Structuralism
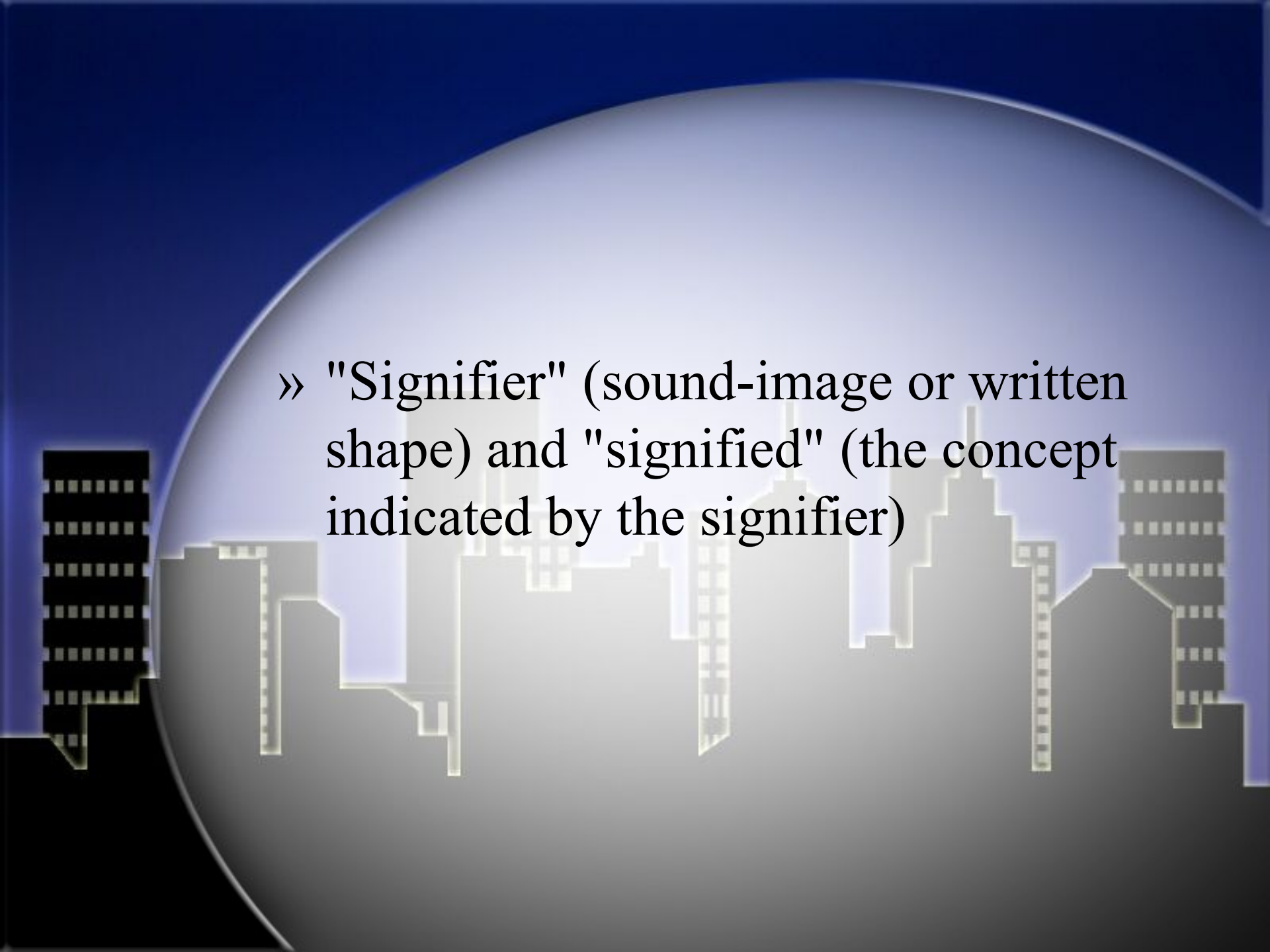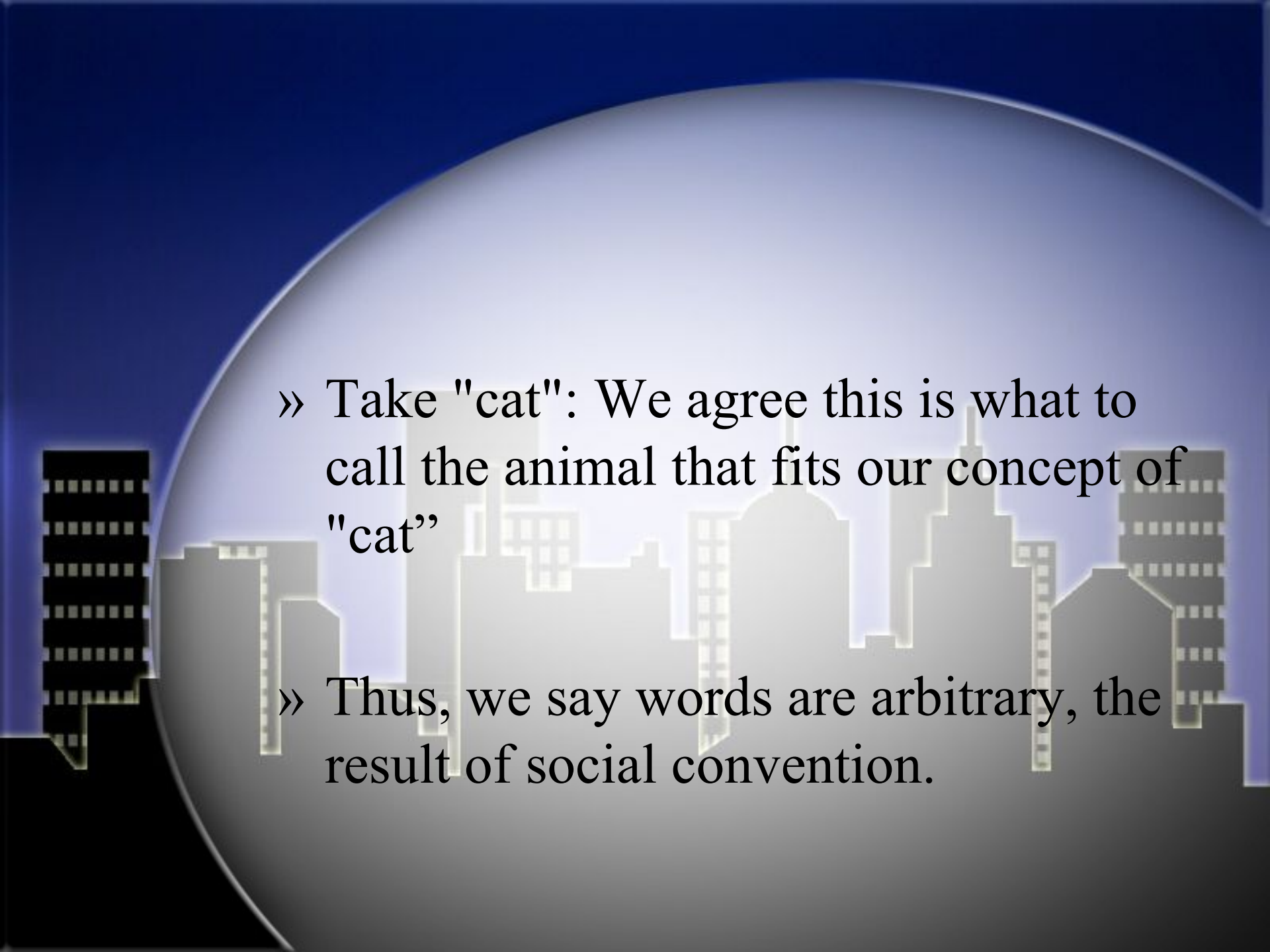