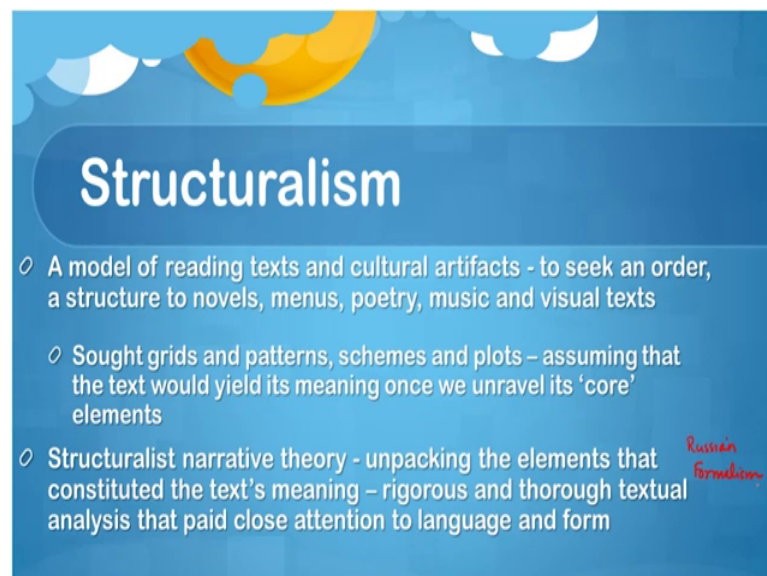


**Postmodernism in Literature**  
**Dr. Merin Simi Raj**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**

**Lecture – 08**  
**Derrida, Deconstruction and Postmodern texts**

Hello everyone. Good morning and welcome to yet another session of the NPTEL course; post modernism in literature. Today's lecture is titled Derrida, deconstruction and postmodern text.

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However, at the outset of our discussion on Derrida and deconstruction, it is important to locate the emergence of deconstruction, as there is a departure from structuralism modes of thinking, from structuralism modes of critical practices structuralism our proposed is a model of reading texts and cultural artifacts. Overall, it is based on a search for order, they also believe in our structure which is inherent to novels, menus, poetry, music, visual text and all kinds of other our literary and cultural artifacts.

There is also a way in which is the structuralist, a seeker ingrids and patterned schemes and plots in order to analyze, in order to unravel meanings within embedded, within particular texts. And, they also work with the inherent assumption that every text has a single meaning, and the text would yield to its meaning once we unravel its core elements. So, structural is operate with the assumption, with the belief that every text has

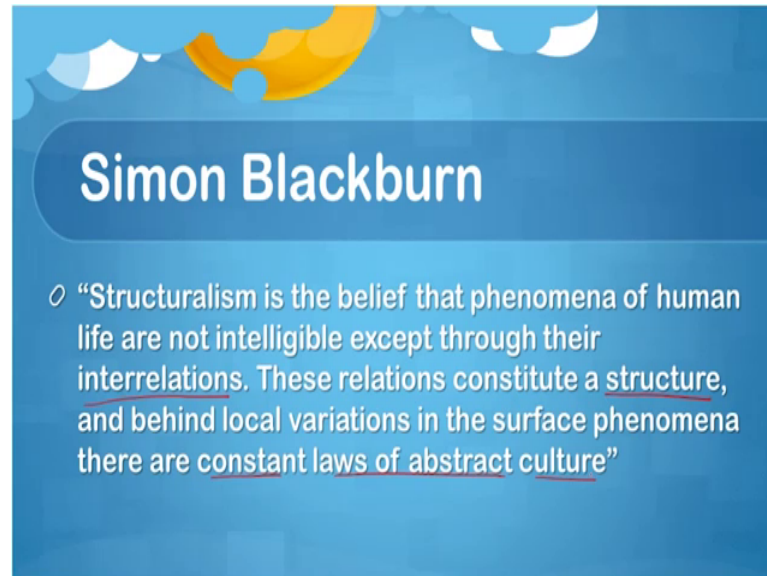
an embedded meaning which needs to be sort, which needs to be analyzed through a series of grids and patterns through a series of particular are structures, within which meanings and meaning making processes are embedded.

Within the larger context, structuralism also argues that the elements of human culture also could be located within particular structures by way of their relationship to one another, towards an larger overarching system. So, are those structuralism is primarily concerned with various aspects of language. We find that it is ago, it has gone to define various other disciplines including anthropology and various other disciplines related to human relations, human culture and also the various forms of expressions in genres, texts and various contexts.

If we extend the structuralist approaches, to narratives theory. We can also see that they believe in the unpacking of the element is it constitute a text meaning. All together, structuralism argues for the foregrounding of various structures which would eventually lead to a meaning of a text, which will eventually lead us to a single truth; the unraveling of the text as they would call it. This in case of filigree and our cultural practices, it could be through a rigorous and thorough, textual analysis by paying close attention to language and form. So, here I, some here it is also important to note that one of the critical practice is one of the schools of criticism that emerged as part of the structuralist movement, is also termed as Russian formalism.

So, beginning with the linguistic term, structuralist practices have had a very significant effect in a number of disciplines related to the humanities and social sciences.

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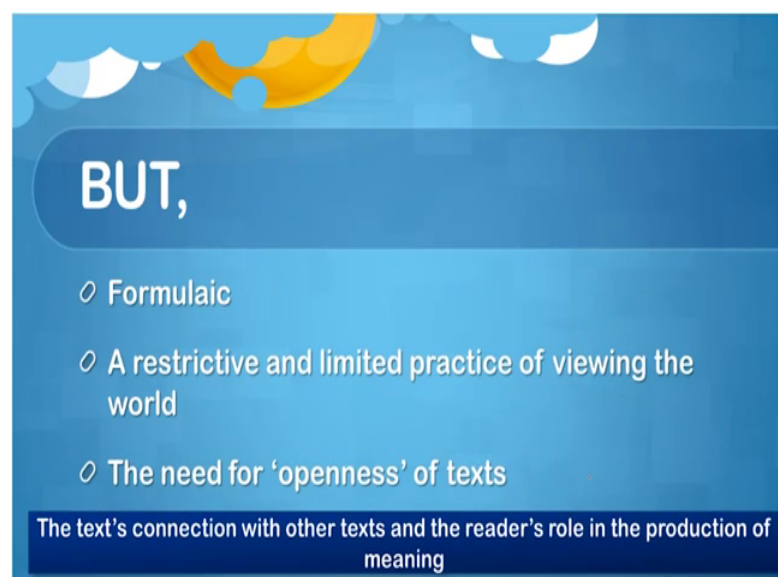


**Simon Blackburn**

- “Structuralism is the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract culture”

Simon Blackburn has defined structuralism as a belief that a phenomena of human life are not intelligible except where interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind vocal variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract culture. Structuralism also eventually becomes one of the means through which one could begin to make sense of human culture in general and also various patterns of human behavior and social structures.

