Chapter 3

From Structuralism to Poststructuralism

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Introduction: Identifying and Differentiating

As the immediate precursor to poststructuralism, the movement or para-digm of structuralism was naturally responsible for determining many of poststructuralism's salient features. But what was structuralism, and how are we to understand its transformation into poststructuralism? In this chapter I will address these issues by first outlining the contours of what might be called the image of structuralism. An appreciation of this image is necessary for a full understanding of the shift from structuralism to poststructuralism. Nevertheless, an acknowledgement of its limitations, of the inconsistencies it suppresses and the inaccuracies it perpetrates, is equally necessary. As I will therefore demonstrate, alongside the formation and propagation of the classical structuralist image runs a history of its transformation – a history of those aspects and individuals who subverted the image of structuralism in one way or other, as it was in the process of emerging.

Many of these aspects and individuals will in time be collected under the banner of 'poststructuralism'. But as we will see, this raises several problems. Firstly, how are we to comprehend and categorise these various proto-developments? Are they properly poststructuralist, or merely a dif-ferent kind of structuralism? If the former, how can poststructuralism pre-exist its own emergence, and if the latter, then what is it that distinguishes structuralism from poststructuralism? Such considerations are made even more difficult by the fact that almost none of the thinkers identified today as 'poststructuralist' ever used the term, let alone self-identified with it. These issues, however, belie a larger problem that has been of concern to structur-alists and poststructuralists alike: the problematic nature of transformation. If we are to make sense of the shift from structuralism to poststructuralism, the *manner in which we make sense* will itself require analysis and critique. A

historical analysis of the relation between structuralism and poststructuralism will thus arguably take us only so far. In addition to this history, what will also be required is an analysis of the particular problematics from which our investigation garners its imperative force. By considering the problematic nature of the transformation from structuralism to poststructuralism in conjunction with its history, a final and perhaps more pressing question will be raised: what is it that drives our interest in the shift from structuralism to poststructuralism, and what is the importance of these two terms for us today?

The Image of Structuralism

Structuralism was a largely French intellectual movement that began in the 1950s and rose to great prominence throughout the 1960s and '70s. At its height, structuralism was the leading intellectual paradigm in France, with advocates to be found in a vast range of disciplines. Influential thinkers who were associated with the movement at one point or another included Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, Algirdas Julian Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov, Jacques Derrida and Pierre Bourdieu. Structuralism promised to unlock the mysteries of human culture by suggesting new ways for looking at and approaching social relations. Much of the impetus for these new techniques and insights originated from disciplines in the social sciences such as anthropology, linguistics, semiology, psychoanalysis and sociology. Although more traditional disciplines such as philosophy and history would in time come to make enormous contributions to the nature and success of structuralism, at its inception structuralism was wedded to the post-World War II rise of the social sciences and their explicit critique of venerated academic institutions (such as the Sorbonne) and their traditionally favoured disciplinary agendas.

Structuralism, as such, was an eminently modern movement that sought to break away from previous academic constraints by entirely recasting the terms and conditions for understanding human existence. Central to this intellectual revolution was the quest for scientificity. Due to its strong affiliation with science and scientific method, early structuralism was able to radically distinguish itself from traditional approaches to society in the humanities and consequently position itself between (if not above) the sciences and the arts. As Francois Wahl put it in his introduction to *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?*, structuralism had a specifically 'scientific vocation' (Wahl 1968: 7). This vocation provided structuralism with an immensely seductive programme that purported to replace subjective conjecture with

objective truth in the social domain. The desire for social disciplines to partake in the successes of science was of course hardly a new phenomenon. History, to name just one example, had carried out a similar appropriation of science in the second half of the nineteenth century, when it attempted to detach itself from philosophy and literature in order to recast its method as astutely objective.[1] But like history before it, this quest for scientificity in the social realm would ultimately fail, despite its great advances; in time, the validity of structuralism's scientific credentials would be exposed by critics and modified or abandoned by poststructuralists, leaving classical structuralism adrift between the port it had left and the promised land it never quite reached.

Part of the desire to attain scientificity was driven by the widespread disillusionment with ideology in the mid to late 1950s. In the period following the end of WWII, French culture and politics were dominated by Marxism and existentialism. Political events would, however, come to severely undermine the popularity and credibility of these movements. In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev delivered a report to the Twentieth Party Congress, titled 'On the Personality Cult and its Consequences', in which he catalogued the extensive crimes committed by Stalin. Although Khrushchev's speech was largely motivated by party politics, its delivery would have far-reaching consequences for Soviet sympathisers throughout the West. When combined with the violent repression of the Hungarian revolution of the same year, Stalinism became untenable and Marxism tainted for many Western intellectuals of the Left. Structuralism, with its scientific rather than ideological premises, offered an attractive way out of this quandary for many.

This was achieved through a number of further key attributes, objectives and objections. To begin with, structuralism distanced itself from the diachronic methodology of Marxist thought, and more broadly Hegelian dialectics, through an insistence upon synchronicity. As a scientific method for analysing the relations within and between structures/series, structuralism developed and employed synchronic models in which all of the structural and inter-structural relations for a given situation were simultaneously present, or more specifically, coexistent (even if particular elements were themselves obscured). Synchronicity thus allowed for the inner logic of a structure or series to be revealed in its entirety at once, without having to wait for the diachronic development of past or future defining elements that may be unknown or unidentifiable at present.

This synchronic methodology effectively amounted to a challenge of history and the historical form of explanation. Understanding, according to structuralism, was not gained through an analysis of diachronic development,

nor was a system to be explained by the evolution of its elements over time. Instead, structuralism maintained that in order to fully understand a system, whether it is language or some other system, the entirety of its relations needed to be simultaneously considered in order to 'see' what was hidden from view and 'hear' what was unspoken. Structuralism, however, did not merely claim that synchronic and ahistorical models provided for greater systematic understanding: more profoundly, it argued that these structures were in fact universal. For instance, structural linguists did not devise a linguistic system that applied to one language alone. Rather, they compared the continuities and discontinuities between different language systems in order to devise synchronic models that could be applied to many languages, both similar and disparate. Such models, once constructed, were thus universally applicable. Structural psychoanalysis, to give another example, was not created as a theory and practice that corresponded to only some people. On the contrary, psychoanalysis identifies principles and procedures that should be of pertinence to everyone, regardless of time and place, due to the scientifically verifiable status of its universal methods and claims.

