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Two groups of structuralists

There are obviously two groups of structuralists. There are the original quiet ones, led by Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, and the new noisy ones, propagating 'neo-structuralism' with its political message.

Already last year this process of degeneration was apparent in France. *Le Monde* for the 30th November had a special section of comment and opinion called: 'Was structuralism killed by the movement of May?' Its general conclusion seems to be that it was.

With the publication of *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?*, a series of essays from various hands, published late last year,¹ it is apparent that the work of the original structuralists cannot be brought together into any meaningful synthesis. Their key concepts are meanwhile being misapplied.

It may seem incredible that such a promising idea as the original concept of structuralism can have been side-tracked so soon, long before any adequate understanding of what it was has penetrated into our discussions in this country.

But does 'structuralism' exist?

Yet it is the case. *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* is only the last, and poorest, attempt to give a unity to something which defies unification. In the last two or three years we have seen appear *Clefs pour le Structuralisme*, by Jean-Marie Auzias (1967); *Comprendre le structuralisme*, by J-B. Fages (1967); *A Quoi sert la Notion de 'Structure'?* by Raymond Boudon (1968); *Le Structuralisme* (in the series *Que sais-je?*) by Jean Piaget (1968); and last and most formidable of all, *Claude Lévi-Strauss ou la 'Passion de l'Inceste'*, which is subtitled *An Introduction to Structuralism* by the young research student who is working under Lévi-Strauss, Yvan Simonis (1968) (*Éditions Aubier-Montaigne*, 1968, 384 pp.). On top of all this comes *Qu'est-ce que le Structuralisme?* (1968) with essays by five thinkers each working in a different field, linguistics, anthropology, psycho-analysis, philosophy, etc.

Why all this pressure, this speed, to explain what 'structuralism' is, unless there is a growing fear that it may disintegrate or disappear almost at once? There have not been critics lacking who have said as much. Umberto Eco published a book last year in which he made a passionate appeal for a stop to the chaos of 'structuralism'. He

¹*Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* by Oswald Ducrot, Tzvetan Todorov, Dan Sperber, Moustafa Safouan and François Wahl, *Éditions du Seuil*, 1968, 448 pp., 29f.

called the book (significantly enough) *La Struttura Assente*. Likewise, Boudon in the book mentioned above, expressed his disbelief in the category 'structuralism' as any kind of self-sufficient, self-contained 'method'.

Michel Foucault himself, author of the astonishing *Les Mots et les choses* of 1966 (acclaimed by nearly everyone ever since its appearance as the apotheosis of 'structuralism') has himself in a recent interview disclaimed that his work is 'structuralist' or that he shares anything significant with other so-called 'structuralists'. He says there (*Quinzaine Littéraire*, 1st March, 1968): 'Structuralism is a category which exists for other people, people who aren't in it. It is only from outside that one can say: this man or that man is a structuralist . . . we ourselves don't see any unity.'

What is the force of this remark? If 'structuralism' is only there for people who aren't 'structuralists', then can there be anything left over which *is* 'structuralism'? Obviously not, and this seems to Foucault so evident that he does not bother to elaborate on this.

But then what of the book that has just appeared, *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* If Foucault is right, then why have these five authors presented us with this mass of indigestible material? For their material is not only indigestible and riddled with the technicalities which make Simonis' book such tough going, but this collection also commits the greatest sin of all: hypostatization. If there *isn't* any 'structuralism', as so many people (who ought to know) affirm, then why this constant effort to define it?

For the answer to this, we must in fact go, not only through the thick book itself, which will mystify us, but to the *éminence grise* of 'structuralism', Roland Barthes. Through the medium of the journal called *Tel Quel*, which is apparently run under his benign inspiration by a group of intransigent young left-wing theoreticians, we may grope our way out of this labyrinth without having to take too seriously these thick expositions of what 'structuralism' is.

Through the labyrinth via Roland Barthes and Tel Quel

For *Tel Quel* gives us the clue. Structuralism now only exists as a passionate left-over from the 'events of May', and is more or less exclusively concerned to 'politicize' structuralism. The issue of last summer (No. 34) gives the game away. Passionate denunciations of the disgusting bourgeoisie are couched in this Barthes-inspired jargon of rhetoric and 'écriture'. Instead of using the brilliant breakthrough (which is methodological above all) of Lévi-Strauss, these young and passionate essayists have reduced the structuralist 'method' to a jargon, a jargon which has left behind all pretence of objectivity or scientific impartiality, in order to give itself over to hate-poems to the bourgeoisie, couched in the new lingo which derives from Barthes.