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**BUT,**

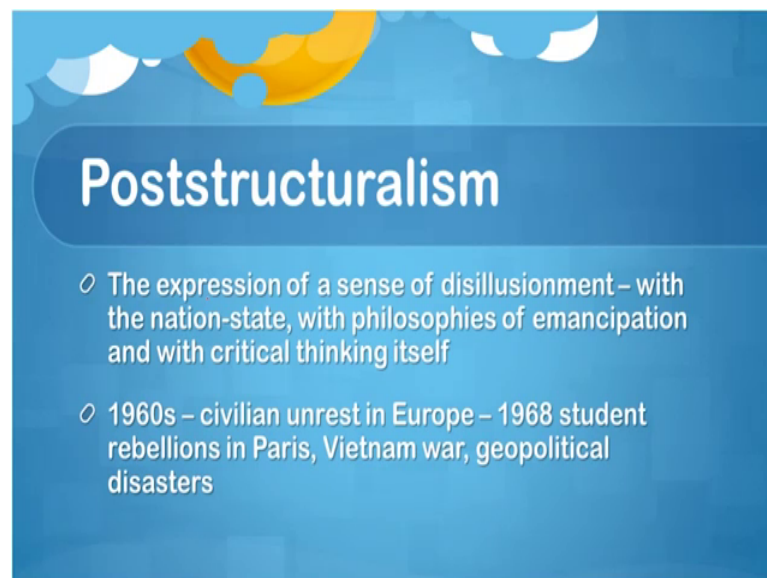
- Formulaic
- A restrictive and limited practice of viewing the world
- The need for ‘openness’ of texts

The text's connection with other texts and the reader's role in the production of meaning

However, there is an inherent problem in the structuralist mode of thinking in the structuralist political practices, because they are largely formulaic. It is, based on particular structures, patterns and schemes of thought which also runs the risk of being ready was two particular formulas. And, a number of critics, a particularly especially from the late 1950's and 1960's they began to see the structuralist mode of thinking as a restrictive and limited practice of viewing the world.

And, we also know how a number of critics, this bath began to argue for the need for the openness of text. We also saw how in but, that of the older what gets for granted is the text connection with other text and their leaders role in the production of meaning, which is again move away from the structuralist move, structuralist critical practices.

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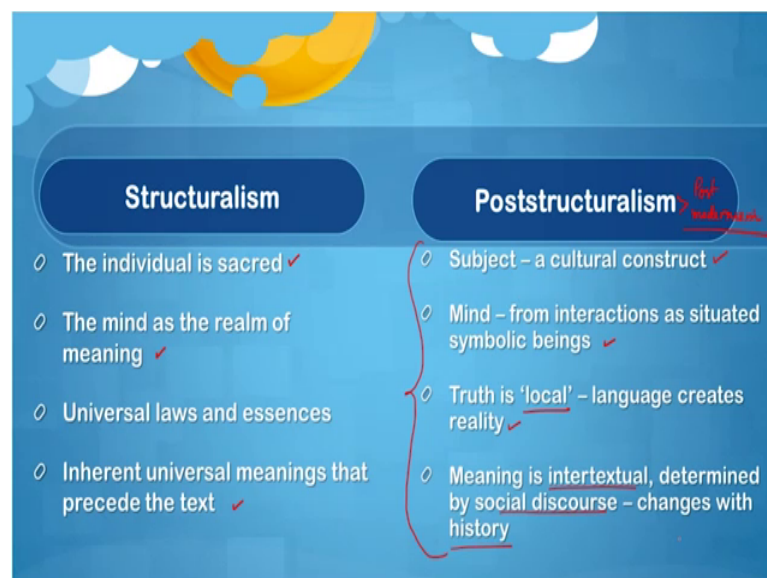


And post structuralism in that sense could be seen as an expression of a sense of the solution meant with the nation state, with philosophies of emancipation and critical thinking itself; and this is not totally a baseless allegation which is being made against nation states and philosophies emancipation, because this is something that the world all also witnessed, because this is something that the world also witnessed of the aftermath of the second world war and also with the various of kinds of our political unrest and social, also with the failure of the various systems of social hierarchies that we began to see; especially from the middle of the 20th century onwards. And, in the context of our today's discussion in the context of situating the post structuralist philosophies, we may

particularly recall the civilian unrest in Europe in the 1960's, and in particular are the 1960's student rebellions in Paris with a, which number of the French post structuralist philosophers were also involved. The Vietnam War which had unforeseen consequence, and also altered the grammar of animation slaves, the grammar of politics in the 20th century and also a number of other geopolitical disasters.

So, the mid-20th century began to pose a crisis, and the need to move away from the structuralist or modes of thinking; from structuralist critical practices became all the more imminent there.

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And, it is, it is important to also see how the post structuralist began to depart from the structuralist modes of thinking. Here, we have some of the fundamental ways in which post structuralism began to radically differ from structuralist space of thinking. Here, it also becomes important to note that it becomes in, that it is impossible to make sense of post structuralism; that it becomes impossible to define post structuralism without any reference to the structuralist modes and the structuralist methods. For example, if the structuralist thinkers considered the individual as sacred, we see our completely radically different proposition being put forward by the post structuralist. They locate the subject; there is a cultural construct, it is not, there is nothing sacred about the individual, but everything becomes a social construct.

The mind is located as a realm of meaning in the structuralist practices. But; however, in the post structuralist form mind is a site where interactions are situated as symbolic beings. And, why the structuralist critics believed in the universal laws and essences which they also are thought, I had given the fundamental premise for our framing and locating particular structures of language of culture and of various other forms of social realities. The post structuralist began to feel, began to argue that truth is local, language creates reality. There is no other inherent, always already present reality other than the one created by language.

