacred, separate and intact, their minds the only true realm of meaning and value, their rights individual and inalienable, their value and nature rooted in a universal and transhistorical essence -- a metaphysical being, in short -- the post-structural view holds that persons are culturally and discursively structured, created in interaction as situated, symbolic beings. The common term for a person so conceived is a 'subject'.
  - a. Subjects are created, then, through their cultural meanings and practices, and occupy various culturally-based sites of meaning (as family members, as occupationally and economically and regionally defined, as gendered and of sexual orientation, as members of clubs or clients of psychotherapy or presidents of their school parents' organization, and on and on -- every site evoking a different configuration of the self, different language uses, different foci of value and energy, different social practices, and so forth).
  - b. Subjects are material beings, embodied and present in the physical world, entrenched in the material practices and structures of their society -- working, playing, procreating, and living as parts of the material systems of society.
  - c. Subjects are social in their very origin: they take their meaning and value and self-image from their identity groups, from their activities in society, from their intimate relations, from the multiple pools of common meanings and symbols and practices which they share

variously with their sub-cultural groups and with their society as a larger unit.

- d. Post-structural understandings of persons are sometimes referred to as 'anti-humanist', because they are opposed to the Humanist idea that persons are isolate, unified, largely immaterial beings, and that humanity is transcendent, universal and unchangeable in its essence. To be anti-humanist is not to be anti-humane, however, but to have a different philosophical and ideological understanding of the nature of the person.

3. **Post-structuralism sees 'reality'** as being much more fragmented, diverse, tenuous and culture-specific than does structuralism. Some consequences have been, Post-structuralism's greater attention to specific histories, to the details and local conceptualisations of concrete instances; A greater emphasis on the body, the actual insertion of the human into the texture of time and history; A greater attention to the specifics of cultural working, to the arenas of discourse and cultural practice; A greater attention to the role of language and textuality in our construction of reality and identity.
4. **Post-structuralism derives in part from a sense that we live in a linguistic universe.** This means, in the first instance, rejecting the traditional aesthetic, phenomenalist assumption that language is a 'transparent' medium which hands over experience whole and unproblematically; in a 'linguistic' universe 'reality' is only mediated reality, and what it is mediated by is governed by such things as: The way language works, by difference for instance; The world of discourse which governs our knowledge and way of speaking about the subject under discussion: we can imagine only what we can symbolize, speak of only what we have language for, speak only in the ways our rules of discourse allow us to; the workings of the 'master tropes' (a trope is a way of saying something by saying something else) of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony; the structure of ideology, which attempts to 'naturalize' power

relations and our sense of how the world is configured; The various cultural codes which govern our understandings of our selves, our place, our procedures; The idea that any cultural construction of meaning will privilege some meanings or experiences and deprivilege others, but that there will be traces of the deprivileging or suppression of some experiences, and by looking at the cracks, the silences, the discontinuities which ideology attempts to smooth over, we can deconstruct or demystify the cultural meanings; The idea that we think in terms of certain tropes, and construct meaning in terms of genres, so that meaning is pre-channelled in certain typified, identifiable ways, which ways reveal more about their construction of meaning than about any 'reality' beyond the rhetorical constructs. To put this briefly, we live in a world of language, discourse and ideology, none of which are transparent, all of which structure our sense of being and meaning.

5. **All meaning is textual and inter-textual:** there is no "outside of the text," as Derrida remarked. Everything we can know is constructed through signs, governed by the rules of discourse for that area of knowledge, and related to other texts through filiations, allusion and repetition. Every text exists only in relation to other texts; meaning circulates in economies of discourse. This understanding does not mean that all reality is textual, only that what we can know of it, and how we can know, is textual, constructed through discourse, with all its rules; through symbols, linguistic and otherwise; through grammar(s).
6. **Discourse is a material practice:** the human is rooted in historicity and lives through the body. (Why 'historicity' instead of 'history'? Because the term 'history' suggests an objectively existing, cognitively available reality; 'historicity' implies that what we conceive of as history is tentative, situated and contingent.)
7. **In Foucault's terms,** the production of discourse, the (historical, material) way we know our world, is controlled, selected, organized and distributed

by a certain number of procedures. Discourse is regulated by rules of exclusion, by internal systems of control and delineation, by conditions under which discourses can be employed, and by philosophical themes, which elide the reality of discourse -- the themes of the founding subject, originating experience, and universal mediation. Discourses are multiple, discontinuous, originating and disappearing through chance; they do not hide the truth but constitute its temporary face. Foucault is post-structuralist in his insistence that there is no great causal flow or plan or evolution of history that what happens is mainly by chance.

8. **The Derridean concept** of difference links up with Freudian suppositions and Marxist ideas to highlight concepts of repression, displacement, condensation, substitution and so forth, which, often by following metaphoric or metonymic links carefully, can be deconstructed or revealed; what is 'meant' is different from what appears to be meant. Meaning disguises itself. This is essentially structuralist, one of the reasons why 'post-structuralism' cannot be understood without structuralism.
9. **Texts are marked by a surplus of meaning;** the result of this is that differing readings are inevitable, indeed a condition of meaning at all. This surplus is located in the polysemous nature of both language and of rhetoric. It must be kept in mind that language is what is (for us as cognizant beings), that our sense of reality is linguistically constructed. Consequently the 'meaning of it all' is continually differing, overflowing, in flux.
10. A 'text' exists as read. This 'reading' is formed, conducted, through certain mediating factors: the present structures of discourse, hence understanding, including the present conceptions of the discourse structures of the time of the 'writing' of the text. The traditions of reading, and the oppositions which those traditions have made possible, of that particular text, the expectations dictated by the genre of the text and the tradition of genre of the reading, The relations of meaning which are 'in' the text by virtue of its

having been written at all, modified by the fact that these relations have a certain historical existence, a local, situated, and corporeal existence whose reality may or may not be imaginatively recoverable;