Barthes and *Tel Quel* represent, so to speak, the 'second eleven' of

structuralism. Lévi-Strauss and Foucault and Lacan are the 'first eleven'. *Their* work is passionate only in the sense that their intellectuals are passionate, questing, Cartesian. Their single hope and aim is to make sense out of chaos, to construct 'codes' which are helpful, which actually produce order and structure in their materials. Structure, for them, is a word which covers (very roughly speaking, for I know that it is not, for them, exclusively this) the 'models' which one can build, to explain how a given society, art-form, or psychotic 'discours' are in fact built-up. *Structure is what you see in your materials, not something you impose on them.* This is vitally important.

Because when we come to the 'second eleven', the linguistic-semantic-rhetorical jargon of Barthes and the indignant editorial team of *Tel Quel*, 'structure' is something which is brought to bear on the materials (usually the bourgeoisie which is hated to execration) rather like a battleship brings its heaviest guns to bear on a resisting coastal village. The destruction and carnage are not to be disputed—but the result is not scientific, nor is it any more even interesting. Scattered corpses and the ruins of other people's gradually-evolved culture patterns are not in themselves amusing. Hatred in itself is not interesting.

The authors of *Tel Quel* are, soi-disant, structuralists. Their vocabulary is made up from the foam which has been generated on top of the whirlpool of structural linguistics (itself something very solid, very respectable, very dull, very dispassionate, very scientific, tautologous to the point of boredom and absolutely non-political). This foam, which floats about in large masses in *Tel Quel*, consists of the following sorts of words:

langage, inscription, discours, mutisme, écriture, texte, texte précis, transformations, lecture, texte historique, imitation formelle, paroles, déchiffrement, récit, récit politique, échange, ossature, écriture negative, écriture automatique.

These are all taken from the essay called 'La Grande Methode' by Phillippe Sollers in the summer number (No. 34) of *Tel Quel*, 1968. Here is an example of how this kind of jargon is used:

La double inscription, le double registre: introduction du texte comme spatio-drame dont le mouvement déborde le temps reflexif; dont l'articulation et la désarticulation pénètre l'ensemble historique des textes qui vit, meurt, se transforme et façonne les corps respirant en lui (p. 26).

Useless to translate. This kind of thing only has meaning in its own dress.

But what is so distressing is that the bourgeoisie should be accused, not of having got something wrong, but of having purloined the 'texte historique'! Idealism knows how to juggle its 'discours' in order to get the proles to work cheaply (p. 24). Idealism, instead of 'digging out the stinking ditch' of the culture from which it takes its

rise, only dreams of exploiting the proletariat 'sexually' (*sic*) in giving back words where it itself receives benefits (p. 24).

This may be social criticism, pretty wild and untutored, but is it structuralism? Surely not, although it takes itself very seriously as such. Here is the passage:

Elle rêve d'exploiter sexuellement le prolétariat, c'est à dire de lui rendre en paroles ce qu'il lui donne en forces, en feignant de faire commencer le processus révolutionnaire au moment de la contrepartie verbale de cet échange (p. 24).

Well, well, we have come a long way down the hill from the Lévi-Straussian Parnassus, for it is indeed the faint assonance with Lévi-Strauss on 'échange' which gives this passage, and many others like it, its ring of verisimilitude. Any reader familiar with his work must sense its presence here in a kind of mocked and travestied form. And this presence does not work in Sollers's favour.

Or take another passage, from the most recent number of *Tel Quel* (No. 36, winter 1969):

Le mécanisme de la clôture, en conditionnant le texte à n'être jamais que la reproduction, la réécriture du texte déjà écrit, en le condamnant à être asservi au sens, à ne pouvoir échapper à la gravitation du sens, a pour effet, une fois donc qu'elle est posée comme clôture, c'est à dire comme réécriture actuelle, manifeste, de montrer l'écriture même à l'oeuvre dans le texte soumis au sens, la production textuelle depuis toujours en jeu (p. 41).

