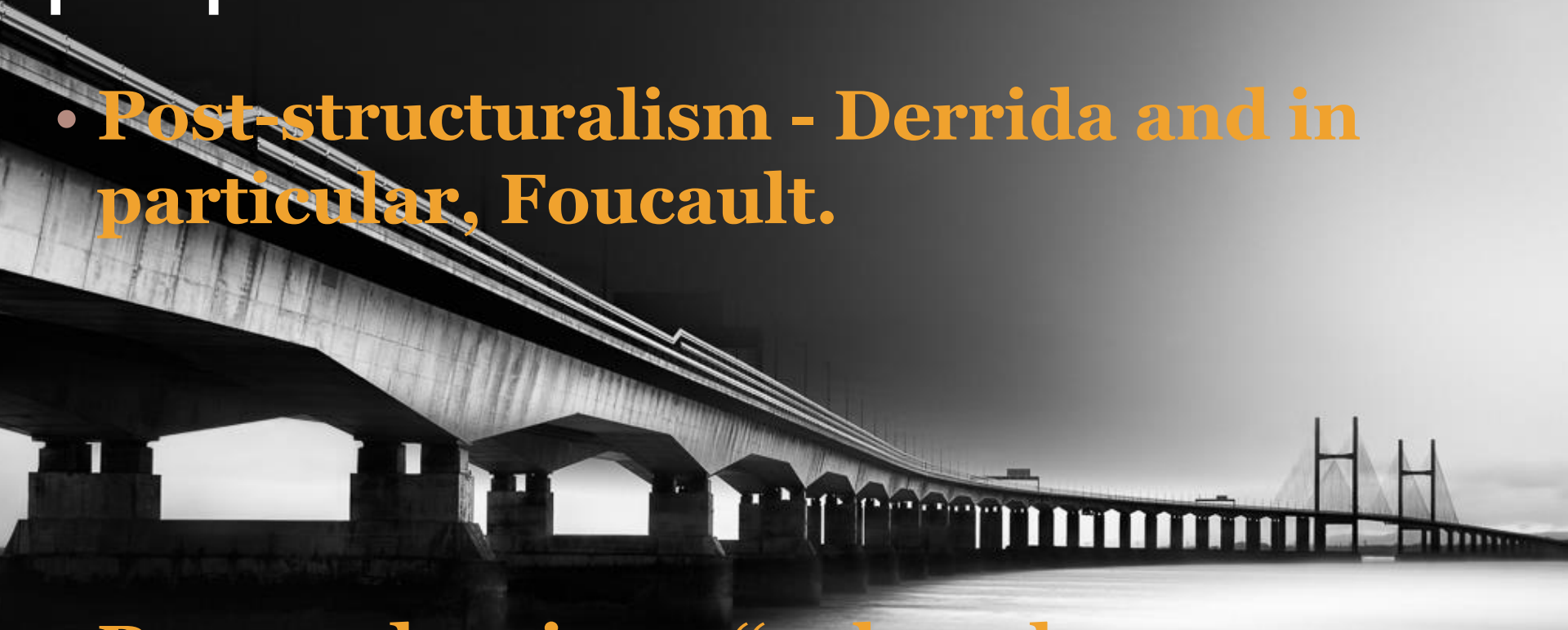# Leaving objectivity and subjectivity behind …

Beyond the objective and the subjective (or experienced)

- Objectivity, Subjectivity, Reflexivity (May 1999)
- The objective world, the experienced world and bridge building (May 2011)

Reflexive and Bridge Building perspectives

- **Post-structuralism - Derrida and in particular, Foucault.**

- **Postmodernism - "cultural movement and/or epistemology" (May 2011, 16). Lyotard and Baudrillard are key authors.**

The remainder of this session is about...

the implications for social science research of the underlying from **underlying structures** and the rejection of the **grand narrative**

Lecture 4 (a)

Post Structuralism

Structuralism/post structualism

- Structuralism seeks the grand structure that organizes all parts of the system, in terms of texts; it seeks to find the "true" meaning.
- Poststructuralism is **beyond structuralism** and focuses on "social discourses" that shape meaning within the reader's mind.
- "Destabilising": the reader replaces the author as the primary subject of inquiry.