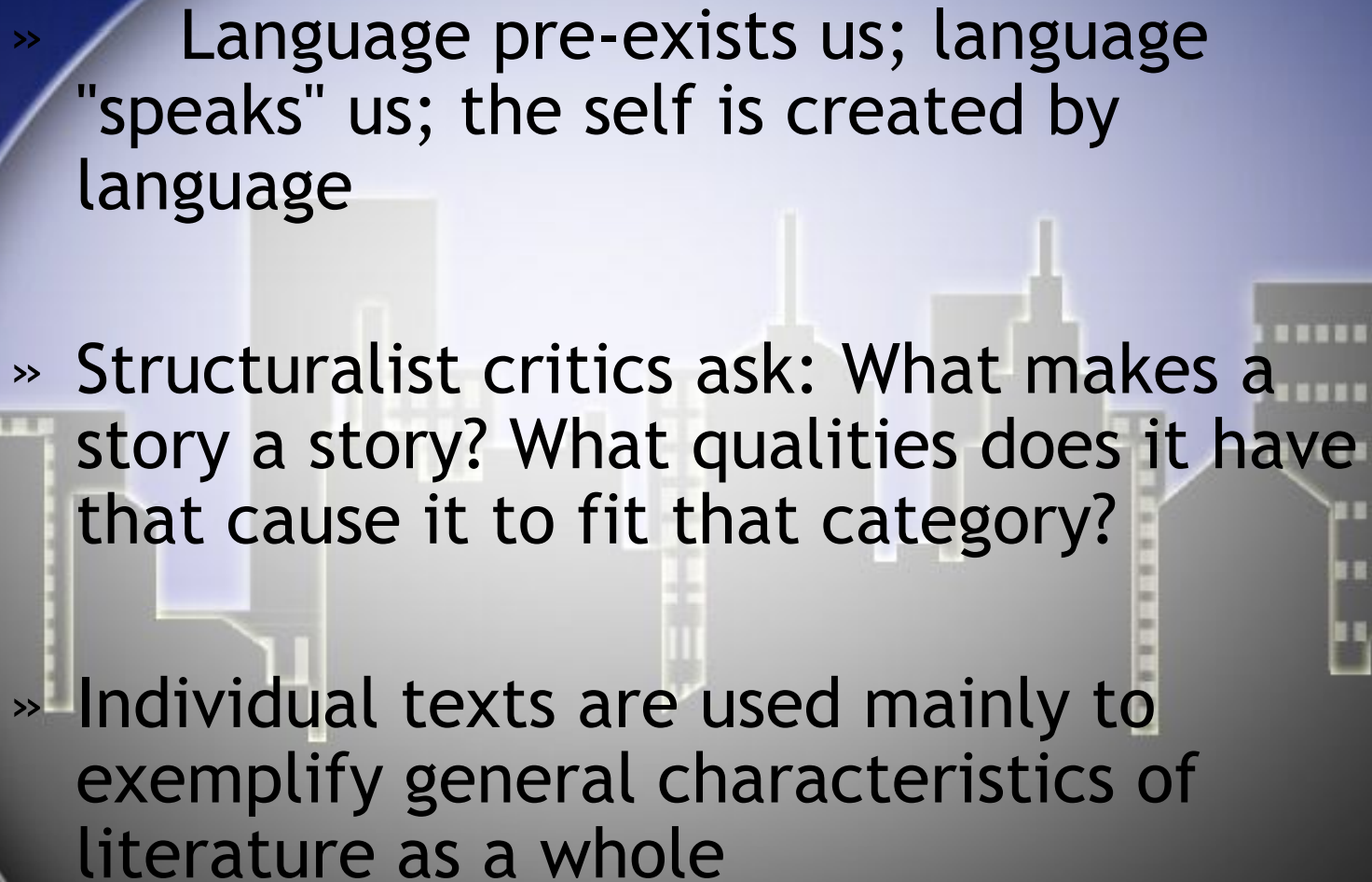
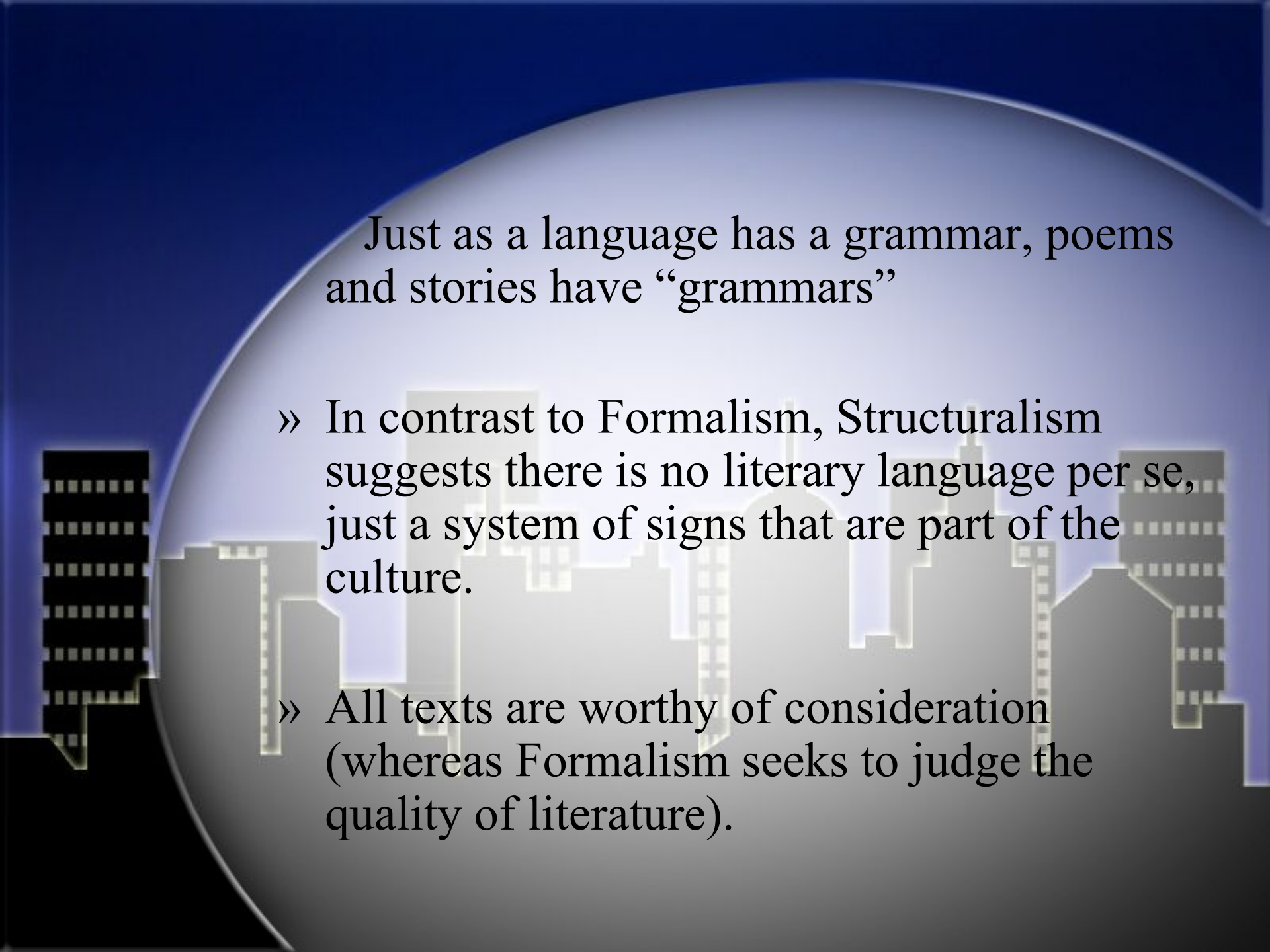»   Ferdinand de Saussure, linguist, d. 1913 (work translated, popular in the 1950s): Language is a system of signs (arbitrary). Each sign in the system has meaning only by virtue of its difference from others.

