

## Structuralism: A Destitution of the Subject?

Introductory Note: The following paper was originally presented at a colloquium, “Normes et structures,” at the Université de Rennes, March 22–24, 2001. The style of a conference presentation has been preserved.

*The* paper I would like to present to you today represents a simple attempt on my part to establish an order among a certain number of texts. My working hypothesis will be that the notion of *text* occupies a point in between those of *work* (*œuvre*) and *statement* (*énoncé*). Both of these possibilities—extension in the direction of totality and restriction in the direction of the elementary—are implicated in the notion of text, but no a priori suppositions are justified concerning either the *unity of works*, classified by author or by groups of authors, or the *univocality of statements*, subjected as they are to the inevitable process of dissemination through reading and appropriation. The perspective of assembly and interpretation of texts corresponds to a practical, even professional goal of mine, which forms the immediate background and condition of possibility of my participation in this colloquium. Having signed a contract

with an American publisher, I am now obliged to put together an anthology of *Postwar French Philosophy*;<sup>1</sup> roughly spanning the years from 1950 to 1980 (although these entirely conventional dates need to be relaxed somewhat in order to bring to the fore both continuities and divergences, as well as a few significant retrospective movements). The limits set by the publisher for length are quite generous, but still restrictive enough to force us to stick to the most essential texts. The fact that my associate in this enterprise, John Rajchman, is of a different nationality and has different disciplinary training than I guarantees in some respects that the selections chosen will not be overly narrow and one-sided. Still, we cannot but impose simplifying protocols—contestable by definition—on our description and “classifications.” The advantage we can hope to gain from this sort of process is that it requires the clearest statement possible of our hypotheses with respect to the crucial *problems* and *tendencies* of French philosophy in the period under consideration (which should not be confused with a survey of schools and debates).

In the end (and this is what motivates my presence here and the proposal I gave the organizers of this colloquium to speak about this subject), my principal hypothesis is that *structuralism*—and I will presently try to specify the meaning we should give to the word—will, as far as philosophy is concerned, have been the decisive moment in French thought during the second half of the twentieth century. If our hypothesis that it was a decisive moment is justified, then there is every reason to believe that the retrospective characterization that is now possible of fundamental aspects, events, and statements particularly characteristic of structuralism is not in the least a final recapitulation, much less an obituary. On the contrary, what makes such a project meaningful is the prospect of showing that the structuralist movement, multiple and incomplete by its very nature, is still going on—although it may be in sites where and under denominations that we cannot immediately recognize it. In a well-known text entitled “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” published in 1973 in François Châtelet’s collection *Histoire de la philosophie*, Gilles Deleuze attempted to enumerate a number of marks or transversal criteria in the writing of his contemporaries so as to formulate a diagnosis of a first *turning point* in the structuralist trajectory, indeed, to contribute to that turn. My own modest intention here, following upon another cycle of broadening and transformation, is likewise to try to formulate a diagnosis, and perhaps also to contribute to a renewed movement.

The considerations I am proposing center around the question of structuralism's contribution to a philosophical reformulation of the question of the subject and subjectivity, but first, three preliminary observations of a more general character are necessary.

*The first* concerns precisely the idea of *movement*. It is well known that structuralism was not a school, nor did it ever risk becoming one. It had no founder—not even Claude Lévi-Strauss—and consequently neither scission nor dissidence. On the contrary, it was characterized from the beginning by the *encounter* between questions or problematics, and thus between different voices or styles of writing. This encounter gave rise to publications that took the form of the “manifesto” (signed by Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, Althusser), which clearly demonstrates what Deleuze called the essentially *polemical* value of structuralism. But even more often, it gave rise to *denials*, which I would read not only as a refusal of the label “structuralist” but more importantly as a refusal of any idea of univocity. It would seem that for those who agreed in their rejection of certain motifs coming from metaphysics, anthropology, and the philosophy of history—particularly in the form given them by transcendental philosophy (that of a subjective constitution of experience caught between the poles of a priori universality and the particularity of sensation)—nothing was more urgent than to bring out what Foucault was to call the *points of heresy* (*Order* 100), even before any paradigm or episteme had a chance to be defined. It would further seem that structuralism's *commonplaces* had to be decentered in favor of a radical multiplicity of interpretations and that, in the end, it was impossible to formulate the conditions for *entering* the field of structural or structuralist discursivity without immediately looking for the *way out*. The apparent agreement between structuralists on the necessity of studying structures rather than histories, essences, figures of consciousness, or experiences, or on the “primacy” of structure with respect to subjectivity, life, and historicity, was only possible insofar as the irreducibility of structures to a single epistemological model was immediately and collectively posited. The agreement also concerns, that is, the insufficiency of the reference to structure and structures (a term both inherited and transformed) to express the project whose necessity it had designated.