What makes us; concepts or the world?

- Signifier: the form, a word, "Justice" for example.
- Signified: the sense made of it; the concept.
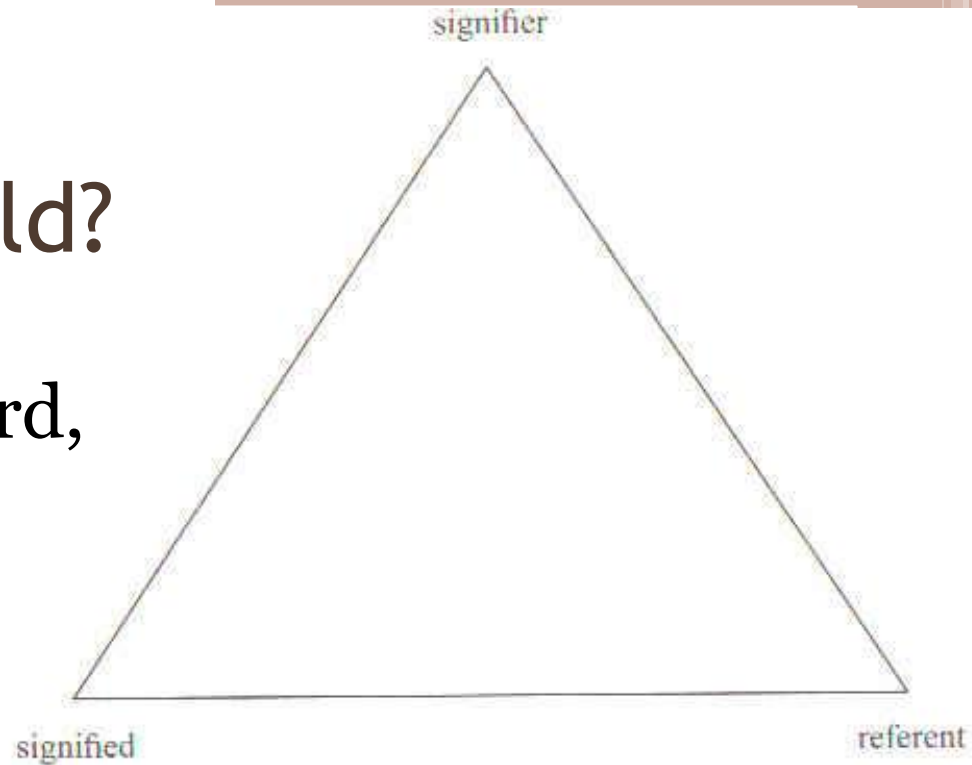- Referent: what the sign 'stands for'; how the reader, not the author understands it.

signifier

signified

referent

Figure 2.1 The signification triangle

Poststructuralism: some definitions

- [It has] "evolved in reaction to both the subjectivism of some social science perspectives and the naïve empiricism imported from the natural sciences" (May 2011, p 15)

- Often very abstract and theoretical but has been used effectively to explain governance and regulation in organisations.

A contested and confusing label

"Poststructuralism is an awkward term and one which continues to generate more confusion, frustration, argument and outright anger than most. One of the main reasons for this is that it is often very unclear quite to whom or to what the term refers ... [T]he figures, works and views gathered under the title poststructuralism are for the most part not self-selecting; they did not and have not signed up to a manifesto and do not share a credo (Harrison 2006, p 122).

Put more simply..

- A more or less loosely grouped collection of texts and philosophers which came to prominence in France during the 1960s.
- Ontological questioning – concern with questions of being.
- Anti – essentialist: meaning and identity are effects NOT causes.
- Ethics: Concern with radical otherness and difference.