These aspects of classical structuralism (scientificity, synchronicity, ahistoricism, universalism and a withdrawal from the immediately preceding political climate) were most clearly reflected in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss – the father of structuralism. Lévi-Strauss was an anthropologist who sought to provide his discipline with a new grounding. As Francois Dosse explains in his peerless *History of Structuralism*, in the mid-1940s anthropology was in desperate need of renewal. French anthropology had for some time been dominated by naturalist and biological predilections, such as the search for Man's natural foundations (Dosse 1997a: 16–17). By the close of WWII, however, the racist undertones of these traditional investigations were no longer palatable, and anthropology required a new direction capable of severing ties with the past. Lévi-Strauss duly obliged. According to Simone de Beauvoir, the urgency of the situation was such that resistance from the anthropological establishment to Lévi-Strauss' new ideas was virtually non-existent: 'The historical liquidation of physical anthropology had made theoretical debate unnecessary. Claude Lévi-Strauss arrived on the spot that history had prepared for him' (de Beauvoir quoted in Dosse 1997a: 16).

Lévi-Strauss capitalised upon this golden opportunity by adopting a particular strand of linguistic theory for his anthropological work. This, again, was made possible in part by accidental circumstances involving WWII. Following the French capitulation to the Nazi's in 1940, Lévi-Strauss fled to New York City where he took up a position at the New School. While in

New York, Lévi-Strauss was introduced by Alexandre Koyré to the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson, who in turn introduced Lévi-Strauss to linguistics and Saussurian phonology in particular (Lévi-Strauss and Eribon 1991: 41). According to this linguistic theory, elements of a language, and in particular phonological differences, can only be appropriately understood through a consideration of their interrelationships. Saussure's linguistic theory, as conveyed to Lévi-Strauss by Jakobson (who had developed his linguistic theory with Nikolai Trubetzkoy), thus advanced and relied upon a synchronic notion of system in order to extract constants within and between languages from which general laws could then be constructed. Lévi-Strauss seized upon this insight: in the same way that Saussurian linguistics provided a universal method and model for analysing spoken languages from contemporary Europe to colonial Africa, so too, Lévi-Strauss claimed, should the same structural techniques be applied to the analysis of human society. As Lévi-Strauss would later clarify:

> [Structural linguistics] must also welcome psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists eager to learn from modern linguistics the road which leads to the empirical knowledge of social phenomena. (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 31)

As a method for revealing hidden aspects within a system through the application of general laws and universal constants, structural anthropology provided a means to extract and explain that which was unapparent and unconscious: 'The linguist provides the anthropologist with etymologies which permit him to establish between certain kinship terms relationships that were not immediately apparent' (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 32). Because of this, although the structuralist method was overtly empirical, it was by no means constrained by apparent facts and conscious statements. On the contrary, Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology consistently refused to explain social phenomena by deferring to the conscious statements of a speaking subject. At all times, what was of greater significance were the structural constants to which such statements corresponded, in turn eliciting their true meaning. The lessons Lévi-Strauss drew from linguistics for the establishment of his structural programme were thus as follows:

> First, structural linguistics shifts from the study of conscious linguistic phenomena to study of their unconscious infrastructure; second, it does not treat terms as independent entities, taking instead as its basis of analysis the relations between terms; third, it introduces the concept of system …;

finally, structural linguistics aims at discovering general laws …. (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 33)

These lessons could well have been recited by two other giants of early structuralism: Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes. Perhaps more so than any other structuralist, Lacan's theory and practice of psychoanalysis was predicated upon the importance of the unapparent and unconscious aspects of subjective experience: 'nothing could be more misleading for the analyst than to seek to guide himself by some supposed "contact" he experiences with the subject's reality' (Lacan 2006: 210). As with Lévi–Strauss, Lacan's work was quite heavily influenced by structural linguistics. In 1953, Lacan delivered an address known as the 'Rome Report' in which he set out the parameters of psychoanalytic method explicitly along structuralist lines:

Linguistics can serve us as a guide here, since that is the vanguard role it is given by contemporary anthropology, and we cannot remain indifferent to it. … It is up to us to adopt this approach to discover how it intersects with our own field, just as ethnography, which follows a course parallel to our own, is already doing by deciphering myths according to the synchrony of mythemes. Isn't it striking that Lévi–Strauss – in suggesting the involvement in myths of language structures and of those social laws that regulate marriage ties and kinship – is already conquering the very terrain in which Freud situates the unconscious? (Lacan 2006: 235–6)

Lacan was particularly attracted to the scientistic credibility that structural linguistics could bestow upon his discipline. Freud, of course, had himself always insisted that he was a scientist and not a philosopher or mystic. But by the mid-twentieth century, the scientific credentials of psychoanalysis were in need of re-certification. Recognising the revolution that was afoot in structural linguistics and anthropology, Lacan took the opportunity to attach psychoanalysis to this modern movement:

Today, however, the conjectural sciences are discovering once again the age-old notion of science, forcing us to revise the classification of the sciences we have inherited from the nineteenth century in a direction clearly indicated by the most lucid thinkers. (Lacan 2006: 235)

Lacan's 'Rome Report' thus served as a manifesto for psychoanalytic renovation that was to parallel the successes of Lévi-Strauss' overhaul of anthropology. By rereading Freud through structural linguistics, Lacan erected

a psychoanalytic theory and practice that was able to elicit and interpret phenomena on the basis of a synchronic and generalisable unconscious infrastructure of relations.