I challenge anyone to make any literal sense out of that passage of Jean-Louis Baudry. All it shows is a quite morbid fascination for the word 'écriture' (or 'réécriture') which is exercised as a kind of charm or magic spell, having a deeply soothing effect on the initiates of the 'second wave' structuralists, but moving any adherents of the 'first wave' to tears.

To what extent Roland Barthes himself is the source of this kind of rhetoric (even if not of the sentiments) may be judged from any of his recent work since his long essay *Rhétorique de l'Image* in *Communications* No. 4 (1964) and his even more ambitious essay *Introduction à l'Analyse structurale des récits* in *Communications* 8 (1966). Of course the invention of the terms 'écriture' and 'récit' was his, ever since *Le Degré Zéro de l'Écriture* (1953). Barthes has refined on this original socio-critical-structural-rhetorical aperçu through the last ten years. *Elements de Semiologie* (again in *Communications* 4 (1964) has been Englished as *Elements of Semiology* by Cape Editions in 1967. Whether the English-reading world has been much edified by this is a matter for doubt. A certain amount of confusion in front of this work seems to be the rule, confusion which stems I am sure from a deeply English desire not to spring too quickly to uncharitable conclusions so long as there is hope that the bottom of the casket might not yet have appeared. But that bottom surely is there to see in Barthes' amazing structural analysis of costume, *Système de la Mode*, which a

couple of years ago poured fresh blood into the structuralist stragglers, convincing them, against their own nagging doubts, that all was still well.

Recently, Barthes has been in England and was interviewed in the *Observer*. Here is a fragment gathered from that interview:

Briefly, structuralism ('though this is now a banal and inaccurate term', says M. Barthes) aims to remove from the reading of a 'text'—book or essay, or, indeed, film—all the emotional, ideological or just pure human preconceptions that we bring to it, so that it exists solely as a book. . . . By launching a general attack on signs, symbols and representation of every sort, Barthes and his friends of *Tel Quel* aim at 'the fundamentals of society. Our political aim is more theoretical and long-term than that of earlier committed writers. Marx has taught us that the fight can be very vigorous and very long with only a very vague idea of the future. I believe the eventual society will be Marxist in outline, but most of us will not live to see it.'

Suppose Barthes is right, suppose he is wrong. What does any of this have to do with *structural analysis*? He himself admits here his political colour and his 'de-personalizing', 'de-individualizing' attitude to the 'text'. But he seems to make no distinction of level. To say 'we must read a work structurally, not subjectively and idealistically', does not, in itself, imply, either in a weak or a strong sense, that we should read it with Marxist presuppositions! Rather the reverse. For if we should come to a text without our 'ideological or just pure human preconceptions', why should we come to that text with Marxist ones? What has the future of society to do with structuralist analysis?

We can see the depths to which we have sunk if we compare for a moment Lévi-Strauss's own attitude to politics and society. Lévi-Strauss has never hidden the fact that he has, as he says, 'the guts of a man of the Left'. Furthermore he has admitted that an early reading of Marx led directly to his penetration into possibilities of structural analysis.

But when has he ever descended into the political forum of the all-too-painfully here-and-now? When has he turned his rich and detailed analyses to the decorating of a social club, group or party? He would be quite incapable of making any link between what he feels to be 'structurally' the case about the tribes, or myths, he studies, and actual participation in the political market-place of his own society. As a man, as an intelligent man, as a committed man of the Left, Lévi-Strauss of course has views. But as a *structuralist* he has no views. What he finds the structure to *be*, is where the whole thing stops. Lévi-Strauss would be quite incapable of using his structural analyses as Barthes does, as a kind of Prospero's wand. For Lévi-Strauss, for Foucault, for Lacan, for Ricoeur, for Greimas, for Martinet, the 'first eleven', structures are *not predictive, not*

legislative. They are obedient to the lie of the facts in a given society and do not predict or recommend the future. Scientifically, at least, that is *out*, what the French would call *exclu*.

But the 'second eleven' do it all the time. Barthes himself has an essay in last summer's number of *Tel Quel* on a certain type of Japanese marionette theatre, the *Bunraku* theatre.

Here again is an attack upon what is presented as the maudlin hypocrisy of Western theatre. The Japanese, it would appear, do it all differently, and of course (it goes without saying) better.

