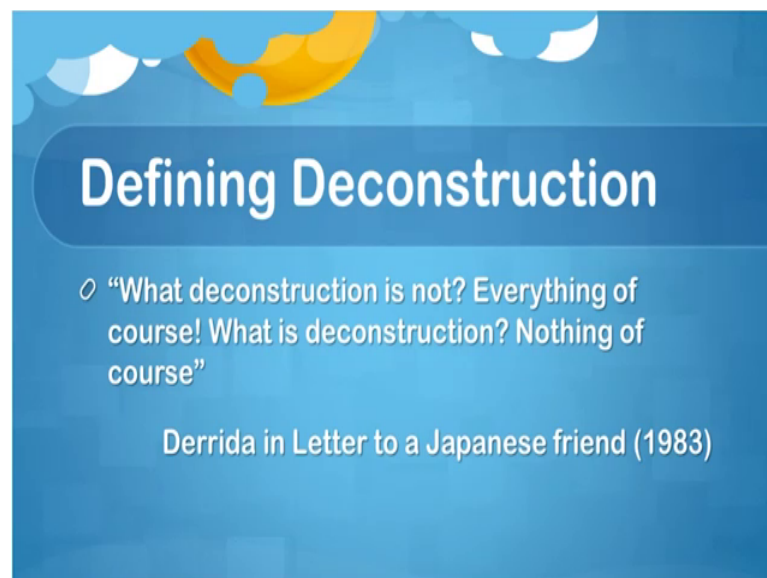


Postmodernism in Literature
Dr. Merin Simi Raj
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Week -04
Lecture – 8a
Derrida, Deconstruction and Postmodern texts

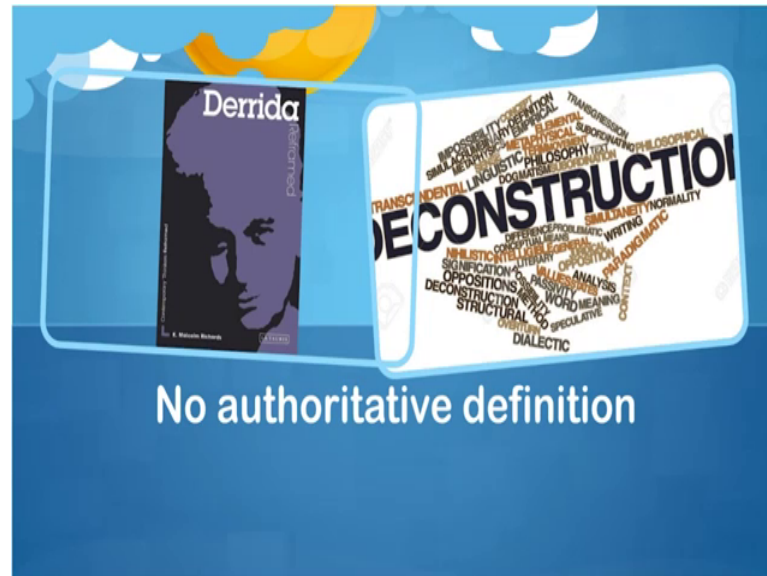
Hello and welcome to yet another session of the NPTEL course post modernism in literature continuing with our discussion on Derrida, Deconstruction and postmodern texts we begin today's our session.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:30)



With the challenges inherent in attempts to define deconstruction Derrida himself has written in his 1983 work try to letter to a Japanese friend; what deconstruction is not everything of course, what is deconstruction nothing of course,. So, this is the irony which is embedded in the in the many attempts to define deconstruction.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:50)

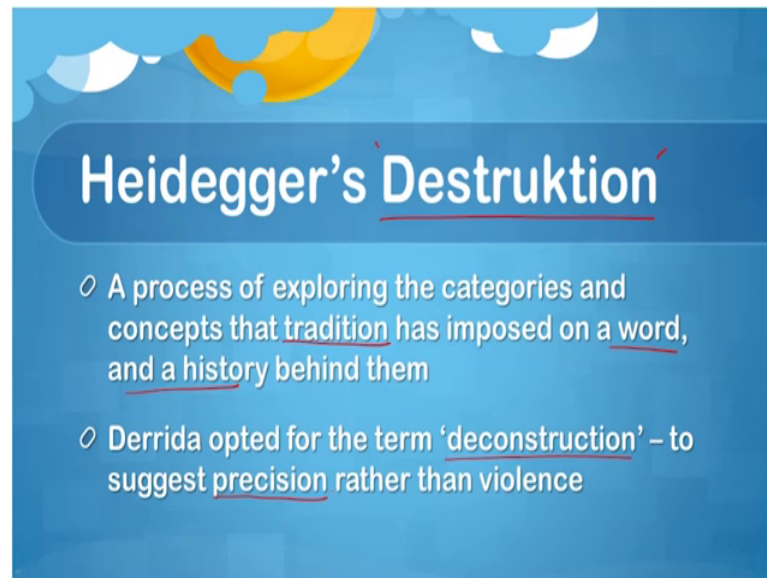


Derrida himself has stayed away from giving any kind of authoritative definition to the idea of deconstruction in fact, if we scan across the 40 odd books and about 100 articles that he himself had written.

He has not offered a definitive authoritative definition to the idea of deconstruction. He has only spoken about it discussed deconstruction at length in a number of his works through various frameworks and talking about; how the construction helps him to access culture access text. In particular forms how it helps him to how it how deconstruction enables him to unpack a language in ways that it has not been available and to that point of time.

