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DE/STRUCTURING THE STRUCTURALIST ACTIVITY
A CRITIQUE OF SELECTED FEATURES OF
THE STRUCTURALIST PROBLEMATIC

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This essay represents an attempt to critically assess the intellectual orientation often termed 'structuralism.' In particular, the essay is concerned with European, and even more specifically French, structuralism as displayed in the writings of Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and C. Levi-Strauss. The analysis indicates that despite a novel language, an often rigorous character, and some interesting, indeed exciting, intellectual constructions, structuralism is very much a child of positivism. The positivism/structuralism relationship is most clearly revealed when structuralism is contrasted with Marxian social inquiry. For comparative and illustrative purposes, then, the essay contrasts structuralism and Marxism.

For all its possibilities, structuralism was stillborn and to know it now is to seize its character as an instantaneous transformation. Nietzsche would, of course, have said that it appeared in the 'hour of its shortest shadow' (Bouchard; in Foucault, 1977:16).

Structuralism "was" an intellectual *tour de force* whose understandability was never particularly great. Shrouded in the argot of linguistics, it managed to present itself as an intellectual posture to be reckoned with; yet always on the far side of comprehension. This was its public image. It was an enigma for all those honest social theorists who sought to construct a modern social science predicated upon humans in the real world. By its very enigmatic status, however, structuralism was deemed important. The claim by Bouchard that structuralism has expired is historically inaccurate and naive, for structuralism is far from dead. It lives in the form of a hundred pedantic syntheses with the orientations it once seemingly opposed.

A single presentation cannot adequately detail the numerous epistemological and metatheoretical differences that exist between structuralism and all other sociological traditions. We have selected Marxist social thought as the contrasting perspective, since a number of the leading structuralists (e.g., Althusser, Barthes, and Levi-Strauss) have posited certain theoretical affinities between their work and Marxism. Althusser and the others notwithstanding, it is our contention that a comparison of Marxism and structuralism brings into sharp relief some of the more important dimensions of the structuralist problematic. Moreover, these aspects of the structuralist problematic preclude an intellectually honest synthesis of structuralism and Marxism.

STRUCTURALISM¹

What is structuralism? A veritable plethora of texts have attempted to answer this question. Most have endeavored to posit the basic theoretical and methodological principles common to the structuralist project. These efforts have tended to highlight rather meaningless differences and gloss over critical ones between structuralism and other orientations. Almost without exception, they have presented structuralism in reference to unspecified, and certain theoretically incoherent, global frames; for example, structuralism and sociology, as though sociology implied some understandable whole. As Miriam Glucksmann (1971) has suggested, any effort aimed at distilling a core of the structuralist project is misleading.

Broekman (1974) has suggested three geographic centers of structuralist research and thought; namely, Moscow, Paris, and Prague. While these centers of structuralist research are internally quite differentiated, Broekman argues that each has a rather distinctive style. To Broekman's list of three, we are tempted to add a fourth that might be labeled the Anglo-American, typified in the work of Katz (1976) and Mullins (1973). These centers are not based upon specific methodological, theoretical, or metatheoretical claims. They are not even based upon certain methodological strategies or techniques. Instead,

they are distinguished by certain theoretical assumptions. It is only through an examination of these assumptions that one can comprehend the structuralist project.

Limiting our discussion here to Parisian structuralism Roland Barthes (1972:213-220), approaches the structuralist project by centering on the category of "activity." Since practice, action, activity [praxis] are central concepts in Marxian thought, Barthes' notion of "structuralist activity" provides an avenue through which one can contrast the two positions. Here we shall let Barthes (1972:214-215) speak for himself:

structuralism is essentially an activity, i.e., the controlled succession of a certain number of mental operations. . . .

The goal of all structuralist activity, whether reflexive or poetic, is to reconstruct on 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the 'functions') of this object. . . . Structural man takes the real, decomposes it, then recomposes it . . . between the two objects, or the two tenses, of structuralist activity, there occurs something new, and what is new is nothing less than the generally intelligible: the simulacrum is intellect added to object, and this addition has an anthropological value, in that it is man himself, his history, his situation, his freedom, and the very resistance which nature offers to his mind.

We see, then, why we must speak of a structuralist activity: creation or reflection are not, here, an original 'impression' of the world, but a veritable fabrication of a world which resembles the primary one, not in order to copy it but to render it intelligible.