Derrida, Foucault & Poststructrualism

- The idea that discourse produces subjects rather than the other way round was taken up by a number of authors (such as Derrida, Foucault).

- Derrida, in particular is critical of binary oppositions of signifier/signified.

signifier

signified   referent

Figure 2.1   The signification triangle

- Discourses are incomplete (or never closed) linguistic systems, which mediate and organize our experience of the world.

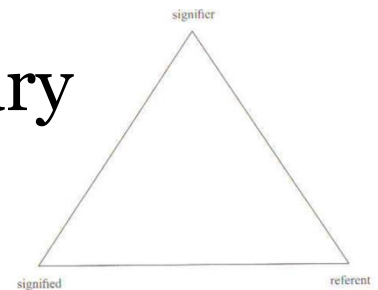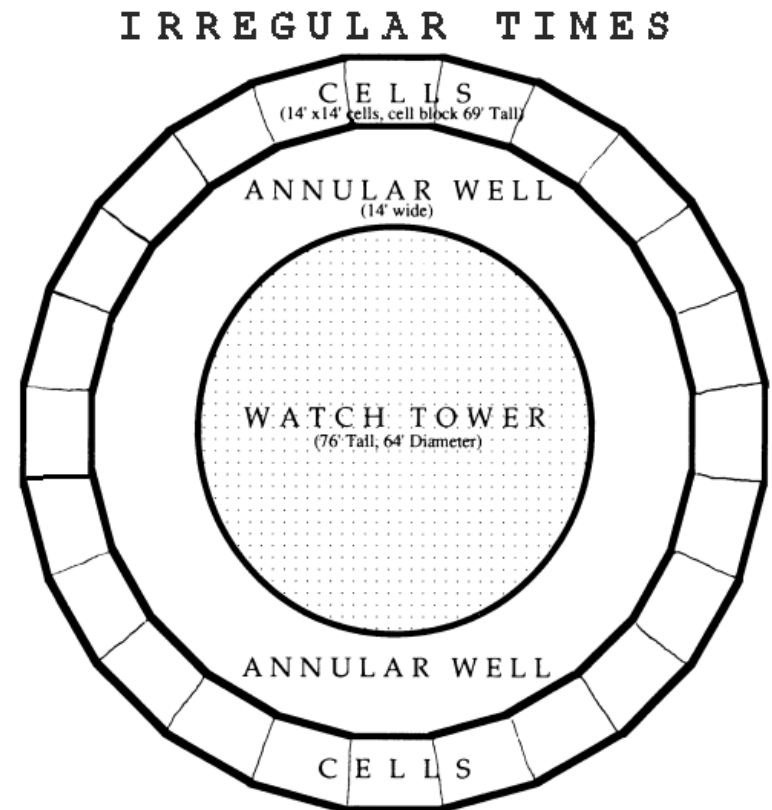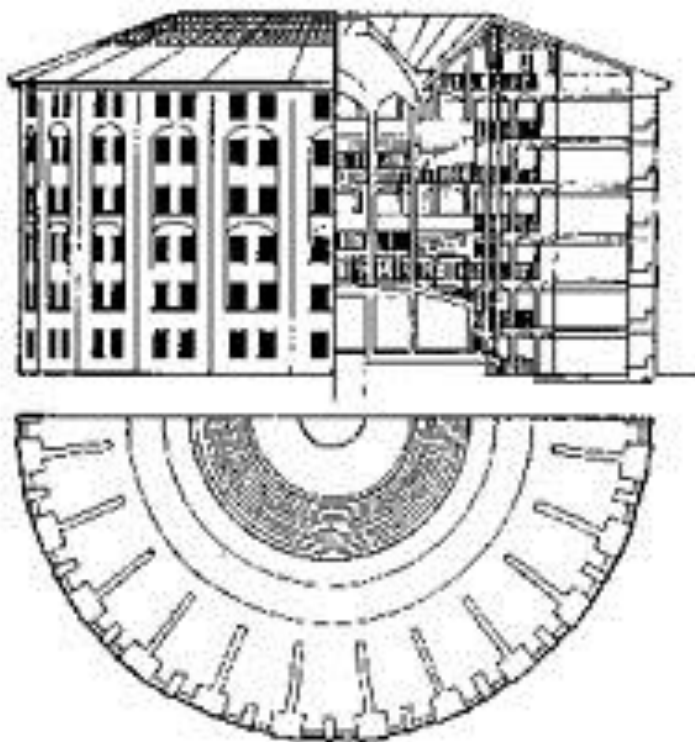- Foucault argued that language can be broken down into particular discourses and it is these particular discourses which define subjectivity.
- Foucault was interested in discourse *formation* and in the exercise of bio power

