The Structuralist Controversy

The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man

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The Space Between—1971

Le présent est un coup de dès.—Michel Foucault

The republication of a symposium connected with structuralism perhaps deserves a word of explanation. Today we may question the very existence of structuralism as a meaningful concept, for not the least of the paradoxes generated by what has come to be known as the structuralist controversy is the fact that as an operative concept it is more evident in the language of its detractors and popularizers than in the express statements of those who are supposed to be its main proponents. With the exception of Lévi-Strauss, all those whose names have come to be associated with structural theory—Foucault, Lacan, Derrida—have felt obliged programmatically to take their distance with relation to the term. Indeed, Roland Barthes, one of the earliest thinkers whose name was linked to the concept, has left little doubt in his recent works that the avowed scientific end which Parisian structuralism had assigned itself constitutes more a strategic moment in an open-ended process than an attainable goal. Although the intellectual inheritance was clear, with its preoccupation with articulated sign-systems and the repudiation of the hermeneutic enterprises of the last century, evidence was already available in the Johns Hopkins symposium of the ensuing moment of theoretical deconstruction. The spaces had begun to open, not only between neighboring camps but in the conceptual matrix of "structures" itself.

This emergent impossibility of marshalling under a single flag what has become the total spectrum of contemporary French thought is reflected in the attempts that have been made on both sides of the Atlantic to account for its putative practitioners in a unified fashion. The collective volume

Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?[1] passes in review some of the dominant preoccupations manifest in French anthropology, psychoanalysis, literary criticism, and philosophy, but it does not even attempt to offer a synthetic view. To take an example closer to home, Edward W. Said's excellent article entitled "*Abecedarium culturae*: structuralism, absence, writing"[2] again provides a valuable panorama while noting the inherent diversity within the subject matter and the terrible paradoxes unleashed by the various rules which attempt to contain "linguicity."

These negative observations do not mean that it would be impossible to find a certain number of elements common to thinkers as different as, say, Lévi-Strauss and Derrida. Some of the papers in this symposium bear witness to the fact that a few years ago, briefly, there existed the necessity of referring the various lines of thought which dominate the current French intellectual scene to a unified core, or perhaps better to a pre-text concerning the status of the subject in diverse modes of signification. To suggest what might constitute such a common denominator today there is perhaps no better formula than that of Gilles Deleuze describing what Foucault has in common with some other contemporary thinkers: "A cold and concerted destruction of the subject, a lively distaste for notions of origin, of lost origin, of recovered origin, a dismantling of unifying pseudo-syntheses of consciousness, a denunciation of all the mystifications of history performed in the name of progress, of consciousness, and of the future of reason. . . ."[3] If such a negative perspective is not adequate to explain the diverse working concepts of, say, Foucault's intellectual "archaeology" or of Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, it at least provides a spectral screen against which the latter may emerge.

The easiest way to measure the distance travelled in the last few years would be to take note, on the one hand, of the declining methodological importance of linguistics and, on the other, of the paradoxical displacement of the rôle which Hegel had previously oc-

[1] *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* (Paris, 1968), containing essays by Oswald Ducrot, Moustafa Safouan, Dan Sperber, Tzvetan Todorov, and François Wahl.

[2] Edward W. Said, "*Abecedarium culturae*: structuralism, absence, writing," *TriQuarterly*, 20 (Winter 1971), pp. 33–71.

[3] Gilles Deleuze, "Un nouvel archiviste," *Critique*, No. 274 (1970), p. 195. ["Une destruction froide et concertée du sujet, un vif dégoût pour les idées d'origine, d'origine perdue, d'origine retrouvée, un démantèlement des pseudo-synthèses unifiantes de la conscience, une dénonciation de toutes les mystifications de l'histoire opérées au nom du progrès de la conscience et du devenir de la raison . . ."]

cupied within French thought. The traces of both phenomena can already be discerned within the final pages of these proceedings.

Linguistics had for some time provided a leitmotif orchestrated in the works and vocabularies of Barthes, Lacan, and Lévi-Strauss. It was said of linguistics that it should have provided a theoretical methodological model and a universal matrix for understanding all human phenomena (at least at the inter-personal level), linguistics had already reached an advanced state of formalization and since the reality of all human phenomena was, in fact, primarily linguistic. The ancestral priority of Saussure's diacritical example and the insistent logocentricity of the initial structuralist enterprises hardly require comment. Yet it has since become apparent that, for example, Lévi-Strauss's deference to linguistics was unnecessary. Mathematics has provided a more powerful formulation of his studies of kinship than was ever promised by the use of linguistic models.[4] Further, his study of systems of classifications has entered the field of social anthropology unencumbered and on its own merits. As for his monumental *Mythologiques*, the last volume of which has recently appeared, its far-reaching implications have yet to be drawn, but it is already evident that such a work has embedded within itself its own methodological and ideological consequences whose decipherment will not require any reference to the chartered concepts of structural linguistics.