The understanding, that these 'historical' relations of meaning will to some extent be mystifying and ideologizing relations. The understanding that insofar as texts have a surplus of meaning they tend to reveal the flaws which the reigning discourse is attempting to mystify, the conceptual distances between the historical discourse/ideology/cultural codes/genre-traditions of the past and the historical discourse/ideology/cultural codes/genre-traditions of the present, which distance opens up 'new' meanings which the work could not have, in a sense, had before. Post-structuralism is deeply aware of such hermeneutic reading and also suspicious of it, certain that meaning is historical, uncertain that it is recoverable as what it may have meant.

11. Post-structuralism is consequent on and a reaction to structuralism; it would not exist without structuralism. Macherey's points in his critique of structuralism (1965) lay out some of the groundwork for post-structural thought: Structuralism is a-historical; life and thought are historical -- they change, different relations with different elements at different times, and so forth The transfer of knowledge from one area of knowledge e.g. linguistics to other areas of knowledge is questionable enterprise Structuralism assumes that a work has intrinsic meaning -- that is, it is 'already there' and always there, that the 'meaning' pre-exists its realization which is already there what we do is we just identify it).

Structural analysis is therefore the discovery of the rationality or 'secret coherence' of a text. But this coherence is a coherence that precedes the text, or it could not form the text. For there to be 'intrinsic meaning' there has to be a pattern or order or structure, which governs and orders and regulates the production of meaning. The text is therefore in a sense a 'copy' of that order or structure which grounds the coherence of the text; analysis of a text is a copy of a copy, the text is

just an intermediary between the reader and the structure of rationality, and so it 'disappears'.

Structuralism presupposes the traditional and metaphysical notion of harmony and unity; a work is only a work, i.e. only has meaning as an entity, only insofar as it is a whole. This notion negates the reality of the material conditions of production or reception, it makes the meaning itself unitary, it makes criticism commentary, a pointing out of the essential truth which is embodied not in but through the work.

### 3.6. Deconstruction and Assumptions:

**Différence:** a term coined by Derrida (from **differ** and **defer**): a word is known not through what it is but through its **difference** to other words, its ultimate meaning is always **deferred** or postponed (as when looking for a meaning of a word in a dictionary you are always led to another word and so on) **Deconstruction** is textual analysis that begins with the assumption that since there is no **transcendental signifier** then a text would lack **presence** (it does not have meaning in isolation but must be differed and deferred). Therefore, no text can simply mean one thing as all meaning is based on difference. It is neither destruction nor devaluation of a work of art.

#### Steps to a deconstructive reading:

1. find the binary operations in a text
2. comment on the values beyond these operations
3. reverse their binary operations
4. dismantle previously held beliefs and worldviews
5. accept the possibility of multiple meanings
6. allow meaning of text to be undecidable

**Deconstruction Again:** To deconstruct means to question. Deconstruction questions everything that is metaphysical, everything that cannot be derived from *physis* - everything that is just based upon appearances and assumptions. This process of

deconstruction is a natural one; it belongs to the scientific method. The new aspect of this kind of deconstruction which poststructuralism is about is that it goes much deeper, much more beyond the surface of illusion that we have created or that reality has created for us. Deconstruction means to question everything, question every single bit of information. Everything that is superficial, everything that is just loosely attached to some concepts but not really proven, the act of proving itself - nothing is to be spared. Deconstruction reveals the structures behind the structures, it reveals some mechanisms that are hidden, it explains them. Deconstruction is supposed to create transparency.

Transparency means creating a sharpened awareness, creating a deeper understanding for certain processes, for certain facts. Facts! Can we really determine facts? Or can't we just approach them, working with probabilities and possibilities and uncertainties? But though we think we could know everything - what a deeply 'scientific' belief.

No, deconstruction will not find the final answers. All philosophic ideas have been modified or dis'proven' by subsequent philosophers. So if history doesn't come to an end during the next years or decades, this approach of deconstruction will be succeeded by another variant of revealing the truth. The quest for the truth never ends; it just changes its face. And the search will never come to an end, never arrive at a final result - for we have no choice but to trust our senses. We are dependent on them; our means of investigation are our limitation.

The aim of deconstruction is not chaos, it is solidification of our knowledge - if we become aware of our limitations, and we can value our options much more. It is us who have to live in this world. We name the things that we perceive. Those names have to be exposed as what they are: Just names, artificial and metaphysical structures. They are images and represent a form. They are constructions that create the illusion of knowledge, the illusion of familiarity, the illusion of truth. We have to know the flaws of our means to be able to see behind the masks of reality. But naming is creating.

### **Deconstructional assumptions:**

**In deconstruction the basic structuralist principle of difference is located ontologically as well as semiotically:** At the very point of beingness of every thing there is difference -- or *différance* -- because only through *différance* is one thing not another thing instead. *Différance* comes before being; similarly, a trace comes before the presence of a thing (as anything which is itself by virtue of not being something else, by differing, and that which it differs from remains as a trace, that whose absence is necessary for it to be); so too writing precedes speech -- a system of differences precedes any location of meaning in articulation. See my summary of Derrida, *Différance*.