Barthes appeals to a number of central categories around which he structures his discourse; the notions of activity, anthropological value, decomposition, object, recomposition, simulacrum, structural man, and intelligibility are all used as important ordering concepts. Perhaps for our purposes the most significant segment of this passage refers to Barthes contention

that the structuralist activity can be viewed as "the controlled succession of a certain number of *mental operations*" (emphasis added). The most obvious and immediate implication of this claim is that, with a structuralist project, activity is conceptualized as an attribute of being which is engaged exclusively at the level of pure intellect.

In Marxist thought, there is always a dialectical nexus between the *being which is active* and the *activity of that being*. As with pragmatist thought, the Marxist notion of practice is inseparably fused with the notion of truth. Both activity and truth are, from the Marxist vantage, viewed as products of the totality of human life and not mere by-products of the human intellect. In addition, Marxist thought considers the human capability for action as an essential quality of truth itself. The crucial difference here is that the Marxist position, contrary to that outlined by Barthes, posits truth and action as something more profound and involved than a mere residual consequence or category of human cognition. Truth derived from scientific inquiry is, moreover, not considered to be rendered valid simply on the basis of its "utility" (i.e., use-value) in deciphering or decoding a reality, be it social or "natural," which is independent of human experience. On the contrary, Marxist social thought contains no justification for the notion of an independent reality or a reality which has relevance only to pure intellect. Regarding this point, Marx's (1970:47) rather over-quoted line, "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life," seems to be particularly germane.

Within the Marxist theoretical frame, activity is used as synonymous with action in two rather special ways. First, it is used as an opposition to non-action. Activity in this instance refers to processes such as labor, and as a differentiation of the human activity of intelligence from other activity. Second, activity is used as an indicator of the state which envelops intelligence by preceding it, preparing the conditions of its existence, and following and surpassing it. Furthermore, it refers to that dimension of thought itself which is characterized by the process of internal synthesis more than by the process of objective representation (Blondel, 1902).

In Barthes' formulation activity remains essentially an affair of the intellect and occurs primarily, if not exclusively, as mental activity. The notion of an actual event between a subject and an historical object is nowhere to be found in Barthes' statement. Here again, there is a marked contrast between activity on the one hand and praxis on the other. From the standpoint of etymology the Hegelian/Marxist notion of praxis is also associated with activity and/or action. However, among certain Hegelians in general and the writings of Marx in particular, praxis refers to the historical character of technical, economic, social, and cultural collective human action. Moreover, this action is viewed as the basis for and the judgment of theoretical thought and ideology. The complexity of this notion is far greater than that associated with Barthes' notion of activity. Instead of remaining wholly within the subject the notion of praxis necessarily interlinks subject and object (or another subject). Thus, the result of praxis is not a *simulacrum* but rather a dialectical change in both subject and object vis a vis their relationship in social reality.

MAN'S PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Another notion of considerable interest in Barthes' statement is that of "structural man." In the history of Western thought one can encounter many "typifications" of man. For example, man has been termed *Homo faber*, *Homo oeconomicus*, *Homo sapiens*, *anima naturaliter scientifica*,² and *Homo ludens* to mention but a few. Thus, man has been cast as the *maker*,³ as an *actor* determining his actions by economic interests to the virtual exclusion of any motives of passion, morality, religiosity, etc.; as the *first species* in the animal kingdom as illustrated in Carolus Linnaeus'⁴ classification system and as a *player* of games. These notions share the peculiar attribute of existing as unidimensional universals. Each seems to be proclaiming the identification of an essential attribute (*the essence*) that simultaneously identifies and elaborates upon some quintessential quality of man's being. One might suggest, therefore, that Barthes' *structural man*, having lost his Latin *écriture*,

and assumed a more acceptable literary slant, expresses his nature through the examination of discourse. Man is reduced to a segment of his own intellectual processes and activity as though he were but an occasionally engaged cog in a machine not of his own design. Structural man is identical to *Homo loquax*. That is to say, the man who thinks when he thinks (or thinks about his thinking) is but a reflection of his own words (see Bergson, 1959). In any event, these conceptualizations of man are at best partial and fragmented in contrast to that offered by Marx. For example, Marx (II, 1967:19) states that "man is by his nature . . . a social animal." Here, in contrast to all of the other conceptualizations of man, man is defined in terms that account for both his being and activity rather than a single dimension such as his activity or his subjectivity.

