

Reference points: A “structuralist” account of Deleuze’s (radical) structuralism and semiotics

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Abstract. In this essay I explain a radical version of structuralism and concept of the sign, put forward by Deleuze. My aim is to create a model of Deleuze’s structuralism, called Interpretative Structuralism, that can be applied to the world and everything in it (bodies). My explanation of Deleuze could be called structuralist because I take a systematic approach to explaining his structuralism and produce a model for future application. I maintain, however, that the model of Interpretative Structuralism is not an interpretation of Deleuze’s work, a reading. That means, despite being a model, it enables a perspective on bodies and world that sees immanence and difference – in line with Deleuze’s own radical structuralism and philosophy of difference. I focus my analysis on the Deleuze–Parnet essay “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature”. This essay explains Deleuze’s structuralist approach, and, in terms of its own structure, shows Deleuze’s structuralism in action. The concept of the sign outlined in this text is vital, but most salient is the semiotic mediator of structuralism, which (from Deleuze’s concept of external relation) I call ‘the joker’. Crucially important to Deleuze’s radical structuralism is “seeing”, and thinking with, the joker.

Keywords: Ferdinand de Saussure; Claude Lévi-Strauss; Charles Sanders Peirce; sign; literature; film; affect; empty square

The ultimate structuralist dream (or fantasy) might be the discovery of a Structure of structures which would enable us to claim that all structures were isomorphic of one another. (Sturrock 2003: 52)

For my pathetic wish to be loved I will substitute a power to love: not an absurd will to love anyone or anything, not identifying myself with the universe, but extracting the pure event which unites me with those whom I love, who await me no more than I await them, since the event alone awaits us, Eventum tantum. Making an event – however small – is the most delicate thing in the world. (Deleuze, Parnet 1987: 66)

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Introduction

#difference #model #reference points

My aim in this essay is to explain Deleuze's version of structuralism. Also, I will explain Deleuze's concept of the sign – and so, Deleuze's structural semiotics. My focus is not debating the “value” of Deleuze's structuralism, in terms of its relation to the broad sweep of criticism of structuralism, including more recent claims suggesting that it is passé and “unappetising” (Galloway 2012: 24). However, I will focus on the value Deleuze sees in structuralism and make some suggestions about why this value remains valuable today.

There are two reasons why I wish to explain Deleuze's structuralism. The first is my own desire to apply Deleuze's philosophy to other areas of inquiry – for example, media today. An account of his structuralism provides a foundation for doing so, for I believe that a structural perspective, such as Deleuze's, can make the world “more intelligible” (Caws 1988: 4). (While there is no scope in the current essay to apply Deleuze's structuralism, my explanation will suggest some approaches.) The second reason is because I see an opportunity, in Deleuze scholarship,² to explain his structuralism with a slightly different emphasis and, following from this, apply Deleuze's structuralism in a practical way to other areas of inquiry. Whether this is passé or not is of no concern to me, for I believe any analysis that aims to engage with something critically is certainly valuable.

My argument about Deleuze's structuralism is that his perspective on structure and system – which he fundamentally believes in – results in a philosophy of structure and structural analyses that is systematic and formal, but in a different sense to what one would expect of typical accounts of structuralism – which I refer to as orthodox structuralism. A recent example of the latter is Warren Buckland's (2019) analysis of Wes Anderson's films. Buckland interprets their meaning by analysing each film as a structure of binary relations, considering how these relations articulate the myths and meanings of the time, and applying a method called paradigmatic analysis. Deleuze's radical structuralism proceeds from a philosophy of structure that sees world and bodies as systems of elements in relation, and these relations are not oppositional (binary), but productive of difference. Deleuze's structural analysis produces what can be described as a sprawling account of a work (such as film), where concepts, ideas, and arguments characteristically run off in multiple tangents. See, for example, his cinema books, and – of course – Deleuze's “rhizomatic” writing with Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. For Deleuze, structuralism is a philosophical approach and method of analysis that

² Notable explications of Deleuze's critique of structuralism include Balibar 2003, Campbell 2022, Clark 1997, Dawkins 2005, Dosse 2012, Kaufman 2013, and Williams 2005.

recognizes structures and produces ideas in process, not interpretations that are versions of something else (other ideas).³

I mention this now, this somewhat paradoxical notion that Deleuze's philosophy is systematic (fundamentally structuralist), yet the writing he produces, like his structuralist worldview, abounds with seemingly tangential arguments, because I need to address something in my essay's out-of-field. I stated my intention to explain Deleuze's structuralism, to build a model that I can apply to other works, but there is an elephant in the room. The elephant is this: in setting out to explain Deleuze's structuralism, to make it more "concrete" and intelligible, to link together the tangents into what is ostensibly a narrative, to "connect the dots", my approach to Deleuze's writing may seem anti-Deleuzian. One could say I am a structuralist and am attempting an orthodox structuralist reading of Deleuze's (radical) structuralism. One might also say I am attempting to halt the movement of Deleuze's writing, strap it down. I insist, however, that I am not aiming to reduce Deleuze's account of structuralism to an interpretation. As will become clearer shortly, Deleuze's structuralism aims to realize difference in works, and the world, and encourage us (subjects) to think difference. In philosophy 'difference' refers to "difference in itself", and some *thing* is "different" when it is conceived in itself and *not* in comparison to something else. Deleuze sees this latter kind of difference as negative, as reductive. To return to my aim in this essay and that elephant in the room, my approach will explain Deleuze, and build a model of Deleuze's structuralism, without ending up with a blueprint: a master file, solution, or to borrow from Deleuze's own terminology, a manifesto (Deleuze, Parnet 1987[1971], referred to as S in in-text references below).

