



# Derrida on Deconstruction

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# Deconstruction

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- ❑ Deconstruction originated in France in the late 1960s, when structuralism and existentialism were still intellectually active. It was created and has been profoundly influenced by the French Philosopher Jacques Derrida
- ❑ In fundamental sense, deconstruction is associated with certain techniques for reading texts developed by Jacques Derrida and some other thinkers
- ❑ Derrida affirms that deconstruction is not a method, but an activity of reading as it refers to certain new strategies for interpreting literary text
- ❑ The approach of deconstruction towards the notion of meaning is also relevant in the context. Deconstruction asserts that texts, institutions, beliefs, societies, and practices do not have unambiguously definite meaning, as they do not have very strict and rigid boundary

# Deconstruction

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- ❑ Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher who sits at the forefront of post-structuralism, is the father of deconstruction
- ❑ Jacques Derrida was born in July 15, 1930. He was in Algeria, in North West Africa. He was expelled from school at the age of 10
- ❑ He became very sensitive to racism and eventually he moved to Paris
- ❑ Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), the French Philosopher and father of deconstructionism and his worked has been leveled as post-structuralism
- ❑ Deconstruction is not synonymous with “destruction”. The term denotes a particular kind of practice in reading and, thereby, a method of criticism and mode of analytical inquiry
- ❑ It means “to de-construct.” A very broad sense, it means break the construction or system

# Deconstruction

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- ❑ Deconstruction is a way of understanding how something was created, usually things like art, books, poems and other writings
- ❑ Deconstruction is breaking something down into smaller parts. It looks at the smaller parts that were used to create an object. The smaller parts are usually ideas
- ❑ Sometimes deconstruction looks at how an author can imply things he does not mean. It says that because words are not precise, we can never know what an author meant
- ❑ Author is dead or redundant
- ❑ It argues that a text's meaning is produced through the reader's process of encountering it
- ❑ Deconstruction is understood as a response to structuralism, it is referred as a post-structuralist approach

# Deconstruction

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- ❑ Structuralism argued that individual thought was shaped by linguistic structures
- ❑ Deconstruction attacked the assumption that these structures of meaning were stable, universal and ahistorical.
- ❑ Deconstruction does not show that all texts are meaningless, rather they are overflowing with multiple and often conflicting meanings
- ❑ It does not claim that concepts have no boundaries, but their boundaries can be parsed in many different ways as they are inserted into new contexts of judgment
- ❑ 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 de-construct." ... 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

# Deconstruction

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- ❑ It does not seek to prove an objective truth
- ❑ **Deconstruction** is a critical outlook concerned with the relationship between text and meaning
- ❑ Derrida's 1967 work of *Grammatology* introduced the majority of ideas influential within deconstruction
- ❑ Literature was taken to be mimetic, reflecting and presenting the truths about life and the human condition
- ❑ Because text depicted life in a powerful way, they were thought to have a life of their own that could be discovered and analyzed
- ❑ Language is subjective; meaning is context-dependent
- ❑ The real meaning of the text is unknown
- ❑ Derrida accepts the ground of Saussure's linguistic only to dismantle it
- ❑ Deconstruction is a critique of structuralism

# Structuralism

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- ❑ The world is organised as structure
- ❑ Structures are forms made of few units that are arranged in a specific orders. What is there in world is structurally formed
  - For example, the poems are made of smaller units like words, speech, rhymes, punctuation, smaller unites make the bigger structure, is called a poem. Poem itself a unit of another bigger structure called literature. You know in literature there are different forms, that is poem, novel, short story and drama these are some other units that forms a bigger structure, that is literature. Now literature is another unite that forms a bigger structure, that is society. Literature is a part of society
- ❑ What Structuralist says that Whatever is there in the world, is structurally formed. You cannot understand one thing in isolation. In order to understand one thing we will always have read it in relation to another.