### **Deconstruction declines the Structuralist assumption:**

Deconstruction, as do other post-structural theories, declines the structuralist assumption that structural principles are essences that there are universal structural principles of language, which exist 'before' the incidence of language. (The emphasis on the concrete, historical and contingent in opposition to the eternalities of essence reveals one of deconstruction's filiations with existentialism.) All 'principles' of existence (i.e., of experience) are historically situated and are structured by the interplay of individual experience and institutional force, through the language, symbols, environment, exclusions and oppositions of the moment (and of the previous moments through which this one is constructed). Structures are historical, temporary, contingent, operating through differentiation and displacement.

### **Deconstruction believes just in text than outside:**

There is no outside of the text; everything that we can know is text, that is, it is constructed of signs in relationship. This claim does not mean that there is nothing outside of language: the claim refers to the realm of human knowledge, not to the realm of concrete existence (elusive as that might be). Deconstruction does not deny the existence of an independent, physical world. All texts are constituted by difference from other texts (therefore similarity to them). Any text

includes that which it excludes, and exists in its differences from/filiations with other texts.

### **Opposites are united:**

Opposites are already united; they cannot be opposites otherwise. Nor can they be a unity, and be themselves. They are the alternating imprints of one another. There is no nihilism without logocentrism, no logocentrism without nihilism, no presence without absence, no absence without presence, and so forth.

**Inherent in language itself is difference and deferral:** It is impossible for language to be identical with its referents. A word or any other sign can only mobilize the play of the fields of signs from which it is distinguished, and from which it is of necessity removed. See quote from Barbara Johnson, below.

Inherent in language also is the contest between grammar and rhetoric. Grammar is the syntagmatic protocol, meaning as created by placement; rhetoric is the intertextual system of signs, which makes what the grammar means, mean something else (irony and metaphor are principal examples). Grammatical and rhetorical meaning cannot be identical, and one may well not be able to assign a priority of 'meaning'.

### **Deconstruction is profoundly historical: A sense**

It sees temporality as intrinsic to meaning, in that meaning can only be structured against that which is before it, which is structured against that which is before that. Meaning is that which differs, and which defers. The claim is not that there is no meaning -- that is a misunderstanding of deconstruction: the claim is that what we take to be meaning is a shifting field of relations in which there is no stable point, in which dynamic opposing meanings may be present simultaneously, in which the meaning is textually modulated in a interweaving play of texts. Meaning circulates; it is always meaning by difference, by being other. The meaning-through-difference creates or draws on 'traces' or 'filiations', themselves in some senses historical.

Deconstruction is also historical insofar as it functions etymologically, turning to the root, often metaphorical, meanings of words for an understanding of how they function within the web of differentiation which spans the chasm of the non-human over which we constantly live.

As deconstruction works on (in both senses of 'works on') the web of differentiation which spans the chasm of the non-human over which we constantly live, it is intrinsically and deeply human and humane. It is affirmative of the multiplicity, the paradoxes, the richness and vibrancy, of our life as signifying beings. If it seems to deny affirmation, it is because it knows that affirmation is always, intimately and compellingly, itself, only in the presence of and by virtue of negation. To fully live we must embrace our deaths.

If deconstruction seems to oppose Humanism, it is because Humanism operates by substituting the concept 'man' for the concept 'God' (or 'order', 'nature', 'Truth', 'logos', etc.) and so placing 'man' as the unproblematic ground of meaningfulness for human life. It should be clear, however, that 'man' is then a hypothesized centre, substituting for another hypothesized centre, in the history of metaphysics. Deconstruction wants to clarify the instability upon which such a concept is grounded.

One can and indeed must work with ideas such as 'centre', 'man', 'truth', but must work with them knowing their instability; to do so is, in deconstructive terms, to place them "under erasure."

### **Deconstructive reading can be applied to any text:**

Deconstructive reading can be applied to any text. It is a theory of reading, not a theory of literature. Derrida generally deconstructs philosophical writing, showing the metaphysical contradictions and the historicity of writing which lays claim to the absolute. 'Literature' is a writing clearly open to deconstructive reading, as it relies so heavily on the multiple meanings of words, on exclusions, on substitutions, on intertextuality, on filiations among meanings and signs, on the

play of meaning, on repetition (hence significant difference). In Jakobson's phrasing, literature attends to (or, reading as literature attends to), the poetic function of the text. This, in (one guesses) a Derridean understanding would mean that the naive, thetic, transcendental reading of a text is complicated (folded-with) by a counter-reading, which de-constructs the thetic impetus and claims. The more 'metaphysical' or universal and 'meaningful' a text the more powerfully it can provoke deconstructive reading; similarly as 'reading as literature' implies a rising of meaning to the highest level of universality, 'reading as literature' also calls forth the potential for a strong counter-reading. As Derrida says, "the more it is written, the more it shakes up its own limits or lets them be thought."

Deconstruction, based on the work of Derrida aims to show that any and every text inevitably undermines its own claims to determine a definite meaning. Thus, the lack of meaning sabotages any attempts to form a definite conclusion within a text. This raises the concept of the lack of closure within the text. This in turn emphasized the role of the reader in the process of determining meaning in text, which led Roland Barthes to propose the four main points that comprise *The Death of the Author* (1968).

That the concept of the author (as an authority) has been made obsolete by the power of the reader in the interpretations of a text.