So, our understanding of deconstruction is also fraught with such challenges it is also embedded within such ironic effects, then there is an impossibility to define a deconstruction, but at the same time we attempt to define it we attempt to unpack it through a series of discourses available to us through a series of frameworks within which deconstruction has been situated. In the previous session we started looking at the various ways in which Derrida began to frame the idea of deconstruction.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:08)



And it is also important to recall that Derrida's term the use of deconstruction is also a departure from Heidegger's idea of our destruction, and this is a French word that a mountain Heidegger uses and Heidegger used. The term destruction to talk about a process of exploring the categories and concepts the tradition has imposed on a word and the history behind there.

So, these terms tradition word and history are continue to be important for us we have also seen, how from a linguistic turn which spoke about the structural aspects of language, Derrida was able to formulate as a departure from the structuralist modes Derrida was able to formulate his idea of deconstruction which is also essentially a post structuralism approach Derrida; however, uses the term deconstruction.

When he translates Heidegger's idea for the de destruction he also modified it in multiple ways as we have been analyzing he also modified, the term in multiple ways the critics of feel that Derrida opted for the term deconstruction as the translation of destruction rather than going for a literal translation because he sort of precision rather than violence

So, when we also analyze deconstruction as a method, when we analyzed a deconstruction and applied to various texts and contexts; we also begin to see that it is also about seeking a new understanding of a text rather than completely destructing it rather than completely annihilating it and in that sense if we also trace; the way in which the term deconstruction departs from destruction it is also about though the term implies

the certain violence in certain mode of deconstruction it is also about constructing the text in alternate ways.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:01)

Derrida's Deconstructive turn

- To be read alongside that of Barthes'
- Both provided a significant shift in the way we think of language and meaning

Ferdinand de Saussure Looked at language <u>diachronically</u>	} Kantian critique of Reason	✓ Rene Descartes (1596-1650) Frederic Nietzsche (1844- 1900) ✓ Began to question the <u>objective truth of language</u>
--	------------------------------------	---

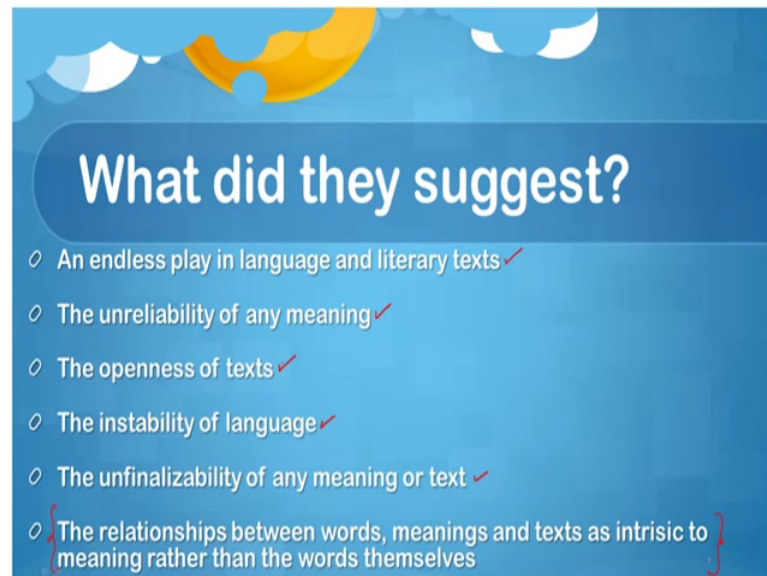
Constructing the text in ways that are not readily available or readily accessible in the previous session we also notice, how Derrida's deconstructive turn could be seen as an offshoot from the linguistic turn foregrounded by Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure as a starting point and that sense becomes very important, because he looked at a language dynamically and it was also have been multiple ways in which Derrida departed from the structuralist mode that helped us make better sense of the construction and also the other ideas of a Derrida.

And if we trace this back a little further we can also move to see Derrida was immensely influenced by the Kantian critique of reason which was also a dominant ideology. In the 19th century and we can also look at other intellectual traditions as and when we begin to trace the significance of this term deconstruction and we also notice that Descartes who lived in the 16th century that our context because they also had begun to question the objective truth of language.

And this is something which this is this is also a theme on which Derrida, further builds upon to talk about deconstruction also keeping in tune with the context that; this course has already set Derrida's deconstructed term can be read alongside that of Barthes this. We have already noticed; in the way we are engaged with Barthes' texts the net of the

order and it would also be perhaps appropriate to say that both derrida and barthes provided a significant shift. In the way we think about we think of language and meaning and this understanding is extremely important to read derrida; in the context of a post modernism in the context of post structuralist approaches. So, if we try to read derrida alongside barthe.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:51)



What does it entail? What would it would suggest and here is a very comprehensive commentary that Pramod Nayar offers in his book on contemporary electric theory.

He talks about a range of things that both of them are together suggest and how they would be helpful? How these ideas? How these a frameworks would be helpful in understanding the idea of deconstruction? First of all part and derrida talked about an endless play in language and literacy texts and they also foreground the unreliability of any meaning and this is something that barthe extensively worked upon and this we had particularly noticed in his work the death of the author and we also highlight; the need for openness of text and this is also an essentially a post structuralist postmodern characteristic which also presents the text as a site which is open to multiple meanings and open to multiple interpretations.