# Structuralism

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- ❑ Structuralism is the study of structures of texts
- ❑ Emphasis is given on the language or formal properties of text
- ❑ Structuralists believe that all things have underlying structure
  - For instances every language has structure: its rules of grammar
- ❑ Their interpretations of texts are too static and unchanging
- ❑ They produce readings that posit fixed meaning
- ❑ Structuralism pays more attention to the structure
- ❑ Structuralism argued that individual thought was shaped by linguistic structures
- ❑ The text is static to some extent
- ❑ Most famous structuralist Ferdinand De Saussure who published a book **COURSE IN GENERAL LINGUISTICS** in 1915, where he talks about the structures of language



# Structuralism

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- ❑ Saussure believes in structuralism
- ❑ He divides language in two parts
  - 1. Langue 2. Parole
- ❑ What is Langue is basically a set of rules or the language system
- ❑ What is Parole is the employment of the rules; the individual usages
- ❑ It is not enough to see who the words have acquired meaning over time
- ❑ It is also important to see how they (words) mean within the time
- ❑ He gives two words for this thing:
  - Diachronic and Synchronic Study:
- ❑ Diachronic literally means the historical study of words. How does word acquire meaning over time. It is the study of changes in language over time.

# Structuralism

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- ❑ How language have evolved over time. How language has been developed through history or evaluation.
- ❑ Linguistic structure is basically historical factors
- ❑ What is Synchronic Study: within time, how does word mean within a period. It is the study of the linguistic elements and usages of a language of a particular moment. It studies language in a fixed time period without reference to any other time period either past or future.
- ❑ Saussure says that in order to understand the nature of language, we will have to do both Diachronic and Synchronic Study of the language
- ❑ For the Structuralists like Saussure, meaning arises from the functional differences between the elements called 'Signs' which are within the system called 'language'