The possibility of using structural linguistics as a privileged model depended upon the distinctness of the various hierarchical levels that it ordered and brought into play. Most external references to structural linguistics were based upon Jakobson's phonetic models and his complementary notions of metaphor and metonymy. This relative independence of a phonetic level and the implicit subordination in the *découpage* of semantics to it has recently come to be questioned in, for example, the work of Thom.[5] And, as Ruwet observes in his symposium paper, the linguists had failed to provide the literary critics and others with any general theory of context. Derrida's reading of Saussure in *De la Grammatologie* has, however, been an even more important element in the decline in the importance of the linguistics than the more technical questioning of the models implied by recent modes of analysis. Derrida's underscoring of the logocentric metaphysical presuppositions

[4] See, for example, P. Courrège, "Un Modèle mathématique des structures élémentaires de parenté," *L'Homme*, V, 3–4 (1965).

[5] See R. Thom, "Topologie et signification," in *L'Age de la science* (Paris, 1969) and "Linguistique et topologie," in *De Rhum Commemorative Volume* (Berne, 1970).

implicit in a great deal of linguistic thinking has made the generalizing power of the latter strategically inoperative, at least for any attempt at analysis which would claim to be independent of the notion of subject-centered (or of subject-consciousness-centered) concepts of presence and identity. In other words, structural linguistics itself unknowingly perpetuated the Hegelian inheritance.

Jean Hyppolite's paper in this volume, the last before his untimely death, was a brilliant illustration of the infinite capacity that the Hegelian system has of absorbing all sorts of systems that too hastily assert their independence from it. Foucault's apocalyptic announcement in *Les Mots et les choses* of the imminent disappearance of *Man* restated the necessity of renouncing the burden of our Hegelian metaphysical heritage while still situating us this side of its crepuscular horizon. And his proclamation that the last man is both younger and older than the death of God states succinctly the inevitable relationship that such an enterprise has to Nietzsche's.

Nietzsche has now come to occupy the central position that, since the thirties when Koyré and Kojève started teaching at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, was held by the Gallic Hegel. Such displacements are never simple (or nonviolent) operations, and the growing importance of Nietzsche to the development of the thought of Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze must not be taken merely as a fashionable substitution in the sociology of knowledge. Hegel still haunts us, but whereas before he afforded a concretely systematic reference point from which one could weave successive conceptual webs, he has lately come to be an "Otherness" which delineates the horizon of a conceptual system which aspires to be without center, without origin, or without end. As a consequence, we have witnessed the surfacing of what for lack of a better denomination we might call philosophical metaphors of defeat—"supplement," "trace," "simulacrum," "series," "archive," "errancy," and the like. The most conspicuous of these privileged terms has been that of *Difference* —witness Derrida's *La Différance* and Deleuze's *Différence et Répétition.* And all these terms have as an avowed characteristic the impossibility of sustaining the temporal and spatial marks common to traditional philosophic concepts. Today's task for thinkers within this climate thus seems to reside in the possibility of developing a critical discourse without identities to sustain concepts, without privileged origins, or without an ordered temporality to guarantee the mimetic possibilities of representation. The fundamental entities of such systems, adrift in radical discontinuity, are *Events* which cannot be accounted for by transcendental idealities. For the interpreters of texts or codes,

as a surrogate for the lost presence of a center the reader is forced (or freed) to interrogate the systematic absence of allegory or the distorting mirrors of parody. We are left with the necessity of articulating what Said has called "the vacant spaces between things, words, ideas."[6] We are left with the task of developing what Foucault has called "une métaphysique où il n'est plus question de l'Un-Bon, mais de l'absence de Dieu, et des jeux épidémiques de la perversité."[7] The different strategies imposed by such apocalyptic "games" determine today the different paths outlined by the recent works of Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze; the shadow, the "genealogy," and the empty spaces are Nietzsche's.

Given that the times are not propitious to another symposium which would attempt to circumscribe (nostalgic image!) this new topology, the editors of this symposium have accepted its republication in the hope that its readers may come to see the papers and discussions as a point of departure whence to re-enact for themselves on an imaginary stage the necessary confrontation of old sureties demanded by the exigencies of our present intellectual conjuncture.

Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato
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Editorial Note: The three French texts which appeared as appendices to the original edition have been omitted here. They were supporting essays to the papers of MM Goldmann, Hyppolite, and Vernant; they appeared as a matter of record, although most of the argument was embodied in the composite text of the translations.

A brief bibliographic note on relevant publications since the appearance of the original edition has been added to this volume.

[6] Said, "*Abecedarium culturae,*" p. 38.
[7] Michel Foucault, "*Theatrum philosophicum,*" *Critique*, No. 282 (1970), p. 885.