1. That, there are two basic experiences to be had in reading, *Plaisir* and *Jouissance*.
2. That, texts may be either *Lisible* or *Scriptible* ('readerly' or 'writerly').
3. That, with the use of particular codes, a text can be analysed and interpreted as 'readerly' or 'writerly'.

In *Elements of Semiology*, Barthes also proposed the concept of a 'metalanguage', which is a higher order language that is used to explain a lower order language. For example, a *second-order* language is used to explain a *first-order* language.

However, deconstruction exists as the most influential feature of post structuralism because it dictates a new kind of reading, which is the actual application of post structuralist theories. In *The Critical Difference* (1981), Barbara Johnson suggests that: "deconstruction is not synonymous with 'destruction', however. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word analysis itself, which etymologically means 'to undo'- a virtual synonym for 'to deconstruct'. The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself. If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not the text, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. A deconstructive reading is a reading which analyses the specificity of a text's critical difference from itself." The analysis of a text reveals what Derrida called 'dissemination' and 'trace'. Dissemination is used to describe the scattering or dispersal of meaning, whilst trace represents the absence of a signifier in a sign. Derrida's deconstructive theory displaces the traditional 'violent hierarchy' of speech over writing by suggesting that they are both forms of one science of language, *grammatology*.

### **Some attributes of 'literature' in the deconstructive view are:**

That literature is an institution, brought into being by legal, social and political processes; That literature is that which at the same time speaks the heart of the individual and which shows how the individual is made possible only by otherness, exteriority, institution, law, structures and meanings outside oneself; that literature is both (simultaneously) a singular, unrepeatable event and a generalisable experience, and demonstrates the tension/ antithesis between these -- as something which is original is also of necessity not original, or it could not have been thought.

It is possible that texts which 'confess' the highly mediated nature of our experience, texts which themselves throw the reader into the realm of complex, contested, symbolized, intertextual, interactive mediated experience, texts which therefore move closer than usual to deconstructing themselves, are in a sense closer to reality (that is, the truth of our real experience) than any other texts. This

kind of text conforms to the kind of text known as 'literature' -- most clearly, to modernist literature, but to all texts which participate in one or more of the ironic, the playful, the explicitly intertextual, the explicitly symbolizing -- from Renaissance love poetry to Milton to Swift to Fielding to Tennyson to Ondaatje.

Reading these texts in the deconstructive mode is, however, not a matter of 'decoding the message'; it is a matter of entering into the thoughtful play of contradiction, multiple references, and the ceaseless questioning of conclusions and responses. The less a text deconstructs itself, the more we can and must deconstruct it, that is, show the structures of thought and assumption which ground it and the exclusions which make its meaning possible. If, as Roman Jakobson suggests, a mark of literature is that it draws attention to its textuality, its constructedness, then literature may be said to be inherently closer to 'reality' than other forms of writing or discourse are, just when it seems to be furthest away, as our 'reality' is symbolic, signified, constructed.

### **The strategy of deconstructive reading is based on fissures:**

The particular strategy of deconstructive reading is based on fissures in what we take to be the common-sense experience of texts and reality, and on reversals, oppositions and exclusions that are lying in wait in, or implicit in, signification and textuality. Take, for example, the sorts of conflict Jonathan Culler suggests in *On Deconstruction* that the critic is on the lookout for: the asymmetrical opposition or value-laden hierarchy (e.g. host and parasite, logocentrism and nihilism) in which one term is promoted at the expense of the other. The second term can be shown to constitute or signal the condition for the first, and the hierarchy up-turned (this is not a simple reversal, as the reversal is then in the condition of reversibility, and so forth) points of condensation, where a single term brings together different lines of argument or sets of values (and hostilities to hosts hosting the Host).

The text will be examined for ways in which it suggests a difference from itself, interpretations which undermine the apparently primary interpretation.

Figures of self-reference, when a text applies to something else a description, figure or image which can be read as a self-description, an image of its own operations. This opens up an examination of the stability and cogency of the text itself. An example of self-reference is in the vines and parasites in place of the erased (i.e. under erasure) antique and learned imagery of Shelley's "Epipsychidion" in Miller's "The Critic as Host," the natural images themselves an image for and replacement for (every image of is also a replacement for) the tracing of writing, which is itself the writing that constitutes the poem; the images of the poem themselves attempt to naturalize what cannot be naturalized, writing itself, in a recuperation in which the act of naturalizing reveals itself as an ancient strategy of meaning, so the imagery is an image of itself.

Conflicting readings of a texts can be see as re-enactments of conflicts within a text, so that readings can be read as partialising moves simplifying the complex interplay of potential meaning within the text.

**Attention to the marginal, and that which supplements** -- as with hierarchised oppositions, the margin in fact encompasses or enables the rest, so that a marginalized figure, idea, etc. can be re-read as the 'centre', or controlling element; similarly the supplement re-centres and re-orientes that which it supplements, as the fact of supplementing reveals the inadequacy, the partiality/incompleteness of the supplemented item.

**The deconstructive activity is ceaseless:** It can never be resolved in a dialectic (that is, there is no synthesis), 1) but is always reaching back to a pattern of operations, antitheses, displacements and so forth, each 'behind', or 'before', or logically, ontologically, referentially, hierarchically, temporally or semantically or etymologically, etc, 'prior to' the other, and 2) alternating between the poles of antitheses or opposite. Like the form of mathematics called topography, deconstruction studies surfaces, as there are no depths, however firmly we may think we see them: there are only twists, (con)figurations, (re)visions.