The abstract and anti-empirical nature of Barthes' structural man and his structuralist activity are strongly paralleled in Levi-Strauss' structural anthropology. For Levi-Strauss, the notion of structure has virtually nothing to do with empirical reality. Social structure is a constructed conceptual schema designed to operate as a category of mediation between reality (itself unknowable) and the universal unconscious structure of the human mind. Thus, both Barthes' activity and Levi-Strauss' social structure are best understood as methodologies or "techniques" of inquiry and not, as is true with Marxism, the objects of inquiry. Furthermore, as methodologies they are devoid of historical content or relations with a subject. In the final analysis, to speak of a historical dimension or subject relation in reference to methodological properties is a non sequitur.

The importance of history in specific understanding is the dimension of inquiry that modern structuralists have not appreciably comprehended.⁵ Method cannot totally transcend the historical conditions encompassing its practitioners. In this light, the technical rigor and near clinical detachment of structuralist scholars projects an image of positivistic integrity which mystifies the very history that made structuralism itself a possibility. The prevalent structuralist avoidance of historical concerns, including a reflexive analysis of structuralism itself, diminishes its interpretive utility. It would be untrue, however, to

suggest that all structuralists are insensitive to the problem of "history."⁶

Jacques Derrida (1967:46), a "post" structuralist attempted to address the historical issue:

We must therefore try to free ourselves from this language restriction imposed by the very language and concepts. Not actually attempt to free ourselves from it, for that is impossible without denying our own historical situation. . . . But rather, imagine doing so. Not actually free ourselves from it, for that would make no sense and would deprive us of the light (its) meaning can provide. But rather, resist it as far as possible.

The most cursory examination of the works of Althusser, Barthes, Foucault, and Levi-Strauss reveals numerous references into history. The structuralists are clearly not unconcerned with history per se. But what separates their concern with history from the concerns of the Marxists is the type of history they deem important, and the value and role of the subject in that history. Structuralism operates with a "model" of a compartmentalized history of logical categories devoid of subjects which are subject only to methodological governance. In short, structuralism operates with a non-historical history in order to justify its preoccupation with formal analysis and the pure intellect. As Marx (1970:35) stated in the *German Ideology*, concerns of this nature must necessarily be non-historical since intellect (i.e., consciousness) has no history of its own. History, here, becomes an irrelevant category.

STRUCTURALISM VS. MARXISM

*Structuralism as Method*⁷

Michael Lane (1970:32-32) makes the claim that structuralism is not a theory or metatheoretical orientation but a method of inquiry "whose primary intention is to permit the investigator to go beyond a pure description of what he perceives or experiences, in the direction of the quality of rationality

which underlies the social phenomenon in which he is concerned." It should be obvious from Lane's comment that structuralism as method can only be taken as legitimate description if one is willing to operate with an extremely broad notion of methodology. This point is further clarified by Levi-Strauss (1975) in the Overture of *The Raw and the Cooked* when he states:

We are engaged in researching for the conditions under which systems of truth become mutually convertible. . . . Following the example of structural linguistics, structural anthropology shifts its consideration away from the conscious relations . . . to unconscious ones, hoping to find there a system from which general laws may be derived. . . . The structuralist method . . . is a means whereby social reality may be expressed as binary oppositions, each element, whether . . . an event in a myth, an item of behaviour, or the naming and classification of natural phenomena, being given its value in society by its relative position in a matrix of oppositions, their mediations and resolutions.

These two conceptualizations of structuralism as method are worthy of more detailed consideration. First, there is the contention that structuralism is *only* a method and not a theoretical orientation. Second, there is the concern with, in Levi-Strauss' phrase, the "conditions under which *systems of truth become mutually convertible*" (emphasis added). In contradiction to the first contention, this second concern is not purely methodological. Third, the lack of concern with conscious reality, and preoccupation with "unconscious reality" or, perhaps more appropriately, preconscious reality. Fourth, the belief that these unconscious dimensions are expressed through opposition (e.g., binary oppositions for Barthes and Levi-Strauss). Finally, that these oppositions provide the basis by which the entire project proceeds toward a goal of generating further logical constructs which, in principle, are to be extended across the entire range of *social* and *natural* phenomena.

The structuralism as method position can be addressed indirectly via Marx's critique of Proudhon's philosophy. Marx (1963), commenting on Proudhon's (1946) *Philosophie de la Misere* states:

In the same way that through abstraction we transform everything into a logical category, we also make abstraction of every distinctive character of the different movements, to arrive at movement in the abstract state, at purely formal movement, at the purely logical form. . . . If we find in the logical categories the substance of everything, we imagine ourselves to find in . . . logical form . . . the absolute method . . . everything being reduced to a logical category . . . , it naturally follows that every ensemble of products and production, objects and their movement, is reduced to an applied metaphysics.