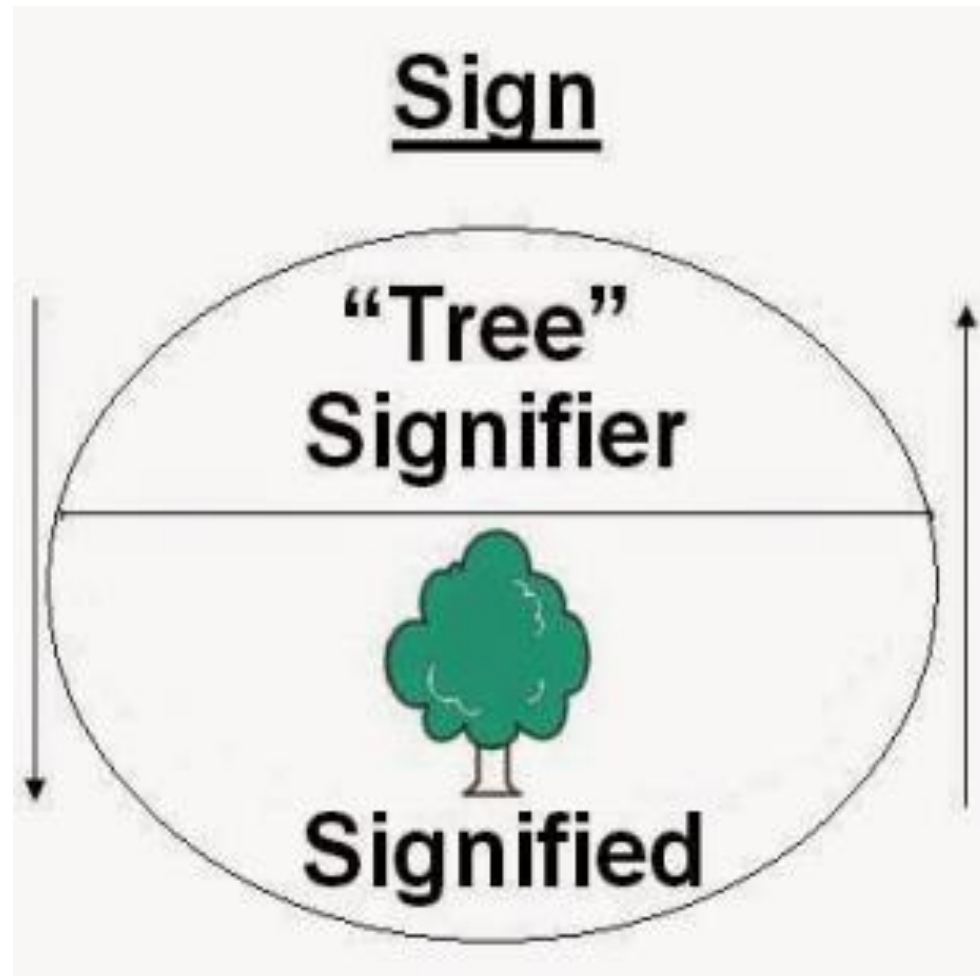
# Structuralism

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- ❑ 'Signs' are the primary concepts in order to study languages better
- ❑ A word gets its meaning only in relation to or in contrast with the other signs remaining in the system of signs
- ❑ Saussure divided the sign into two components: the signifier (or "sound-image") and the signified (or "concept")
- ❑ Today, the signifier is interpreted as the material form (something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelled or tasted) and the signified as the mental concept
- ❑ Just accept it that it is a Traffic. It is a sign, Signifier is the purpose, the purpose of the traffic light and Signified is the concept, whenever the concept is fulfilled.

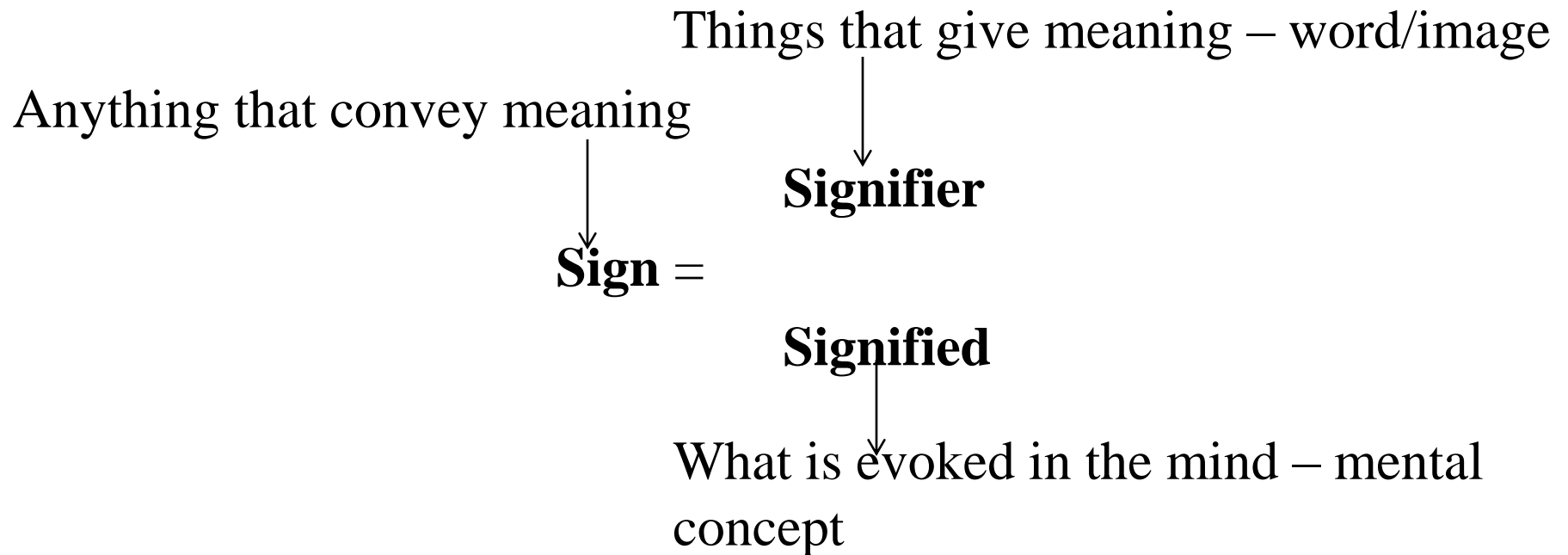
# Sign = Signifier + Signified

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# Sign, Signifier, Signified

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# Sign, Signifier, Signified

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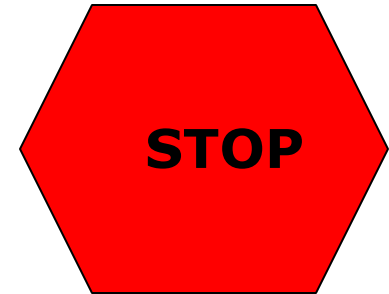
**Sign**

red traffic light

**Signifier**



**Signified**



- Whenever there is red light, we have to stop, whenever there is green light, we have to move. These are the concepts we act according to these signs.
- Traffic light is the sign, its purpose is the signifier and we act according to this, that is the signified, that is the concept of traffic light.