## A deconstructive reading of a love poem:

### LOVE POEM

I want to write you  
 a love poem as headlong  
     as our creek  
         after thaw  
             when we stand  
                 on its dangerous  
 banks and watch it carry  
         with it every twig  
 every dry leaf and branch  
         in its path  
             every scruple  
                 when we see it  
                     so swollen  
                         with runoff  
 that even as we watch  
         we must grab  
             each other  
                 and step back  
 we must grab each  
         other or  
             get our shoes  
                 soaked we must  
                     grab each other

-- Linda Pastan

Poem taken for scholarly purposes from: (*The Norton Introduction to Literature* 6th edition)

In looking at this poem we do not want to stop with the bathos underlying it: the stakes of love being reduced to people getting their feet wet; or the powerlessness of grabbing, as the lovers admit themselves incapable of anything but retreat and grasping before the forces, however weak, of nature. This is not

properly speaking deconstructive reading but simply putting the weight of its own language and images on the passion it claims to express in order to test its structures of meaning.

We can look at "dangerous banks": in part because it is the most powerful image in the poem. In fact it could be said to be the whole poem. Banks are dangerous because they can be undermined by the force of the water, and crumble; hence the dangerousness of banks is not that they are not safe as much as they can look safe and not be safe. A bank is containment. The poem transfers the danger of the force of nature to that which is the apparent containment of that force. But of course containments are created by the forces, which they apparently seek to control: banks are the silent co-conspirators of the force of the water. If we tie the tension of banks, including the secret of their danger, that as banks they are creatures of what they seek to control, and as measures of control they are not assaulted but eroded; we can tie that to the situation of the lover as she expresses it.

We, however, to go to the main disruption in the poem, "scruple", and to its use 'Twigs, dry leaves, branches and scruples'. Quite literally, this is so. The word "scruple" comes etymologically from the Latin *scrupulum*, small pebble. Twigs, dry leaves, branches and pebbles washed downstream by the swollen creek. You say, "Hold it, it's apparent that the writer is shifting domains, that by including "scruple" she is working metaphorically, shifting to social and moral ground, showing how the force of nature washes away scruples as well, being nature, being force, our inhibitions cannot stand before the force of nature, that is, in the domain-transfer, passion. And of course we noticed, we're fourth-year students after all, what an ambiguity that introduces into the poem, as the lovers retreat in the face of that force which washes away scruples -- a deeply scrupulous couple indeed, protecting themselves from anything which would expose them to passion, afraid even to get their feet wet."

But scruples, orally and socially considered are containments, that is, banks. They are, as containments, created by the passions that they seek to control. They appear only in the face of them, and are as intense as they are;

scruples, like all moral containments, are the mirrors of passion. They are the most interior, the most unseen of containments; they are in fact the constructions of ideology, our social rules acting internally as conscience. "Scruples" tie the moral and the social together brilliantly as well. The word is used of manners and of performances ("She was a scrupulous housekeeper") as well as of morals, and suggests the internal force of sociality acting as moral demand. The word suggests as well the presence of an ideal against which action is measured, so the shadow of the absolute falls over a person with every mention of scruple, with every scruple held.

Scruples are also small pebbles, that is, they are in fact elements of nature, and the odd and etymologically appropriate use of the word here leads to reflection, in two directions. First, the word "scruple" seems to have come into our language through the use of it in measurement, "a small weight or measure" (OED), and was used of time as well as of substance,  $1/24^{\text{th}}$  of an ounce, or one sixtieth of an hour or, as the second scrupulum, one sixtieth of a minute (hence "second"); this directs us to the way in which our human imagination reconstructs the world in a quantitative way (time is placed in hours, distance in kilometres, we count our heartbeats and the words in our essay, number our page -- how do I love thee, let me count the ways). And the scruples that the lovers face, or are afraid of, are themselves ultimately natural, as we are led to think about the rootedness of social constraint in the constructions of nature itself, and so here as with any transformation of a physical into a moral object are led to consider the deeply rooted and pervasive physicality of life which such metaphorical use silently insists on throughout our language. The real tie-in of this poem to nature is not through the obvious analogy of passion to a raging river, an analogy which is obviously rather faulty in this poem, but through the deep rootedness of our imaginations in the natural which the use of scruples in that slightly unexpected and contradictory way leads us to.

But banks are dangerous, because they can be undermined, they are that which seems secure -- after all, we bank on them, we keep our money in them, we preserve fire at night by banking it -- but which are at any moment likely to give

way. So are scruples likely to be undermined, swept away. And this leads me to the third oddity in the poem, the use of "grab." As a word of passion, this is a most curious one. But in the logic of the text that the deconstructive reading reveals, it is a logical reading. The writer herself is on a dangerous bank, and quite naturally so; as so often is the case in a deconstructive reading, those instabilities and anxieties, which underlie our existence and give the lie to our certainties are uncovered by the reading. In order to unpack "grab", If we review how the speaker begins. "I want to write you/a love poem" Let's skip for a moment -- or maybe forever, time passes -- the intriguing evidence of the break, which makes the first line read simply "I want to write you," as of course she is inscribing her lover (we presume it's her lover), writing him in to her life (although legally he is already there, see below). Well, we've skipped that. I *want* to write you a love poem. Not "I am writing you a love poem". The circumlocution, or the hesitation, opens up a space of undecidability and anxiety. A want is a desire and a lack; all desire indicates a lack. The poem from the very beginning hedges itself, contains itself. If the writer had perfect possession of her love, she would want for nothing, but she does want, and she wants to inscribe him, to write him in, but he is not in, or may not be in, banks being so dangerous, and she is not depending on him being in. The poem is a risk, a revelation of something hidden. I *want* to write you [break] a love poem. That the poem is titled "love poem", with the carefully circumspect lower case, confirms this anxiety.