In a similar vein it could be argued that structuralism is not a method but a rigorous metaphysics replete with formal techniques and normalized conventions of logical manipulations. The one question that the structuralist must confront is how can a "method," when taken in the traditional sense of the term, legitimately encompass a theory of truth, even if it is an implicit theory? Moreover, how can a theory of truth not be metaphysical and yet assert its validity on the basis of logically derived categories independent of any agreed upon reality?

Structure and Categories

Structuralism has incorporated into its methodological frame an entire group of categories borrowed from structural linguistics, semiotics, and other interpretive human science strategies. Some of the more visible of these include Barthes' notions of system and syntagma; Althusser's (1970) concepts of problematic, and overdetermination; Levi-Strauss' idea of binary opposition; and Foucault's categories of episteme and signatures. The use of these interrelated notions, to the extent that they operate as a calculus for structuralist analysis, cast the structuralist research object into an entirely new cognitive and explanatory system. This casting of phenomenon into logical

categories transfers scientific concerns to a level of analysis whereby inquiry, on an *a priori* basis, is always taken as non-problematic. Thus, the analyst no longer needs to inquire into the historical origins of the research object or the techniques utilized to attain an understanding of the object. The concern with origins ceases to be an issue since it is taken for granted as being irrelevant.

By returning to Marx's critique of Proudhon, we again discover certain similarities between structuralist inquiry and the project proposed by Proudhon. Marx (1963) comments:

At the moment that we do not pursue . . . the historical movement of the relations of production, of which the categories are but a theoretical expression, at that moment we want to see these categories just as ideas . . . independent of the real relations, we are forced to assign as the origin of these thoughts the movement of pure reason. How does pure reason, eternal, impersonal, make itself and the source of these thoughts? How does it proceed to produce them?

For structuralism, the entire analytical process, the formation and organization of structures, occurs on a level that has little relationship with man, nature, or human work and action. The structuralist categories, technique, and view are all rooted in abstraction. Yet, this abstraction is posited as real, true to reality, and capable of penetration via analysis. *But what the structuralists fail to realize is that abstraction cannot negate itself; it can only reproduce itself in further abstraction.* Thus, the structuralists do not question the relevance, origins, and nature of their categories. The categories become, in every manner of speaking, the structuralists' data; not data of the social world nor from the social world. Yet this data is supposed to be able to explain that world. It is at this point that structuralism and Marxism are worlds apart; regardless of whether one terms structuralism theory, method, technique, and/or world-view.

Subject-Subject Relations

Earlier it was noted that structuralism has manifested a central concern with "deep structures" or unconscious structures

of social reality. Employing Marx's three levels of the social totality (i.e., super-structure, infra-structure, and praxis) as a point of contrast to the notion of deep structure, one can see a marked contrast between the two positions. This contrast is, perhaps, most noticeable regarding the issue of subject-object relationships and/or subject-subject relationships. With structuralism an almost insurmountable idealism prevails regarding such relationships. By centering all analytical concerns upon unconscious, as opposed to conscious levels of analysis, structuralism delimits man to a passive non-productive being. Thus, structuralism views all data as restricted to the level of superstructure. Moreover, the superstructure is posited as determining all other levels, to the extent that structuralism acknowledges other levels. In addition, regarding the superstructure itself, the structuralists differentiate between "deep structure" and "surface structure." The latter refers to ideology, myth, various types of knowledges and cognition itself. The real focus of analysis is not upon the totality (i.e., social relations, modes of production, units of praxis, etc.) but, rather, upon formal relations which are not only logically derived but *derived at the level of deep structure.* In this way, the structuralists effect a transmutation in subject-subject relationships, and their real possibilities and capabilities for conscious action, by reducing all this to phenomenal manifestations of the logical constructs and operations of the structuralist "methodology" itself.