# Sign, Signifier, Signified

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- ❑ Saussure's 'theory of the sign' defined a sign as being made up of the matched pair of signifier and signified.
- ❑ **Signifier**
- ❑ The signifier is the pointing finger, the word, the sound-image.
- ❑ A word is simply a jumble of letters. The pointing finger is not the star. It is in the interpretation of the signifier that meaning is created.
- ❑ **Signified**
- ❑ The signified is the concept, the meaning, the thing indicated by the signifier. It need not be a 'real object' but is some *referent* to which the signifier refers.
- ❑ The thing signified is created in the perceiver and is internal to them. Whilst we share concepts, we do so via signifiers.

# Sign, Signifier, Signified

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- ❑ Whilst the signifier is more stable, the signified varies between people and contexts
- ❑ The signified does stabilize with habit, as the signifier cues thoughts and images
- ❑ According to Saussure, the signifier reflects the signified: the signifier *creates* the signified in terms of the meaning it triggers for us.
- ❑ The meaning of a sign needs both the signifier and the signified as created by an interpreter.
- ❑ A signifier without a signified is *noise*. A signified without a signifier is impossible.
- ❑ The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary (Saussure called this 'unmotivated')



# Sign, Signifier, Signified

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- Saussure talks about the arbitrariness of language. There is no real connection between the word and the meaning or concept it really signifies. Whenever we see the red colour, will we stop there, no. But if we see the red colour in a particular traffic area, we have to stop there because we know that it signifies something and we have to stop there
- Another example, the word C-A-T what it signifies, it signifies a specific creatures which has four legs, two eyes, a tail, etc, it gives a certain image of that creatures. But is there any relation between the word CAT and image of CAT. Answer is No. We just have given the meaning that this is a creature, though the creature looks like this and we call it that this creature is CAT. So we have given meaning to this creature is called CAT. We have given meaning to the word. There is no real connection between word and meaning or concept
- That is the arbitrariness of language according to Saussure

# Deconstruction

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- ❑ In contrast, Poststructuralists view texts as fluid, dynamic entities that are given new life with repeated readings and through interactions with other texts reading, thereby providing an ongoing plurality of meaning
- ❑ Where Structuralists provided a broadly applicable new method of arriving at meaning through an analysis of underlying codes and rules
- ❑ In fact, deconstruction declared meaning to be essentially undecidable
- ❑ What a text means and how it means, they said, cannot be determine
  - Because it is not possible to systemically find the grammar of a text
- ❑ In stead, one can find many meanings in a single text, all of them possible and all of them replaceable by others

# Deconstruction

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- ❑ In stead of looking for structure, then, deconstruction looks for those places where text contradict, and thereby deconstruct, themselves
- ❑ In stead of showing how the conventions of a text work it shows how they falter (loose strength)
- ❑ A literary work can no longer have one unifying meaning that an authority (critic or author) can enunciate
- ❑ In stead, meaning is accepted to be the outgrowth of various signifying systems within the text that may even produce contradictory meanings
- ❑ According to **Post-structuralism**, meaning doesn't exist outside of the text and that meaning is not fixed but rather contingent and unstable
- ❑ This movement evolved alongside Jacques Derrida's theory of 'deconstruction' which emphasized meaning as it functioned in language

# Derrida on Deconstruction

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- ❑ According to Derrida, languages are made up of units that don't contain inherent meaning
- ❑ For him, meaning in 'deconstruction' is therefore constantly deferred, which can never be in place, or in other words, be stable
- ❑ Poststructuralists recognized the lack of fixed or inherent meaning and have also acknowledged the need of language in order to acquire meaning
- ❑ According to Structuralists, everything in the world is structurally formed and meaning does not lie in isolation
  - For example, every signifier has a particular signified
- ❑ But the Post-structuralists deconstruct the idea led by the structuralist and developed their own theory and saying that meaning is nowhere located as every signifier leads to another signifier