But the vocabulary is the thing to note. Here is a typical passage: *Le Bunraku* pratique en effet trois écritures séparées, qu'il donne à lire simultanément en trois lieux du spectacle: la marionnette, le manipulateur, le vociférant; le geste effectué, le geste effectif, le geste vocal . . . la substance vocale reste écrite, discontinuée, codée, soumise à une ironie . . . (*Tel Quel*, 34, summer 1968, p. 31).

There are a great many surreptitious cuts at bourgeois sentimentality, but the essential is that, whatever Barthes may think as a private individual about the values of Western theatre (and we are not lacking critics ourselves within the Western theatre), his analysis of visual 'écriture' is incapable of being given a literal sense. To say that the marionette, the people who move the marionette around, and the speaker on stage are 'trois écritures séparées' is in fact to do damage to language. They are not 'écritures'. They may be 'significant' or 'signified', they may be 'coded'. But they are not 'écritures', any more than the bourgeois Idealism actually possesses itself of 'le texte historique'. It is an abuse of language, not a use, not even a metaphorical use. Because when one gets to the point of calling visual codes 'écriture', when one refers to 'substance vocale (qui) reste écrite', then one is simply playing a wilful game at the expense of category distinctions. It amounts to little more or less than self-indulgence in a not very sympathetic kind of one-up-man-ship.

And so back to the second group of 'structuralists'

But let us come back now to *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* In view of what has already been said about the corruption of structuralism, this book may be taken as a kind of last death-agony of unification. At least one supposes so. Can there be any *more* of these 'introductions'? Five or six in two years, and all of them still-born, even in France—surely this must be significant?

Look, for instance, at the opening statement by François Wahl:

We will say—and it is the only way of not falling into confusion—that under the name of structuralism are grouped the sciences of the sign, and of systems of signs (p. 10).

This is surely unexceptionable. Linguistics, anthropology, psychoanalysis—all these, in their structuralist dress, would fit in here. But the awful thing about this fat book of essays is that this opening

definition is also its conclusion. No more will appear through these essays than exempla of the truth of this opening definition: that structuralism groups together sciences of signs. And because this is so, there is a *petitio principii* from the very beginning of the book, right up to the very end.

For we already *knew* that structuralism has to do with the sciences of signs. But does this constitute structuralism as something which actually exists *apart from* given detailed interpretations of signs, in a society, a myth-sequence, a psychotic *discours*? For if there is any point at all in titling a book *What is Structuralism?* it must surely reside in making us see in what way the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. And this book does not do this.

The book *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* is immensely disappointing because there is nothing new in it. Respect for the elders of the tribe could not go farther. The first essayist, Oswald Ducrot, gives us a tedious account of the break-through of Saussure and the meditations of Hjelmslev. The second essayist, Tzvetan Todorov (known already in 'structuralist' circles for his edition of the Russian Formalists), gives us a few observations on Valéry, Henry James, Propp, Joyce and others, and an extremely idiosyncratic break-down of some narratives of Boccaccio, which lacks as much in precision as it does in relevance to his theme, which was meant to be 'Poétique'. The formalization of causality which Todorov tries to accomplish with the help of the little sign → just throws into relief even more sharply the difference of level between that sign used by Lévi-Strauss in a closed group of inter-defining myths, to indicate strict 'transformations' and that sign used in a general literary context to mean 'causes' or even 'gives rise to' or 'leads to'—for which function of the 'récit' we really do not need a sign.

Dan Sperber is our anthropologist. He gives us the meat of some early break-through formalizations made by Lévi-Strauss, in *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté*, and goes through Lévi-Strauss's work from then (1949) on up to *Mythologiques* (1964, '66, '68) with painful fidelity. Sperber's is an article of respectful and pedestrian exegesis. There is still not much talk about signs, which we hoped there would be after Wahl's opening promise. All three essays so far have avoided or failed to reach the explicit discussion of the 'sciences of signs'.