Structural Dynamics and Dialectics

Although a number of structuralists have claimed that their primary goal is to identify the character of structures so that they can derive the possible transformations open to a particular structure, only three structuralists have elaborated notions of structural transformation. The first is French anthropologist Levi-Strauss whose research on the structure of kinship led him and his associates to undertake a formal analysis of the dynamics involved in the transformation of kinship systems.⁸ The other two are Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar. Balibar's approach, like Althusser's, ostensibly utilizes Marxist categories to address

the issue of structural transformations. He is particularly interested in the notions of production and reproduction of wholes. However, in his essay "Toward a Theory of Transition" (in Althusser and Balibar, 1970), the manner in which Balibar undertakes his analysis depicts a concern with the internal dynamics of structure rather than structural metamorphosis into other distinct structures and formations.

Althusser argues for the periodicity of knowledge and for the identification of structural imbalances (e.g., his appeal to Mao Tse Tung's theory of contradiction and Bachelard's notion of epistemological break). He uses these as concepts to tap into the internal dynamics of discourse rather than as a means to view the relationships between global structures. Thus, both Althusser and Balibar are less concerned with total transformations and more concerned with *internal structural shifts*. In neither case is there much similarity with Marx's theory of global transformations.

What is of particular interest in the cases of Althusser, Balibar, and Levi-Strauss is the way in which the dialectic has been reformulated. Rather than operating with a Marxian, or even Hegelian, notion of contradiction (contradiction being a central notion in the analysis of transformations in wholes) the structuralist version of contradiction and transformation comes much closer to that offered by Nietzsche.⁹

Michel Haar (1977) noted that in Nietzsche's system, the antagonism between two elements was not conceptualized as a conflict that brought the elements into a mutual relation and, therefore, attached the elements together. This is, of course, the dialectical notion of contradiction. Nietzsche viewed the antagonism between elements as a mutual separation that detached and distinguished the elements from one another. The Hegelian opposition of master and slave, for example, is a dialectical relationship based upon a reciprocity of relations. For Nietzsche, as well as for the structuralists, opposition is based upon rupture, a cleavage within the object of their analysis. Moreover, neither Nietzsche nor the structuralists desire to bridge this cleavage. For Nietzsche these "paths of distance" are to be underscored and not negated.

Through an examination of Marx's dialectical method, one can see how the structuralists' approach diverges from the Marxian. Marx's dialectical method *starts* from the simplest fundamental historical relationship, that is, economic relations. As Engels noted in opposition to popular misinterpretations, the approach *starts*, not ends, at this level. In fact, true Marxian dialectics is quite different from its popularly understood (orthodox Marxist) version. The actual concern of dialectics is with the determination of the practical relations inherent in all human existence and in every form of organized human experience. Simple economic relations do not exhaust the full range of possible relations. The dialectical method, therefore, is not simply an exercise in "economic thinking." Rather, it analyzes relations and then reintegrates them into the totality from which they came.

The fact that there are relations implies the existence of at least two (frequently opposed) elements. Each of these elements can be considered in itself. And, from a careful consideration of each element, one can begin to grasp the character of their mutual relation; of their action and reaction to each other. This mutual relation produces antagonisms which will ultimately require a solution. The transformation begins, according to Engels, when a solution is required and brought forth. The dialectical movement is placed in an historical situation involving real men in actual empirical situations (i.e., relations). The dialectical moments, oppositions, and negations are derived from these real units, in opposition to the "structural processes" characteristic of structuralist thought. In the latter case, the identification of "structures" is accomplished through oppositions of terms, groups of terms, and sequences of terms; making transformation an internal affair predicated upon projected logical arrangements. The contrast between structuralist and dialectical conceptions of change is evident in Marx's reflection upon his method:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel . . . the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'Idea,' he transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of the 'Idea.' With me . . . the

ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought (1967:19).

In the above passage, it is still possible to visualize a subject in the social process. That is, the subject is active in the 'Idea' or, if one prefers, the collective and historical growth of man. In structuralism, however, even Hegel's synthetic subject disappears. Human reality becomes the product of operations of an unconscious structure which seems to emerge independently of actions undertaken by any subject(s). Here again, Marx's own words reveal a fundamental difference:

In its rational form (the dialectic) . . . includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature no less than its momentary existence . . . is in its essence critical and revolutionary (1967:20)

It is exactly the critical and revolutionary dimension that is missing in the structuralist position on transformation. In this regard, the issue can be raised, as Lefebvre (1971) did, that the structuralist preoccupation with the static form of structures undermines the approach and opens it up to the charge of political conservatism.¹⁰

The Structuralist World—Action and Event

In this final section we will examine selected comments by Levi-Strauss on social life; thereby providing a glimpse of one structuralist's view of the world. Accomplishing that, we can contrast that view with the position taken by Marx.