# Derrida on Deconstruction

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- ❑ Meaning of a word is not fixed and final; it depends on context
  - One signifier leads to another signifier in order to get the meaning of a signifier
- ❑ Deconstruction is a method of inquiry which asserts that all writings are full of confusion and contradictions and even a writer cannot overcome these contradictions by his deliberate effort to convey meaning
- ❑ So this is something about the very property of language that it precludes the possibility of conveying any meaning with in its absolute form
- ❑ In fact deconstruction is a critique of structuralism, Derrida accepts the Ground of Saussure's linguistics only to dismantle a structure sign

# Derrida on Deconstruction

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- ❑ Derrida questions the fixity of the center and argues for the free play of center or margin
- ❑ Derrida also questions the finality of signified
- ❑ He asserts that in language which we keep moving from one signifier to other and the ultimate meaning or the supposed signified remains elusive
  - For example, we can take the word ‘mean’ if somebody asks what is the meaning of this word, we say that ‘mean’ means ‘meaning’, what is meaning, ‘meaning’ means some significance then ‘what is significance,’ the state of being significant or the state of being important. In this way, we keep moving we see here from one signifier to another signifier without getting to any definite meaning. In this way language constantly in a state of dissemination
- ❑ So, the relation between signifier and signified is broken

# Derrida on Deconstruction

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- ❑ There is nothing called Signified
- ❑ Signified is under *eraser*
- ❑ Everything is called Signifier and signifier does not have definite signified
- ❑ One signifier leads to another signifier
- ❑ Rejected the idea: there is an object which needs to be named
- ❑ Rejected the idea: meaning exists outside and beyond the signifier

## Binary opposition

- ❑ Binary opposition is the structuralist idea that acknowledges the human tendency to think in terms of opposition. Humans always understand thing by comparing it to something that is opposite to it. If you understand the concept of day, we will compare it by night or we will compare it to something that is opposite to it

# Binary opposition

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- ❑ But Deconstructs refuse this idea led by structuralists that we cannot specify things in oppositions.
  - For example, deconstructs say that if we talk about day and night but what about the dawn and dusk and they also said that this way the structuralists had created a hierarchy, they are privileging one thing over another thing. If we talk about the two opposite terms that are rich and poor. We know that these are negative and positive terms. All the positive qualities are attributed to the term rich and all the negative qualities are attributed to the term poor. In this way, good and truth, these are the terms may associated with positive qualities. Evil and bad, these are the terms associated with the negative terms.

## Phonocentrism

- ❑ Deconstructionism said, you cannot privilege one thing over another. You cannot specify things in oppositions



# Phonocentrism

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- ❑ Deconstructionism gives the example of speech and writing. We have attributed to speech all the positive qualities and writings has been given the secondary status
- ❑ Ever since Plato, written words are mere representation of spoken words. So, we are privileging one thing over another
- ❑ This is what deconstructionism said that this is wrong. We shouldn't give privilege one thing over another. And privileging speech over writing is what deconstructionism call it Phonocentrism.
- ❑ Derrida demolishes the long tradition of Logocentrism and Phonocentrism. He maintains that there is God, no centre in the Universe. He proved that writing is not inferior to speech
- ❑ He claims that writing can retain the purity during the ages while speeches are incapable in doing this.

# Phonocentrism

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- ❑ Derrida refers to the long battle which has been existing between Philosophers and writers, in the sense that Philosophers always claim that philosophy is only medium to convey the truth or to reach the truth. Truth can only be achieved through philosophy
- ❑ This tradition started from Plato only till Saussure, philosophers have the same opinion
- ❑ Derrida challenges this view and said that language is everywhere same, be the text of philosophy or be text of literature
- ❑ He demolishes the difference between metaphor and metaphysics.
- ❑ He argues that text of philosophy have metaphorical credentials
- ❑ So, even philosophy cannot lay (set) claim to truth
- ❑ Derrida maintains that there is no truth which plays centre in philosophy

# Logocentrism or metaphysics of presence

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- ❑ Logocentrism is the term Derrida uses to describe the assumptions and the quest for a core, an essence, truth, and centre
- ❑ Derrida says that we as human always quest for core or centre of something
- ❑ the notions of truth are always are dependent upon this idea of a centre (logos), core, and presence of something
- ❑ He said that why we privilege speech over writing because the listener assumes that the speaker embodies the truth
- ❑ Because he is present and writings, on the other hand, are considered as artificial or unreliable source
- ❑ But the speaker embodies the truth because he is the present.
- ❑ Derrida rejects the emphasis on centre and core
- ❑ Basically he deconstructs the hierarchy of presence and absence.