Another thing I will note before I begin outlining Deleuze's structuralism via several important reference points, relates to the concept 'reference point' itself and the focus of my approach. 'Reference point' appears several times in Deleuze and Parnet's essay "On the superiority of Anglo-American literature", originally written in 1977. I borrow this concept from it and, more than that, I base my

³ I refer to explanations of Deleuze's philosophy as poststructuralist (for example: Williams 2005; Smith 2010). These acknowledge significant theoretical overlap between structuralism and poststructuralism. I agree Deleuze transforms key ideas from structuralism, making his philosophy aligned with poststructuralism. In my discussion, however, I argue an emphasis in Deleuze's philosophy on positing ("recognizing") systems, structured non-oppositionally. I see in Deleuze's work a model of structural analysis, based on several criteria, that is productive of difference, not reductive (like paradigmatic analysis). Given my emphasis on system and structure, and my ultimate claim to universal structure in Deleuze's work (the plane of immanence – see p. 23 below), I choose to refer to Deleuze's philosophy as radical structuralism – and borrow 'radical' from Williams (2005: 53). See also Kaufman (2013: 89) who claims Deleuze does not reject structure "in the manner of [...] poststructuralism".

argument in what follows on this essay. There are four reasons I develop my explanation from this essay. The first is to narrow my source material. Deleuze develops his structuralism and semiotics from his monograph on Hume in the 1950s, through to his collaboration with Guattari, and right up until the 1990s when he reiterates his “belief in systems”.⁴ The span is massive. As will become clear, “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature” is a wonderful, compact examination of Deleuze’s belief in structure, his own version of the structuralist tradition, and it is appropriately timed with the popular decline of this movement in France. The second reason I base my reading (almost) exclusively on this essay, is because I am intentionally side-stepping the most obvious source for thinking about Deleuze’s structuralism: his 1967 essay “How do we recognize structuralism?”. While the 1967 essay discusses the reference points I outline in the present work in terms of what Deleuze (2004[1967]: 173) calls “criteria” of a kind of structuralism that is “interpretative”, it is heavily layered with references to structuralist concepts and theorists. This is likely because of the context of the work – the time preceding “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature” by several years, when Deleuze had (perhaps) felt it necessary to establish his own version of structuralism explicitly in a historical/philosophical context. All in all, a secondary analysis of “How do we recognize structuralism?” would be densely explicatory in nature, and necessarily so, and I do not believe there is scope in the present work for the level of detail needed. Third, and also related to my last point about “How do we recognize structuralism?”, is the opportunity that exists in Deleuze scholarship for a close reading and detailed explanation of the later essay through the lens of Deleuze’s structuralism.⁵ Fourth, and finally, “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature” is an essay that I truly love: it is packed full of structuralist ideas, and it abounds with example after example that are provocative and poignant.

Eventually, it is true, I arrive in the final sections of this essay at a model of Deleuze’s radical structuralism, made up of three criteria; furthermore, my objective is for each criterion to be readily applied to any work: for example, image-based content on social media platforms, even virtual reality. However, I want to emphasize again that these criteria function as reference points, meaning they are intended as guides for a model of analysis more experimental than interpretative. In themselves, also, the reference points *point* the analyst towards seeing, and

⁴ “I believe in philosophy as a system, but I dislike the notion of system when people relate it to the coordinates of the Identical, the Similar and the Analogous. [...] The system must not only be in perpetual heterogeneity, it must be in heterogenesis, and it seems to me this has never been tried before” (Deleuze 2010[1990]: vii).

⁵ For a useful overview of “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature”, see Surin 2000 and Bogue 2012.

thinking, difference. So, while I am outlining a model, it is a model that renders difference visible: it is more a way of seeing, more another way of recognizing structure in the world. To develop (in my own way) elements of Deleuze's own writing on structure, I have self-consciously adopted two specific techniques. First, I have included hashtags in sub-sections of the essay. In social media, hashtags are words and numbers, following the # symbol, added to social media posts to categorize the content. I have placed these, in alphabetical order, to signpost the focus of sections of the essay and to emphasize relations between sub-sections, encouraging a transversal reading of the structure of this text in addition to the typical linear reading. Deleuze's own writing in "On the superiority of Anglo-American literature" is non-linear and transversal in parts, and my own approach in this sense is produced through the hashtag. Second, and aligned with the function of the hashtag, I have punctuated sections of this essay with passages from "On the superiority of Anglo-American literature". I have deliberately chosen ones that are connotative – that is, far from didactic. Their purpose: to illuminate a section without interpreting it. As will become clear shortly, Deleuze refers to passages from literature to the same effect, the difference in my approach simply being that I have chosen another way to distinguish such passages, to set them apart as different – in other words, if this essay were a film, I have chosen another kind of edit linking sequences of the work.