Levi-Strauss (1963) begins his analysis with the assumption that all social life is characterized by a quality of systematic organization. He believes, furthermore, that the possible varieties of this systematic organization are limited. He states:

I am persuaded that these systems do not exist in limitless numbers, and that human societies . . . are limited to a choice of certain combinations from an ideal repertory, which it should be possible to reconstruct . . . because social structures are the product of a reason (*esprit*) that is innate in all men. That is, it is genetically rather than socially or culturally determined. Further, this reason operates unconsciously, and we have access to it only through the systems that it forms, myths, kinship systems, systems of exchange, linguistic structures, cultural artifacts, and so on.

In the above, Levi-Strauss posits an ideal level of analysis which includes all the possible *combinatoires*. Second, he contends that with any particular period of a given society, the actual existence of one of these possible structures is operative at the unconscious level. Third, the conscious "life world" is always supported by these collective unconscious forces (products of the human *esprit*) which could conceivably be linked with the structural determinants emanating from the structure of previous periods (including, at least hypothetically, negative structures). Fourth, all life processes taking place at any given moment are grounded in the prevailing structure which, through mediations, remains primarily unconscious. Fifth, because of these mediations and the unconscious character of structures, the explanations for given actions and events offered by the actors are most often 'illusionary' or ideological. Finally, the possibility for critical evaluation of ongoing actions and events by the participants is radically constrained.

For Marx, social relations are phenomena that exist in the real world, and it is from their combinations, transformations, and evolutions, that global forces are derived. For structuralism, in marked contrast, structure, the product of collective unconscious reason, is considered *the* reality and all acts and events are merely derivations and outgrowths of that reality.¹¹

The Marxian man is an active man, praxis oriented, who aims at changing and transcending existing contradictions. The structuralist world appears to be in diametric opposition to that

proposed by Marx. For structuralism, the world appears epiphenomenal and men are viewed as "pawns" engaged in actions and experiences that unconsciously encompass them. Furthermore, the structuralist view concedes to man only an ability to engage in fictional explanations of his world. The structuralist world is a world without a real history of real human beings since there is no change, only combinations and recombinations of limited possible structures. Thus, man's only possible practice becomes a fictional one; man as the stuff of novels.

In overview, the structuralist conception of the world is defined by a logical or semantical reduction. Human beings in this world exist essentially in the intellect or the analytical process. Man, before and above everything else, is viewed as a creator of forms and significations. Content, to the extent that structuralists acknowledge it at all, is seen as an irrational residue which manifests itself only in the fissures and lacunae between the forms, systems, and structures. For Derrida (1967), this is captured in his plea to find man and his discourse in the "space between" things. Furthermore, the intellect is conceptualized as having a classificatory and combinatory function. It breaks apart the ensembles into elements and reconstitutes them into logical systems. The capacity to combine arrangements and permutations simultaneously determines both intellect and the intelligible; the instrument and the object.

CONCLUSIONS

Structuralism removes from its analytical concern much of the content that Marxism maintains is essential to, and inseparable from, the social world. Structuralism does not concern itself with the complexities of concrete human praxis. Instead, analytical rigor and technical/logical manipulations are given central importance in the structuralist project. Removed also are the concerns with the social world, history, social-dialectics, human tragedy, emotion, passion, and the subject. For structuralism, such concerns are discarded and disappear. In their place structuralism celebrates formal technique. As Poster (1975:306-360) observes, it is the role of the subject in the

process of inquiry that places the greatest theoretical gulf between Marxism and structuralism. Marxism is the science of man whereas structuralism is the science of man "decentered."

It is not the anti-historical posture of structuralism which separates it from Marxism. Rather, it is the kind of history that each focuses upon. This is not a difference between a diachronic and synchronic view of reality but between a view of history that permits subjects to be involved in the production, generation, and reproduction of social life and a view that does not. The latter view, the structuralist view, becomes formal in character out of necessity. And, with that formality, there is a strong tendency to minimize the difference between that which is a category of method and that which is the object of analysis. For example, the structuralist analogy between language and social reality is at once a methodological technique and a theoretical assertion that succumbs to invidious forms of reification. Thus, what begins as analogy eventuates in a truth claim regarding the actual substance and form of social reality. This is, then, the ever present risk assumed by the structuralist project whose nature is essentially anti-reflective, anti-idealist, and anti-phenomenological.¹²

Jan Broekman (1974:98) provides us with yet another important difference between Marxism and structuralism. Broekman observes that Marxism, like a number of other approaches, never really moves very far from reality itself. For Marxism, the categories of analysis are either derived from, or fundamentally associated with, human action and the actual empirical contents of the world. For structuralism, on the other hand, the process of inquiry never moves very close to either action or the real world. The Marxist project, furthermore, never really abrogates its theoretical concern for the essence of things and the subject as, at least potentially, constituted independently and in accordance with its own essence and consciousness. Again, structuralism inevitably leads to the *decentration* of the subject and to a positing of the subject as dependent.