But I would maintain precisely this paradox: it is because structuralism is not a school but a divergent encounter, because it consists as much and more in the testing of the limits of the category that gives it

its name as in the construction of its consistency, that it represented a unique and unavoidable moment in which, during a particular era and in a particular context, all philosophical “schools” or “orientations” found themselves implicated. This is true not only of movements that, through some of their representatives, contributed to affirming or configuring its problematic, but also of those that refused it but were obliged to transform themselves by this very refusal. This is why, even more than a movement or an encounter, we can say that structuralism was an *adventure* for contemporary philosophy: an adventure through which, as occasionally (but relatively rarely) comes to pass, philosophical discourse underwent and in turn engendered history in the field of thought in general. Philosophers “went in” to structuralism as neo-Kantians, phenomenologists, Hegelians or Marxists, Nietzscheans or Bergsonians, positivists or logicians, and they came back out with all these identities upset and their mutual compatibilities and incompatibilities redistributed.

*The second preliminary observation* I want to formulate concerns the status of philosophy and the way the structuralist adventure called this status into question. I maintain that structuralism is a *properly philosophical* movement and that this is where its importance lies. Questions of structure, the effectivity of structure, subjectivity as a structural effect, and of course, the limits or aporias of structural definitions are entirely philosophical questions—otherwise this term would have no meaning, at least in the period we are talking about. This did not prevent structuralist questions, notions, and styles from giving rise, as much and perhaps more than other circumstances, to diagnoses of the *death of philosophy* (just as, closer to us, structuralism’s real or supposed eclipse has been saluted on many sides as a renaissance of philosophy or of “true” philosophy). More particularly, it did not prevent more than one protagonist of the structuralist adventure from calling himself, or being called by others, a *nonphilosopher* (for example, a “scientist” [*savant*], particularly in the field of the “human sciences,” but this was not the only option), even an *antiphilosopher*. Indeed, I expect reactions of skepticism, refusal, or condescension if I mention, for example, names such as Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan as philosophical representatives of structuralism.

The issue here is no doubt a general one, proper neither to our period nor to the texts we are talking about. We know, moreover, that it was the object of about-faces and polemics even within what I am calling the structuralist movement. In order to establish straightaway a clear thesis on this decisive point, upon which depends to a great extent our diagnosis of the reasons that many philosophical currents today have for

distancing themselves from structuralism, I will say the following. First of all, structuralism situates itself in a general way within an orientation that Georges Canguilhem used to characterize with a formula, almost a slogan, that he claimed to have found in the work of Léon Brunschvicg: “Philosophy is the discipline for which every foreign material is good, and for which only foreign material is good” (33, translation modified). Which means, if I understand it correctly, that what is important is the *becoming-philosophical* of theoretical or practical questions and not their position as *originally* philosophical or as “internal” to a given philosophical field. Next, and more important, at the point in time where we are grasping it, let us say in France around 1960, structuralism is characterized, in a striking unity of opposites that is highly unstable, by *both* a resolute affirmation of the autonomy of the human sciences with respect to the set of preexisting philosophical orientations or possible philosophical foundations *and* by an uncompromising struggle against the traditional *positivism* of the human sciences, whether it appears in the form of a methodological objectivism that claims to bracket the question of the genesis or intentionality of experimental protocols or rules of formalization, or in that of a preestablished (and, in fact, metaphysical) distribution of “regions” of experience or objectivity. This, moreover, is both what connects structuralism to (and in the end, distinguishes it from) more or less contemporary movements that it could be compared with, such as post-Diltheyan hermeneutics, or Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms, or the analysis of ordinary language. It is also what allows us to understand exactly what the structuralists were looking for among “precursors” such as Freud, Marx, Rousseau, or even Aristotle. I would express this by saying that from a structuralist point of view, the distinction between “philosophy” and “nonphilosophy” has an essentially relative signification, or yet again, that what is important for thought (for the philosophical *activity*, we might say, recalling how Barthes once spoke of the *structuralist activity*) is always the task of finding the nonphilosophical, or the limit, the nonphilosophical condition of philosophy, and of managing, by means not only of a specific turn of expression but also of an invention of categories, to bring about its recognition as something new in and for philosophy. Structuralism presents itself, in a particularly coherent and radical way, as a practice of *immanent externality* (a “thought of the outside,” as Foucault put it) in opposition to reflexive, foundational, ontological, or apophantic styles of philosophy.