The renowned literary theorist Roland Barthes also worked in and on the realm of the unconscious by adopting the structuralist paradigm. His role within the movement was, however, slightly different to that of Lévi–Strauss and Lacan. Barthes was the great synthesiser and advocate of early structuralism. Although he shared in the pursuit for scientificity and the application of a synchronic and generalisable method for the analysis of texts and society, as a consummate writer Barthes' work retained a literary flourish that was distinct from these aims. The attraction of his work, as such, was not so much derived from its scientific promise as it was from its artistic merit. In later years Barthes would abandon his pursuit for scientificity, but in the 1950s and early '60s Barthes work was characterised by a resolute adherence to the structuralist programme and a commitment to extending its scope and popularity.

Whereas Lévi–Strauss investigated kinship relations in human societies and Lacan explored the psychoanalytic unconscious, Barthes subjected objects of the everyday to structural analysis: 'The goal of all structuralist activity … is to reconstitute an object in such a way as to reveal the rules by which the object functions' (Barthes 1964: 214). Barthes' extraordinary analyses, however, were not garnered from fieldwork with indigenous cultures or repeated therapeutic sessions with paying clients, nor were they confined to these disciplinary settings. His application of the structuralist methodology was instead far more eclectic than many of his structuralist contemporaries. As just one example, Barthes' understanding and application of 'signs' encompassed practically everything that had any meaning (Dosse 1997a: 77). This metaphorical usage allowed Barthes to draw all kinds of novel and creative connections, helping to facilitate structuralism's profusion. But by the same token, it also took structuralism away from the controlled phonetic parameters that it had initially been set, in turn bringing its status into question.

This status would be directly challenged by a number of thinkers closely associated with structuralism. The structuralist paradigm, as such, would be subjected almost immediately to an internal critique that would later contribute to the materialisation of poststructuralism. Alongside the emergence of the structuralist image can therefore be traced a parallel history of its transformation to poststructuralism.

From Structuralism to Poststructuralism: The History of Transformation

As the structuralist paradigm was in the process of taking shape, key contributions were made from a number of thinkers who departed from the structuralist norm. Chief among these were Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida. In their own ways, these three thinkers contested, modified and/or failed to adhere to various aspects of the classical structuralist image. For starters, all three were philosophers by trade and tradition. Thus while they each held a keen interest in the new developments coming from the social sciences, their objective was not exactly to dethrone the discipline of philosophy per se, but to reassess its foundations and suggest new directions. As a result, these three thinkers, each in their own way, used structuralism in order to reinvigorate philosophy rather than usurp it.

Michel Foucault's work had the added effect of reconciling history (or more specifically, a particular form of history) with the structuralist movement. While structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss were dispensing with history in favour of science, Foucault was busy subjecting science to one of the most radical critiques it had ever faced – a critique, no less, that was largely mounted upon historical grounds. Foucault therefore could not fully share in the scientistic aspirations of structuralism or its condemnation of historical investigations *in toto*. This is not to say that Foucault was opposed to or dismissive of science. As a protégé of Georges Canguilhem, one of the great French philosophers of science, Foucault was extremely well informed about and interested in the nature and epistemology of science. Indeed, in his introduction to Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological*, Foucault contrasts two lineages of philosophical thought in France largely on the issue of science: on the one hand, as Foucault identifies, there is 'a philosophy of knowledge, of rationality and of concept', which he associates with Bachelard, Cavaillès and Canguilhem (and himself); while on the other hand, Foucault claims that there is a quite distinct 'philosophy of experience, of sense and of subject', of which Sartre and Merleau-Ponty are the main French proponents (Foucault 1991: 8). This distinction of Foucault's, furthermore, is not merely motivated by scientific and epistemological concerns; there is also an implicit political point in Foucault's opposition. While Cavaillès and Canguilhem were staunch members of the Resistance during the Nazi occupation of France (the former gave his life to the cause), Sartre's involvement was rather questionable, in turn casting an unfavourable light on his post-war Marxism and political activism. Foucault's self-association with the likes of Cavaillès and Canguilhem as opposed to Sartre was thus entirely

consistent with the emerging intellectual trend in France that contrasted itself with the traditions of existentialism, humanism and their dubious political record in France. Recognising the similarities that he shared with structuralism, Foucault wasted no time in positioning himself as a leading light of the movement.

With the publication of *History of Madness* in 1961, Foucault announced a new direction for structuralist thought. As Dosse recounts: 'Barthes hailed this work as the first application of structuralism to history' (Dosse 1997a: 155). On the one hand, *History of Madness* was decidedly structuralist: it sought to elicit the vital role that the unapparent (in this case madness) played in the operation of apparent norms (in this case reason) through a consideration of their structural relations and systematic consistencies. The debt here to Canguilhem's analysis of the normal and pathological was evident, but so too was the new structuralist agenda with which Foucault's analysis affiliated itself. On the other hand, however, *History of Madness* was a *history*. Much of its persuasive force was thus derived through historical contextualisation, historical interpretation, and more specifically, the historicisation of structures: 'This structure of the experience of madness, *which is history through and through*, but whose seat is at its margins, where its decisions are made, is the object of this study' (Foucault 2006: xxxii, emphasis added). Foucault's contribution to structuralism, therefore, would be to not only strengthen the movement, but also subject it to transformations such as the above from a very early stage.

The work of Louis Althusser also had a profound effect upon the complexion of structuralism. As French Marxists and intellectuals of the Left came to terms with the revelations of Soviet repression and recalibrated their positions accordingly, Althusser offered many of them an attractive alternative to Sartre's Marxist-humanism. This alternative was predicated, to a large extent, on a turning away from established Marxist doctrine and its various contingent applications in order to facilitate and focus on a return to Marx himself. *Reading Capital*, first published by Althusser in 1965 with contributions from his students at the École Normale Supérieure (including Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Jacques Rancière and Pierre Macherey), would demonstrate the full power of this 'return' to the writings of Marx.