Beginning with Saint-Simon's thesis that society constituted an organic totality, Auguste Comte led a movement aimed at fragmenting the social whole by distinguishing between social

states and social dynamics. Comte, by subordinating the dynamic, gave theoretical and methodological priority to the static. From Comte's position, there arose amongst sociologists a profound concern with static laws, stable relations, and the rules that maintained their operation of functioning. From this, positivism was projected into the world as "scientific sociology." The goal of this new science was clear: to identify the invariances, stabilities, and conditions of equilibrium thought to be society. Society and man were to be viewed as having to conform to these regularities since regularities were necessary and, therefore, of the natural realm. History, if taken to be anything more than temporal duration or the succession of temporal moments, was deemed an illusion, a stream of errors and oscillations finite and absolute. The only history that mattered was that of things and their order: not men.

Structuralism, despite its novel language and systematic and rigorous manipulations, can be considered an extension of the tradition initiated by Comte.¹³ Structuralism is not a sound theoretical bridge between critical and empirical sociologies. Moreover, despite claims to the contrary, structuralism has few theoretical affinities with the so-called interpretive tradition. At its most fundamental level, structuralism is an extension (albeit a creative one) of the logic inherent in the positivist tradition. This is a point that cannot be overemphasized. Structuralism, regardless of the sophistication it displays or the numerous forms in which it presents itself, remains a source of theoretical closure and not an enabling paradigm capable of advancing sociological thought.

FOOTNOTES

1. Althusser, Barthes, Foucault, and Levi-Strauss are the principal figures in the present construction of the structuralist problematic. In addition to being French, each of these scholars has made a central contribution to structuralist theory and research. For example, Althusser has endeavored to articulate "Marxist" concerns through structuralist discourse. Barthes has applied a structuralist paradigm and perspective to a full range of cultural and social phenomenon. Foucault has endeavored to develop structuralist discourse and historical techniques. Finally, Levi-Strauss, perhaps the father of structuralism in the social

sciences, has done more than anyone else to advance the structuralist perspective from a theoretical and methodological standpoint.

2. The notion of scientific or empirical man and its opposition concept, man of faith, are both developed in Peter Berger's volume *The Heretical Imperative*. New York: Anchor Books, 1979.
3. Henri Bergson's *La Pensee et le mouvant*, in particular p. 105, further develops this notion of man the maker. For example, he states, "We believe that it is the essence of man to be a material and moral maker, to make things and to make himself."
4. See C. Linnaeus, *A General System of Nature*, 1802-1806.
5. To address the historical intent and character of the structuralist project it is instructive to reflect upon a few points raised by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer (1975) undertook a systematic and calculated critique of the 19th century preoccupation with objective truth and the notion of an absolute or universally correct method of interpretation. Gadamer claimed that, contrary to the positions advocated by scholars such as Boeckh (see e.g., *Encyclopadie und Methodologie der Philologischen Wissenschaften*, Leipzig, 1886), there could be no one *methodologie* of textual interpretation since interpretation is not a *Wissenschaft* whose aim is objective and permanent knowledge. For Gadamer, Truth cannot reside, as the structuralists seem to believe, in a singular "scientific" act of recognizing an author's or text's meaning. In the final analysis, Gadamer maintained that such a position was a non-realizable ideal which naively disregarded the fact that every act of interpretation of a text is, in essence, a new and different cognition, since, each new cognition involves the interpreter's own historicity as the specific differentiating criteria. In short, it is the *interpreter's* history which is the *specifica differentia*.
6. Jonathan Culler (1975) in his volume *Structural Poetics*, has an entire segment devoted to just such concerns. In addition, Julia Kristeva (1969:284) has attempted to discard the structuralist's disjointed notion of history by rejecting the notion of a "geno-text" which is intended to be inclusive of the whole historical evolution of language as well as the various signifying practices that have emerged. Rather than viewing a discourse from the ideological position of a single meaning center with finite variations, Kristeva seeks to posit a technique that accounts for an infinite number of possible variations and structures with all the possible historical dimensions; namely, past, present, and future. The possibility of all languages (i.e., past, present, future) are