1. Structuralism

Everything is a compound of bodies – bodies interpenetrate, force each other, poison each other, insinuate themselves into each other, withdraw, reinforce or destroy each other, as fire penetrates iron and makes it red, as the carnivore devours its prey, as the lover enters the beloved. (S: 62–63)

A common perception of structuralism, in its best-known form (what I am calling orthodox structuralism), is that it is old-fashioned and unappealing. Yet at the same time structuralism still abounds, in so many contexts – so much so that structural analysis seems the norm. What, then, is structural analysis? How can it be passé, yet an invisible given; at once dated yet mainstream?

What is it?

#linguistics #opposition #system

In what follows I will gloss orthodox structuralism, in terms of its development from linguistics and its apparent unpopularity today. This will lead me in the next

section to explain how Deleuze's structuralism is a radicalization of structuralism. I should note too that my focus is on Deleuze's own points of contact with structuralism from approximately the 1950s to the 1970s – and this is to be expected, given the breadth of structural analysis since its zenith of popularity in France in the middle of the twentieth century. In analysing structuralism I am working backward from Deleuze's structuralism, meaning my account of orthodox structuralism, before I offer Deleuze's take, is already somewhat "Deleuzian". I say this now because my intention is not to offer the final word on structuralism, but to explore the encounter between Deleuze and structuralism.

Structuralism is a belief in the world and a method of analysing the world and everything in it: its entities. In a philosophical context, it is a belief in the world that stands against Kantian idealism (Buckland 2012), atomism and behaviourism (Sturrock 2003[1986]), in so far as a formal approach understands the world and entities to have significance (meaning) because of the relationships of their elements.⁶ Structuralism does not believe entities are determined by some "ineffable reality which lies behind them" (Caws 1988: 28). Instead, whatever the thing is, how it behaves, and, in the context of social science, its significance for someone interacting with it, is produced by its underlying structure.

Structuralism believes that we apprehend the world by recognizing structures *or* projecting structures onto entities.⁷ Notable are the concepts 'system' and 'structure'. 'System' refers to the sense in which objects exist in relation – that is, the world is a system made up of systems; 'structure' refers to the abstract concept of relation binding things together (Caws 1988: 13). A structural analysis is an analysis of the relations (the structure) of systems. Moreover, a structural analysis sets out to explain an entity by uncovering its structural relations to bring out how they function. For structuralists, this is the same as producing a model of an entity (Buckland 2010).

What emerges as important in this perspective, sometimes specified as 'French structuralism' (Caws 1988), are the relations of elements rather than elements themselves. "What stands out in a structure is that the relationships between the elements are more important than the intrinsic qualities of each element" (Sturrock 2003[1986]: 6). Claude Lévi-Strauss, for example, describes systems of exchange where women are substituted for gifts (Caws 1988: 26). Consequentially, such a structural analysis necessarily asks – in the context of Lévi-Strauss' (1963)

⁶ Kaufman (2013: 83) describes structuralism as "a quite radical strain of mid-twentieth century French thought [...] that in essence attempts to envision a world not mediated by the gaze of another".

⁷ Sturrock (2003[1986]: 52) attributes this understanding of perception to Gestalt psychology's assimilation of structuralism.

analysis of myth, for example – what myths already exist of which the structure may be a transformation.⁸

Immanence?

Raised here are questions about structure and the concept of immanence. (My question regarding immanence follows from explaining orthodox structuralism by working backwards from Deleuze's criticisms of structuralism. To be clear, Deleuze is not framing my understanding of structure, but providing "points of reference" from which my analysis proceeds – to use Deleuze, from which I am developing my own problems for analysis.)

From ontology, immanence is when a "cause remains in itself in order to produce", and "the effect or product remains in the cause" (Deleuze 1988[1970]: 92). Involved in the relation of two things is a transformation of one thing into another, where both explicate and involve each other. What is produced is novel and new, according to this mutual transformation.⁹

Although a structuralist does not consider a structure's significance to be produced from "elsewhere" by some "hidden reality", but through the structuring activity itself, the process is not *immanent* in the way just described. A structure's meaning is always considered an effect of the system's relation to a higher order system as cause, such as a "reference" myth in anthropology or any other "engendering entity" (Caws 1988: 27). A structural analysis sets out to discover how the relations of elements reconfigure a higher-order system, and meaning resides in the negative difference between structure and higher-order system.

It is true that significance is not added from elsewhere since it is produced in the system, but it can still be argued that it is nevertheless produced from "elsewhere" in so far as a structure's meaning is an effect of something transcendent to elements of structure.