(Again) put more simply

- Foucault has a concern with (bio) power – for example how are technocratic discourses and practices used to shape, identify, classify, regulate and judge bodies?
- Focus on "docile bodies" needed in capitalism – trained, sorted, classified in schools, workshops, barracks and hospitals and prisons.

An example: Discipline and Punish: Bentham's Panopticon

https://vimeo.com/62555879

IRREGULAR TIMES

CELLS
(14' x14' cells, cell block 69' Tall)

ANNULAR WELL
(14' wide)

WATCH TOWER
(76' Tall, 64' Diameter)

ANNULAR WELL

CELLS

http://irregulartimes.com

How is this perspective used?

- Studies of medical knowledge and the Asylum.
- Studies of the prison.
- Technologies of disciplinary power. CCTV and ID cards for example, monitoring employees.
- Technology + Expert knowledge: some examples.

Post structuralism and Accountancy (Macintosh 2002)

- The reader becomes both a consumer and producer of meaning as they read the financial statements.
- Each reader of the financial statements can infer meaning, in spite of the intention of the accountant who prepared them.
- Conflicts with the (structural) economic-rational approach of accounting representing "facts" and "truth".

Applying Foucault's "docile bodies" to home ownership (Gurney 1999)

- Three disciplinary instruments:
  (i) hierarchical observation, (ii) normalising judgement and (iii) the examination
- The normalising judgement sustains housing tenure prejudice. Discourses of *home*, *being good citizens* and *being natural* demonstrate this.
- Home ownership was constructed socially and culturally as the "normal" form of tenure, connoting respectability, adulthood and success, while renting was characterised as "abnormal". Owners are normal and normalised and live in "homes", renters are neither and live in "houses".

Conclusions and Implications

What can we learn from post-structruralism, studies of discourse and in particular, Foucault?

- Be self consciously archaeological – dig up the past to identify discursive trajectory.
- Be suspicious of social science as yet another discursive formation.
- Don't assume that people all see the same thing or act on it in the same way.
- Be aware of the relationship between power and knowledge.
- Look at intersecting discourses (including your own) - there are many, never one.

Lecture 4 (b)

Postmodernism

Modernism - Postmodernism

- ## *Blade Runner*
  - *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPcZHjKJBnE*
  - *Https://youtu.be/iYhJ7Mf2Oxs*

Why is Bladerunner so post-modern?

- Reality under question
- Residue of Modernity
- Knowledge, not labour and capital
- The consumer society
- Identity

Postmodernism as OBJECT

- Stage of societal development after modernity/modernism
- Shift from standardisation and uniformity to pluralism and diversity
- In architecture – a shift from clean, functional buildings and spaces of post-war period where social engineering could occur to new forms of architecture which reject uniformity and homogeneity instead promoting variety, colour, playfulness and ornamentation. This has impacts upon the organisation and use of urban space.
- Movement away from discrete functionality zoned spaces towards lively, diverse heterogeneous spaces.