- therefore, given in the "geno-text" before they are masked and presented in a mystified articulation through the "pheno-text." As Culler (1975:247) notes, however, the concept of a geno-text is no solution at all. In many ways, the problem of the "geno-text" is homologous to that which confronted Habermas (1971) in his analysis of "distorted communication" the blockage to reasonable human decision making. Habermas' solution, however, was not to open up all possibilities and thereby engage his analysis in a set of infinitely varying avenues of inquiry. Rather, he grounded his solution in the transformation of history as detailed in the Marxian conception of ideology and labor. Here Habermas sought to posit the idea of a "community of scientists" that could, at least theoretically, transcend and/or accommodate the delimiting influences of history.
7. Numerous anthologies and monographs on structuralism are available in English. In addition to those cited in the text and the bibliography, the following are among the better, and more recent ones: Coward, Rosalind and J. Ellis, *Language and Materialism*, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977; Gardner, Howard, *The Quest for Mind*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; Hawkes, Terence, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977; Kurzweil, Edith, *The Age of Structuralism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980; and Seung, T.K. *Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
 8. Dan Sperber's critique of Levi-Strauss in *Structuralism en Anthropologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1973) provides excellent insights into the theoretical weaknesses of Levi-Strauss' research program.
 9. Barthes and Foucault, both prominent structuralists, have acknowledged an intellectual debt to Nietzsche. However, unlike T. Adorno and other members of the "critical theory" tradition, the structuralists have tended to use Nietzsche's writing with little regard for its critical import and/or potential. For the structuralists, Nietzsche symbolizes the spirit of pessimism and despair so characteristic of structuralism itself. For them Nietzsche justifies a return to scientific idiosyncratic thought and action; a view which not only decenters man but also renders him faithless and foolish. This advocacy of the idiosyncratic, despite its frequently creative form, is of course only one possible reading of Nietzsche. For a more detailed account of the structuralist attitude see Gunter Schiwy's 1969 volume, *Strukturalismus Und Christentum* (Freiberg: Herder KG).
 10. Lefebvre's critique of structuralism is by no means one of the more recent. And while it remains one of the best, many of its points have been countered with varying degrees of success. Yet, while scholars such as M. Poster, P. Ricoeur, and E. Said, to mention but a few, have advanced new and very sophisticated critiques, Lefebvre's is the most relevant in the context of a structuralism/Marxism comparison. Additionally it should be noted that most of Lefebvre's remarks remain valid at least in terms of structuralist research. For historically there has been a world of theoretical difference between the metatheoretical defenses offered by structuralists and their actual research projects. Roland Barthes' *S/Z* and *Mythologies* are excellent cases in point.
 11. One could of course argue that Marx also posited a limited number of modes of production with each mode being based upon particular inequalities in the unit of production. The emergence of these modes, however, is *not* predicated simply upon logical derivations from a limited number of possible modes any of which could exist at an ideal level. Rather, the modes are determinant in the sense that they are products of social forces, often social movements, which include rational action *consciously* aimed at change, and as partial solutions to "contradictions" existing in the previous mode.
 12. This danger is perhaps best detailed in the words of Paul Ricoeur (1974:85), one of structuralism's more insightful critics:

An antinomy begins to show itself here: on the one hand, structural linguistics starts from a decision of an epistemological character to remain inside the closure of the universe of signs. By virtue of this decision, the system has no outside; it is an autonomous entity of internal dependencies. But this is a methodological decision which does violence to linguistic experience. The task then, on the other hand, to reclaim for the understanding of language what the structural model excluded and what perhaps is language itself as act of speech, as saying. . . . The claim by some to demystify, as they put it, speech ought itself be demystified, as being noncritical and naive.
 13. Comte's social physics with its preoccupation with "natural/social laws" is reproduced (albeit in modified form) throughout structuralist research. For the structuralists Comte's "laws" are transformed into laws/structures of discourse (Foucault and Barthes), universal categories of mind (Levi-Strauss), and rules of capitalist society (Althusser). Thus the structuralists share with Comte a common faith in the existence and knowability of structuring laws be they specific manifestations (e.g., in discourse) or in the nature of mind itself.

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