Saussure

#cut #immanence #linguistics #negative #opposition #signifier

This point, about a structure being productive of significance where production is not immanent, is an evident given in Saussure's linguistics.

⁸ "The methodological consequences of this view will be that instead of asking for an interpretation, say, of a myth, right away, one will first ask what other myths exist, of which it might be a transformation, or which might be reached from it by a series of transformations" (Caws 1988: 26).

⁹ 'Explicate' and 'involve' is from Deleuze 1990[1968].

Saussure is considered the founder of structuralism, and he was delivering his courses of lectures in General Linguistics in Geneva as early as 1906. Saussure conceived of language as a synchronic structure of elements at a specific moment in time, and fundamental to the relations involved is the two-valued logic of opposition. An opposition involves “the setting of one thing over against another rather than merely distinguishing them as they remain juxtaposed” (Caws 1988: 79). One term in a relationship is distinguished because it is not another; consider an example, not from linguistics but social analysis. In the relation of Peter and Paul, Peter is like Paul in so far as Peter is not Paul: “Peter” is what remains when Peter is subtracted from Paul.¹⁰

This binary logic of negative difference is apparent in two fundamental levels of Saussure’s linguistic structuralism. At the elementary level, language is comprised of phonemes in a “system of difference without positive terms” (Saussure 1959[1916]: 120). A sign, which involves a signifier, a sound image, and a signified, a concept, depends on relations of difference in so far as both signifier and signified are “purely differential”; that is, the sound image is the differential of phonemes, and the concept is the differential of “the mass of thought” (Saussure 1959[1916]: 120). Saussure uses the word ‘cut’ to describe the relation in the system of difference.¹¹ A user of language must also distinguish a given sound image, a signifier, from others; similarly, a user must distinguish one concept from others – according to the logic of opposition. It follows too that the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary, meaning there is no necessary connection between the two parts of a sign.

Moreover, rules of use and convention determine a sign’s concept, meaning a sign is considered in its difference from other signs as well as existing rules/conventions of use. Saussure (1959[1916]: 71) explains: “The signifier [...] is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it.”

According to Saussure’s linguistics, a sign’s significance is produced in the system of language, but this production of meaning is a modification of existing meaning based on the logic of opposition, where one term (whether a phoneme or a concept) is defined by the shadow of another. Although there is no determinant of meaning from outside the system strictly speaking – since elements/terms are considered differential modifications of one another – meaning involves a repetition of sameness proceeding from a basis of comparison.¹²

¹⁰ See Deleuze 2004[1972].

¹¹ “A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas [...] the pairing of a certain number of acoustical signs with as many cuts made from the mass of thought engenders a system of values” (Saussure 1959: 120).

¹² “Basis of comparison” is from Troubetzkoy, quoted in Caws 1988: 87.

Lévi-Strauss

#model #opposition #trickster

Structuralism developed from Saussure's linguistics into social analysis and anthropology, cultural analysis, semiotics and film philosophy, to name a few areas. In anthropology, Lévi-Strauss is a seminal thinker. He developed Saussurean linguistics into an analysis of social relations, famously applied in detail to the so-called "primitive mind".

Sturrock's (2003[1986]) explication of Lévi-Strauss highlights two broad appeals, or advantages, of structuralism. Lévi-Strauss believed that all social relations and social formations are structured, and that each is understood (and can be analysed) in so far as they are comparable versions of one another (isomorphic), according to the logic of opposition described earlier. Sturrock (2003[1986]: 54–55) explains the significance, for an imaginary reader of a work of anthropology:

Whereas once the lay reader might have been bored and bemused by technical accounts of, let us say, [...] aboriginal kinship structures, [they are] at once attracted by the suggestion that those structures can be assimilated to the forms of the observable in aboriginal rock art.

The argument here is that structural analysis of one entity is a stepping stone to bringing about an understanding of the function of another entity in the same context. "Thanks to Lévi-Strauss and the structuralism he has so widely imposed," therefore, "culture has come to seem a matter fully deserving of intelligent and systematic analysis" (Sturrock 2003[1986]: 55).

The second advantage, arguably, is a consequence of negative difference, specifically the notion that a system is comprised of terms with no positive value. Given an element of structure is thought to have value in so far as it is related to other elements of the system, all aspects of a structure are considered significant. Taking the example of social relations, Sturrock (2003[1986]: 55) notes how "[s]tructuralism works against any condescending assumption that some aspects of social behaviour are insignificant, because its principles force it to take an interest in everything [...] at least to treat everything it meets with as interesting because significant".

Lévi-Strauss, and Buckland's semiotic analysis of film

#film #model #opposition #time #trickster

A recent example of structural analysis is Buckland's (2019) study of Wes Anderson's films, in terms of his theoretical position that an analysis of the structure of one film helps us understand the meaning of the others. Again, this is an emphasis on systematic relations first and foremost; Buckland (2019: 5) points out the importance of relation in this structuralist approach: "Structural Semiotics replaces the atomistic theory of meaning, which posits a one-to-one direct correspondence or link between a sign and its referent, with a theory in which a sign's meaning is dependent on a series of differential relations with other signs." Buckland develops Lévi-Strauss' method, and he specifically references the essay, "The structural study of myth" (Lévi-Strauss 1963).