So, this also leads us another inherent assumption that language is essentially instable the instability of life the instability of language needs to be acknowledged, when one needs to understand the construction and the ways in which language and literary text can be

played with and eventually this leads us to the possibility of the un finalized ability of any meaning or text.

Here is where the approaches of barthe and derrida they begin to challenge these structuralist assumptions of meaning making process of language being unified a site and ultimately what makes the approaches of barthe and derrida. Essentially post structuralist and also quite conducive to the postmodern scenario is that the relationships between words meaningless antics as intrinsic to meaning rather than the words themselves.

So, it is within this relation that we need to understand it is within this relationship within this context that; we need to approach deconstruction or approach the various ways in which language has been unpacked language has been deconstructed to move away from the structuralist assumptions and the structuralist meanings.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:06)



So, how do we then begin to place deconstructive criticism deconstructive criticism or we can say that it builds upon three major themes and drawing upon the ideas drawing upon the various modes of departures from the structuralist mode. They have built upon these three themes one unfinalizability two deference and three relationality.

We have also briefly taken look at, how all of these are things operate within the context of language and when deconstruction makes use of unfinalizability of text the deference of meaning. And the relationality of the; and the relationality of language and meaning

making process it together leads us to show how a text can subvert its own stated philosophical or literary assumptions.

So, here we have moved away from the static understanding of a single meaning and we only look at different assumptions which are made available to us. So, if we again try to look at the construction as a departure from the Saussurian understanding of structuralist linguistics. We will be looking at the ambiguities deconstruction will be looking at the ambiguities and signifiers. In other words there can be many signified meanings for a single signifier as we have already noted in the previous session.

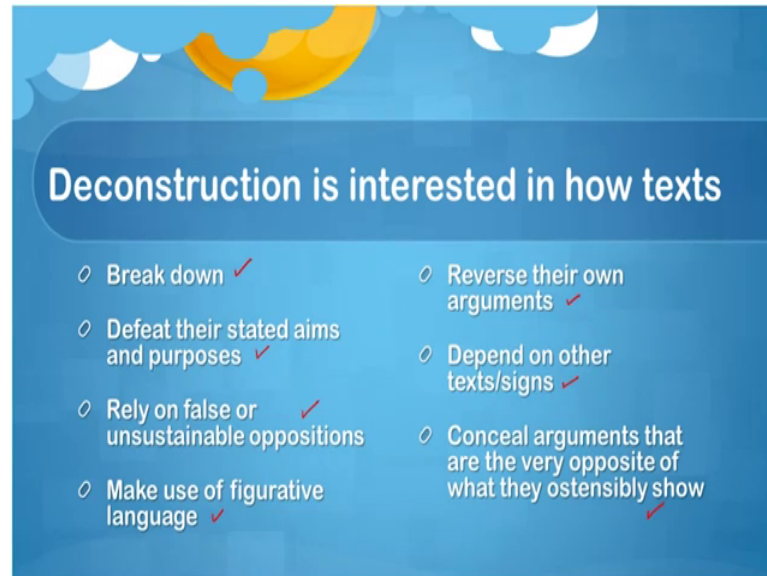
(Refer Slide Time: 09:38)



So, when we subject a text to a deconstructive criticism the text refers to and is open to one: a different reading. Secondly, another text that rather than reinforce its argument might subvert it because there is no single meaning there is a possibility of different and multiple interpretations.

Thirdly the text is open to revisions even as it states its meanings in unambiguous terms. So, there is everything is in the state of flux, there is no single meaning. There is no fixed a kind of a text everything is subject to change and this is also incidentally a quality that; Derrida located in language and meaning. In general if there is no single meaning, if the text is open to multiple interpretations multiple possibilities of a tellings multiple alternative a meanings.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:33)



Then deconstruction is also interested in; how text breaks down? How they defeat their stated aims and purposes? How the texts rely on false or unsustainable oppositions.

How they make use of figurative language such as met first? How the text reverse their own arguments? How the texts depend on others texts and signs which are not straightforwardly available within the text. How the texts conceal arguments that are the very opposite of, what they ostensibly show deconstruction in that sense is not interested? In the text per say, but in these many possibilities in these many layered meanings that the text offers.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:17)

Methodology in practice

Structuralism	Deconstruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Interested in how meaning is produced ✓How texts work ✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Interested in the <u>contradictions</u> that resist meaningHow <u>texts deconstruct themselves</u>

Displaced structuralism and undertook to decenter or subvert the claims for the existence of all foundations such as knowledge, meaning, truth, subject

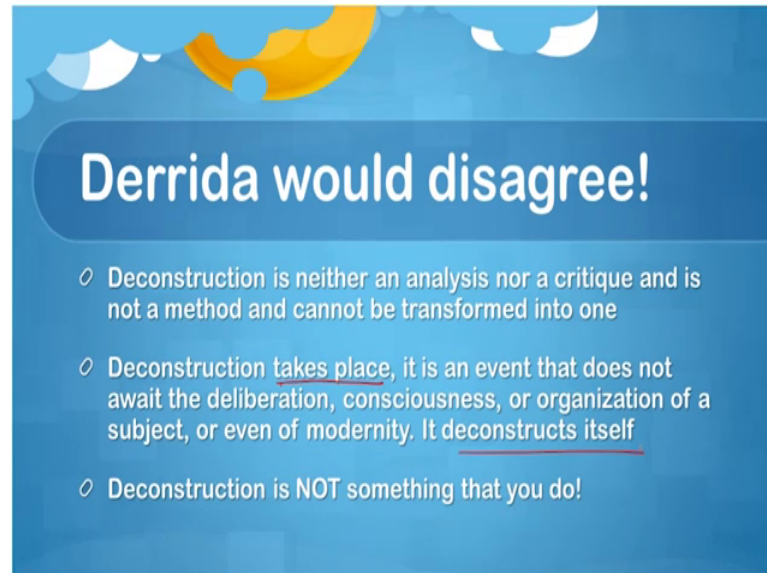
And when we approach deconstruction as a methodology in a practice; it is also important to see; how deconstruction differs? How it departs from the structuralist mode of criticism in structuralism. They are interested in knowing how meaning is produced; when we move to the construction. The interest is in locating the contradictions that resist meaning, because it is also a futile to make an attempt to know the single meaning the single truth with which the text talks about.