Structural is believed in the inherent universal meaning is that precede the text. And, on the other hand was; post structuralist argued that, meaning is intertextual. It is determined by social discourse, and this is not a fixed meaning. This is not a fixed to scores or a fixed or entity; it changes with history. And, these are the, and and interestingly all of these promises which are associated with post structuralism; can also be associated with post modernism.

I am here, and we are; get time and again every I too late need to see post structuralism and post modernism as interrelated phenomena, and there are also ways in which the postmodern attendance, the postmodern ideas could be identified as an offshoot of a number of post structuralist ideologies and post structuralist principles. Consequently, as noted earlier, when we begin to identify post structuralism, an expression of the disillusionment with the worldview endorsed by structuralists practices, we also begin to see a number of intellectual movements, and number of our critical movements against this dominant structure of structuralism.

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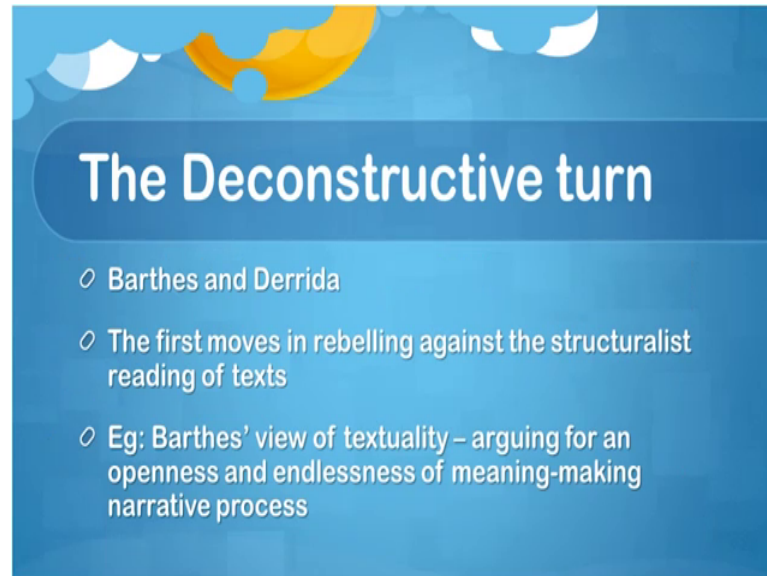


Ah in that sense particularly from the 1960's onward we find the number of thinkers, a number of philosopher particularly from the French, post structuralist, opposing the structuralist practices by their, but with the with the kind of a new ideology; is the new frameworks that they begin to fold on. And, in this context particularly, for this lecture; we shall be focusing on Derridas of grammatology published in 1967.

There are also a number of other philosophers and thinkers who began to challenge the structuralist modes of thinking, such as Michel Foucault, Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Frederic Jameson from a Marxist point of view Julia Kristeva, Zizek and Jean Baudrillard. And, these are also interestingly some of the writer's whom we shall be taking a look at in the context of discussions related to post modulus.

Here, we are again being alerted to the fact that, a post structuralism has close contiguities with post modernism. So, it becomes as we have noted multiple times in the introductory sessions, it becomes rather impossible to understand or locate post modernism without a clear understanding of post structuralism. And, our simultaneously it becomes difficult to understand post structuralism without engaging with structuralism in order to see how post structuralism departs, how post structuralism moves away from the dominant tenets of structuralism.

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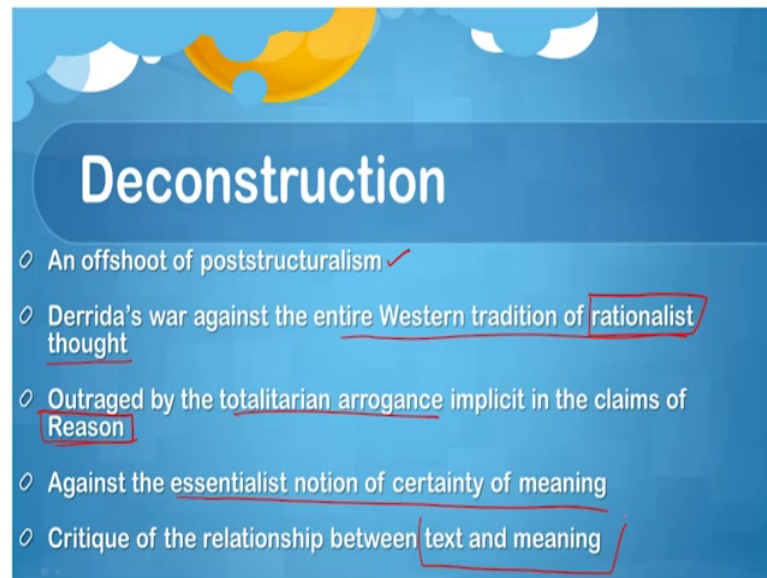


In this context, what becomes more relevant for today's discussion is a deconstructive turn that Barthes and Derrida began to propose from the 1960's onwards. And, here we also realized that, and this was also evident in our discussions related to Barthes that is of the order; let Barth and Derrida are among the earliest thinkers who began to make the first moles in rebelling against the structuralist reading of text. Are, here its again important to recall Barthes we have textuality where he argues for an openness and aimlessness of meaning making and narrative process.

And, here we begin to see how the departure from the structuralist mode, and also the connection the interconnection between different theories in different texts, and become important in understanding post structuralism and thereby post modernism. And, it is in a similar mode that we begin to understand and unpack the idea of deconstruction.



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Deconstruction in a broad sense could be considered as an offshoot of post structuralism, and many critics have also felt that; since the Derrida is the person who is associated with the term and the movement deconstruction; it is also about Derridas what against the entire western tradition of rationalist thought. And, that is a very significant at a point in statement to make, because Derrida was outraged by the totalitarian arrogance implicit in the claims of reason.