As noted by his early readers (though later disputed by the author), Althusser's 'reading' of *Capital* was coordinate with several principle traits of structuralism: his exegesis of Marx's writings was highly analytic, anti-humanistic, marked by its appreciation of scientificity and largely synchronic in method (in so far as Althusser's reading of *Capital* was guided by '*the conception* of the specific relations that exist between the different

elements and the different structures of the structure of the whole' and 'the knowledge of the relations of dependence and articulation which make it an organic whole, a system' (Althusser and Balibar 1970: 107)). Like a structure of social kinship or a linguistic system, Althusser approached Marx's texts as a hermetically sealed set that imbued its own logic (or in some cases several). This logic, moreover, could not be solely constructed from the readily apparent alone; if anything, the genius of Althusser's return to Marx was that he did not just return to what Marx said, *but what Marx did not say in what he said*. This way of reading Marx was derived by Althusser from none other than the very texts to which it was being applied. As Althusser noted, Marx did not only comment on what was explicitly 'said' by classical political economists; he more profoundly extracted critical points that were 'unspoken' in their texts, thus raising problematics that had been as yet unrecognised. An appropriate appraisal of capitalism was thus only made possible through an examination of the structural relations between the seen and the unseen, or more exactly, the blindness that lies at the heart of vision: 'non-vision is therefore inside vision, it is a form of vision and hence has a necessary relationship with vision' (Althusser and Balibar 1970: 21). In Althusser's terminology, such forms of examination are 'symptomatic' in method: 'A "*symptomatic*" reading is necessary to … identify behind the spoken words the discourse of the silence, which, emerging in the verbal discourse, induces these blanks in it, blanks which are failures in its rigour, or the outer limits of its effort' (Althusser and Balibar 1970: 86).

Althusser made the intellectual sources for this notion of 'absence' and his 'symptomatic' form of reading explicit. Aside from Marx and Nietzsche, he asserted that

> only since Freud have we begun to suspect what listening, and hence what speaking (and keeping silent), means (vet dire); that this 'meaning' (vouloir dire) of speaking and listening reveals beneath the innocence of speech and hearing the culpable depth of a second, quite different discourse, the discourse of the unconscious. (Althusser and Balibar 1970: 16)

In a footnote attached to this claim, Althusser went on to credit this reading of Freud to Lacan, and furthermore 'our masters in reading learned works, once Gaston Bachelard and Jean Cavaillès and now Georges Canguilhem and Michel Foucault' (Althusser and Balibar 1970: 16). Althusser thus firmly placed himself within the same structural and philosophical nexus as Foucault.

Despite his fraught relationship with the French Communist Party

(of which he was a long-time member) due to his deviation from Party orthodoxy, Althusser's 'symptomatic' method of reading Marx would enjoy great success amongst the Left. It would also considerably strengthen the structuralist movement by adding to its ranks a significant portion of the Marxist intelligentsia in France. By doing so, however, structuralism would never be the same: by facilitating a détente between structuralism and Marxism within the French intellectual scene (intended or not), the ideal of an apolitical social–scientific method would be exposed as naive. But perhaps more importantly, the presentation of Marx as a founder of structuralist thinking and reading would ultimately accentuate the growing disparities between this fast–growing brand of structuralism and the classical image as envisioned by Lévi-Strauss and his linguistic associates.

The early 1960s also witnessed the emergence of a third discordant structuralist philosopher: Jacques Derrida. Of all the thinkers associated with structuralism, Derrida's position was perhaps the most ambiguous. This is because, from as early as 1963, Derrida advanced an explicit critique of structuralism that would later be labelled as poststructuralist. In a lecture presented in March of that year, titled 'Cogito and the History of Madness', Derrida subjected Foucault's structuralist history to a scathing attack. The crux of this critique was to ask of Foucault the following: from what privileged position does Foucault carry out his history of silence and the repressed? In his words:

> Is not an archaeology, even of silence, a logic, that is, an organized language, a project, an order, a sentence, a syntax, a work? Would not the archaeology of silence be the most efficacious and subtle restoration, the repetition, in the most irreducibly ambiguous meaning of the word, of the act perpetrated against madness – and be so at the very moment when this act is denounced? (Derrida 1978: 41)

Derrida's intention, in short, was to cast doubt on the grounds from which Foucault's analysis derived its authority. This point was simple, yet effective. It was also applicable to the rest of the structuralist movement. In 1966, three years after delivering his critique of Foucault's *History of Madness*, Derrida took part in one of the most significant moments in the history of structuralism: the colloquium *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, held at Johns Hopkins University. This colloquium – attended by Lacan, Barthes, Todorov, Goldmann, Vernant and Derrida among others – served as a primer to French structuralism for the American academic market. Derrida's contribution, however, would serve as an announcement

of the paradigm's underside. In his lecture, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', Derrida repeated his critique of Foucault, but this time with respect to Lévi-Strauss:

> When Lévi-Strauss says in the preface to The Raw and the Cooked that he has 'sought to transcend the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible by operating from the outset at the level of signs', the necessity, force, and legitimacy of his act cannot make us forget that the concept of the sign cannot in itself surpass this opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. (Derrida 1978: 355)

Following this remark Derrida proceeded to deconstruct Lévi-Strauss' programme and, consequently, reinfuse his structural edifice with 'what we might call the *play* of the structure' (Derrida 1978: 352).

Structuralism's deconstruction therefore coincided with its arrival on the big stage. As the structuralist image was in the process of mass exportation, Derrida attempted to destabilise its centre of gravity by raising and unravelling its metaphysical presuppositions. Far from effectuating a break with philosophy, Derrida demonstrated how many structuralists perpetuated some of the most pervasive trends in the history of philosophy, such as the privileging of speech over writing that Lévi-Strauss and Jakobson both indulge in (see Derrida 1976). Nevertheless, Derrida was by no means an opponent or even outsider to the structuralist paradigm, as his involvement in the Johns Hopkins colloquium indicated. Rather, in accordance with his methodological approach, Derrida *inhabited* structuralism, so as to deconstruct it from within (Derrida 1976: 24). This approach was strategic in more ways than one: irrespective of the dictates of his deconstructive method, Derrida knew full well that structuralism at the time was on a path to glory. He was therefore quite content, like others, to be grouped under the structuralist sign for the time being, despite the obvious discontinuities between himself and various other structuralists. As Derrida admitted at one point: 'Since we take nourishment from the fecundity of structuralism, it is too soon to dispel our dream' (Derrida 1978: 3).[2] In the mid 1960s, structuralism was yet to be fully consecrated, and poststructuralism was but a glimmer in the eye of the English-speaking world. Thus, while Derrida pursued an internal transformation of structuralism from the early 1960s on, the culmination and recognition of this metamorphosis would have to wait for a more propitious external moment.