Structuralism is interested in how texts work? Deconstruction is interested in how texts deconstruct themselves and this is. So, this a phrase is extremely important, because deconstruction as Derrida himself would reiterate is not something that; we do to a text it is not something that we forcefully inject upon a text, but the texts are capable of deconstructing themselves, because language also has a power to store these unlimited layered constructed meanings within the framework of a text.

So, to sum up these moves of departure from structuralism towards deconstruction, it would perhaps suffice to say that deconstruction displays structuralism and undertook to de center or subvert. The claims for existence of all foundations, such as knowledge meaning, truth and subject and this is also evident in the many deconstructive readings which are available and which we shall also come back to take a look at in the latter half of this course.

Who does largely convenient for us to look at our deconstruction to engage with deconstruct methodology as a practice as a political framework.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:01)



Derrida would disagree!

- Deconstruction is neither an analysis nor a critique and is not a method and cannot be transformed into one
- Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity. It deconstructs itself
- Deconstruction is NOT something that you do!

Derrida would certainly disagree with this proposition, because according to him deconstruction neither an analysis nor a critique and it is not a method and cannot be transformed into one. And he also believe that deconstruction takes place, it is not something that we need to do it is an event that does not have a deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, even of modernity. It deconstructs itself. Deconstruction is not something that you do! that is what derrida had believed it.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:34)



And he had repeatedly written against this re-appropriation of deconstruction. Especially, within the academia, fraternity and nevertheless, we also know that there are innumerable numerable attempts to explain simplified define and or 'package' deconstruction for the academia-Derrida had protested and criticized this tendency throughout And also it is just ironical that in this of course, in this lecture we are also trying to do precisely that; and in spite of Derrida is extreme discomfort with this idea of packaging deconstruction for academic purposes for introducing deconstruction as a methodology as a critical practice as a mode of criticism.

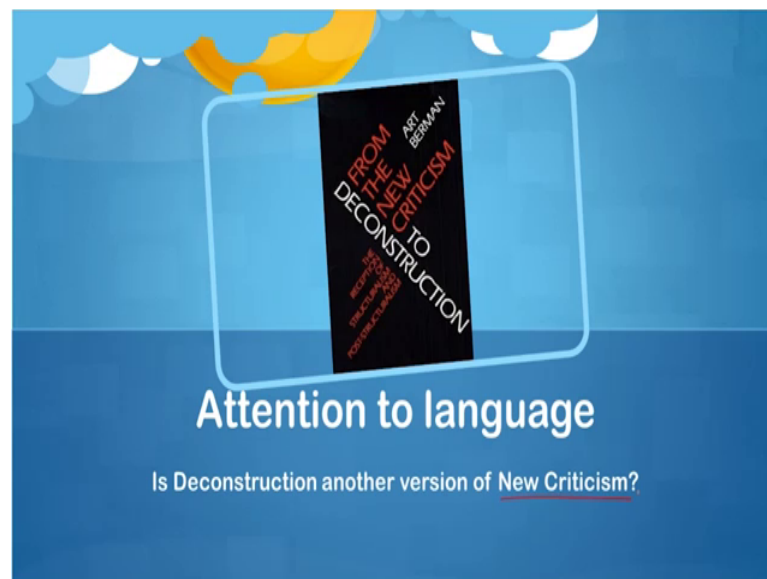
(Refer Slide Time: 14:16)



We find that deconstruction has also now become the foundation of many postmodern ideas. It is become our rather impossible not to engage with the deconstruction as a critical practice when we engaged with post modernism and also in the post structuralist practices especially from the 1980s onwards. Deconstruction is perhaps the one critical method, which is dominated all other kinds of a critical practices and this is also found it is way into our range of theoretical enterprises, in law anthropology, historiography, linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychoanalysis, political theory, feminism, and even and queer studies.

And maybe a deconstruction has a; become more popular than almost all the other kinds of frameworks is also, because it offers a revolutionary explanation of the world society and knowledge and, this is extremely important for the understanding of the wall to make sense of knowledge systems; to make a sense of various subject positions in the postmodern scenario.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:19)



There have been numerous criticisms against a deconstruction; because of the particular and detailed attention that the construction phases to language many critics have also felt that occurred many critics have asked. Whether deconstruction is not a version of new criticism; however, new criticism is certainly very very different from that of a deconstruction in new criticism. A new critical practices we know that there is a close attention being paid to language on the paid to a close reading of the words on a page.