Nor is our psycho-analytical expert more helpful. Moustafa Safouan gives us the meat of some of Lacan's aperçus. He goes in for a horrid kind of latter-day Freudian primitivism. For instance, here is the opening of Safouan's Conclusion:

L'organisation du manque autour d'un signifiant, le phallus, qui l'indique dans le sujet, est ce qui fait que pour l'homme sa propre image sera toujours marquée d'une cassure ou d'une limite sur laquelle toute 'expansion narcissique' viendra se briser. La prévalence de l'investissement narcissique de l'image du phallus,

comme c'est le cas au cours de la phase phallique, aggrave le sentiment de castration chez le sujet, et fait s'enfoncer dans l'auto-érotisme un organe qui, de toute manière, n'avait pas besoin de cet investissement supplémentaire puisqu'il faisait partie du corps et, comme tel, était déjà investi (p. 294).

This is really shockingly bad in itself, but as structural analysis it's not a starter. Lacan is much better than this. But we are still nowhere near the 'sciences of the sign' which Wahl promised us. Or is *this* meant to be an analysis of, a *science* of, signs? . . . If so, there's no hope for structuralism in psychology, not yet at any rate. But Lacan is much more subtle than this. He is being done a disservice by his exegete.

'Structuralism' and philosophy—is there a meta-structuralism?

This only leaves the fifth and last essay, that of François Wahl himself, on *Philosophy and Structuralism*. But Wahl, though more circumspect and more subtle, is no less derivative than his colleagues. He is hypnotized by Foucault's *Les Mots et les Choses*, hardly daring to put his foot down anywhere for Foucault has said roundly that there is *not* an 'épistémè structuraliste', the possible existence of which Wahl havers about for seventy pages. Wahl scrambles over the back of Althusser only to propose us a real horror in his second Part which is subtitled 'Two philosophies beyond structuralism: Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida'.

Now, we have more or less been forced, in reading this book, in reading these diverse essays, to the conclusions (1) that structuralism doesn't exist, (2) that none of the essayists at least know what it would be if it did exist, and (3) that whatever it is or might be it is *not* a self-contained thing like a philosophy. But here is Wahl positively suggesting, not only that there *is already* a philosophy called structuralism, *but that there are two beyond it*.

At this point one can hardly believe one's bad luck. One feels like weeping from sheer frustration.

For Wahl *promised* us, at the beginning, in his Introduction, that structuralism is a grouping together of 'sciences of the sign'! We have not touched that level at all, anywhere, during the whole course of the book, except in so far as certain diagrams of Lévi-Strauss have been given in illustration by Sperber. As soon as Todorov made a tentative step towards his own formalizations, he lost grip, and the others do not even attempt specific analyses of signs in a formalized way at all.

One of Wahl's candidates for trans-structuralist philosophy leads us to suspect an organic link between *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* and the Barthes-*Tel Quel* sort of 'structuralism' we discussed earlier—it is the name of Jacques Derrida. Jacques Derrida's 'philosophy' is claimed by Wahl to be 'beyond Structuralism'.

Jacques Derrida burst out into print in 1967 with three books on

grammar, rhetoric *écriture*, etc., and by so doing established himself, with Barthes, as the latest and most fashionable socio-linguistic critic. He appeals to a generation of young people which is so tired of the sterility of (pure) linguistics, that it wants at all costs to mystify it into a religion, or politicize it into a weapon. In either case, it wants to *participate*, not to study merely, and Derrida, like Barthes, gives it a good run for its money.

Derrida published in 1967 *l'Écriture et la Différence, De la grammatologie* and *La Voix et le Phénomène*. Derrida believes that we must escape from the phonocentrism and logocentrism of (pure) linguistics, in order to establish 'écriture' as that activity of consciousness without which linguistics would not have a sense or an existence.

In so far as he does this, all is well. Paul Ricoeur had said as much, in a more responsible manner, in an article in *Esprit* for May 1967. In that article he affirmed that a sufficient linguistics would get beyond the phoneme in order to study significant unities as large as the phrase, and even the act of speaking itself, for 'someone is speaking to someone: there is the essential of the act of communication' (p. 810). Ricoeur is so honest and so full of good will for the cause of linguistics, that his sincerity shines like a light through his text, which is really an appeal for more *sense* (in both acceptations of the word!) in linguistics.

But Derrida is not so straightforward. He wishes to establish an 'archi-écriture' which would be a kind of 'ultimate condition of every form of language' (the phrase is Wahl's, p. 423). He furthermore introduces a distinction between *différence* (spelt with an e) and *différance* (spelt with an a), which is little less than sheer mystification, in view of the reasons he gives for it. Thirdly, he has a kind of mystical vision of what he calls a 'trace'. This 'trace' hovers about in language, being everywhere and nowhere at once, such that all 'differences' in language are somehow only possible through the presence or absence, the slight odour shall we call it, of this 'trace'.