» Each part is significant only as it relates to others in the total structure w/nothing meaningful by itself

    » binary oppositions are quickest way to see this: "up"/"down"; "good"/"evil"

» "Signifier" (sound-image or written shape) and "signified" (the concept indicated by the signifier)
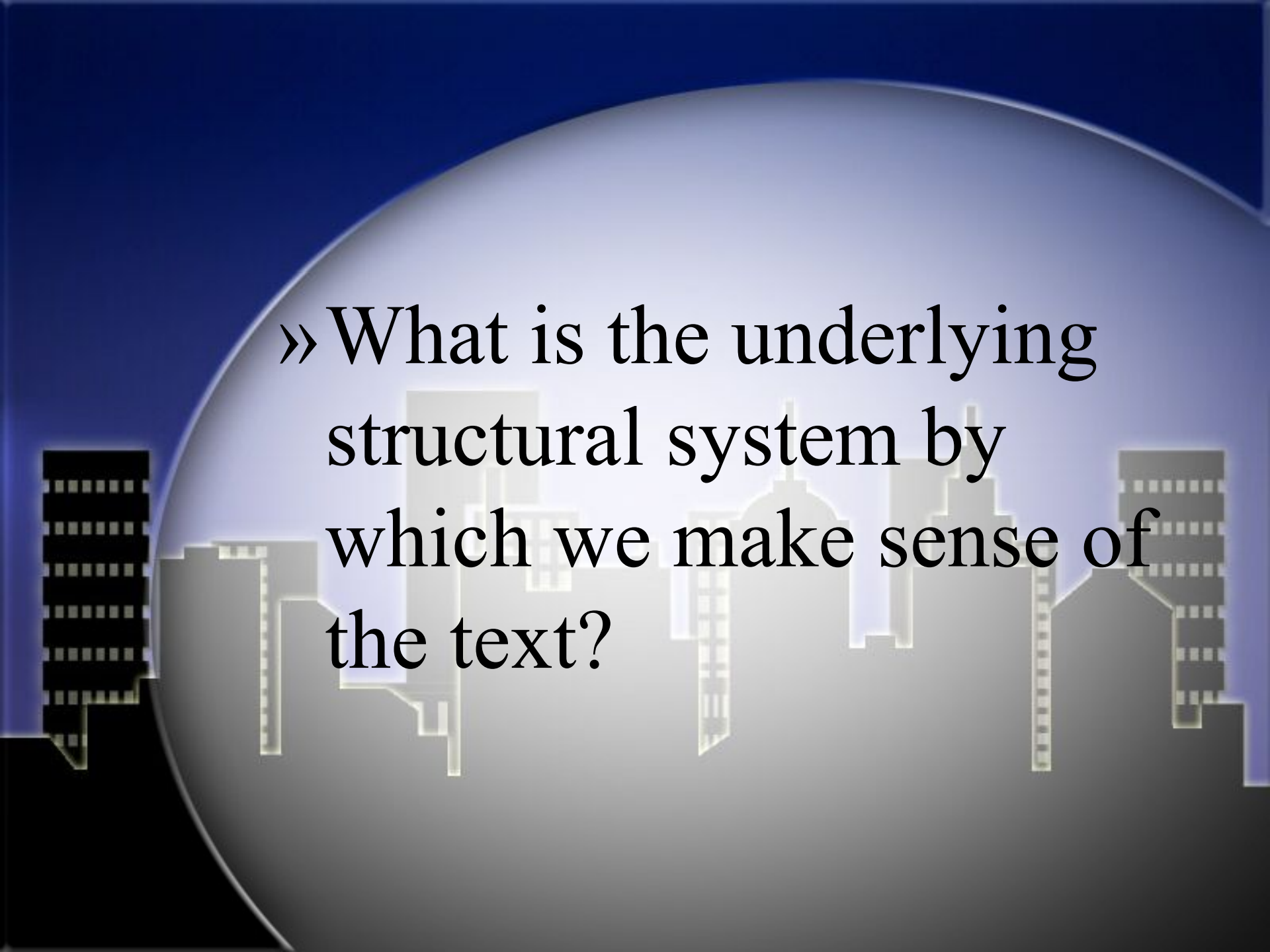
» Take "cat": We agree this is what to call the animal that fits our concept of "cat"

