

Lecture One: The 'Linguistic Turn'

Discourse

- “The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the idealism/realism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ or ‘expressions of the wrath of God’, depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence.” (Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*)

Developments in Continental philosophy :

Hermeneutics

- Hermeneutics points to the problems in understanding and grasping meaning (of texts and utterances). This cannot be taken for granted and involves understanding the social and linguistic context in which it was produced. In other words, how do we understand what an author is saying to us in a text or what the author intends? The only way we can do this is by understanding the broader cultural and linguistic context in which he/she was writing.

Developments in Continental philosophy :

Structuralist Linguistics

Focuses on the external structure of language rather than the subject who speaks – the speaking subject is seen as secondary to a linguistic system of signs through which he/she constructs meaning and make sense of the world.

Ferdinand de Saussure: Language is a system of signs (consisting of words and meanings) which exist independently of the speech acts of speaking subjects.

Meaning is determined by language, and does not depend on psychological intention of the speaking subject: *we do not speak language, language speaks us.*

Saussure: Signifier and Signified

Language is a system of signs: each sign consists of a signifier (the word or sign in terms of a particular sound) and the signified (the meaning of concept the signifier represents):

Tree (Signifier)



Signified



Meaning of sign determined by differential relation between signifiers

Signifier → Signifier → Signifier

_____	_____	_____
Signified	Signified	Signified

Marxist base-superstructure model

Superstructure

Level 1) Politico-legal (law and the State)

Level 2) Ideology (different ideologies – religious, political, ethical, legal etc)



Economic Base (Infrastructure)

Means of production (factories, machines etc) +
Relations of production (class divisions, private property, the division of labour)

Althusser's alternative model

Capitalism (means and relations of
production) ↔ The State and ISAs
(Ideological State Apparatuses)