This moment arrived in May of 1968. By 1968 structuralism had transformed itself from a marginalised method of the social sciences to a

multifaceted movement that permeated numerous disciplines, including stalwarts of the humanities such as philosophy and history. Structuralism was enjoying a level of public success akin to the heyday of Sartre and de Beauvoir, and on the back of this fervour structuralists were preparing for their anointment by academic institutions at all levels, from the Sorbonne down to regional lycées. The uprising of May '68 in Paris would accelerate this process, but in doing so it would also expose the movement's redundancy and help facilitate its overcoming.

As the student occupiers of the Sorbonne made clear, the spirit of '68 was not structuralist: 'Structures', read a famous slogan, 'don't take to the streets' (Dosse 1997b: 116). This hostility towards structuralism exhibited by elements of the failed revolution is perhaps best explained by the untimely nature of May '68. If May '68 was a profound social and political event, it was in large part due to its inexplicable nature. Nearly everyone, including most significantly the structuralist avant-garde, did not see the uprising coming. Moreover, the uprising did not neatly correspond to the expectations of the French Left who had been long preparing for (and bickering over) the revolution: white middle-class university students were not exactly the designated revolutionary class. As such, May '68 was in many ways *not* a product of its times, but rather an untimely eruption that would only later be re-contextualised. Its participants, for the most part, were not well organised or agreed on what they hoped to achieve, other than to bring down the system. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that structuralism, itself the eminent 'sign of the times', would be out of sync with this untimely rupture. The incompatibility of structuralism with the dissident mentality of May '68 was further emphasised by the fact that structuralism effectively promoted unitary and inescapable systems which demanded strict obedience to a method or procedure, whether that meant swearing fealty to Lacan, science or some other master principle/al; following the rules and giving oneself over to a universal and irresistible system was not exactly a feature of the spirit of '68.

And yet, despite this reaction against the rise of structuralism, May '68 also offered structuralism the chance to crown its recent successes with institutional recognition. As Lévi-Strauss and other early structuralists had long recognised, the institutions of French academia were in drastic need of modernisation. May '68 brought this process to immediate fulfilment. As the epitome of modern intellectual theory and practice, structuralism was perfectly placed to capitalise upon the academic shake-up necessitated by May '68 and convert its popular success into positions of institutional power. Thus while structuralism was too conservative and stifling for many of the

radical students that instigated the May '68 uprising, it was sufficiently modern–yet–respectable to satisfy the demands for institutional reform.

Among the many institutional advances that structuralists made in the aftermath of May '68 (such as the appointment of Foucault, and later Barthes, to the Collège de France), none were more pronounced than the creation of the experimental university at Vincennes (*Université de Paris VIII*). This institution of learning located on the outskirts of Paris was established on a structuralist mandate that May '68 had helped make possible. Foucault, the leading figurehead of structuralism at the time following his extraordinarily successful *The Order of Things* (which at one point had the subtitle *An Archaeology of Structuralism*), was asked to form the Philosophy Department, while the structural linguist Jean Dubois was charged with establishing the university's Linguistic Department (Dubois was in fact initially asked to be Dean of Vincennes, which he declined). Vincennes also inaugurated the first Department of Psychoanalysis, headed by Serge Leclaire – an important disciple of Lacan.

But despite these structuralist overtones, it must be said that in reality Vincennes was far too cutting edge to be simply structuralist – a movement that even young students knew by that time was old-hat. Thus while it might not have been clear to university administrators, May '68 demonstrated to the structuralist thinkers that the game was up. In the period following May '68, nearly all of the major structuralist thinkers embarked upon an overhaul of their work or attempted to distance themselves from the structuralist paradigm (Kurzweil 1996: xii–xiii). To cite an example, when Foucault's next book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, appeared in 1969, he made it clear in no uncertain terms that he was not a mere structuralist:

> In order to avoid misunderstanding, I should like to begin with a few observations. – My aim is not to transfer to the field of history, and more particularly to the history of knowledge (connaisances), a structuralist method that has proved valuable in other fields of analysis. My aim is to uncover the principles and consequences of an autochthonous transformation that is taking place in the field of historical knowledge. It may well be that this transformation, the problems that it raises, the tools that it uses, the concepts that emerge from it, and the results that it obtains are not entirely foreign to what is called structural analysis. But this kind of analysis is not specifically used … In short, this book, like those that preceded it, does not belong – at least directly, or in the first instance – to the debate on structure (as opposed to genesis, history, development); it belongs to that field in which the questions of the human

being, consciousness, origin, and the subject emerge, interest, mingle, and separate off. But it would probably not be incorrect to say that the problem of structure arose there too. (Foucault 2002: 17–18)

Althusser, too, would be at pains around this time to clear up any such 'misunderstandings'. On the release of the Italian edition of *Reading Capital* in 1968, he would take the opportunity to add the following disclaimer in a brief preface:

> Despite the precautions we took to distinguish ourselves from the 'structuralist' ideology (we said very clearly that the 'combination' to be found in Marx 'has nothing to do with a combinatory'), despite the decisive intervention of categories foreign to 'structuralism' (determination in the last instance, domination, overdetermination, production process, etc.), the terminology we employed was too close in many respects to the 'structuralist' terminology not to give rise to an ambiguity. With a very few exceptions (some very perceptive critics have made the distinction), our interpretation of Marx has generally been recognized and judged, in homage to the current fashion, as 'structuralist'.
>
> We believe that despite the terminological ambiguity, the profound tendency of our texts was not attached to the 'structuralist' ideology. It is our hope that the reader will be able to bear this claim in mind, to verify it and to subscribe to it. (Althusser and Balibar 1970: 7)