Ah, but; however, deconstruction operates at a different level all together, there is a close reading. There is a close attention being given to the language which is being used, but the concerned of the decons ah, but the concerned of deconstruction is not exactly the words which are being displayed on the page, but the constructed meanings that these words are foreground and deconstruction also seeks to peel away. These various meanings which are being offered to us at the outset and also look beyond these constructed meanings. Look beyond these constructed common sense images in order to engage with the text at multiple levels within various or contexts, why we can say that new criticism is largely an apolitical approach towards reading literature deconstruction is a very political approach.

We would also see how and when we talk about the construction in as the electrical practice in one of the later sessions.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:52)



The playfulness and puns that are the that the construction are heavily uses it will also led to the accusations of deconstruction being very frivolous and not serious enough to engage with a literary and cultural artifacts, but; however, it is the idea of playfulness and the use of puns that makes the construction rather useful practice to engage with the various sites or contexts and texts in the postmodern scenario.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:23)

Chief strategy of Deconstruction

- To analyse a hierarchy, to reverse it and to show how the elements of the hierarchy are constitutive of each other
- To discover:
 - Impurities
 - Contamination
- Border-crossing that upset
 - Purity, Structure
 - Linearity, origins

TEXT ⇒ NEW TEXT
telling

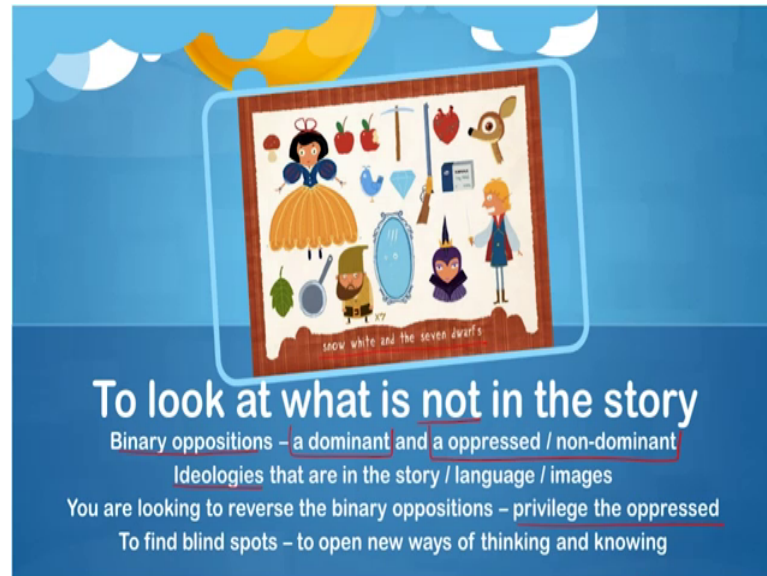
Moving we want to see how deconstruction works as a particular critical method as a particular strategy it is important to take a look at the look at the various steps that are involved in no particular order; when we apply the method of deconstruction. When we try to engage with a text through; though a deconstructive method, we find that we are also analyzing a hierarchy and you are trying to reverse it and to show how the elements of hierarchy are constitutive of each other. We do not art it take this understanding for granted. We do not take the various positions various locations of hierarchy for granted rather we begin to subvert it.

And analyze the structures of meaning, which are embedded onto it and we also try to discover the impurities and contaminations that are that are within a text. They may not be a very apparent, but one once we begin to peel away. The structures of meaning we would also begin to see that these impurities and contaminations also have a different story to tell and we are also particularly pay attention we are also very alert to the body crossing that would upset notions of purity structure linearity and origins.

So, eventually we would begin to see that when we apply these strategies to engage with our text through a deconstructed method. We would begin to see that the text undergoes a radical change and we have an entirely new text. A new telling available before us it is this radical notion is this this our capability to invent itself to engage with the text in a playful manner to completely be to be dismissive of the original meanings quote

unquote. The original meanings that the text entails makes; these capabilities that makes a deconstruction a very significant and a foundational element of post modernism.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:31)



If we try to give the example of the well known fairytale snow, white and the seven dwarfs and try to do a deconstructed reading of the same. What would we eventually get? If we look at this story in very simple terms it is about the story of a little girl, snow white who is also vulnerable to all kinds of evil attacks; that are present in the world and she is also being rather coincidentally being rescued at different points of time by characters, were also kind hearted and there is also an ultimate triumph for the good over the evil and this story could be seen as a moralistic story it is also seen as a feel good story like all fairy tales ah, but; however, a deconstructive reading of the story the snow white and the seven dwarfs would enable us to look at what is not in the story.

How do we do? That, because beyond these apparel constructed meanings; there is the story there is an alternative telling which is available within the text and if we push the deconstructive methods a little further into the story of snow white, we would also see that what is not in this story becomes an alternative telling, for instance; this story of snow white could also be a scene as a story of a young woman who does not have any agency to control her own life, the incidents in her life the various happenings in her life are subject to how the others operate are dependent on others cruelty, others kindness, others intervention at various points of time and also to take this reading a bit. Further, it

will also be not wrong to say that the person that snow white the characters snow white embodies is certainly not the kind of person the that a model introvert woman aspires to be.

Because, there is an utter lack of control over one's own life and there is also an utter there is also a complete dependency, that the character shows not distant persons, but also on circumstances and that that totally takes away any kind of power any kind of agency that the character would have to con would have possibly to control her own life here in this very crude deconstructive approach that we took. We are talking we are also taking a look at the binary of positions, in every story in every tale. There are these binary oppositions which are present of which one would be a dominant and the other would be an oppressed or a non dominant factor or a character. And when we try to deconstruct, the particular tale we are also being made aware we are also being made alert to the ideologies that are in the story in the language in the images.