Preface

Les théories et les écoles, comme les microbes et les globules, s'entre-dévorent et assurent par leur lutte la continuité de la vie.
—Marcel Proust

The papers and discussions collected in this volume constitute the proceedings of the international symposium entitled "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," ["Les Langages Critiques et les Sciences de l'Homme"] enabled by a grant from the Ford Foundation. The sessions were convened under the auspices of the Johns Hopkins Humanities Center, during the week of October 18–21, 1966, when over one hundred humanists and social scientists from the United States and eight other countries gathered in Baltimore. The symposium inaugurated a two-year program of seminars and colloquia which sought to explore the impact of contemporary "structuralist" thought on critical methods in humanistic and social studies. The general title emphasized both the pluralism of the existing modes of discourse and the interaction of disciplines not entirely limited to the conventional rubric of the "humanities."

2 By focusing the discussions on the structuralist phenomenon, the organizers were not seeking to promote a manifesto nor even to arrive at a fixed and unambiguous definition of structuralism itself. To many observers there seemed already to be too many manifestos, while satisfactory definitions of such polymorphic activities, or cultural events, are generally only achieved after the principals are safely dead. The danger was clearly that of deforming a method or a "family of methods" into a doctrine. The purpose of the meetings, rather, was to bring into an active and not uncritical contact leading European proponents of structural studies in a variety of disciplines with a wide spectrum of American scholars. It was hoped that this contact could, in turn,

stimulate innovations both in the received scholarship and in the training of scholars.

3 As this was the first time in the United States that structuralist thought had been considered as a cross-disciplinary phenomenon, the organizers of the program sought to identify certain basic problems and concerns common to every field of study: the status of the subject, the general theory of signs and language systems, the use and abuse of models, homologies and transformations as analytic techniques, synchronic (vs.) diachronic descriptions, the question of "mediations" between objective and subjective judgments, and the possible relationship between microcosmic and macrocosmic social or symbolic dimensions. In addition to affording a common ground for the discussions, the same questions seemed to be paradigmatic to any critical analysis of the prospects for interdisciplinary co-operation.

4 With these aims and questions in view, the organizers felt that it was important to guarantee that both the symposium and the program of continuing seminars which it generated would include representatives of alien, if not hostile, viewpoints. Certain of the European visitors were more closely identified with "thematic" approaches or with traditional phenomenology, while many of the American delegates to the symposium and participants in the seminars were representatives of archetypal, Gestaltist, contextualist, communication-theory, or transformationalist persuasions. Further, to introduce many of the latter to the European context of structuralist debate, it was decided to try to maintain a balance between more or less theoretical papers and a number of historical or applied topics. In addition, the continuing seminars attempted to explore a number of inter-relationships and complementarities between specifically American and European problems and methods in the sciences of man. Finally, another sort of balance was sought between representation of senior men in the field and a number of younger scholars who had not yet achieved an international reputation. Thus, at the symposium the youngest active participant was under the fateful age of thirty, while the eldest was over eighty. The presence of such younger scholars was a local stimulation to those Hopkins students who worked closely with the visitors on the details of the program and who were able to renew these contacts during study abroad under a program which was initiated at the same time.

5 The composition of the symposium program, which presented fifteen communications and eleven discussions, included representatives from the following disciplines: anthropology, classical studies, comparative literature, linguistics, literary criticism, history, philosophy, psychoanalysis, semiology, and sociology. It also reflected the active participation at all stages in the planning of colleagues from the Sixième Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études. In addition to those colleagues present at the sessions, the organizers also owe a debt of gratitude to MM Fernand Braudel and Claude Lévi-Strauss for counsel and encouragement. The American colloquists, who were charged with initiating the discussions, were drawn from disciplines complementary to those of the European visitors. In all, there were fifteen colloquists. Although two of the original panel, Professors David Schneider and Roman Jakobson, were prevented (in the first instance by illness, in the latter by obligations in Europe) from participating in the debates, their advice was appreciated even as their presence was missed.

The balance in both the communications and the discussions gave the sessions a distinctly Gallic flavor. (One journalist described the symposium as "a ninety-six-gun French dispute.") The dominance of French as the natural language of the meetings was not unexpected, given the differing life-styles of American and European scholars, but it placed a considerable burden on those who generously supplied consecutive summary translations of the interventions, Bernard Vannier of Hopkins and Gerald Kamber of Bowdoin. Any review of the transcriptions reminds one of the wit and economy with which they courageously negotiated the bridge between the two languages.