This new mystification of linguistics, this new rhetorical and quasi-mystical vocabulary, fits in well with the prevailing radicalism in Paris at the moment, and I think it is fair to say that its journalistic appeal is much greater than its claim to scientific validity. Nevertheless, the job is done, Derrida is crowned (with Barthes and *Tel Quel*) as the 'new wave of structuralism'.

What is appalling is that Wahl can take this work of Derrida's and of Lacan's as being 'beyond structuralism'. He has previously said that Foucault is 'this side of structuralism'. What he should have said surely is that all three, Foucault, Lacan and Derrida, are all doing work *which forms part of* whatever 'structuralism', in a wider sense, actually *is* at the moment. And the actual result of his essay is to show us that the work of these three men is so heterogeneous that 'structuralism' as a possible unity in which their work might be held to come together, simply does not exist.

The point surely is that Foucault and Lacan themselves (I do not think we can include Derrida here) *are actually concerned with the 'déchiffrement', the decoding of signs, and their work is an analysis of given bodies of materials—'representation' in the sixteenth century in Foucault's case, the psychotic 'discours' or 'parole' in Lacan's.*

But these very activities make their work belong to 'sciences of the sign', and for this very reason it becomes impossible to conceive of their work as 'philosophies' which would transcend the 'sciences of the sign'! No, Foucault, Lacan and Derrida belong very securely on this side of whatever 'structuralism' is. They are in no possible sense 'beyond' it.

Wahl ends his essay in a rather sad and depressed way. 'Structuralism begins when the system of signs sends us somewhere else' (p. 441).

Quite so.

For what is actually missing from this thick book? Is it not precise analyses of the exact inter-relations of systems of signs? Has not the very generality, the verbosity and the lack of precision, with regard to *what we are actually talking about*, been the most nerve-racking aspect of our experience of this 'écriture'?

For in fact there are only two or three extant bodies of structuralist analysis as such. They are Lévi-Strauss's works on totemism and myth, on kinship and exchange; Lacan's actual analyses, some of which are to be found in his massive *Ecrits* of 1966, a book which collects the key papers written through a life-time of actual psychiatric practice; and Foucault's detailed study of the sixteenth century in *Les Mots et les Choses* and of the development of madness in *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (translated as *Madness and Civilization*, 1967). One can safely say, without exaggeration (although one will not be allowed to escape unscathed for saying it), that this is all there is of structuralism. The work of Althusser, Barthes, Derrida and others are really extrapolations from, and variations upon, the methods uncovered by these three men, and the 'second wave' of structuralists have not actually worked with a given body of materials in a close and systematic way, as the 'first wave' did. Someone will say: there is Althusser's *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital*, there is Barthes' *Système de la Mode*. But a reading of these shows how heavily they lean on the discoveries of their predecessors, and how, in so doing, they actually distort the lie of the facts they attempt to deal with, because their method does not spring organically (structurally, in its ordinary sense) from their materials.

The greatest single body of actual structural analysis is of course Lévi-Strauss's. The list of his books is by now impressive, we cannot help being a little over-awed. But these analyses are analyses of *something in particular*, not just methodological vapourings in general and unattached to any given body of stuff. I have myself attempted to show how Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis works, because I think

his attempt to do structural analysis is worthy of deep respect and a great amount of study.¹

It is in this sense, and this sense alone, that Yvan Simonis's book, *Claude Lévi-Strauss ou la 'Passion de l'Inceste'—Introduction au structuralisme* may be called an introduction to structuralism. Because he does take the *actual analyses* of Lévi-Strauss seriously, and examines them in detail. Where he comes adrift is in seizing something quite arbitrarily (Lévi-Strauss's supposed fascination with the theme of incest) and making this arbitrary aspect *the key* to Lévi-Strauss's whole work. He says, for instance, on page 79: 'We think, to take up again S. Leclair's expression when he was speaking of Freud, that Lévi-Strauss is absorbed in incest (passionné d'inceste) and is, in this sense, a genius and a fruitful discoverer.'