This sort of orientation is expressed in the return of theses that are themselves philosophical, none of which is proper to structuralism in a historical sense but which acquire a particularly urgent significa-

tion with regard to it, all the more so in that these theses are constantly problematized, that is, the possibility of their employment and their rigorous observation is continually questioned. I will give two examples. The first, to which Lacan attached a particular importance, and for which he forged the neologism *lalangue*, is that *there is no metalanguage* that can be isolated as such, not only in an ultimate sense but even in a local one (which recalls such different authors as G. W. F. Hegel and Ludwig Wittgenstein).<sup>2</sup> The other, for which Louis Althusser constantly sought a justification even as he, in a sense, “practiced it on himself,” is the idea that philosophy and “theory,” rather than being self-isolating discourses, are as such (and not only in limit-cases) “interventions” whose end is to *disappear in the production of their own effects*, and which thus have an essentially “conjunctural” character (“Philosophy” 78). Applied to the structuralist movement as a whole, this allows us to understand why it was so concerned with *systematicity* (one of the least contestable connotations of the idea of structure, and one of the reasons why inspiration was sought in diverse practices of systematization, from axiomatics to biology by way of linguistics), while at the same time it so regularly avoided formulating *systems*, with much greater success than many other philosophical movements. We should see this not as a failure but as an effect of coherence. And we have to take it into account in our reflection upon the singular implications of structuralism as far as the temporality or historicity of theoretical thought is concerned.

*Finally, as a third preliminary point*, I would like to pose the question of what, in a sense, was particularly *French* about structuralism and the structuralist movement. It is, of course, out of the question to claim that structuralism was a national or nationalist philosophy that could be attached to some “geophilosophical” specificity or unity. Structuralism is highly universalist. It is, moreover, important to remember that, much like the existentialist and phenomenological movements that preceded it in France in the interwar period, and similar to literary surrealism, which, in many respects, prepared its questions and objects of interest as far as everything related to the articulation of the imaginary and the symbolic order (or disorder) is concerned, it was characterized by a lively cosmopolitan reaction against the provincialism and traditionalism of the French university system.

Still, it is impossible not to sketch out at least a triple complication beyond this remark. First of all, some of the developments of structuralism that we are speaking of here, in particular with respect to the question

of the subject, are, if not dependent upon, at least facilitated and suggested by idiomatic properties of the French language or by linguistic derivations that are given particular prominence in French (at least this is the impression after the fact). This is, in particular, the case for the concatenation of significations of the “subject” (*sujet*), “subjection” (*sujétion* and *assujettissement*), “subjectivity” (*subjectivité*), and “subjectivation” (*subjectivation*). This does not mean that structuralist theorems are untranslatable, but rather that they require (and did require, in their international diffusion, which can hardly be called discreet) a labor of *translation*, inscribed in the materiality of languages and every bit as incompatible with the idea of the existence of an idiom that is philosophical “by nature” (or by destiny) as with that of an idiomatic neutrality or indifference.<sup>5</sup>

Next, it is fairly clear that the rise or crystallization of the structuralist movement at the end of the 1950s, at first around ethnography and psychoanalysis (the two disciplines that Foucault refers to in *The Order of Things* as accomplishing an immanent critique of the perspective of the “human sciences” and calling into question the empirico-transcendental dualism proper to the constitution of “man” as both subject and object of a set of knowledges), occurs within a context that demands a detailed history, and which I would call *the French episode of the question of philosophical anthropology*, following upon the German episode of the interwar period (around Cassirer, Scheler, Heidegger, and the successors of Dilthey), whose themes it carried forward in a certain way even while remaining fairly independent of the contemporaneous American episode. This articulation between the structuralist adventure and the problem of philosophical anthropology—that is, not only the question of whether there is a philosophy of man and of the human, but above all the question of whether philosophy *as such* is a “thought of humanity” or of *humanities* that distribute human existence by assigning it a variety of norms, or still yet of the differential of humanity and inhumanity that “creates” man—explains why the occasionally violent conflict between structuralism and its designated or declared adversaries crystallized around the question of humanism and antihumanism. It further explains why structuralism itself, from one moment to the next and from one author to another, oscillates between various possible negations of classical humanism, whether of essence or existence, or between theoretical antihumanism and the humanism of alterity or even the “othering” (*altération*) of the human (which does not seem to me the same thing as what Levinas calls the “humanism of the other man”).

Finally (but I will not have the time to explore such hypotheses here), I would like to suggest briefly that structuralism (and in this it was not alone, but related by a compound of complementarity and antagonism to the “French-style” phenomenology that descended from Merleau-Ponty in particular, or to the Bergsonism or Biranism of certain contemporary French philosophies of life) retrospectively contributed to the detaching of certain founding works of classical philosophy written in French from the interpretations that Kantianism, Hegelianism, and Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology had given them, just as it posed, at least in principle, an obstacle to the interpretations perpetuated by anglophone cognitivism. I am thinking here in particular of Descartes and Rousseau.