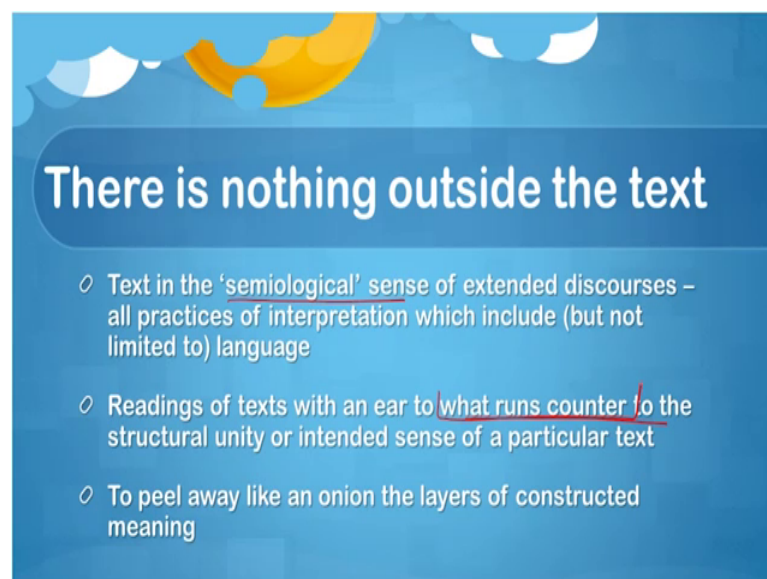
So, again it became to begin to note that Derridas problems, Derridas quarrels seem to be with the ideas of rationality, and with the ideas of reason. And, this sort of an eccentric outburst,, if we may collapse of against the ideas of reason against the foregrounding of rationality was not entirely out of place, because Derrida was living during a time when the world itself, the when the world had begun to witness a number of atrocities in the name of rational, in the name of rationality and in the name of reason. Particularly, if you recall the various events that followed the Second World War.

If we think about the aftermath of the second world war, the atomic bomb and the effects that it had on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, about the events related to holocaust, about the various kinds of atrocities privileged in different parts of the world, in the name of scientific rationalism, in the name of different forms, of attempts to make reason of the modern nation as states, it could all be traced back to the various progressive ideas projected by the enlightenment ideas of reason and rationality. So, Derrida could not be

isolated in blaming, reason and rationality for a being the fundamental reasons, the fundamental promises in perpetuating this kind of violence in this kind of totalitarian arrogance. Here, we find Derrida going against the entire western traditional rationalist thought, by arguing doing against the essentialist notion of a certainty of meaning and. So, we can also find our number of intertextual references as in when we discuss, this is all this is also something that barked began to foreground in his, that with the author and what a Foucault later.

Our problem crisis in our number of us works including in waters an author and, what Derridas deconstruction does, in the fundamental sense is to critique the relationship between text and meaning. With, and how he goes about this, and how this begins to affect the meaning making process in the post structuralist postmodern world is something that we shall be taking a look at shortly.

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## There is nothing outside the text

- Text in the 'semiological' sense of extended discourses – all practices of interpretation which include (but not limited to) language
- Readings of texts with an ear to what runs counter to the structural unity or intended sense of a particular text
- To peel away like an onion the layers of constructed meaning

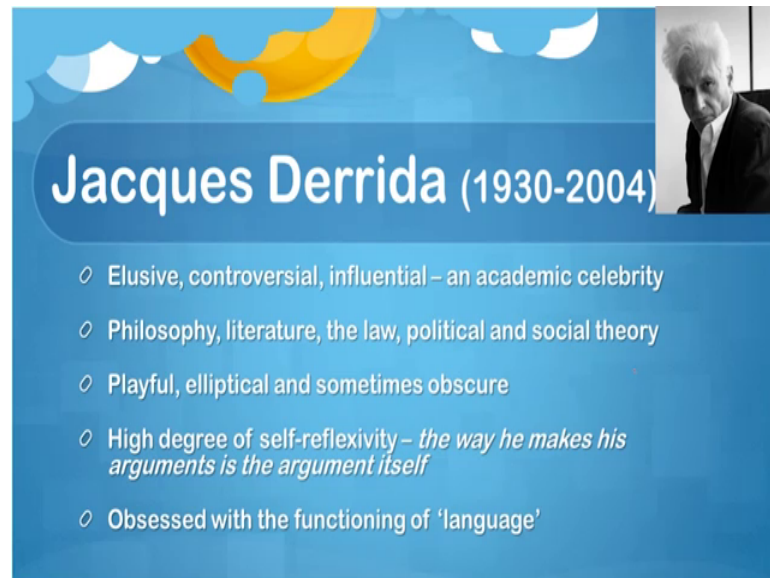
There is nothing outside the text; is the post structuralist dictum associated with deconstruction. And here, when Derrida tells us that there is nothing outside the text, he uses the term text in a semiological sense of extended discourses. Here, he talks about all practices of interpretation including a language, and language here is not seen as the only form of interpretation there could be other forms which is what deconstruction would eventually lead us to.

And, one of the popular ways of understanding the construction is to see there is a series of readings of text with an ear to what runs counter to the structural unity, or intended sense of a particular text. So, in some sense, the deconstructive turn which argues that there is nothing outside the text also shares the same belief with the structuralist modes of thinking, that there is a structural unity or an intended sense for a particular text, but we need to make an alternative reading or a better sense of the text by paying attention to what runs counter to these unities or these intended center, the, these intended meanings.

In other words, what deconstruction, I would eventually propose to do is to encourage a kind of reading which would also peel away like an onion; the layers of constructed meaning. So, away from the structuralist modes, deconstruction also believes that there is no single meaning. In the contrary, there are layers of constructed meanings which could be peeled away one after the other, and this also; this also argued foreground solution that meaning making process is not an end by itself.

It also for grounds the notion again shared by barthe that there is no single meaning making process, but on the contrary, the process of meaning making process itself becomes another kind of a meaning. And, here, we are also moving away from the single idea of truth, the single idea of author intended meaning and also again giving the text or a context, or any kind of a cultural literary product into the hands of the reader for him or her to make his or her own particular interpretations based on his or her experiences and all different sorts of frameworks that they chose to employ.