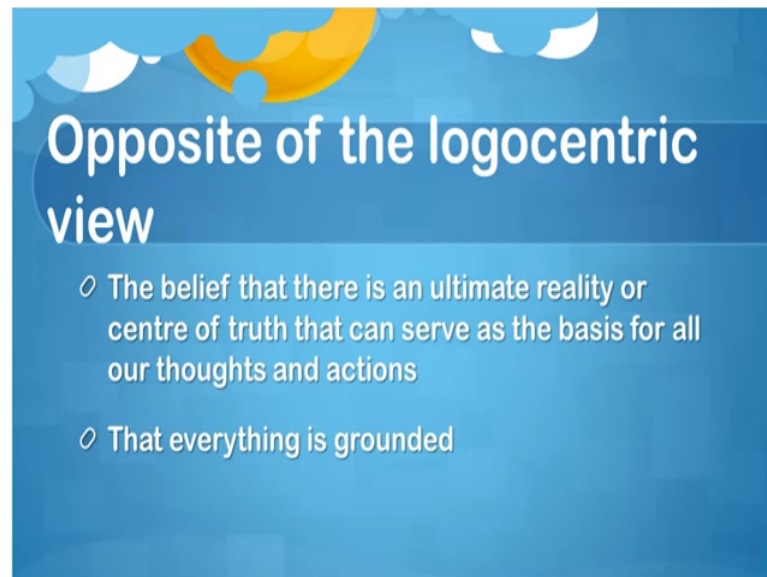
We are also being made aware of the of the subject positions that are being foregrounded of the ideological practices; that are being celebrated and the things which are being condemned and hear in a deconstructive approach. We are looking to reverse these binary of oppositions, we are privileging the oppressed and also trying to see, what kind of an alternate reading is available? What are the various other suppressed meanings? What are the various other non dominant ideologies and non dominant through a non dominant meanings which are being made available.

So, the task at hand is also to find the blind spots and to open new ways of thinking and knowing. So, here being also begin to see that this alternate are telling this alternate tale, which is available within the story is not something forced; we do not have to force and force anything on the text as Derrida would say, there is nothing outside the text these alternate readings these absences these oppressed non dominant ideologies these oppressed non dominant subject positions are available within the story itself.

All we have to do is to just peel away the constructed meanings peel away the common sensical meanings one after the other to deconstruct the text. Again, we would also see that just like Derrida argued; in the case of language there is no final meaning that one can access there is no getting to the core of the text once. We begin to peel away the constructed meanings one after the other. We are only opening up newer ways of

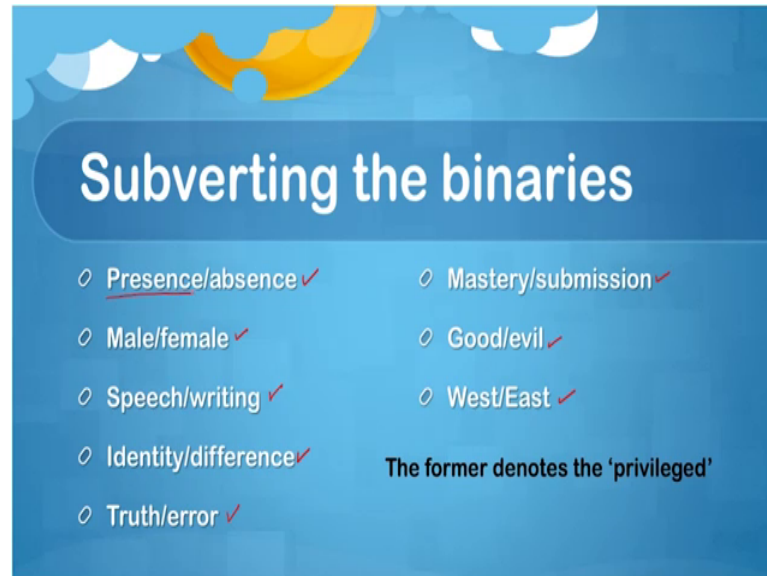
thinking and knowing and also totally doing away with the idea of binaries with the idea of binary oppositions that privilege one kind of an ideology one kind of a subject position over the other and this certainly is the very political thing to do it is a very political reading of available text and available tellings.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:25)



Subsequently, in these discussions related to deconstruction; we also find Derrida moved away from the logo centric. Logo centric view is a belief that there is an ultimate reality or center of truth; there can serve as the basis for all our thoughts and actions and that everything is grounded in the way we understand.

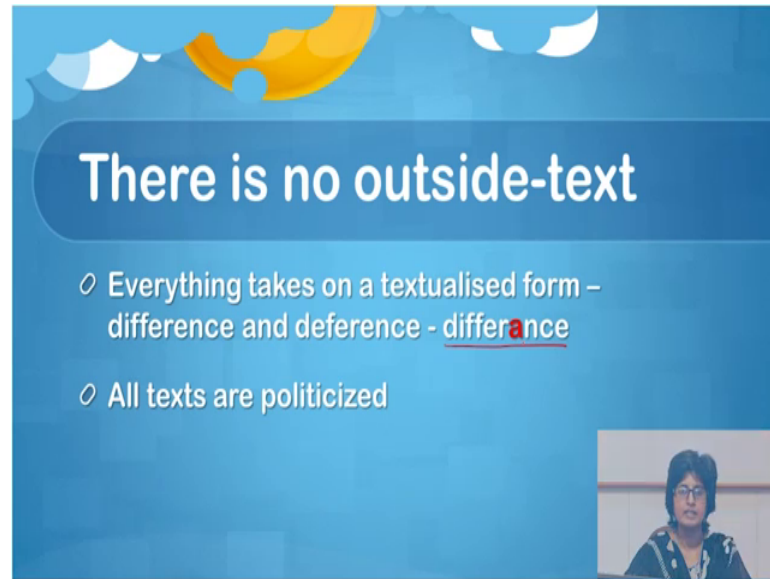
(Refer Slide Time: 24:49)