Lévi-Strauss (1963: 207) defines myth as "fundamental feelings common to the whole of mankind", "collective dreams", "the basis of ritual" and that which "reflects" "social structure and the social relations". In analysing a myth, Lévi-Strauss (1963: 211) reorganizes its linear narrative into "bundles" of relations. For example, he analyses the Oedipus myth into blood relations, monsters, and the "*autochthonous origin of man*" (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 216). The aim of Lévi-Strauss' analysis is to understand how the myth resolves human dilemmas, and so his approach involves considering how the differential relations of these bundles, and the differential relations of bundles themselves, interpret the myth.

Implied by this structural analysis are two concepts of time. On the one hand myth involves linear time. This is insofar as myth determines meaning in an event – as Lévi-Strauss (1963: 209) argues, myth "explains the present and the past as well as the future". On the other hand, the articulation of myth in a specific event is iterative, dynamic, continuous and non-linear. This involves "a time referent of a new nature" (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 211), which Buckland (2019: 10) points out is "analogous to the conception of space-time in the theory of relativity".

In Lévi-Strauss' analysis, mythical thought involves oppositions and the resolution of oppositions. Importantly, myths have a 'mediating term' or 'mediator' that appears to resolve the oppositions in bundles of terms. Buckland's succinct explanation is valuable here: "Mythic thought [...] moves progressively in circles to neutralize (or offer solutions to) contradictions by generating additional sets of oppositions and mediators" – a "circular" and "dialectical" process (Buckland 2019: 14). I say "appears to resolve oppositions" because the resolution provided by the mediator is an illusion, and this is because mediating devices function to generate other oppositions "through a process of opposition and correlation" (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 226). Lévi-Strauss claims the "trickster" as an example of a

mediator in American mythology, arguing that the raven and coyote are specific embodiments of the trickster.

Buckland uses Lévi-Strauss' analysis of myth in his theoretical approach to Anderson's films. He analyses the relations of films in order to ultimately consider how each film re-constructs a transcendent, internally consistent and pre-existent "storyworld" – also called Anderson's 'archi-film'. 'Archi' "names the kernel of features that remain constant across two or more entities" (Buckland 2019: 28, n1). Buckland examines how bundles of relations in Anderson's films articulate myths, and how these myths "add up" to create a consistent storyworld. According to Buckland, myths operating in and through Anderson's films tend to be kinship myths. What is important is how the storyworld is an abstract totality, and Buckland is clear that the conception of an auteur's storyworld rejects the realist view of cinema and the romantic view of the director as an individual expressing themselves in their films (Buckland 2019: 24). In fact, an auteur may not even be aware of their own storyworld.¹³ Buckland also explores the role of mediating elements, such as objects or people, bringing terms in opposition into contact and reconciling contradictions – through the creation of new oppositions.¹⁴

This approach of structural analysis is as follows: Buckland takes all films one at a time, and begins by methodically identifying each film's multiple narrative elements. For *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), for example, Buckland provides an estimated 1,000 words of numbered elements of the plot, in a total of 58 elements. Next, the constituents of (a) myth(s) specific to that film are identified by organizing elements into paradigms. For Buckland, the analyst's role is to consider the relations in each paradigm and between paradigms, and opposition is the operative logic. Also, the roles of mediators are identified and considered. Buckland performs this stage of the analysis over several pages, structured as prose (notably, Lévi-Strauss incorporates visual representations of bundles of terms in structure, even formulas). Buckland's method is repeated for each film being considered until the various transformations of myths are posited to add up to Anderson's archi-film: his storyworld.

In his final chapter, Buckland (2019: 169) presents "a model of the overall structural organization of Anderson's films". He argues that three kinship structures and their paradigmatic oppositions dominate Anderson's storyworld: death or the absence of parents or spouses, intergenerational relationships – functioning

¹³ Buckland (2019: 24) explains: "The storyworld is not some ineffable or unique vision, it is not the expression of some personal meaning or experience, but simply an effect of the specific selection and combination of pre-existing codes and structures."