When Althusser and Foucault suggest that they were never really structuralists, even if there are resonances between their work and structuralism, we can certainly take them at their word. After all, which serious thinker that was associated with structuralism at one time or another did not have aspects of their work that were incongruous with the classical structuralist image? Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Althusser, and especially Foucault, only really felt it necessary to explicitly point out their distance from structuralism once the movement was on the wane. As F. Scott Fitzgerald might have put it, by the end of the 1960s it was clear to those intellectuals involved that the structuralist plate had cracked, and the only thing left for it was to consummate a clean break as best one can, and quickly (Fitzgerald 1945: 81–4). In light of this, although structuralism during this period was reaching the summit of institutional and popular success, at the ground level of academic work structuralism was in severe decline, if not already extinct: structuralism in this period, to put it one way, was like an exploding star that shines forth most brightly long after it has ceased producing new light.

The list of academics at Vincennes confirms this shift. While there was certainly a strong structuralist presence at Vincennes, including some of the movement's recognised superstars, the majority of academics were not card-carrying structuralists, and many of those who were so tainted were beating a fast retreat. Among the intellectuals who walked the corridors of Vincennes during the late '60s and early '70s (at one point or another) were Barthes, Dumézil, Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Derrida, Lyotard, Irigaray, Cixous, Poulantzas, Negri, de Certeau, Balibar, Badiou, Rancière, Judith Miller (Lacan's daughter) and her husband Jacques-Alain Miller. Despite their debt to structuralism, this roster of thinkers did not collectively promote a classical structuralist agenda. In fact, if anything, what they all shared was a tendency to push beyond the previous established parameters of structuralism in order to inhabit its margins and address its blind spots. Vincennes, as such, was not exactly structuralist, but poststructuralist.

This, however, raises the crucial problem mooted at the start of this investigation: if even the crowning institution of structuralism was more accurately poststructuralist, where does one end and the other begin? And more significantly; from what position do we determine this problematic, let alone its resolution?

From Structuralism to Poststructuralism: The Problem of Transformation

Just as Derrida questioned Foucault in 1963, we must ask ourselves now: in the name of what authority does this history of the transformation from structuralism to poststructuralism proceed? Given that other thinkers associated with poststructuralism, such as Gilles Deleuze, pose similar sorts of questions,[3] we might consider this to be a pre-eminently poststructuralist problematic. As it happens, 'problem' is precisely the right word when it comes to Deleuze. During the 1950s and '60s, Deleuze produced a series of monographs on individual thinkers, including Hume, Bergson, Proust, Nietzsche, Spinoza and Kant. As established scholars from the academic field of each thinker would concur, Deleuze's readings of these thinkers are highly idiosyncratic and at times perverse. This is because in each case Deleuze attempts to elicit what he believes are the critical problems articulated by the oeuvre of each thinker – problems that may not always be explicitly apparent in the text, but traverse them throughout and provide the source of their vitality. As a consequence, Deleuze is never that interested in debating points of contention with his

contemporaries. His intention is to rather distil the problematic of each great thinker that produces something worth knowing. As he explains in an interview of 1968:

> When you are facing such a work of genius, there's no point saying you disagree. First you have to know how to admire; you have to rediscover the problems he poses, his particular machinery. It is through admiration that you will come to genuine critique. The mania of people today is not knowing how to admire anything: either they're 'against', or they situate everything at their own level while they chit-chat and scrutinize. That's no way to go about it. You have to work your way back to those problems which an author of genius has posed, all the way back to that which he does not say in what he says, in order to extract something that still belongs to him, though you also turn it against him. You have to be inspired, visited by the geniuses you denounce. (Deleuze 2004: 139)

There are clear resonances here between Deleuze's problematic approach to the history of philosophy and Althusser's interpretation of Marx's method of reading: 'To understand this necessary and paradoxical identity of non-vision and vision within vision itself is very exactly to pose our problem (the problem of the necessary connexion which unites the visible and the invisible), and to pose it properly is to give ourselves a chance of solving it' (Althusser and Balibar 1970: 21). But while Marx's problematic philosophy is no doubt influential on Deleuze, the emergence of Deleuze's concern for the problem can be traced to another source: Henri Bergson. In his book *Bergsonism* (1966), Deleuze contends that Bergsonian intuition – the concept in Bergson's philosophy that was notoriously parodied by Bertrand Russell for its vagueness – is a supremely rigorous and precise method (Deleuze 1991: 13). This method, moreover, is 'an essentially *problematizing* method' (Deleuze 1991, 35). Drawing heavily from an essay in Bergson's *Creative Mind* ('Introduction II: Stating of the Problems'), Deleuze notes that from an early age people are trained to search for solutions to problems that they have been given – problems that are, in other words, 'ready made'. Many of these problems, however, are false, either because they are 'nonexistent' or 'badly stated'. This is to say that such inherited problems no longer fit the circumstances in which they find themselves, and are thus in need of restating in a manner that is more appropriate. Because solutions are always respective to the problems they are solutions of, Bergson argues that a 'problem is solved as soon as it is properly stated' (Bergson 2007: 37). When this is done, false problems evaporate (rather than become 'solved')

and the problems that remain are ones that we truly deserve – they are *our* problems, not someone else's.[4]

Deleuze's Bergsonism, in a way, perfectly illustrates what our problem is at present: while innovative social scientists and philosophers/historians attentive to their developments were busy during the 1950s promoting the new intellectual vogue that was structuralism, Deleuze was off studying philosophers such as Bergson and Hume – philosophers that were hardly fashionable in Parisian coffee houses at the time. Deleuze therefore did not take part in the structuralist wave in the same manner that many of his contemporaries did, such as Foucault and Derrida. This little fact, as Bergson would say, is big with meaning. How are we to understand the contribution of a figure such as Deleuze to the problematic of poststructuralism and its relation to structuralism? For instance, it is not uncommon for Deleuze to be categorised as a 'new' or 'late' poststructuralist (as opposed to 'early' ones like Derrida).[5] On one level – the factual level – such descriptions are simply false: Deleuze did not come 'after' Derrida in time or in conceptual progression. Indeed, many of Deleuze's most enduring and critical ideas (such as the theory of multiplicity developed from Bergson) were already fully formed in the 1950s, and are thus contemporaneous with structuralism, let alone 'early' poststructuralism. But on another level, such descriptions are not necessarily the product of a false problem. If Deleuze is presented as coming 'after' Derrida, it is not only because the wider public became aware of Deleuze after Derrida,[6] but also because the problematic of poststructuralism, according to the manner in which it was first constructed, demands that this is the case.