The present volume represents an edited version of some thirty hours of tapes. Inevitably, some comments have been omitted or severely edited; others perhaps less germane have been included in the interests of suggesting important transitions in the discussions. The discussions in some cases escaped the transcription entirely, continuing informally at the luncheons and dinners which were served on the Homewood campus or spilling over into the corridors of the hotel where most of the guests were lodged. Further, most of the communications were intended for oral presentation, but were supported by papers distributed to the delegates in advance of the sessions. In a number of cases, as indicated in the notes, an attempt has been made in this volume to conflate the two texts, or alternately to publish the "position paper" as an appendix.

The symposium was followed by a series of continuing seminars conceived as a means of exploring in greater depth over a two-year period certain topics raised initially at the symposium. Twenty-six scholars visited Hopkins to conduct the forty seminars in series and were joined by other visitors who participated in the discussions. A number of the original participants in the symposium also offered seminars, but the program also afforded an opportunity for visits by scholars who were unable to attend the opening sessions. The series was concluded by

Hans-Georg Gadamer and Gérard Genette speaking from European corners and Northrop Frye as a representative of North American criticism.

The continuing seminars also sponsored a series of four small colloquia on contemporary problems of structural analysis in the arts, concentrating in turn on the drama, the novel, the film, and some aspects of contemporary music. In addition, there were a number of related events: a group of undergraduate students, who had been following the colloquia and the questions of interpretation through performance, secured funds and conducted their own seminars under the general title "The Person of the Maker"; another group was organized as an informal arena in which to discuss topics raised by the symposium and seminars and as a forum for work-in-progress by the post-doctoral fellows and faculty; this latter, The First Draft Club, was modeled on the interdisciplinary *Kneipe* convened in the first years of the University by Peirce and Royce and met informally in a faculty home. Finally, the range and resources of the continuing seminars were enhanced by other activities of the Humanities Center, notably the series of seminars on hermeneutical problems offered during 1967–68 and subsequently published by The Johns Hopkins Press as *Interpretation: Theory and Practice* and a colloquium in Zürich devoted to congruent problems of literary interpretation. (The papers of the Swiss colloquium are eventually scheduled for joint publication by The Johns Hopkins Press and Franke Verlag.) The symposium and seminars also initiated a series of student and faculty exchange programs, a series of interdisciplinary courses, and the publication of a number of other texts which have all had their effect on the local intellectual climate.

As in any venture so programmatically international and interdisciplinary, the success of "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" depended vitally on the co-operation of many scholars, both on the Hopkins campus and in the larger community to which the meetings were addressed. In addition, a group of students performed many crucial roles during the symposium and the seminars which followed, helping with problems of logistics, translation, and distribution of texts. In the same sense, the present volume has incurred for its editors debts well beyond those which can be recorded here. Some mention, however, should be made of Tom Bray and the students who assisted him with the original transcription; of John Blegen, who worked closely with M. Ruwet on the revision of his paper for publication and whose version of the text, with only minor revisions, appears here; of Anthony Wilden, who worked with Dr. Lacan as well

as on two drafts of symposium papers; and of Mme Janine Sommer, who brought a native ear to some of the more obscure Gallic noises on the tapes. During a six-week period in 1968 Gracia Holt gave a witty and intelligent impulse to the problems of transcribing the tapes without which the present text would never have been completed. George Boas generously agreed to review the final draft of Jean Hyppolite's lecture after the latter's untimely death. Sally Donato and Catherine Macksey have perhaps the most invested in this volume, including a leaven of skepticism and impatience. Finally, Nancy Gallienne of The Johns Hopkins Press succeeded, after many delays and indirections on the part of the editors, in submitting the manuscript to the rites of passage with a steady interest and untarnished good humor which should be the model for all critics.

For the infelicities or the inaccuracies of the translations, which account for about eighty per cent of the text, the editors must take full responsibility, though they received help from many quarters in trying to make out passages in the transcription or in trying to carry over the sense of an argument. Except where indicated, the apparatus has been supplied by the editors. It was judged that the proceedings could most fully realize the original aims of the symposium if the volume were published entirely in English, however ungracefully this ideal may have been realized. Consequently, some of the participants in the discussions may have difficulty in recognizing themselves in another language. Unfortunately, the written text is also an inadequate gauge of the liveliness of that community of discussion into which the contributors willingly entered and to which they gave the weight of their critical experience.

Finally, the organizers of the program are grateful to the Ford Foundation for the freedom in which the symposium and seminars were allowed to develop; for the intelligently critical interest which was evidenced by the active presence of a Ford representative, Dr. Sigmund Koch, at the symposium; and for the timely opportunity to bring together under this aegis a range of scholars and critical perspectives which would have been impossible within a conventional institutional or disciplinary frame. Many scholars, students, and citizens contributed to whatever success the entire program may have achieved, but, in hopes that this volume is not unworthy of his own humane inspiration, the editors wish to dedicate these proceedings to the memory of the man whose generous critical spirit so vitally presided at the original sessions, Jean Hyppolite.