Only when we begin to move away from this a logo centric view that away we would be able to subvert the binaries the binaries would our can operate and many different ways. It is his presence and absence male female speech and writing about which Derrida also had written extensively, about identity and difference of truth and error mastery and submission good and evil or west and east and in this set in this limited set that we present over here. We also notice that; the former always denotes a privileged such as presence, male, speech, identity, truth, mastery, good, the west and the east this also becomes fundamental in understanding; what orientalism is all about?

So, here we notice that deconstruction is also about subverting the binaries because there is always in these binaries there is always a probability of one over the other.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:42)

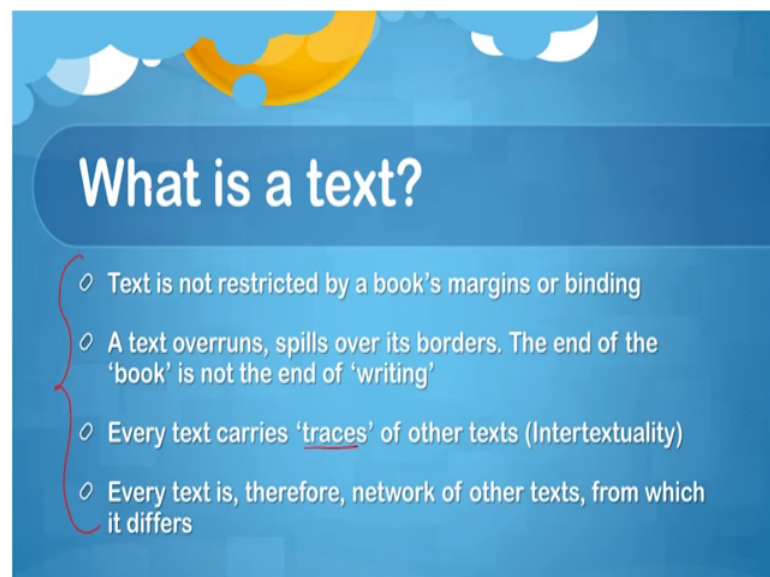


There is no outside-text

- Everything takes on a textualised form – difference and deference - difference
- All texts are politicized

Derrida also of famous your mutt that, there is no outside text what he meant by this was that everything takes on a textualized form. And we engage with the difference and deference in the meaning making process; and for this he also coined the new term difference which is spelt within a and in this reading all texts are politicized as we have also briefly noted.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:07)



What is a text?

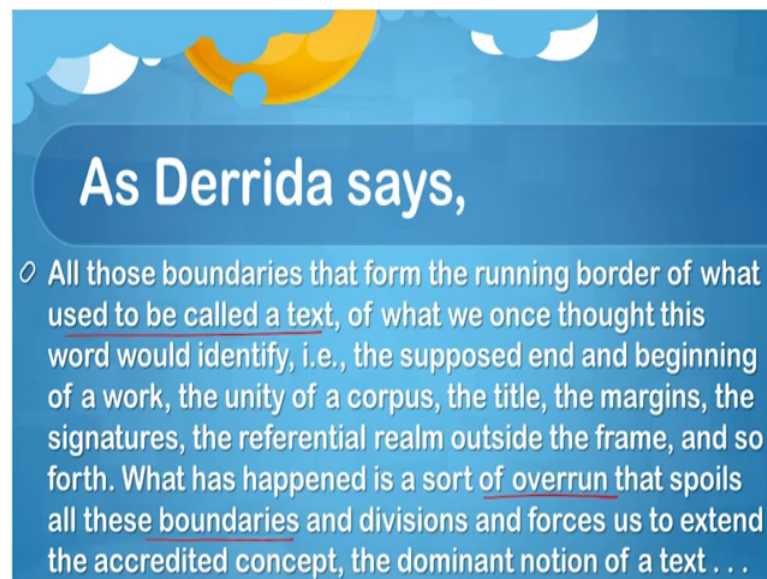
- Text is not restricted by a book's margins or binding
- A text overruns, spills over its borders. The end of the 'book' is not the end of 'writing'
- Every text carries 'traces' of other texts (Intertextuality)
- Every text is, therefore, network of other texts, from which it differs

So, in that sense it is also important to understand, what a text is according to Derrida? According to Derrida text is not restricted by a books margin or binding it overruns and

spills over it is borders and in that sense the end of the book is certainly not the end of writing text. In that sense does not constitute the number of a pages which are bound in the form of a book from the beginning to the end and every text also carries traces of other texts and this is also something that is being extensively engaged in terms of in textuality.