¹⁴ In describing the role of the mediating term in the structure of Anderson's films, Buckland is referring to J. Patrick Gray's "Structural analysis of folktales" (Gray 1978).

as a possible solution to the former structure, and interethnic relations – also offering solutions to the former structures. Buckland explains various characters functioning as mediators; for example in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Richie's function as mediator between his father on the one hand and the relationship of Henry and Etheline on the other. Buckland's theoretical position is explicit in the final pages of the study, as he uses the oppositions characteristic of the films' paradigms to offer a detailed explanation – and understanding – of the films analysed; for example:

We can see immediately that intergenerational relationships dominated three early films [...] and was [*sic.*] only successful in two; that interethnic relations also dominated three early films and were successful in all three. But when interethnic relationships reappear, they are either negative (Jack's treatment of Rita in *The Darjeeling Limited*) or equivocal (Zero's ultimately tragic relation to Agatha in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*). (Buckland 2019: 184)

Ultimately Buckland's structural semiotic study of Anderson's films involves an analysis of oppositional relations of elements in structure, of a film's paradigms, and a set of films' paradigms. Mediators are posited to bring oppositions into contact or resolve oppositions and create new contradictions. Assumptions of kinship myths inform the method, while what is also driving the analysis is the question of how the object (film and sets of films) transforms myths. Analysis is a back-and-forth process between a film's elements, other bundles of elements of other films, and in relation to myths and kinship systems, each explaining the other following a logic of opposition.

Structuralism: passé – yet mainstream

Any event is a fog of a million droplets. (S: 65)

#film #linguistics #opposition #universalism

Notably, by the 1970s structuralism had become drastically unfashionable, and today it is considered passé and uninspiring by many. Buckland acknowledges this criticism and “condemnation” in the very first pages of his 2019 study. Another example, some years prior to Buckland's study, is Alexander R. Galloway's (2012) book on media theory, in which he analyses digital networks using the concept of ‘interface’ and is quick to distance his approach from structuralism in the opening pages.

Buckland (2019: 12) notes a sense in which structuralism is controversial. This is, in so far as structuralist readings challenge causal explanations. In setting out to construct a model of how an object, whether a film or social event, transforms a set of meaning (myths, laws, rules and conventions), and use that model to understand other objects, structuralism “rejects the experience of surface reality”, and

“challenges causal relations, leaving the generation of meaning to [...] an indirect (indeed oblique) causality” (Buckland 2019: 12).

What else is there about structuralism that makes it so unpopular today? Caws (1988) opines that structuralism became unfashionable precisely because it had been so fashionable to begin with – in other words, in reaction to its widespread popularity, thanks in part to thinkers such as Roland Barthes.

Another reason structuralism is “condemned” today is the same reason why it was condemned in the 1970s, and this is its so-called universalism. Lévi-Strauss, possibly the most influential structuralist, believed all aspects of society could be explained through the comparison of structures. The upshot of this position, given “Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism claims to explain so much and to explain it so logically”, is that structuralism is understood to “proffer a theory of culture” (Sturrock 2003: 53). This has been met with hostility in so far as such a universal theory of culture disavows diversity between one society and another, and in terms of the reach of structural analysis, between structures. Galloway (2012: 23) continues this critique in the context of media theory, explaining as “unappetizing” the notion that “[m]edia may be defined via reference to a foundational set of formal qualities, and that these qualities form a coherent language that may be identified across all sorts of new media objects, and above all that these qualities may be read, and interpreted”. Therefore, while structuralism’s emphasis on relation and value *does* account for an entity’s detail, according to the universal view of structuralism, structure is homogenizing.

In the face of these concerns, aspects of structural analysis persist today. It is commonplace for theorists, and everybody else it seems, to explain the “meaning” of films, media – anything really, in terms of meaning that already exists, according to what is ostensibly the logic of opposition. This can be referred to as thematic analysis, which Buckland (2019: 12) describes as conventional, while also noting the resemblance of thematic analysis to the structural semiotics he performed on Anderson’s films.

Another example, this time from the late 1990s, includes Adrian Martin’s film reviews and essays. The opening sentence of Martin’s 1998 review of Carine Adler’s film *Under the Skin* (1997) firmly establishes the film’s significance according to its fit with previous representations of women:

From *Looking for Mr Goodbar* (1977) to *A Winter Tan* (1987), contemporary filmmakers have been irresistibly drawn to the saga of the driven, wilfully sluttish woman who walks on the wild side in desperate search of her own, uncertain identity. British writer-director Carine Adler plugs into this somewhat underground tradition in *Under the Skin*, with mixed results.¹⁵

¹⁵ Martin, Adrian 1998. *Under the skin*. *Film Critic: Adrian Martin* was accessed at https://www.adrianmartinfilmcritic.com/reviews/u/under_the_skin.html.

Martin is an adjunct professor at a university with widespread international reach, and his work is noted here to suggest the mainstream acceptance of orthodox structural analysis, an approach also described as “scientific” (Williams 2005: 17).¹⁶ He has a *Wikipedia* page, which states: “His work has appeared in many magazines, journals and newspapers around the world, and has been translated into over twenty languages and has regular columns in the Dutch *De Filmkrant* and in *Caiman: Cuadernos de Cine*”.¹⁷ Deleuze’s comment from the 1970s summarizes the theoretical perspective Martin exemplifies here: “Something must always remind us of something else, make us think of something else” (S: 46). This is the logic of opposition and repetition at the beating heart of structuralism.