Deleuze is therefore an interesting figure for our analysis of the transformation from structuralism to poststructuralism for he complicates our chronology and requires that we consider the problematic through which we perceive his work. As with most other French intellectuals who lived through the age of structuralism, Deleuze was hardly unaffected by the movement. His *The Logic of Sense* and *Anti-Oedipus*, for example, contain crucial engagements with Lacanian psychoanalysis, while he references nearly all the other major structuralists at some point in his career. Deleuze even wrote an essay in 1967 titled 'How do we recognise structuralism?'[7] But as this essay reveals, it is difficult to articulate Deleuze's relationship to structuralism. Much like his treatment of individual philosophers in previous works, the essay on structuralism does not summarise or provide a description of a widely recognisable classical image of structuralism. Instead, it attempts to extract a novel and creative force that has an uncanny similarity to Deleuze's own philosophy. Perhaps it is for this reason that the essay is often considered

to be more poststructuralist than structuralist, or at least structuralism 'in a very radical guise' (Williams 2005: 53). But if this is so, and if Deleuze's approach to the essay and indeed many of the concepts expressed in it are contiguous with his monographs of the 1950s, then we would have to say that those monographs are also poststructuralist. If this were the case, what would it mean to suggest that some poststructuralist works, such as Deleuze's *Empiricism and Subjectivity* (1953) and his groundbreaking essays on Bergson in the mid 1950s, predate the publication of some of the major structuralist works, such as Lévi-Strauss' *Structural Anthropology* (1958) and Foucault's *History of Madness* (1961)? Such a suggestion is only rendered sensible when directed through the problematics of structuralism, poststructuralism and the transformation between them. Deleuze's early concepts that are propelled throughout his later works can then, at best, be described as untimely – the sign of a 'time to come' (Nietzsche 1983: 60), since they do not sufficiently align with the structuralist sign of the times. The problematic is then restated to incorporate the following: what is the relation between an untimely rupture, the time in which it occurs, and the time in which it is retrospectively recognised as untimely?

Nevertheless, in the case of some thinkers other than Deleuze whose careers spanned structuralism and poststructuralism, the transformation between the two paradigms is arguably much more straightforward. Unlike Foucault and Althusser, who would come to downplay their involvement with structuralism, or Derrida, who could claim with some legitimacy that he was always on the edge of the paradigm (the limit within the centre), Barthes' fidelity to the structuralist programme during the 1950s and early '60s was most explicit and undeniable. So too was the moment that he abandoned the classical structuralist programme. In 1970, the publication of Barthes' *S/Z* heralded a new phase in his career that markedly deviated from his previous classical structuralist positions. In its opening passage, *S/Z* derides those analysts who would 'see all the world's stories (and there have been ever so many) within a single structure', for such an approach disregards the irreducible difference in and of each text – the 'difference of which each text is the return' (Barthes 1974: 3).[8] This new direction, as Barthes acknowledged, was heavily influenced by a set of thinkers that would later be called poststructuralist.[9] Julia Kristeva, in particular, was largely responsible for this change in tack by Barthes. As a recent Bulgarian émigré in Paris, Kristeva brought with her fresh ideas about language and literary analysis that would radically challenge aspects of the existing structuralist doctrine. In 1966 she delivered a lecture that employed the work of Mikhail Bakhtin – a largely unknown figure in France at the time – for the purposes

of reconfiguring structuralism. Her goal, as with Derrida, was to give 'dynamism to structuralism',[10] and thus replace the staid and synchronic nature of classical structuralism with a genuinely dynamic model that imbued perpetual genesis. Upon hearing this lecture, Barthes reassessed his position and almost immediately adopted elements of Kristeva's approach, such as her 'intertextual' methodology.[11]

A relatively clear case, such as Barthes', can tell us much about the 'on the ground' theoretical issues that indicate a shift from structuralism to poststructuralism. Meticulous analysis of the relevant texts and interviews should dispel many erroneous generalisations and regurgitated inaccuracies (some of which have been necessarily repeated in this chapter). But despite, or perhaps more accurately, *aside from* the value of careful reading, it must be acknowledged that the problem of the transformation from structuralism to poststructuralism does not only concern what this or that thinker said, nor can it be exhausted or resolved by settling upon a 'correct' reading of their corpus. This is because the problems at hand are far greater than the thinkers themselves. The reality of their various poststructuralisms, therefore, cannot be reduced to textual interpretation, regardless of how faithful or impressive the analysis may be.