All of this ought to allow us to make a few guesses about the reasons for and the forms of the opposition and institutional resistance that followed upon the apparent hegemony of structuralism in French philosophy in the period between 1960 and 1980. The *internal*, properly theoretical dimensions and conditions of what I began by calling the new turn or aftereffect of structuralism today are much more interesting, from my point of view, than its dependence upon the external environment. But we must be consistent with our hypothesis of a philosophy that is inseparable from its constitutive alterity or heterogeneity (which in my view has nothing to do with reductionism). In its French figure (today a classical one, studied more or less throughout the world), structuralism is sociologically incompatible with the conditions for the institutionalization and linguistic standardization of philosophical study to which such a large part of the French university system has rallied (with all the more haste in that it was behind the curve) or with the temptation to return to an institutional philosophy of national-republican inspiration. However, the conclusion I would draw (I almost said, whose symptoms I observe) is not that the structuralist adventure is now without a future. Rather, it is that structuralism, or poststructuralism if you prefer, is in the course of emigrating elsewhere, where it demonstrates its vitality by combining with other problematics. But that is a different history from the one we wish to tell today.

Let us now come to the theme I announced at the beginning. In truth, the question of the relation between the structuralist movement and the problematic of the subject, as we can describe it across a certain



trajectory of texts (which, of course, are not all structuralist, or not so in the same way, or which lead to the recognition of a fundamental unclassifiability), is not the only one whose hypothetical reconstruction can serve as the ground for testing conjectures about the characteristics of structuralism as a movement of both *entrance into and exit from* the labyrinths of structure (which for us were something like what the labyrinths of freedom and continuity were for the metaphysics of the classical age). There are indeed other questions which cut across that of the subject: examples might include the question of the enunciations of (or ways of writing) truth, or the question of the nature of the event (and of practice) as such. But the problematic of the subject has at least a methodological priority, on account of what I am calling the tight links between the emergence of structuralism and the inflection of debates about philosophical anthropology, to which structuralism contributed so heavily.

For the purposes of synthesis, we can suggest that structuralism constituted itself, in a polemical way, or was attacked from the outset, in a no less polemical way, as the challenging of a generative equation, whose speculative abstraction makes possible a wide variety of developments in which *the humanity of man* (understood in an essentialist way as a common form or *eidos*, in a generic way as a *Gattungswesen* [species-being], or in an existentialist way as the construction of experience) is identified with the *subject* (or *subjectivity*). Subjectivity in turn is conceptualized within the teleological horizon of a coincidence or reconciliation between *individuality* (whether particular or collective) and *consciousness* (or the self-presence that effectively actualizes meanings). It should be noted that such a coincidence or reconciliation does not need to be accomplished at every moment, nor does it need to allow any exceptions, delays, or contradictions that are not the counterpart of its own division or separation. Still, it seems that it must correspond to experiences of thought that allow the subject to exist by itself and form in ideal terms an absolute horizon of meaning, particularly as far as the knowledge, the transindividual and transgenerational communication, and the historical normativity of truth are concerned. In other words, if we situate ourselves on the ground of enunciation, it must authorize the appropriation of an *I* (or an *I say, I think, I live*) and its association with a *We* more or less immediately identified with a humanity distinguished in a transcendental fashion from the “world” or “nature” of which it is a material part.

If you will grant me, at least hypothetically, this characterization of the full humanist figure of the subject,<sup>4</sup> I would like to advance

here, in a descriptive mode, two successive theses that seem to me to correspond to the two moments of “structuralism” (or the two movements that envelop one another within structuralism). In my view, the repeated or renewed succession of these two moments is the only thing that gives a full characterization of structuralism.

First, structuralism in fact *destitutes* such a subject in a radical way by abolishing the presuppositions of autonomy or preestablished harmony that underpin its teleological function: the great classical “identities” or “identifications” of the “ego” or “self” who is or becomes “himself” (or “herself”), who is his or her “own self” (*eigentlich*), of the “I” that is a “We” and the “We” that is an “I.” But this destitution<sup>5</sup> should not in any way be confused with a negation of an apophantic type, in which the annihilation, or inversion, of the predicates of individuation and belonging, or of self-presence and consciousness, constitutes by itself the essentiality of the subject, the truth of the *name* of the subject, the absence of determination or the horizon of absence in the determinations that guarantees the irreducibility, the “*originarité*” of the subject in opposition to its substantialized or reified appearances. But neither should it be confused with a *misrecognition* of subjectivity or of the subject/object difference, which is precisely the mistake that personalist and transcendental critiques imputed to structuralism, whose slogan in a sense was the substitution of the object (be it a formal, residual, or complex object) for the subject. I believe that, in reality (and this is a new meaning that structuralism, in a complex relation with the Copernican revolution and Nietzschean genealogy that we cannot discuss here today, has given to the word *critique*), the typical movement of structuralism resides in a simultaneous operation of *deconstruction* and *reconstruction of the subject*, or deconstruction of the subject as *arche* (cause, principle, origin) and reconstruction of subjectivity as an *effect*, or in yet another formulation, a passage from constitutive to constituted subjectivity.