To round out my account of structuralism, I want to emphasize the following points: structuralism, as a viewpoint that sees the world and its entities in terms of its relations, is a perspective defined by binary opposition and aligned with a kind of universalism – considered old-fashioned and problematic. Still, the legacy of the signifier of structuralism continues; to be clear, we remain preoccupied with that “something else” we yearn to remember.

2. Radical structuralism (Deleuze)

It is the wind, even a wind from the backyard, which sometimes hurries us along, sometimes immobilizes us. (S: 75)

I, structuralist

#difference #model #opposition #reference points

I will now explain Deleuze’s structuralism. I call this Deleuze’s radical structuralism, or Interpretative Structuralism (see Deleuze 2004[1967]). Deleuze is a structuralist, and a version of orthodox structuralism underpins his philosophy, from as far back as his work on Hume to his later writing with Guattari. Specifically, I will explain the key features of Deleuze’s structuralism, its reference points. I will gather these reference points together, in a somewhat systematic

¹⁶ I do not intend to criticize Martin’s work negatively; neither do I intend to offer a definitive and comprehensive analysis of this work. I accept the work cited is a review (a form that involves evaluation) – yet a glance through his essays also reveals an emphasis on what might be called a structuralist position of comparison and evaluation, aimed at arriving at certainty and conclusions. See the analysis of violence in Tarantino’s films, where Martin compares Tarantino’s work to historical examples, explaining what violence in cinema “means” through the ages, available as: Martin, Adrian 2010. Quentin Tarantino: “Just another bullet in the head”. *Film Critic: Adrian Martin* at <https://www.adrianmartinfilmcritic.com/essays/tarantino.html>.

¹⁷ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adrian_Martin.

way. By being systematic, I mean addressing them one by one, building a model in the structuralist manner of analysis.

Two implications follow from this approach. First, my model enables me/you (an analyst) to apply a Deleuzian method of analysis to other works and events and bodies. This is in line with Deleuze's vision – explained in “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature”. Second, creating a model makes clear that I am taking a structuralist perspective on Deleuze's radical structuralism. What do I mean? Deleuze's theoretical position, his Interpretative Structuralism, involves revising what orthodox structuralism typically has understood as a system (defined by its binary logic), and positing a process-driven system of non-oppositional logic (an assemblage, or multiplicity – or what I call immanent structure). This will become clear below. For now, in outlining his theoretical position in “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature”, Deleuze “walks the talk” of the very philosophy he explains. He does not create a model or write a manifesto: he writes an assemblage. He *shows* radical structuralism, and while he does *tell* us about structuralism (he offers some explanation, literally), these are moments only, snatches of Deleuze's writing. That is why the snatches of his telling of structuralism, his offering of key features of radical structuralism, are better described as reference points in an otherwise sprawling assemblage of ideas, also known as a structure.

“On the superiority of Anglo-American literature” is a wonderful essay that incorporates excerpts of literature, criticism of literature, and philosophy. Deleuze argues in this essay that “Anglo-American” literature is superior to French literature because its writing is experimental and transformative of its conditions of experience, while the latter merely repeats the clichés and ideology of the time. Deleuze explains how, in the context of philosophy, Spinoza, Hume and the Stoics demonstrate the same experimentalism as Anglo-American writers, such as Melville and Miller. My argument is that Deleuze's claims about the greatness of certain kinds of writing reveal his philosophy of structure, and I set out to piece together the moments (reference points) of Deleuze's direct and indirect reference to structuralism and build a model of Interpretative Structuralism. (How structuralist is that!) My point here is not groundbreaking, for Deleuze deploys literature and philosophy in other works to discuss language, structure and the sign.¹⁸

What might be considered problematic is whether my approach reduces Deleuze and Parnet's conversation to an interpretation. I have explained how I want to build a model that an analyst can practically apply elsewhere. While any model might be reductive (in so far as a model necessarily is), the nature of the structuralism my model relates to, radical Deleuzian structuralism, encourages

¹⁸ Of course, see Deleuze 1990[1969].

difference. Deleuze would say that structuralism encourages a perspective on a body that is creative and hell-bent on producing new ideas (not re-presenting existing ideas, via the logic of opposition). And so I believe that the model I build is in fact a tool analysts can use for articulating difference in other bodies – not unlike Deleuze’s approach, just different.

1. Understand how the world and everything in it are immanently structured

We have painted ourselves in the colours of the world. (S: 46)

#cut #event #joker #relay #sign #signifier #subject #time #universalism

The first reference point in a model of Interpretative Structuralism points to a very specific perspective on the world, and from this a concept of ‘universalism’ (defined by immanence), and a broad approach to thinking – about the world and everything in it, called bodies – follow. The essay “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature”, is itself divided into two parts: Part I outlines Deleuze’s vision of writing, in terms of his argument about different kinds of literary works, and from this discussion of writing he outlines his Interpretative Structuralist philosophy of the world; Part II is divided into several sub-sections and Deleuze explains the logic of relation informing the concept ‘structure’ in his vision of world and bodies. Part II also includes, in addition to Deleuze’s sustained references to literary works, development of concepts from philosophical works – specifically Hume’s empiricism, Spinoza’s ontology and ethics, and Stoic logic. Deleuze does not use the phrase ‘immanently structured’ and in explaining this reference point I am connecting the dots on several concepts, ideas and comments weaved in and out of Deleuze’s writing.