And it is also a concept that we shall be examining at a later point and according to Derrida every text is therefore, a network of other texts from which it differs and these propositions about text by Derrida also challenges the basic assumptions about a text. So, here time here be again begin to see how Derrida could be read alongside barthe and even Foucault, because they had also challenged the ways in which our text. The idea of an author and even the idea of reading could be approached we also saw how the foregrounding of multiple readings could also be done alongside the foregrounding of the emergence of reader.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:27)

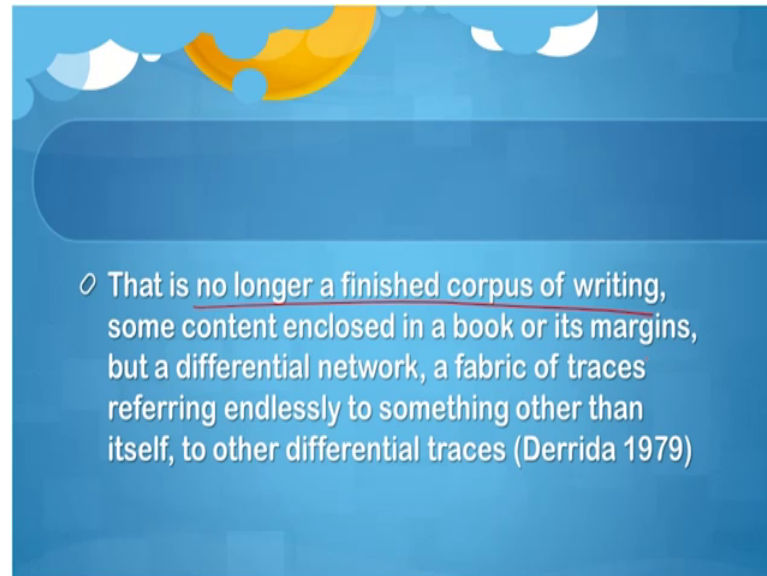


All of these challenging notions of the changing ideas of the text the meaning; the critical practices they all play a significant role in engaging with a text and context in the postmodern scenario.

As we begin to wind up today's lecture it is also perhaps appropriate. we will leave you with a couple of quotes are from Derrida himself where he talks about texts and we need to read them through the lens of deconstruction as; Derrida says all those boundaries that

form the running border of what used to be called a text of what? We once thought this word would identify that the supposed end and beginning of a work the unity of a corpus the title the margins the signatures the referential realm outside the frame and. So, forth what has happened is sort of overrun that spoils all of these boundaries intuitions and forces us to extend the accredited concept the dominant notion of a text.

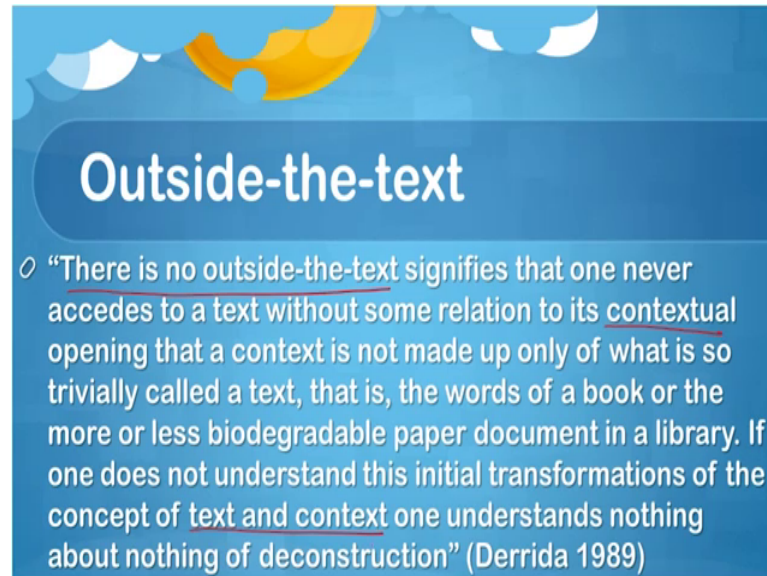
(Refer Slide Time: 28:24)



That is no longer a finished a corpus of writing, some contain enclosed in a book or it is margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. This understanding of the text this possibility of viewing everything as a text is also fundamental to the approaches within post modernism, this also enables us to look at text and context from multiple angles through multiple viewpoints which also eventually lead to the emergence of multiple interpretations.

So, this idea of looking at everything as a text and the idea that there is nothing outside the text, and the idea that every text has the ability to deconstruct itself has been fundamental to our understanding of post modernism itself.

(Refer Slide Time: 29:20)



Outside-the-text

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

Derrida had further qualified the phrase outside-the-text in a lot that he published in 1989. “There is no outside-the-text signifies that one never exceeds to a text without some relation to it is contextual opening that a context is not made up only of what is. So, trivially called a text, that is, the words of a book or the more or less biodegradable paper document in a library. If one does not understand these initial transformations of the concept of a text and context one understands nothing about nothing of deconstruction”.

This also helps us to recall, why we began our understanding of the theoretical frameworks that dominate post modernism with a discussion of the challenging notions of the shifting understanding of the idea of text. When we began to discuss Barthe and Foucault and here we are also being led to understand that one unless; we understand the ways in which text has transformed unless we begin to understand how there has been a radical shift in the ideas about text in the ideas about engaging with particular texts.

In the critical practices of reading our text we would not be able to engage with the construction or by extension post modernism. We shall be following up this discussion, in the next session by focusing on a particular text and how a postmodern reading is also made possible through deconstructivist approach on that note we wind up today’s session.

Thank you for listening and I look forward to see you in the next session.