In an excellent work on poststructuralism, James Williams warns against reducing the work of thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault to the problem of poststructuralism. Poststructuralism, in his view, is rather defined *by* these great works (Williams 2005: 25–6). An understanding of poststructuralism, in other words, can be accumulated through an investigation of Derrida's method of deconstruction, Deleuze's philosophy of difference, and so on, but poststructuralism must not be presumptively deployed as a means for constructing an understanding of those thinkers. Williams' sentiment is a good one: as Althusser showed in the case of Marxism, any 'ism' can arguably benefit from a return to what the relevant thinkers actually said (or what is *not* said *in* what they say). But it is also wilfully limited. As pointed out above, Althusser's return to the texts was in part motivated by a desire to turn away from realities in the East and respond to new challenges in the West. This allowed for much creative 'Theory', but it also compromised the work, for it denied to a large extent the active involvement of *extra*textual elements in the constitution of the problematic. It is questionable, therefore, how far Williams can turn away from extratextual realities in the West that contributed to the formation of poststructuralism, if the objective is to gain an understanding of poststructuralism, including its seminal texts. Poststructuralism, as it is currently understood and deployed, may contain many assertions that have been derived from lazy readings of Derrida or

too little familiarity with Deleuze's solo works, but this problematic still has very real effects in the world of academia and beyond. Like Deleuze and Guattari say of capitalism, its contradictions do not necessarily harm it, but perhaps make it stronger, for better or worse (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 151). This was indeed precisely the case with structuralism: if Lévi-Strauss had been consistently read in the way that he wanted, it is probable that structuralism would not have spread as it did or led to poststructuralism.[12] This is not to say that all misreadings are good, or that what a thinker writes is necessarily of secondary importance to the circumstance of the reader. It is also not to say that one necessarily needs to understand poststructuralism in order to understand Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*. But it is to insist upon a recognition of the importance that extratextual elements play in the determination of poststructuralism, *including* the texts this problematic embraces, if one wishes to fully understand poststructuralism, as opposed to analyse the texts of Deleuze, Derrida, and so on.

So, what exactly is this poststructuralist problematic? Or as Deleuze might have modified, how do we recognise this problem across a number of divergent works and locales? What are its singularities, critical points of change and indeterminacies? Who is it that employs the term, where, when and why? I will leave these questions for others in this volume to ascertain more fully. But as a way of concluding my contribution, I would suggest that the following be borne in mind when pursuing these issues: to understand poststructuralism requires that an attempt be made to articulate both its history and its problematic structure (accompanied, of course, by a reading of the relevant texts). On the one hand, an analysis of the former will illustrate how a historical transformation occurs from structuralism to poststructuralism – a historical transformation, furthermore, that occurs on both a theoretical level (such as the structuralist elevation of the unapparent/unconscious that is then taken up, modified and/or discarded by poststructuralists), and an extratextual level (such as the contribution of May '68 to the contours of poststructuralist theories and their popular success). On the other hand, an analysis of the latter will remind us that it matters a great deal what we presuppose and obscure in the pursuit of this history; that it matters where we begin and hope to arrive. For what would poststructuralism be if we began with Deleuze and then added Derrida (or not)? And what does structuralism become when it is played off the presumption of a later poststructuralism? Could it not be that it is only in this retrospective moment of 'radical', 'ultra' or 'post' structuralism that the 'classical' image first appears? This double reminder might reconstitute the original structuralist battle between genesis and structure, historical origins and synchronic laws, or as poststructuralists might reconfigure, Being and

Becoming; a conflict, moreover, that can no doubt be located throughout the history of philosophy, and thus responded to in a number of ways. But provided that we make this problem our own, there is every chance that it will make a valuable contribution to the world today.

Notes

1. See Lundy (2009: 189–91).
2. Derrida was not the only one aware of the benefits to be had at the time by associating oneself with the structuralist brand. When Julian Greimas went to publish a book in 1966, tentatively titled Semantics, he was told by Jean Dubois: 'You will sell a thousand more copies if you add the word structural' (Algirdas Julien Greimas, quoted by Jean-Claude Chevalier and Pierre Encreve, Langue francaise, p. 97, as found in Dosse 1997a: 317).
3. 'History', Deleuze and Guattari contend, 'is one with the triumph of States' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 394).
4. At this point in the text Deleuze in fact refers to Marx, noting that 'We might compare the last sentence of this extract from Bergson with Marx's formulation, which is valid for practice itself: "Humanity only sets itself problems that it is capable of solving"' (Deleuze 1991: 16).
5. See, for example, Sarup (1993: 4).
6. Although well known amongst intellectual circles in France from the 1950s, Deleuze did not become a widely recognisable figure until the publication of Anti-Oedipus (1972) with Félix Guattari. Furthermore, the English-speaking world would have to wait until 1994 before a translation of his magnum opus Difference and Repetition appeared, thus contributing to his 'late' arrival.
7. This essay was published in 1972 in a collection on the history of philosophy compiled by François Châtelet (Histoire de la philosophie, vol. VIII: Le XXe Siècle, ed. F. Châtelet, Paris: Hachette, pp. 299–335). In the opening to the piece, however, Deleuze indicates that it was written around 1967.
8. Although present in the work of several poststructuralists, Deleuze is perhaps most responsible for promoting this notion of the 'return of difference'. According to Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's eternal return in his Nietzsche and Philosophy (1962), it is not the same that eternally returns (as argued by Heidegger) but difference: 'Every time we understand the eternal return as the return of a particular arrangement of things after all the other arrangements have been realised, every time we interpret the eternal return as the return of the identical or the same, we replace Nietzsche's thought with childish hypotheses. No one extended the critique of all forms of identity further than Nietzsche' (Deleuze 1986: xi–xii).
9. In an interview with Raymon Bellour printed in Les Lettres francaises (May 20, 1970), Barthes cites the conceptual creditors of S/Z as 'Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Sollers, Derrida, Deleuze, Serres, among others' (Barthes 1985: 78).

10. Julia Kristeva, 'Le mot, le dialogue et le roman' (1966); reprinted in Semiotke, recherches pour une semanalyse, as found in Dosse (1997b: 55).

11. When pressed on his distancing from a semiology that 'reveals a structure' in favour of one that 'produces a structuration', Barthes asserted that 'one must go beyond the statics of the first semiology, which tried precisely to discover structures, structure–products, object–spaces in a text, in order to discover what Julia Kristeva calls a productivity – i.e., a working of the text, a junction, a coupling into the shifting infinity of language' (Barthes 1985: 73).

12. In fact, Lévi-Strauss welcomed the demise of the structuralist vogue, since he considered many of the developments made in its name to be unhelpful perversions of his original structuralist programme. As he remarked in 1973, 'structuralism, happily, has not been in style since 1968' (Dosse 1997b: 115).

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