» Thus, we say words are arbitrary, the result of social convention.

»   Language pre-exists us; language "speaks" us; the self is created by language

» Structuralist critics ask: What makes a story a story? What qualities does it have that cause it to fit that category?

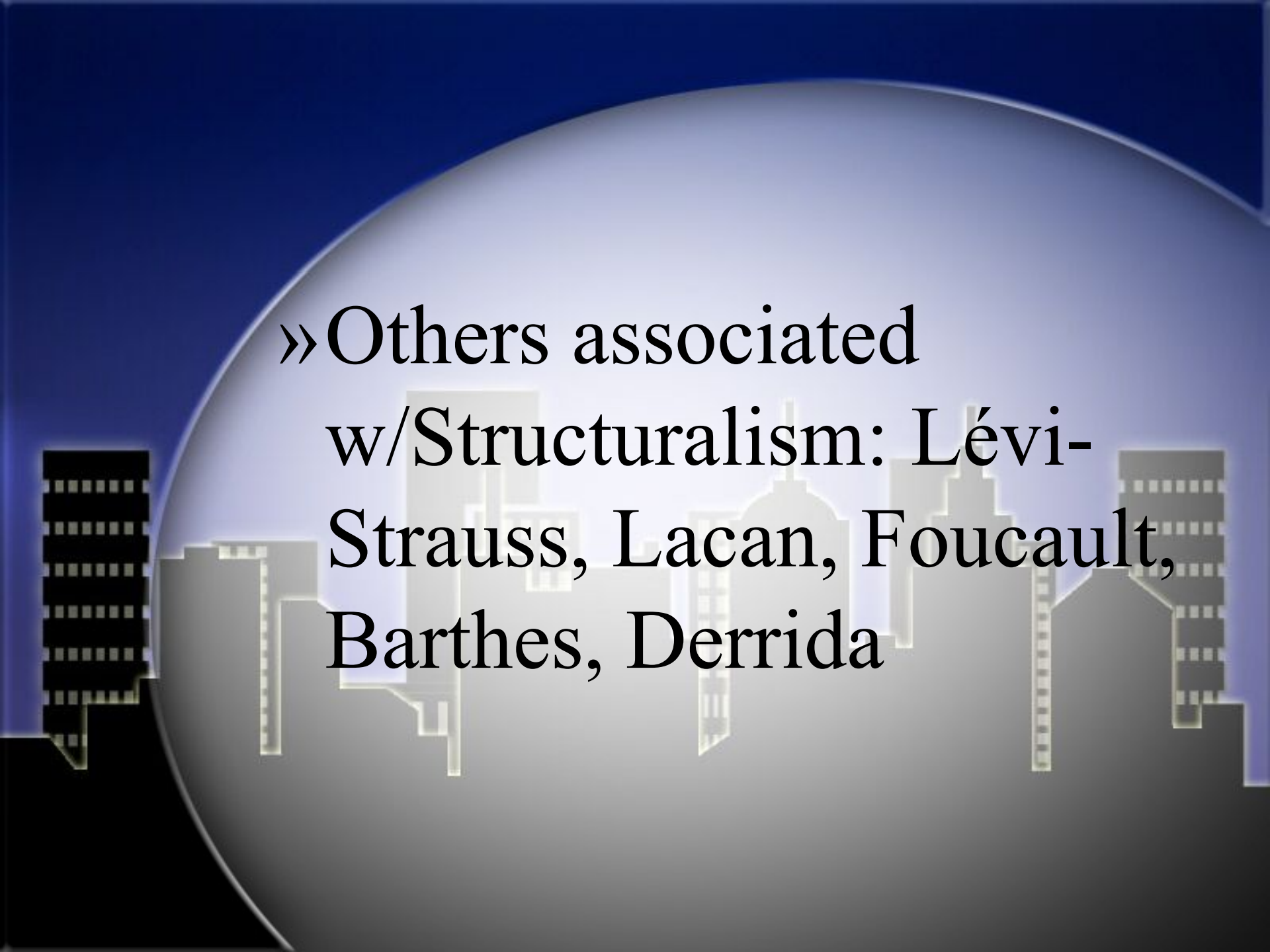» Individual texts are used mainly to exemplify general characteristics of literature as a whole

Just as a language has a grammar, poems and stories have "grammars"

» In contrast to Formalism, Structuralism suggests there is no literary language per se, just a system of signs that are part of the culture.

» All texts are worthy of consideration (whereas Formalism seeks to judge the quality of literature).

»What is the underlying structural system by which we make sense of the text?

»Others associated w/Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Foucault, Barthes, Derrida

»

» Roland Barthes: the "death of the author"; author is merely channel through which language, with its deep structure, speaks

» Northrup Frye: Literature works by a system of objective laws; criticism can formulate, implement those laws. Frye saw four narrative categories providing structure for all literature: comic, romantic, tragic, and ironic

"Jabberwocky"

» 1. What makes this a poem?

» 2. How is each part significant in relation to other parts?

» 3. How do we make sense of this text, even with the coined words?

» 4. What does this myth reveal about human consciousness?

INVISIBLE MAN

» Milestone: through ch. 10
  » "Incidents/Settings": through #5
  » "Symbols": through #7

» The HEROIC CYCLE: a Structuralist means of approaching the novel