"Postmodernism in architecture presents itself as an antagonist, a bandit that breaks all the rules and deliberately calls for anarchy". http://www.widewalls.ch/defining-postmodern-architecture/

Postmodernism as SUBJECT

- A distinct post-modern sensibility as a way of looking at the world and researching it.
- A reaction against the scientific view of knowledge in society
- Critical of social science research which is quasi-scientific
- Society does not have an underlying order which regulates societal outcomes.
- Rejects the distinction (made in lecture 1) between structures/facts/data on one hand and meanings/beliefs/interactions on the other.

…cont

- Social reality can not be studied independently of our theories or methods.
- Meanings are multiple.
- Postmodernism is suspicious of grand narratives.
- The post-modern theorist must opposed to grand narratives is Lyotard.
- Focus instead on local narratives which undercut universalising tendencies.

How to recognise Postmodernist research(ers)

- Reason, science, truth and reality all questioned.

"Reckless, dizzying antics of post modernists seemed to throw reason itself into doubt" (Clarke, 2006, 107)

"I define postmodern as incredulity towards meta narratives" (Lyotard 1984 xxiv) –

- The rejection of overarching perspectives which claim to discover a single truth.

…cont

- Before modernity stories were just myths or fables
- Modernity allowed science to provide evidence of truths and facts –modern medicine cures ills.
- In Postmodernity stories or accounts can no longer be relied upon – reality is called into question

Sceptical and affirmative postmodernisists (Rosenau 1992)

- 'sceptical' postmodernists: the 'impossibility of truth', and the death of the subject in the subject/object distinction
- 'affirmative' postmodernists: Less sceptical about reality. an ontology which is less dogmatic. Their view of the world is very similar to constructionists or interpretivists.

(See also Fielding 1999)

Healthy disregard for labels

- "There is no unified postmodern theory or even a coherent set of positions" (Best and Kellner 1991, p 2)
- "Social constructionism has quite often been associated with postmodernism, and this may be true at a more superficial plane, although their roots and basic tenets are different", (Gergen 2009, p 15)

Case study 1: Tudor 2012

Selling Nostalgia: Mad Men, Postmodernism and Neoliberalism

"a contemporary media product situated in media-derived nostalgia demonstrates how audiences read the past through the postmodern, neoliberal discourse of style" (p 333).

Discursive "reading" of the TV series as text:

- self consciously ironic
- history trivialised
- nostalgia, motherhood, social class, gender and racism

Case Study 2: Roets and Goedgeluck (2007)

Daisies on the road: Tracing the political potential of our postmodernist feminist approach to life story research

- Self advocacy and disability.
- Learning difficulties.
- "Tagging along with each other" as "discovery science".
- Innovative methodologies with multiple authorship of the account.
- Rich qualitative data Life history, ethnography and visual anthropology.

Implications for social science

- Implications for status of social science and social science research: (a) refreshingly honest or (b) undermines scientific status of social science.
- What are the methodological consequences of this?:

Big stories are bad, little stories are good.

Implications for research design

- New objects of analysis. More freedom in selecting what can be studied. Objects previously under-researched can be taken seriously in their own right.
- No specific innovations in methods – a focus on "explanation from within", for example, was established in ethnography and the Chicago school of Sociology in the early 20th Century.

..cont

- Questioned the authenticity of methods by the insistence that objects of analysis are constituted within the discourses of the observer. Research is always a partial view of reality.
- There can never be a final, once and for all authoritative account of your research – a different researcher examining the same object from another standpoint can give an equally valid or valuable account.

Implications for writing up your research

- Important to remember the extent to which research objects are constituent upon the researcher themselves and the discourse theory and methods which they use.
- Be aware of imposing your view upon the research subject.
- Reflexive researcher: be aware that you, as a researcher, are actively constituting the research – you can NEVER be an objective observer.

How can this be resolved?

Two extremes:

(a) ignore it

or

(b) write yourself in as a central character in the research process