But this first, decisive, and spectacular movement is only meaningful to the extent that it is overdetermined and rectified by a second one, which seems to me to correspond to the *alteration of subjectivity* in the various modalities of a denaturation, an excess, or a supplement (as Derrida put it in *Grammatology*). In this second movement, which is oxymoronic and thus more intimately connected to the idea of a *condition of impossibility of experience* (or of a condition of experience as “experience of the impossible”) than to that of a transformation of cause into effect, of the originary into facticity, etc., subjectivity is formed or named as the

proximity to a limit whose crossing is always already required even as it remains in some sense unrepresentable.

This second movement is more commonly considered as “post-structuralist” than as structuralist to the extent that one can call *structure*, in a generic way, the operator of the production of subjectivity as such, or of the effect of subjectivity as self-recognition and distancing with respect to the object, whatever the terms used to describe it and whatever may be the form or formalism applicable in a given field of experience that allows a constitutive function to be reversed into a constituted function. It would seem, on the other hand, that in the emergence of the unrepresentable considered as the subject’s vanishing point, or in the “performative contradiction” of an injunction without any possible execution (whether it be an injunction to transgress, disappear, identify, or metamorphose), we are dealing with the dissolution of structure—whether it be to the advantage of flux, dissemination, the machine, or the thing. But my hypothesis is precisely that there is, in fact, no such thing as poststructuralism, or rather that poststructuralism (which acquired this name in the course of its international “exportation,” “reception,” or “translation”) is always still structuralism, and structuralism in its strongest sense is already poststructuralism. All the “great” texts that can be attached to the name of structuralism in fact contain both these movements, even if we must admit differences of accent between the two. The tendency is for structuralists to move from one gesture to the other—one is tempted to say, from a “structuralism of structures,” that is, one that seeks to discover structures and invariants, to a structuralism “without structures,” that is, one that seeks their indeterminacy or immanent negation.

I willingly admit that each of these movements can only be described in a circular way, in the form of a *petitio principii*. This means that for the purposes of this interpretation, *I am calling “structure,” in the sense of structuralism, a mechanism of reversal of the constituting subject into constituted subjectivity*, based on a deconstruction of the “humanist” equation of the subject. And I am calling “poststructuralism,” or *structuralism beyond its own explanatory constitution, a moment of reinscription of the limit on the basis of its own unrepresentability*. But as a counterpart, I ask that you admit—against an obstinate thesis—that the question of the subject has never ceased accompanying structuralism and determining its orientation. And in reality I am not far from thinking that structuralism is one of the few philosophical movements to have tried not only to *name* the subject, assign it a founding function, or *situate* it but, properly

speaking, to conceptualize it (which may simply mean to conceptualize the preceding “operations” as operations).

Let us now try to illustrate a bit more precisely each of these two moments, which we have evoked in terms that are, we must admit, rather abstract.<sup>6</sup> For the first moment—deconstruction and reconstruction, passage from the constitutive to the constituted—I will give three privileged examples among many other possibilities. Their succession constitutes both a deepening of the question of the effect of subjectivity and a progressive displacement from a formal conception of structure to an increasingly material one. I can obviously only refer to them in a very allusive way to indicate the use I make of them, presuming that my listeners are familiar with or will be able to find the appropriate contexts, which are quite classical.

I borrow my first example from Émile Benveniste, whose themes of “man in language” or “subjectivity in language” practically designate by their very names the process of reversal of the constitutive and the constituted. Not only because language “speaks man” rather than “man speaking language” or languages (as several of the Romantics had already put forth), but because language “speaks” man precisely as a subject, or rather, speaks the possibility and the limit of possibilities for man—for the human individual thrown into the linguistic system—to name himself as subject. I am not seeking here to say whether the thesis put forward in *Problems in General Linguistics* is “true” or not from the point of view of linguistics, but to discover its meaning. What is important is the way Benveniste combines his distinction between *statement* (*énoncé*) and *enunciation*<sup>7</sup> (comparable to that between code and message in Jakobson) with a critical reformulation of the classification of personal pronouns, which I would interpret in the following way: It is well known that for Benveniste, at least in the Indo-European languages (or in their dominant usages), the pronouns classed as “personal” can, in fact, be divided into two classes, those of the first and second persons being the only “true” ones, where the enunciation is implied in the statement itself, and which are capable of exchanging places in a process of interlocution, whereas the third person represents an “invariant” that excludes the subject and moves between the singular and plural in the same way a common noun does. Subjectivity is thus characterized by a two-fold regime of opposition: on one hand, the opposition internal to persons, which institutes the exchange of individual