Now I do not think so, and I am prepared to chance my arm in saying that Lévi-Strauss would certainly not think so either. Simonis even goes so far as to say (p. 306) that 'the methodological position of structuralism is equivalent to the "passion of incest"'. What could be more false? But when we see what conclusions Simonis comes to about structuralism in general, at the end of his book, we understand how it could have come about that he has isolated such an inessential part of the work of Lévi-Strauss. For Simonis says (p. 311): 'In a word, structuralism is a logic of aesthetic perception.' Later, in his *General Conclusions*, he defines structuralism as 'an activity' (p. 339), and as 'ambiguous' (p. 342).

The combination of the extremely precise and wrong (that is to say, the identification of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism with the 'passion of incest') and the extremely vague and undeniably correct (that structuralism is an activity and that it is ambiguous) is what gives to Simonis's book its maddening wrong-headedness. For in calling his book *Introduction to Structuralism* Simonis is only letting another fox into the hunt. Half the hounds will now certainly go after Simonis's fox, which will be a pity. For it is a complete waste of time. Lévi-Strauss has said untiringly that it is not *what* there is, that is significant, but *how groups* of what there is, *are arranged*. Again and again he says this. 'The terms never have any intrinsic significance—their meaning is one of "position"' (*The Savage Mind*, p. 55). Again, 'Prohibitions result not from intrinsic properties of the species to which they apply but from the place they are given in one or more systems of significance' (*ibid.* p. 99). The whole argument of *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui* (1962) and *La Pensée sauvage* (1962) taken together, is that totemism *is* not something. Totemic prohibitions are arranged in patterns, *to get something said*. Totemic prohibitions, etc., are *codes*. Totemism does not exist *as* something. If this is true of totemism, how can Simonis possibly be right about the existence of an entity, a reified abstraction, like 'incest'? For incest patterns,

¹See my Introduction to Lévi-Strauss's *Totemism*, Penguin Books, 1969; and 'Lévi-Strauss: Myth's Magician', *New Blackfriars*, May, 1969. The latter article is a study of the three volumes of *Mythologiques* (1964, '66, '68) and their inter-relations.

like totemic patterns, like economic patterns, like marriage and kinship patterns, like symbolic patterns, only have an existence in so far as they provide a *framework in which significant terms can be arranged*, in order to get something *said*.

Such at least is Lévi-Strauss's position, and I am sure that he would deprecate the fundamental misunderstanding which Simonis is propagating. Simonis is guilty of the methodological mistake which Lévi-Strauss has fought hardest against, throughout the entire course of his anthropology: reification. Simonis, in reifying something which Lévi-Strauss has patiently pulled apart into its various constituent coded strands, over the years, has done his master a grave disservice.

Where, then, is structuralism at the moment? Does it exist? Is it not in a dangerously wounded condition?

Certainly one thing is plain. None of the books written over the last two or three years, purporting to 'introduce' structuralism, in fact do so. Auzias, Fages, Piaget, Simonis, Ducrot, Todorov, Sperber, Safouan, Wahl . . . all of them succeed only in dragging us deeper into the mud if we catch hold of them. Each and every one of them (with the meritorious exception of Boudon) is guilty of reification. And if we approach 'structuralism' as a reified thing, just as if we approach 'totemism' or 'incest' as reified things, we are fundamentally misunderstanding what Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, and Foucault have done. For they have de-reified, if the expression may be permitted, and tried to free us from the heavy servitude to the belief in abstractions. They want to show us a world of things, really existent things, which hang together in connected and coherent codes. They do not trust abstractions, words ending in -ism, or -ity, or even -ion. These abstractions are the enemies of structuralism. And it is a pity that those who have appointed themselves interpreters of this new and exciting intellectual possibility should have so consistently betrayed its spirit and multiplied the confusions.

One thing is sure. Structural analysis can be carried out on *any* body of materials, providing that that body of materials is broken down into its constituent elements and examined for its 'code'. The great structuralists, the great three or four, have always given their results *and their material in one and the same movement*.

But theoreticians who persistently give forth their theoretical views *without basing those views on a given body of materials* are false prophets. Structuralism was, and in its true sense remains, an attempt to explain, not, as the neo-structuralists would have it, a rhetoric intended to persuade.