# Logocentrism or metaphysics of presence

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- ❑ He says that the absence contains the same value as of presence
- ❑ Suppose you are giving priority to speech over writings
- ❑ Suppose listener is not there then would your speech contain the same value then if there is no listener
- ❑ Like we are reading Derrida's philosophy and Derrid's theory
- ❑ Is Derrida there in front of us to teach us philosophy. NO, we are considering his philosophy or his writings or theories as original or reliable source

## Differance

- ❑ This term is combination of two terms Differance = Differ + Defer
- ❑ Differ means different or making different, Defer means postponement of something

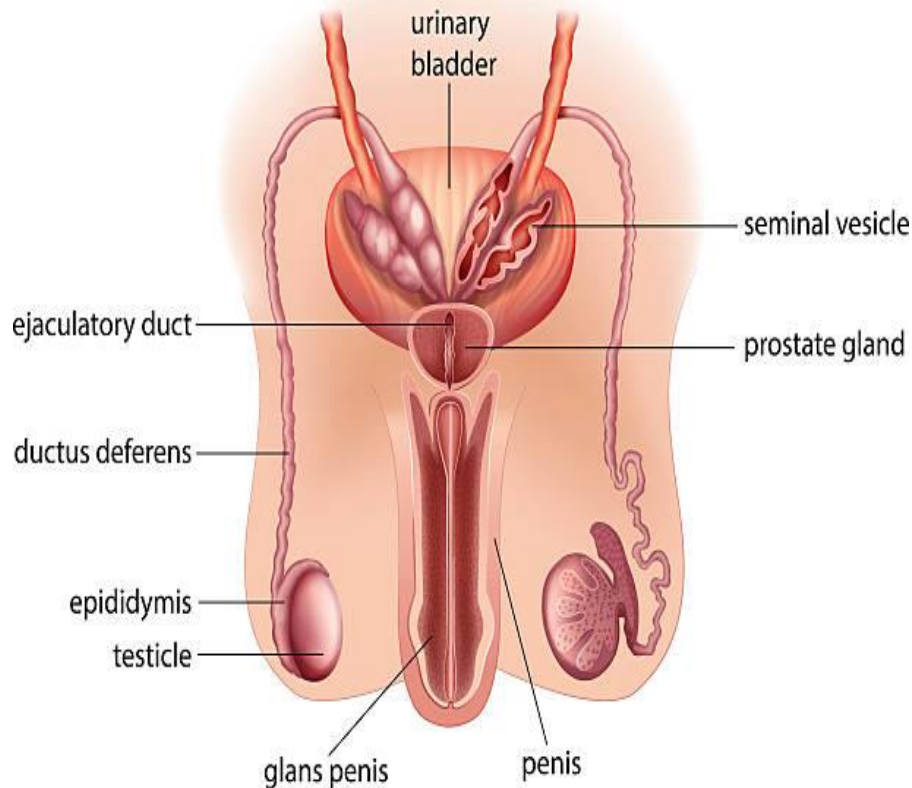
# Differance

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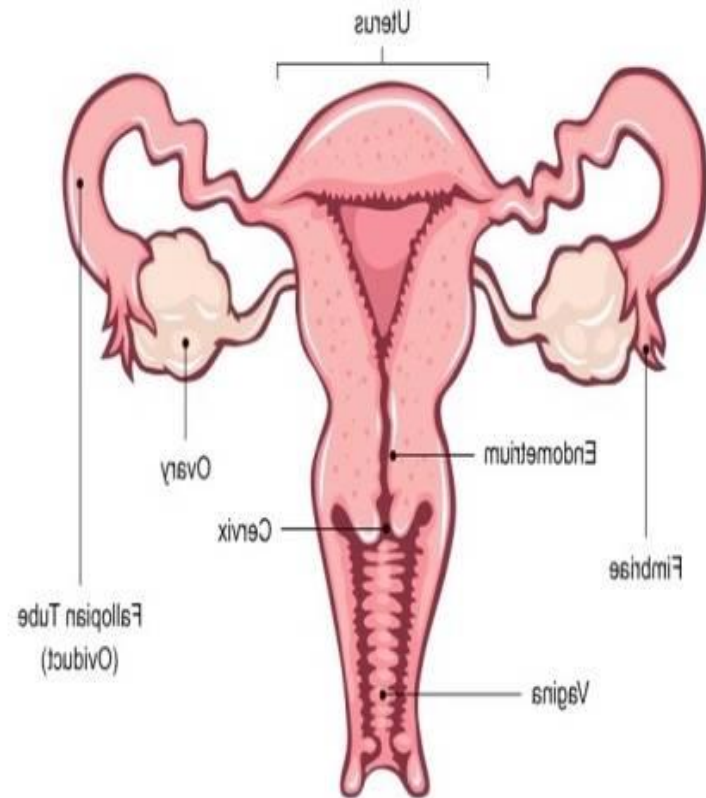
- ❑ Structuralist says that meaning is the result of differance like Saussure.
- ❑ In Saussurian term how we will define 'Men', and 'Women'. This is a reproductive organ of women and this is a reproductive organ of men
- ❑ According to their reproductive organs, they define, this is the man and this is the woman
- ❑ They differentiate the things according to their organs. Another example, for meaning, CAT is cat because cat is different from BAT, HAT AND FAT
- ❑ For Derrida, CAT is cat because there is in absence of BAT, HAT AND FAT. So he gives emphasis on absence over present or he prioritizes absence over present. He basically deconstructs<sup>29</sup> the hierarchy where people used to prioritize presence over absence.

# Human Reproductive System

## Male Reproductive System



## Female Reproductive System



# Differance

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- ❑ One signifier is always different from the other and keeps postponing the other
- ❑ No sign is complete in itself
- ❑ Half of it is something else and that is never there
- ❑ There is always some lack, some incompleteness, so no entity is a unified whole

## Aphoria

- ❑ The “aporia” originally came from Greek word which, in Philosophy, meant a puzzle or state of being in puzzle, and a rhetorically useful expression of doubt. Aporia suggests “an impasse”, a knot or an inherent contradiction found in any text, an insuperable deadlock, or “double bind” of incompatible or contradictory meanings which are “undecidable”