places but excludes the interchangeability of consciousnesses (*I/You*); on the other, the opposition instituted by the different forms of the plural, which implies that for the individual subject *I*, sometimes the *We* installs within his consciousness a virtual representation of the whole of which he is an “indivisible part,” as Rousseau said (50), sometimes the exclusive *They* creates a possibility of alienation that precipitates the community into the world of things and consequently, the subject into skepticism or unhappy consciousness.

I will take my second example from Lacan’s “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” and “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” that is, the first and last texts of the *Écrits* (1966). In analyses that we all remember, Vincent Descombes showed just how much these texts owe to Alexandre Kojève’s reading of Hegel and thus to an anthropological interpretation of the dialectic that binds together recognition and the struggle to death around the infinity of a desire in which the subject can do nothing but pursue the lure of a forever lost completeness. But I would like to insist upon another aspect, which concerns, rather, the doubling of the subject between the instance of the symbolic and that of the imaginary. The famous formula casting the subject as “what a signifier represents for another signifier,”<sup>8</sup> and thus as what is indefinitely *transmitted* or *transferred* from one bearer to another, following the insistence or incidence of an absolutely impersonal, even aleatory chain, does not deprive the subject of existence. Rather, it calls upon the subject to recognize itself in the reflection of the “identifications” that it constructs by interpreting the desire of the Other (which can also be a tragic absence of desire), projected behind the signifying chain or imagined as its origin, and by making of itself the “object” of this desire through the labor of fantasy. The reversal from constitutive to constituted is all the more interesting here in that Lacan’s terminology, superimposing the specifically French duality between two designations for the subject, the *Je* and the *Moi*, on Freud’s instances (*Ich*, *Es*), refers not only to Pascalian and thus Cartesian sources but also to a twisting of the Kantian paralogism of pure reason, in which the subject can project himself into all the places of an “object” (or a “phenomenon”), provided they are invested with a minimal representation of desire.

Third example: Lévi-Strauss. Not so much works such as *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, and *Structural Anthropology* (even though there would be much to draw from these texts), where the “subject” is essentially defined as a

*place*, that is, by what it receives or, better, by the way in which a certain empty place, the defining condition of any combinatory or *invariance*, can be overdetermined in both an order of language and an order of exchange or reciprocity between “halves” of the social whole. Although both of these orders can be rigorously determined, their superimposition appears as a pure contingency.<sup>9</sup> I am thinking, rather, of a later Lévi-Strauss, still little known by philosophers, who has recently been the object of a very illuminating commentary by Patrice Maniglier: the Lévi-Strauss that can be seen, for example, in *The Naked Man*, whose conclusion fulfills the task announced in *The Savage Mind*. What is “constituted” here (even *constituted as constitutive*), is

*thought itself, the constitutive experience of which is not that of an opposition between the self and the other, but of the other apprehended as opposition. In the absence of this intrinsic property—the only one, it is true to say, that is absolutely given—no act of consciousness constitutive of the self would be possible. Being, were it not apprehensible as a relationship, would be equivalent to nothingness. The conditions which allow the emergence of myth are therefore the same as those of all thought, since thought itself cannot be other than thought about an object, and since an object, however starkly and simply it is conceived, is an object only in so far as it constitutes the subject as subject, and consciousness itself as consciousness of a relationship, [on the basis of an] initial opposition [. . .] injected into experience. (Naked 603–04)*

Thus, the structure is no longer considered as a *whole*, it is no longer properly speaking a *combinatory* (these two things being, in truth, inseparable). Structure is, rather, a process of *displacement*, indefinitely enlarged and varied across the surface of the earth, of oppositional couples that, inserted in so many stories that echo one another, make nature into the paradigm of culture, the concrete alterity into which men project their own relations and their singularity.