This brings takes us back to the grabbing, which is repeated (the repetition betrays the anxiety), and we can now perhaps, seeing the anxiety inherent in the poem from the beginning, an anxiety which reveals itself in the smallness of the gestures risked, creeks and twigs, getting shoes wet, we can now pick up that other word, that qualification of grabbing, "must." Not we will, but we will be compelled to. We will have to grab each other. The writer is depending on forces beyond her to create the conditions of her union. This is a very rich and subtle observation. We live in a physical world. We are subject to it. We can never fully possess one another, we are subject to the forces of our physical selves and these are the forces, which compel our union, our being together. The implicit blindness and desperation of "grab", so curious in what we from the beginning thought was

a love poem, because it said it was a love poem, fits entirely with the instability and anxiety introduced, we see, in what, so forcefully expressed in "dangerous banks." The eruption of "scruples" with its complex reference to morality, to propriety, to ideals striven for, while all the while remaining in its most forceful logic a physical thing, although a physical thing through which measurement of physicality was effected, right to the second, this eruption is the eruption which constructs so many sources of anxiety for the writer: we are physical, we are apart, we are in a world of danger, of dangerous banks, of containments that are can be eroded at any time, by passion, by the force of nature, and so the response of the anxious lover is to grab, to place him where he must grab, to grab each other.

The revealed reading is made all the more poignant by the expression of relationship between them of the phrase "our creek": this suggests a joint ownership, a holding of property together. This in turn suggests a settled, or a long-time, relationship, probably of marriage. But it is not, as the poem reveals, "our creek," in that the banks are dangerous; the physicality and contingency which we are controls us, not we it. And this anxiety in what should be a stable relationship, a joint-ownership relationship, emphasizes the anxiety, the lack, the tentativeness with which the relationship is held, in which perhaps all relationships are held; the danger to them is erosion, time and tide and passion and physicality itself.

As is so often the case with a deconstructive reading, we are led to a fuller and more human reading of the poem, a reading that opens up the fragility, the tentativeness, of our human being. We could just have written the poem off as a curiously flawed poem, but it is more than that, it is a human articulation whose deep need the deconstructive reading has honoured. The fact is, too, that the force of the poem as a love poem remains; without it the anxiety would not be salient. No trust without betrayal, no possession without loss.

One could mention, by the way, the fact that the poem works as a poem only by containment, and that containment is imposed by the writer, is a condition

of her anxiety as it is an arbitrary imposition. Without the line breaks this is not a poem; only the spaces, the hesitations, the lack of punctuation, these forced containments of our reading, the banks of the poem contrived of absence, make it a poem.

### **3.7. The Basis of Post-structuralism and Post-structuralists:**

In this section the essence of post-structuralism will be explored through the similarities and differences between the post-structuralists and the masters of modern philosophy and also abstract profiles of some post-structuralist thinkers will be cited.

#### **1. The Basis of Post-structuralism.**

In the field of philosophy, the post-structuralist wave struck Paris after 1968 and produced "a rage against humanism and the Enlightenment legacy" (Harvey, 1990) During these last thirty years post-structuralists have made some very important additions to human understanding. Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard and others have produced an impressive body of work.

#### **Nietzsche: The forerunner of the Post-structuralists.**

Almost all post-structuralists including Foucault found their inspirations in the philosophy of Nietzsche. For example, while Derrida took Nietzsche's critics on 'truth' and 'meaning' and Foucault borrowed Nietzsche's concept of genealogy as the basis of his works.

Nietzsche is critical of philosophy since the Greeks and of Christianity. He says that we have separated two important aspects of ourselves: The "Dionysian" (celebratory and unconscious) and the "Apollonian" (conscious and rational). It is only when the creative individual expresses his will to power by synthesising these elements the he can progress. Nietzsche is critical of any philosophy that claims to show us a final "truth". To him there is no single physical reality beyond our interpretations. There are only perspectives. He wrote:

"What, therefore, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions... coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal". Also in Nietzsche's philosophy the "will to power" is the most basic human drive. He thought that this will to power is a creative force and that human beings will progress to a new level of being.

In short, Nietzsche's position can be thought as anti-scientific, anti-rationalist and critical against the thoughts of western philosophy.

## **2. Post-structuralist Thinkers.**

M. Sarup, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault constitute the leading post-structuralists. They share anti-scientific position and question the status of science itself, and the possibility of objectivity of any language of description or analysis. Their rejection of Saussurian model of linguistics on which structuralism based creates a particular difference with Structuralists. A brief profile of the two, Derrida and Foucault will be given. Also the younger generation of post-structuralists who are influenced deeply by the thoughts of Nietzsche will also be indicated here.

### **I. Derrida and Deconstruction:**

Why are we singling out post-structuralism? Simply because the cluster of ideas it represents pervades today's performance studies and Post-structuralism, especially in its Derridean version, claims universality, a way of explaining how humans grasp and organize "the world." This claim asserts that no assertion about reality, even itself, is anything but, and always already, a "human construction" saturated with ideology. This paradox is at the heart of post-structuralism.