# Aphoria

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- ❑ The word came from Greek which was literally mean puzzle okay. It means whenever we attempt to read a text we always end up at some position where we find difficulty while reading the text.
- ❑ But according to Structuralist, everything is there in structure even if you are reading a text, words are always in a structure, you understand one thing or you can understand one word in relation to another
- ❑ But Deconstructionist says that there are many things that are there in text which are difficult to understand, so there are many contradictions, many hosts may puzzles which are very difficult which you know usually becomes difficult for us to understand



# Aphoria

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- ❑ But according to Derrida or deconstructionist, it is always important that we understand things in isolation as well as, we cannot read or understand everything in relation to another
- ❑ So this is how deconstructionists read their text that you need to understand each and every word whenever you find problem, you cannot just assume that this can mean something because it is in relation with another.
- ❑ It means deadlock of meaning
- ❑ No conclusion
- ❑ Thesis and antithesis remain opposed to each other without any possibility of synthesis

# Conclusion

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- ❑ No text has absolute meaning
- ❑ There is always some possibility of some new interpretation
- ❑ A text is multilayered
- ❑ Language is eternally metaphorical
- ❑ He demolished the distinction between literature and non-literature
- ❑ There are infinite meanings in the text and hence, there is nothing called “the meaning”
- ❑ The necessity of an endless analysis
- ❑ Anti foundationlism
- ❑ There cannot be a center

# Conclusion

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- ❑ Center is always shifting
  - Depends on the reader and the way we read it
- ❑ There is no universal meaning
- ❑ Meaning is forever ‘deferred’ or postponed through an endless chain of signifiers
- ❑ There is nothing outside and beyond the text
- ❑ Every text deconstructs itself
- ❑ There is not one canonical significance to a text; there are several simultaneous layers of meaning
- ❑ The nature of language is such that it cancels meaning