However brief these examples may be, we can see two lessons emerge from them. First, the *structure* that structuralist discourses speak of, make use of, or constitute is never a first-degree structure (what Bachelard used to call “first” as opposed to “second-position” [9]), a totality or system of parts submitted to a law of discreteness, difference, or variation and invariance. It is always a “second-position” structure,

that is, a use of such logical and analogical forms in the second degree, in such a way as to put into place a difference of differences, which can be called the “subject” and which determines our perspective on the system. *In this sense, all structuralism is profoundly Leibnizian.* Second, the primordial operation of structuralism is always already *political* and politically subversive. It is not by accident that I evoked above, in more or less Hegelian terms (but they could just as easily have been Rousseauist, Kantian, or Durkheimian terms) the fundamental possibility, inscribed in the subject’s constitutive function, of creating an identity between *I* and *We* (recalling the key phrase in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*: “‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’” [Ich, das Wir, und Wir, das Ich ist] [110]), be it in the teleological form of a transcendental presupposition or a practical destination. But the structuralists with their structures are always already creating an obstacle between *me* and *us*, that is, between “self” and “self,” the other of the subject that constitutes it. They thus virtually make the community into an indefinitely open (or reopened) problem, and not a given or a possible resolution.

This, in fact, already has brought us to what I called the second movement, the poststructuralism inherent within structuralism, without which there would in fact be no structuralism or structures constitutive of effects of constituted or derived subjectivity. For what are we talking about when we say that the subject cannot be constituted without a *division* and above all without being *separated from itself* by the signifier, form of enunciation, or variation whose trace it is? It is not *another subject*, the *double* of the subject itself, nor is it an *object* in the sense of a constituted objectivity or phenomenality, even though it is in a sense both *more* and *less*. Above, I borrowed Derrida’s terminology to speak of a supplement or excess. Other terminologies would be equally possible, and there is no question of demanding any kind of unanimity, either in terminology, style, or method. If “structuralisms” are fundamentally heretical with respect to one another, what can we say of “poststructuralisms,” which include discourses and texts, some of whose authors never figured among structuralists and which interest us for a retroactive effect on structure that we believe their confrontation can produce?

One last preliminary remark: if there is a thematic that we could describe as poststructuralism’s element of critique with respect to structuralism, I believe it would be that of a critique of the *norm* and of

*normativity*, not to the benefit of objectivity and factuality, but with a view toward the transmutation of values that depends in the first place upon the recognition of the way they have been dissimulated as essences, foundations, or facts. *In this sense, all poststructuralism is profoundly Nietzschean.* I indeed think that this is the common element in every critique of structure as a “determinism,” as well as of identification of entities, in the sense of a “relational ontology”—as homogeneous or self-subsisting “systems,” and in this sense as realized images of noncontradiction. This is also the horizon of what Foucault calls “power,” or “power-knowledge” (“Truth”). Once again we are dealing with a politics, or a metapolitics. But, this being said, we are also in full dispersion.

Let us return to Lévi-Strauss for an example. A little text, this time, but one that has had a great effect and that communicates with a whole current of contemporary anthropology: the twelfth chapter of *The View from Afar*, “Cosmopolitanism and Schizophrenia.” The issue is still one of *thought*, but it is no longer approached in terms of a structure of *oppositions*. Rather, there is a structure of *differences* between two modes of organizing content into “systems of thought”: myth and delirium. Lévi-Strauss, who does not believe in the extreme relativist variants of ethnopsychiatry, tells us that there remains an insurmountable difference between the two, but he also shows us that this difference does not have a nature proper to it. The difference between the normal and the pathological varies effectively between cultures, and in this respect they are condemned to reciprocal misunderstanding, or at least uncertainty. Elsewhere the same demonstration has been conducted with respect to masculinity and femininity. At issue generally are what I call *anthropological differences*, which always are, or can at least become, the occasion for a subjection but are uneasy in that, if their existence is inseparable from our representation of the *human* (and without representation of the human there is no humanity—“humanity is its representation”), the site or point of their difference remains unrepresentable (except in the exhibition of fetishes).

But here is yet another theoretical situation: “subject” and “subjection.” It is time to go back over it, however briefly. This whole historical “play on words” comes from Roman law, passing through Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Bataille, but it has become the most striking common stylistic or rhetorical characteristic of all French philosophy that seeks to find the effects of power at the heart of structures or, better put, to pursue the stumbling block that can be interpreted as *resistance*. We can see here



that no one has taken more seriously than the structuralists themselves the reproach that was initially made to them, namely that they reduced the subject to structure in order to plunge it into slavery. We know how this works: *no subject without subjection*, at least in the first, plastic sense of the word (just as Derrida calls *appropriation* the process that contains both appropriation and expropriation as moments [*Spurs* 109–17]). But what is the subjection of the subject? A differential of subordination (*assujettissement*) and subjectivation, that is, of passivity and activity, perhaps of life and death, or metamorphosis and destruction. We have no unequivocal formula that allows us to conceptualize it, still fewer criteria that allow us to mark its turning point, which can appear in the form of extreme violence, or the appearance of what Lacan, following Freud, calls “the Thing” (*das Ding* [*Seminar VII*]), deindividualized and desubjectified, taking the place of the objects to which the will and desire of the subject are attached. We do, nonetheless, have examples of its hallucinatory presence, or its *over-presence* (which is no longer a *self*-presence), in the “real” of individual or collective experience—that of *jouissance* or terror.