For many analysts, Jacques Derrida is the most influential thinker of post-structuralism. Derrida developed deconstruction as a technique for uncovering the multiple interpretations of texts. He mostly influenced by the thoughts of Heidegger and Nietzsche.

"Post-structuralism refers to the theory of knowledge associated with the work of Jacques Derrida. This perspective suggests that language users do not pluck words out of thin air or thesaurus when trying to convey meaning, fitting them to the objects or feelings being conveyed. Instead, the meanings of words are largely imbedded in language use itself such that how we talk, write, and read largely determines what we end up saying. ... Derrida argues that meaning is forever elusive and incomplete in the sense that language can never perfectly convey what is meant by the language user." (Agger, 1998)

For Derrida, language or 'texts' are not a natural reflection of the world. Text structures our interpretation of the world. Following Heidegger, Derrida thinks that language shapes us: texts create a clearing that we understand as reality. Derrida sees the history of western thought as based on opposition: good vs. evil mind vs. matter, man vs. woman, speech vs. writing. These oppositions are defined hierarchically: the second term is seen as a corruption of the first, the terms are not equal opposites.

He thought that all text contained a legacy of these assumptions, and as a result of this, these texts could be re-interpreted with an awareness of the hierarchies implicit in language. Derrida does not think that we can reach an end point of interpretation, a truth. For Derrida all texts exhibit difference: they allow multiple interpretations. Meaning is diffuse, not settled. Textuality always gives us a surplus of possibilities, yet we cannot stand outside of textuality in an attempt to find objectivity.

In deconstruction, certainty in textual analyses is impossible. There may be competing interpretations, but there is no uninterrupted way one could assess the validity of these competing interpretations.

### **Foucault and Post-structuralism:**

Despite his structuralist label some commentators saw Michel Foucault as one of the most important representative of the post-structuralist movement. However Foucault himself rejects all the labels associated with his position. To

Megill, "Foucault regards himself as a critic and ontologist, but his ontology is the ontology of his own language, and he views criticism not in the conventional sense of a project design to bring us to the haven of understanding, but in the post-structuralist sense of to put into crisis."

He agreed that language and society were shaped by rule-governed systems, but he disagreed with the structuralists from two points. Firstly, he did not think that there were definite fundamental structures that could explain the human condition and secondly he thought that it was impossible to step outside of discourse and survey the situation objectively.

### **Younger Generations of Post-structuralists:**

French thinkers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Jean -François Lyotard and others constitute the younger generation of post-structuralists. These younger post-structuralists take place in leftist tradition and their inspirations come from German philosopher Nietzsche. For example Lyotard who had been a left-wing militant for a long time denounced the Soviet Union and turned to Nietzsche's ideas.

On the other hand, Deleuze rejects both Hegel's dialectical method and Marx's materialism and sees Nietzsche the first real critic of Hegel and dialectical thought. Deleuze also deeply interprets both Nietzsche and Foucault in his works. Foucault mentioned from Deleuze with compliments. In this context, Deleuze's position in the post-structuralism will shortly be cited here.

Deleuze and Guattari in their books *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* have taken three concepts, 'desire', 'production' and 'machine' From Freud and Marx. Then they constituted a new idea derived from these concepts: "we desire machines." In *Anti-Oedipus* (they use this title because of their anti-Freudian ideas), writers try to emphasize the nature of desire (*dèlire*) and its social character. Against the present tendency of privatization of desire they offered the personal is the political. To them there is no separation between personal and the social and the individual and collective.

They describe two different type of desire: paranoid and the schizophrenic and based on these descriptions constitute the main forms of society as the fascist (authoritarian) and revolutionary (libertarian). Both Deleuze and Guattari are against the domination of any ruling class on the society. In this context, they are agreed with Foucault's idea of 'power'. Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari also attack to master narrative and mastercode of Marxism. These all three theoreticians see Marxism as an interpretative system that inevitably transforms itself into an instrument of political and physical domination.

In sum, all post-structuralists thinkers share some critical grounds. Firstly, they are all found their roots in Nietzsche's philosophy. Secondly, they share with Nietzsche an antipathy to any grand system. Thirdly, they are aware of the increasing pressure towards conformity and are highly critical of this tendency. Lastly they denounce science and any totalizing beliefs in the name of the spontaneous and the particular.

### **A brief word or two about poststructuralist:**

**1. Roland Barthes**, is a key figure in international intellectual life. He is one of the most important intellectual figures to have emerged in post-war France and his writings continue to have an influence on critical debates today. He wrote both scholarly and popular pieces, analysing culture through a variety of methods that kept pace with the ongoing debates raging in Paris. He "got" Sartre's existentialist Marxism, he "got" Lévi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology, he "got" semiotics (the theory of culture as sign-system), he "got" Foucault's and Althusser's ideological theories and Lacan's psychoanalytic revolution.... He was an early defender of the *nouveau roman*, a movement postmodern enough to have undermined the novel as the operating system of middle class consciousness, and in essays like "From Work to Text" and "Death of the Author," he made the aesthetic implications of poststructural theory accessible for many readers. Late books took this perspective upon many issues, including our *Lovers' Discourse*, photography, and autobiography.