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**Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)**

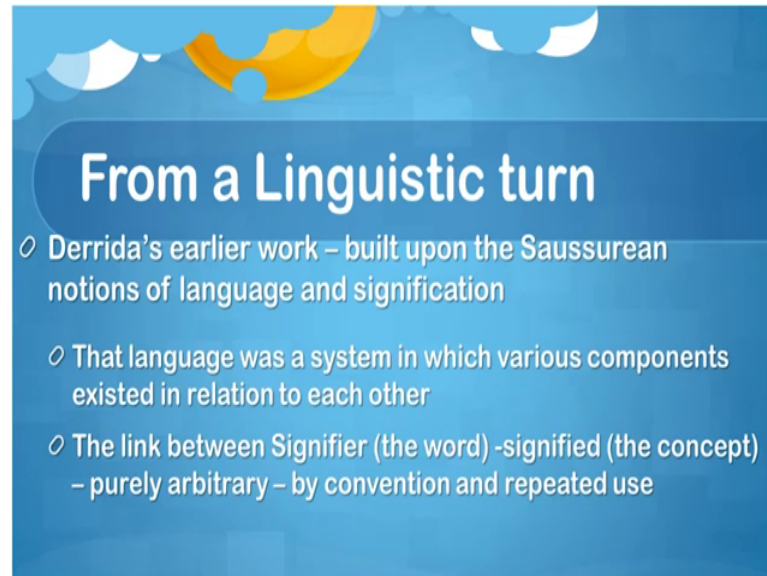
- Elusive, controversial, influential – an academic celebrity
- Philosophy, literature, the law, political and social theory
- Playful, elliptical and sometimes obscure
- High degree of self-reflexivity – *the way he makes his arguments is the argument itself*
- Obsessed with the functioning of 'language'

The slide features a blue background with a decorative top border of white and yellow shapes. A small black and white portrait of Jacques Derrida is visible in the top right corner.

Let us take a closer look at the man behind this movement Jacques Derrida, who lived from 1930 till 2004. He could be considered as one of the most elusive the controversial and influential our figures; it like a tree had intellectual figures of the 20th century. He was also an academic celebrity. His a work, though it was primarily at the level of language and discourse, we also find that it had, it eventually had very significant influence on a number of discipline centers philosophy, literature, under law and our political theory and social theory. His writing has been described as playful, elliptical and sometimes obscure.

And they also, his writings also does also displayed a very high degree of self-practical, self-reflexivity which is a very, which is a rare, feature to be a seen in contemporary writings. As I want the critics would put it, the way he makes this argument is they are given itself; that was the self referentiality, that was a self-reflexivity with which he wrote has our works. Derrida was obsessed with the functioning of language. In that since he was also immensely influenced by the linguistic turn, in the structuralist mode of thinking he was immensely influenced by the various theories put forward by Saussurean.

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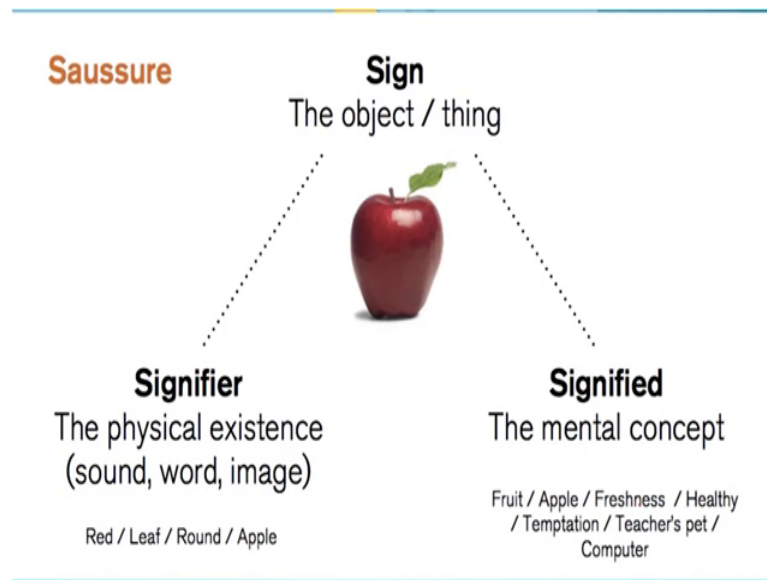


So, whenever begin to locate a Derridas work from a linguistic turn, we also begin to notice a Derridas earlier work was built upon the Saussurean notions of language and signification.

So, what do we understand by the Saussurean notions of language and signification? So, show believed that language was a system, in which various components existed in relation to each other. So, in order to identify the structures inherent in language; it was also important to make sense of this relation between each other. He also spoke a about the link between the signifier and the signified, the signifier being the word and the signified being the concept, a mental concept that we have about the sign; and this relation, this link between the signifier and signified.

So, should argue that it is a purely arbitrary. It begins to participate in the meaning making process by conventional repeated use. And, this is something that we notice with every language, every feature of language, and the way in which the sign the signifier and the signified are connected to each other.

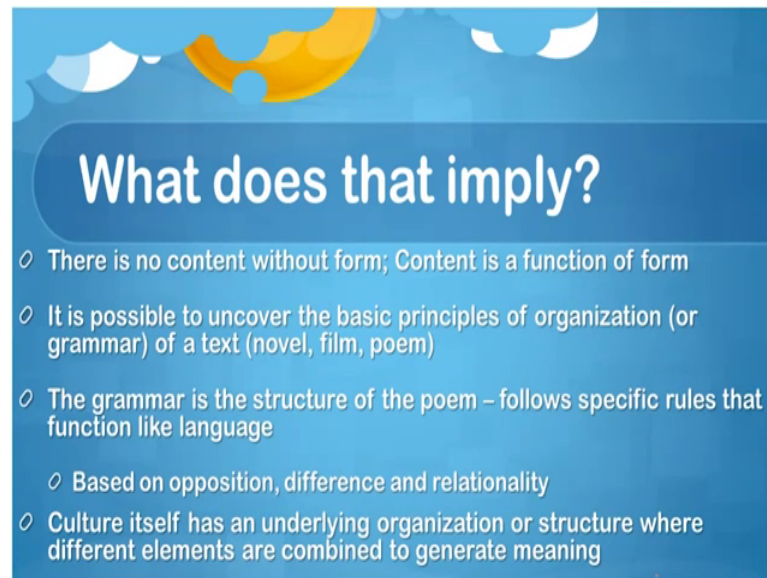
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So, here if we take the apple as an example, the apple is the sign; the object the object of the thing. And the signifier is the physical existence of this object in terms of the sound, the word or an image associated with this are thing on this object the apple., red, leaf, ground, apple could be various, could be the various signifiers associated with this object. The signified or the contrary is that mental concept, their mental image that we have about this particular object. It could be a fruit, it could be related to the idea of temptation, it could be even the brand of computer. There are multiple ways in which the signifier and the signified operates in relation to one another in order to signify the sign, the object all are thing.