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler adds a supplementary logic to her remarkable analysis of this radically aporetic dialectic of “subjection” as a differential of subordination (*assujettissement*) and subjectivation without symmetry or reversal, a paradox she calls, a bit mischievously, the discursive turn (or return), which is both situated on the scene of subjectivation and constitutive of this scene. All structuralists lend themselves to it precisely to the extent that they reject the facilities of metalanguage. But it was Louis Althusser, in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” who gave it what we can call its pure form: there is no “subject” who does not name him- or herself, or rather, whom theory does not stage as naming him- or herself and thus becoming a subject and being subjected in the moment and gesture of emergence from *what is not yet a subject* (a “pre-subject”: in Althusser’s terminology, the *individual*) and thereby becomes *always already the subject*. There is no structural constitution of the subject that is not, if not an image and resemblance of the Creator like the metaphysical subject, at least the performance or ironic *enactment* of a linguistic *causa sui*. Previously, if only to remark its aporia, I called this the presentation or reinscription of the limit on the basis of its own *unpresentability*: unassignable difference, violence, or radical passivity, and also the Thing, the death mask, the primitive scene of interpellation. It is up to us to decide, and I would never want to cut short the discussion in the name of some norm, whether this

is structuralism's grave or the question that sets in motion its indefinite renewal, its *recommencement*.

Deleuze, in the article I referred to earlier, anticipated this question, writing in his personal style that the “structuralist hero,”

*neither God nor man, neither personal nor universal, [. . .] without identity, made of nonpersonal individuations and preindividual singularities [. . .] assures the breakup [l'écèlement] of a structure affected by excess or deficiency [. . .], opposes its own ideal event to the ideal events that I have just described. (281)*

Cut off from its immediate context, this phrase seems to me sufficiently eloquent and sufficiently obscure to *indicate*, in other words, the meaning of the question I have tried to formulate here.

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## Notes

- 1 When complete, this will be the fourth and final volume in “Postwar French Thought” published by the New Press under the general editorship of Ramona Nadoff.—*Trans.*
- 2 See *Seminar XX* 138–43, where Fink translates *lalangue* as “llanguage.”—*Trans.*
- 3 It is remarkable that one of the most interesting “definitions” of “structure” proposed during this period was that of an infinite process of translation (which Michel Serres expressed through the allegory of Hermes, but which, perhaps on account of the purely epistemological foundation he sought, did not prevent Serres from eventually adopting the nationalist idea of a unicity or absolute autonomy of the French language [*Éloge*]).
- 4 The “equation” of the subject that I have stated has probably never been formulated in such terms, or more precisely, it is probable that the simplification this equation involves (the erasure of the *problems* that each of its terms contains) is nothing other than what is “misunderstood” in the conflict between structuralism and “classical” philosophies of subjectivity, which reduce each to the nega-

- tion of the other. Everything in “classicism” that makes possible the structuralist opening (the “performativity” of the Cartesian “I,” for example, or the overdetermination of Kant’s “syntheses” of ontological difference) is erased by this misunderstanding, as is everything in structuralism that renews discussions of classical problems and, quite simply, our reading of the history of philosophy. [Note added in response to discussion at the conference.]
- 5 It was recalled in the course of the discussion that the verb “to destitute” (*destituer*), to which can be opposed in different ways institute, restitute, or constitute, comes from Lacan.
  - 6 Not only rather abstract but immediately marked by contradiction, since after having stated that there is no doctrine, no *com-*
  - mon thesis*, I presented a series of “common” characteristics.
  - 7 The existing translation by Meek erases the distinction by rendering both *énoncé* and *énonciation* as utterance.—*Trans.*
  - 8 Lacan’s formulation is actually “a signifier is what represents a subject to another signifier” (“Subversion” 304).—*Trans.*
  - 9 This is how I interpret the description Lévi-Strauss gives of the relation between “terminologies” and “attitudes” in kinship structures (*Structural Anthropology* 37–40, 302–03, 310–11), inspired by the Saussurean thematics of the arbitrariness of the sign, which in my view is much more interesting than the speculative thematics of a “structure of structures” (the triple exchange of women, goods, and words). See *Elementary Structures of Kinship*.

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