2. **Michel Foucault**, a historian of social thought, with work on institutions that manifested the modern mode of managing populations, namely *normalization*, inducing a population to behave according to internalised norms optimised for the social and economic machinery of their time and place in history. Foucault listened to the marginalized or suppressed voices of history, noticed how medical clinics and psychiatric practice emerged as important agents of normalizing, studied the architecture and rhetoric of prisons, sought out materials that helped him theorize how individuals' sense of themselves was socially constructed, and other similar projects. Though he rejected the Leninist-Stalinist side of his teacher, **Louis Althusser**, one can see Foucault's work as a complement to Althusser's notions of *structural causality* (not linear  $A \Rightarrow B$ , but a causality suffused throughout social and cultural forms and institutions), *Ideological State Apparatuses* (or ISAs, by which he described the shift from the kind of power you see in police or the army--*State Apparatuses*--and semi-autonomous institutions like the schools which carry out a subtler form of "policing" a population by getting them to internalise the kind of subject needed by society), and *Ideology* (which, Althusser argued, had as its primary purpose the "interpellation" of subjects, i.e., calling them into an imagined relation to the basic economic and social machinery of their culture, a web of relations, really, through which structural causality "makes" the individual what s/he is).
3. **Jacques Lacan**, a psychoanalyst, whose rereading of Freud transformed the Oedipus from the family neurosis machine of a bourgeois society to a modelling of how organisms become human beings, giving up their pre-Oedipal infinite desire to take their place in the complex chains of substitute-objects for that earlier, omnivorous form of experience. Organisms shift in part from bodily currents of flowing energy to concepts or signs of themselves, particularly as they are mirrored in the discourse of others. Hence Lacan's "Father" isn't just daddy, it is the weight of this social law, this social semiotic, the social sign system of roles, ideas, vocations, status. And "Mother" isn't

just mommy, either, but the first and most decisive "carrier" for that earlier, omnivorous form of desire which is always in danger of arresting in a dyad (the two-only relation of "me" and "mommy"). Psychoanalysis, in part, means becoming an effective reader of the interested character of the primordial, the dyadic, and the social structuring of desire (and, of course, the egoistic, the personal relation, and the relation to society as a whole).

4. **Jacques Derrida**, a philosopher who absorbed the literary, ideological, and psychoanalytic tributaries of mid-century French thought and reread the history of philosophy accordingly. Some of his pieces were major cultural events, like his 1966 address at Johns Hopkins, "Structure Sign and Play," in which he radicalised structuralism into poststructuralism at a conference that had been designed to introduce American scholars to structuralist thought. With reference particularly to Lévi-Strauss but also more generally to the history of western thought, Derrida made openings for his audience into the radical implications of redefining those three key concepts. He painted a picture of anthropology, philosophy, and culture in general over the long haul since the Greeks that his audience was unprepared for, and that altered decisively how one could think about culture and individuals.
  
5. **Luce Irigaray** and **Hélène Cixous** have varied careers and training, but "This Sex Which Is Not One" and "Laugh of the Medusa" were complementary essays of huge import in redefining feminist work in poststructural terms. Irigaray plays with deadly seriousness at the biomorphic form of traditional patriarchal thought, imagining a contrary tradition modelled on female rather than male anatomy, but is never more serious than when she excavates the devastating effects of gendering in the social construction of individuals; much of her earlier work interrogates philosophy and psychoanalysis with telling wit and insight. Cixous's Medusa laughs at the grimly ludicrous ways in which Woman has been seen in male psychodynamics and its resulting cultural traditions. Recovering from the body its symptoms from the trauma of its social and cultural roles, Cixous enlarges the issue of gender to an inclusive whole rather than leaving it as a more simple opposition of two. As you can

guess from Irigaray's title, "this sex" of Woman is not merely one: both theorists strive to recast traditional gendering as a diminution of *both* men and women. There are many other figures.

### 3.8. A Summary and Conclusion of Post-structuralism

**Poststructuralism** can be thought of as the attempt to free the powerful idea of a structure or system from so tightly controlled a grid. Like the great structuralists, poststructuralists also use the model of language as a metaphor of structure, only they seem more "honest" to the dicier implications of that metaphor. Remember that;

1. Language is no where.
2. Language is not fixed.
3. Language differs from segment to segment of a population.
4. Language reflects a great deal of social history.
5. Language is constantly changing.
6. Language taking in new experience and new words and therefore transforms itself in unpredictable ways, and both enables and frustrates the perfect communication between its speakers.

Such a metaphor of structure is very different from the grid or box-like character of structuralist models. It's been argued that poststructuralism is nothing other than structuralism without artificially imposed limits on its basic assumptions. As the Four Horsemen table suggests, many of the openings begun by some of the major names in modern thought which reach their most radical implications only when they are reread by poststructuralists that to looking at the interplay of openings and constraints in modern thought. Much of the backlash against poststructuralism can be traced to academia's comfort level with those constraints.

Poststructuralism manifests itself in many fields and is highly upsetting to traditional practitioners in those fields. One sometimes feels the weight of Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific change, hinged on the idea of a series of

incommensurate paradigms that follow one another utterly reinventing the world within which their thinkers work. Kuhn was talking very specifically about, say, the shift from Copernicus to Galileo, but the bitter reaction of traditionalists to Post-structural work is a breath-taking example of something similar to the Inquisition that threatened Galileo till he recanted, at least in public. Kuhn's work in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* notes the metaphoric worlds different scientific paradigms work in, to the point that Copernicans and Galileans target different issues, work with different methods, share their results in different forms, and judge that work by different criteria. *Incommensurate* is a word stressing that the incompatibility that results between two such groups is so great that they are not really able to communicate. You can get that same feeling as you marvel over the profound misreading of poststructuralists in many of the attacks upon their work.

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