This was a fundamental promise that Saussure had a put forward. This also had led to the emergence of a linguistic turn in the during the structuralist phase.

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**What does that imply?**

- There is no content without form; Content is a function of form
- It is possible to uncover the basic principles of organization (or grammar) of a text (novel, film, poem)
- The grammar is the structure of the poem – follows specific rules that function like language
  - Based on opposition, difference and relationality
- Culture itself has an underlying organization or structure where different elements are combined to generate meaning

So, what does that imply? How do we make sense of this linguistic a turn, the the relation between the signified and the signifier to talk about the other structures, which are involved in in the other disciplines in other genres, in and also in other contexts and text firstly, this begins to imply that, there is no content without form; content is a function of form, and that that is how we begin to also extend the relation between the signified and signifier to other contexts and secondly, since content is the function of form, it becomes possible to uncover the basic principles of organization or the grammar of a text.

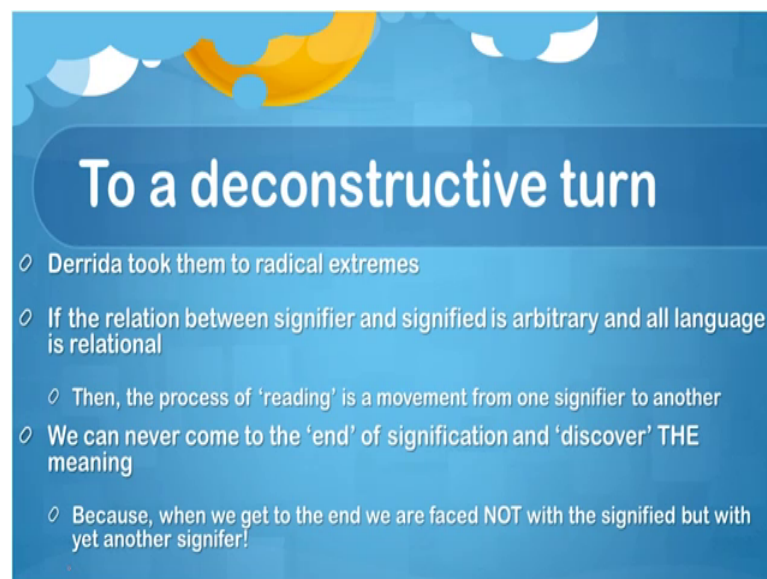
It could be a novel or film or a poem. And, since there is a belief that all texts are based on a particular organizing principles on particular grammar, and this grammar also follows, this grammar also follows specific rules that function like language. And, here there is a parallel being drawn to the structures within language, and the structures which are inherited and all other texts and contexts.

What do we mean when we say that we all follow specific rules that function like language? Because language functions based on opposition, difference and relationality, or this could again be related with the notion the idea of the signifier and the signified, together helping us to make sense of the site. But this lead to the final proposition that culture itself has an underlying organization or structure where different elements are combined to generate meaning. So, structuralism; when we extended to other disciplines

in other contexts also involves the understanding of the structures which are involved in making a particular culture or in making, or in, generating particular discourses and cultural contexts or particular or, or particular kinds of disciplinary contexts.

And these premises are very important in order to employ a structuralist mood of thinking in order to employ any form of critical practice based on structuralism. And this as we pointed out right at the outset of this lecture that, this was also one of the ways in which the structuralist tried to make sense of the culture that it was important that, that they also argue that it is possible to unravel the hidden meanings of our culture, of a particular practice by engaging with the, the relation between different structures, different organizing principles because they all had in the first place combined together to generate meaning.

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We find Derrida initially agreeing with these propositions, but what makes him different? What makes, what enables him to take a deconstructive turn from a linguistic turn is the fact that he took them to radical extremes; and how did he do that? He shared this assuring belief that, if the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary all language is relational.

But here comes a twist of the turn the Derrida employs. If this is the case, if this relation is arbitrary, and if all language is relational; then the process of reading is a movement from one signifier to another. As we have already noted, this object or this image imply



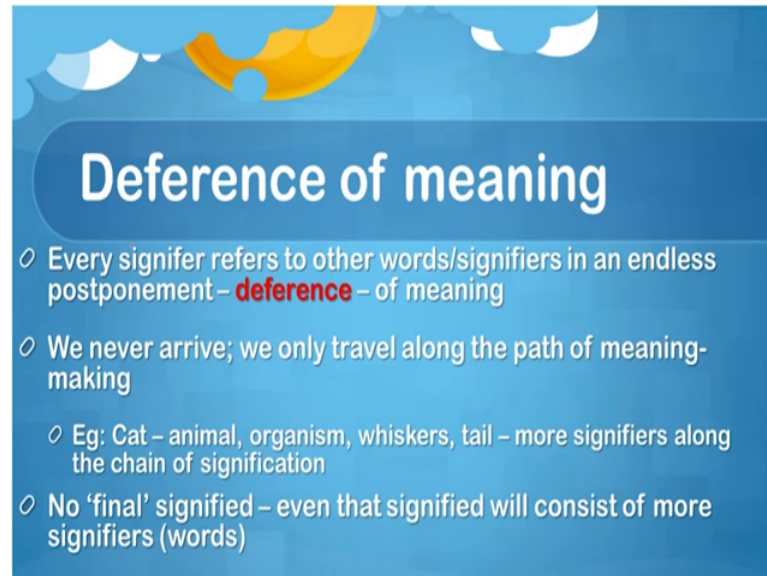
signifier suggests red, leaf, round and apple. So, when we talk about the apple, and when we begin to describe it in shape a in, in terms of its color; we begin to use another signifier which is red, and this has yet another signified. And when we talk about the shape of the apple, we talk about now the signified which is round; which the meaning of which, this could be located in yet another signified.

In this sense what Derrida begins to tell us is that the process of reading therefore, is a movement from one signifier to, because in order to define in order to describe a signified; we would be using a number of signifiers. And in then in this process we can never come to the end of signification and discover the meaning, which is embedded within structures or within languages because this is an impossible task because, when we get to the end; we are faced not with the signified, but with yet another signifier.

And this, in this search for meaning; this process of reading, which Derrida says is a movement from one signifier to the to another; (Refer Time: 24:02) eventually lead us to a single signified after which we can rest the case. On the contrary, it leads us because there is a need to talk, need to bring up yet another signifier because this is a rather endless process. And, this example would show us, we need various signifiers to talk about the signified.

And, again, in making the sense of the signifier; we may have to use yet another signifier. The significance of the construction, the significance of a deconstructed turn in this reading process needs to be situated within this complexity; within this problematization of the reading process of a movement from one signifier to another, because there is an impossibility to locate the end of signification and discover the true meaning.

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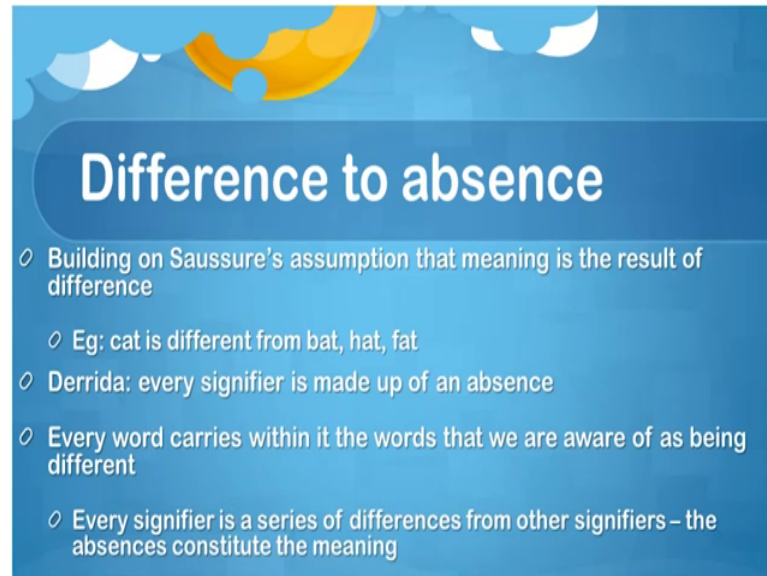
## Deference of meaning

- Every signifier refers to other words/signifiers in an endless postponement – **deferral** – of meaning
- We never arrive; we only travel along the path of meaning-making
  - Eg: Cat – animal, organism, whiskers, tail – more signifiers along the chain of signification
- No 'final' signified – even that signified will consist of more signifiers (words)

And here, in this process, we also begin to notice that every signifier refers to other words or signifiers in an endless postponement the term, the Derrida uses is deferral of meaning. So, just, just when we move from one signifier to another signifier; from one word to another word, there is also a postponement of meaning that takes place.

So, in that sense to code Derrid, we never arrive we only travel along the path of meaning making for example, when we begin to describe a cat, we can use a number of the signifiers number of these words such as animal, organism whiskers, tail. And, we only realize that there is no end to this process, there is no final signified that we can look at, but we only have a more signifiers along with this chain of signification; and this chain is an endless chain. So, there is no final signified because even that final signified will consist of more signifiers, ok. This is how we make sense of language; this is how we make sense of the meaning making process itself.

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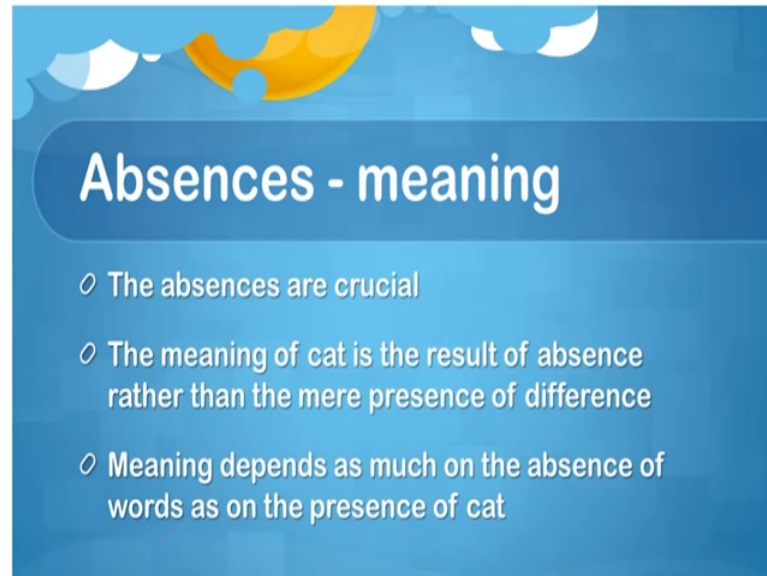
**Difference to absence**

- o Building on Saussure's assumption that meaning is the result of difference
  - o Eg: cat is different from bat, hat, fat
- o Derrida: every signifier is made up of an absence
- o Every word carries within it the words that we are aware of as being different
- o Every signifier is a series of differences from other signifiers – the absences constitute the meaning

And further building on Saussure's assumption, the meaning is the result of difference; because according to Saussure, when we talk about cat, how do we understand the meaning attributed to cat because it is also different from the other sets of words such as bat, hat or fat. And, building on this assumption that meaning is a result of difference.

The difference of one word from the other, Derrida takes this a bit further and argues that every signifier is made up of an absence. Here, Derrida begins to engage with the absence, and as he begins to problematize arguing that every word carries within it; words that we are aware of as being different, and every signifier accordingly is a series of differences from other significant other signifiers; the absences constitute the meaning. It is not the presence of these; it is not the presence of the term, cat presence of the word cat, but the absence of all the other words that begin to constitute the meaning of the word cat.

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And these absences, according to Derrida are very crucial to locate the meaning. Because the meaning of cat, if we continue to use that as an example it is a result of absence rather than the mere presence of different.

So, here we find an interesting claim between the words absence and difference. And the meaning Derrida begins to argue and take us along those lines arguing that, meaning depends as much on the absence of words as on the presence of cat. It is in this interplay of between the concepts of absence and difference that we needs to, we begin to understand the meaning of deconstruction, and the method of the deconstructive process.

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## Differance

- Twin moves of:
  - meaning as based on difference and absent presences
  - Meaning as perpetually deferred
- Difference + Deference = Differance
- All writing is differance
- A study of this differance - Grammatology

The sign: It shows something that is not here, but makes us alert to the fact that something is not here

To be able to theorized this effectively, we can say that Derrida makes the twin moves of one; meaning as based on difference and absent a presences. And secondly, meaning as being perpetually defer. So, the terms difference, absent, presence and deference become extremely important and, when we talk about the absent our presence it is it is it is important to also understand what is the intense.

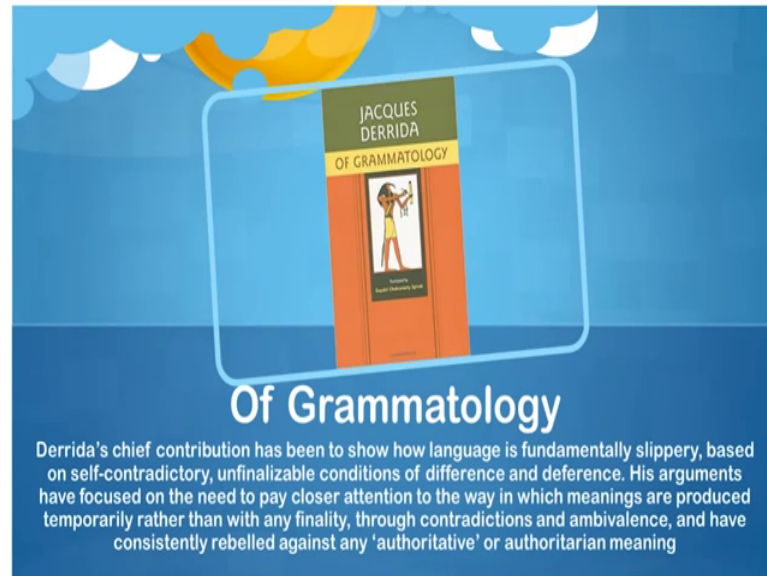
It shows something that is not here, but make this alert to the fact that something is not here. So, the absent presence and an engagement with it becomes very important to understand the deconstructive practices foreground, foregrounded by Derrida. Here, Derrida also does something very playful and interesting. He coins an entirely new word pronounced difference, but with an a.

This a French term which he coined, in order to make sense of the these twin moves that he means, makes of difference, and of deference; because in order to make sense of meaning, in order to engage with the process of writing it is important to locate language, it is important to locate the meaning making process, as based on difference and also on deference.

And, for this he coins this new term difference with an a and argues that all writing is difference; and it is a writing of this difference that he begins to define, he begins to articulate, he begins to our theorize and problematize in, this in, this work on, in his work

on of grammatology. And grammatology is also term that he uses to talk about a study of this difference.

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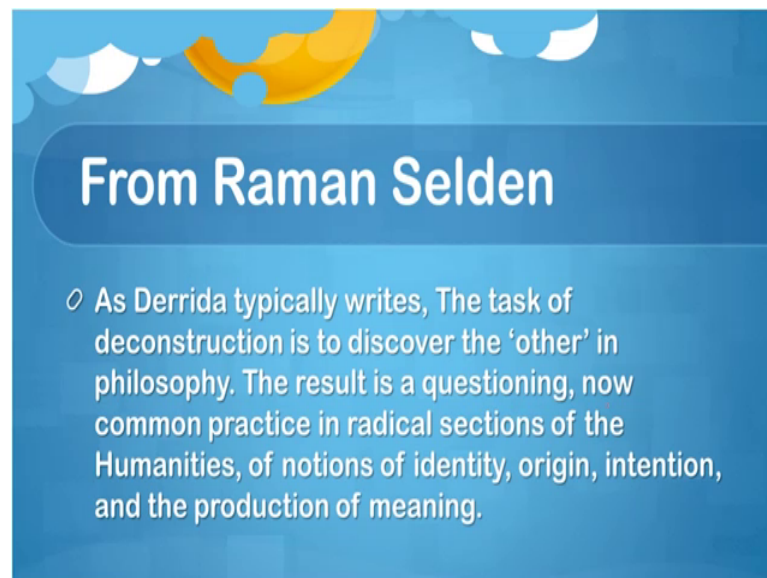
In Derrida's sequential work of grammatology published in 1967 and later translated by, translated into English by Gayathri Chakravarthi's play back in 1976., it is considered as the greatest contribution by Derrida. Derrida discusses the aspects of deconstruction and off difference with an a, and of grammatology. And, he also continues this discussion; he also talks about these aspects these notions in a number of his other works. And, to quote one of the modern theorist, Derrida's chief contribution has been to show; how language is fundamentally slippery based on self contradictory, unfinalizable conditions of difference and deference.

His arguments have focused on the need to pay closer attention to the way in which meaning is a produce temporarily, than with any finality through contradictions and ambivalence, and have consistently reveled against any authoritative or authoritarian meaning when we talk about the postmodernist reading practices, when we talk about the difficulty of meaning making process in the postmodern reading. It also needs to be understood within the context of this rebellion against any authoritative process of meaning a making. And, here again, we begin to see that Derrida's notions of deconstruction, Derrida's engagement with the unfinalizable conditions of difference and deference.

Student: (Refer Time: 31:36).

Also becomes a postmodern premised, which is also yet another defines against all kinds of finality, all kinds of attempts to make, to identify and foreground a single authoritative meaning; significantly a strain of these are the Slovenian; we have located in all the text that we have discussed. So, far because this rebellion; against a single unified meaning is that the heart of postmodernist thought.

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As we begin to wind up today's lecture, let us quote from Raman Selden. As Derrida typically writes, the task of deconstruction was to discover the other in philosophy. The result is a questioning, now common practice in radical sections of humanities of notions of identity, origin, intention and the production of meaning.

In today's lecture, we have article in look at the intellectual context which produced the significance of deconstruction as a method; and how the deconstructive takes off or moves away as a departure from the Saussurean linguistic turn. We have also seen how post structuralism as a mode of engagement with meaning, becomes continuous with the postmodern thoughts with the postmodern engagement with meaning. In the following lecture, lecture we shall be taking a look at how deconstruction as a method operates; how deconstruction seeks to discover the other, and how it helps the it, it enables the questioning of the notions of identity origin intention and the production of a meaning in

the postmodern text and context. That is all we have for today. Thank you for listening. I look forward to seeing in the next session.