Throughout “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature” Deleuze outlines his vision of the world, both at an absolute level and in terms of its individual bodies. At one moment in the essay, Deleuze refers to a harlequin’s jacket. A harlequin is a comic servant first appearing in the seventeenth century, somewhat like a joker, who wore a checkered costume. Deleuze describes his philosophy of a world that unfolds “fragment by fragment”, just like the design on a harlequin’s jacket:

[It is] made up of solid parts and voids, blocs and ruptures, attractions and divisions, nuances and bluntnesses, conjunctions and separations, alternations and interweavings, additions which never reach a total and subtractions whose remainder is never fixed. (S: 55)

Deleuze is describing the concept of a world made up of all kinds of things the nature of which may be solid or void, and whose relations may include all manner of physical relations. In another part of “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature”, Deleuze specifies that these bodies are “physical, biological, psychic, social, verbal” (S: 52), as well as “breaths and souls [...] and passions” (S: 63). Referring to Spinoza’s ontology, he states that “everything is simply an encounter in the universe” – thus he describes individuals “in Nature as though on a plane of consistence whose whole figure they form, a plane which is variable at each moment” (S: 59–60). Deleuze also explains (from Bergson) how time in this vision of the world is non-chronological, while concerns of “historical past and future” are secondary (S: 37). This is a structuralist perspective on the world in so far as it prioritizes relations: of bodies and their elements, and bodies themselves and other bodies.

In another passage Deleuze makes clear his alignment with orthodox structuralism, also flagging his major point of theoretical difference: “Look at structuralism: it is a system of points and positions, which operates by cuts which are supposedly significant instead of proceeding by thrusts and crackings” (S: 27). It is clear Deleuze is disagreeing with something in this passage, but the sticking point is not the concept ‘system’: it is the nature of relation of elements in systems. Deleuze is positing relation in the world (structure), but disparaging the nature of relation espoused by orthodox structuralism. When Deleuze describes relation as a “cut” between things, he is describing it as an absence, a void. (Recall, this is the same concept used by Saussure when describing relations of negative difference.) Yes, relations make the world, Deleuze is saying, but relations are thrusts and crackings. If we jump forward in the essay’s narrative, it becomes clear that the concept of relation Deleuze is putting forward in place of the cut is the idea of relation as a kind of bridge – that is, something with ontological consistency.¹⁹ Deleuze describes this concept of relation (from Hume) as “external to its terms”. Relation, in Deleuze’s vision of structure, is a thing itself, meaning it “may change without the terms [of a system] changing” (S: 55). Relation, then, is like a “wire”: a “line” (S: 55).²⁰

I will soon explain how this kind of relation “proceeds by thrusts and crackings”, and even how it produces what Deleuze calls “lines of flight”, but for now I want to clarify the implications for structural analysis of Deleuze’s conception of relation as external. Given relation is external, any element of a system

¹⁹ In “How do we recognize structuralism?” Deleuze (2004[1967]: 189) explains relation as void that is “not a non-being of the negative” but a “positive being”. In my use of ‘ontological consistency’ I acknowledge a debt to Brian Massumi (2021[2002]: 75), describing the “in-between as having a logical consistency, and even ontological status, of its own”.

²⁰ For a key resource for a discussion of external relation, see Bains 2006.

is completely distinguished from others – in other words, *it is what it is* regardless of any other element(s). Without external relations, one element depends on another, is necessarily defined by another, and this is because the relation is an absence (there is no relation, just a cut): there is no other way the elements could relate. This is what Deleuze means when he describes relation as internal to one of the terms, “which would consequently be subject” (S: 55). According to orthodox notions of structuralism, including the structural analyses of Lévi-Strauss and Buckland, relations in a system are said to be oppositional and follow a binary logic – as Saussure says, there is only difference without positive terms. On this issue of relation in systems, Deleuze, therefore, is taking a very different tact. For Deleuze, elements relate in a process of mutual relay and exchange.

In a large part, Deleuze’s concept of relation results from the influence on his work of Spinoza and Hume. Deleuze’s philosophical agenda is to ensure a conception of a body that is not reducible to another: he explains his intention to outline a philosophical vision where “the body [is] a power not reducible to the organism” and “thought [is] a power not reducible to consciousness” (S: 62). What is broadly at stake with external relation is Deleuze’s refutation of transcendence in philosophy – part and parcel of his conception of immanence. A world where one thing does not depend on another is a world where transcendent determinants are neither natural nor necessary. One body does not determine another, and at a higher level there is no conception of consciousness necessarily determining thought. What is evident here is Deleuze’s empiricism, informing his radical structuralism. Also evident is Deleuze’s Spinozism, and his reading of God as univocal substance from which all bodies are in immanence. There is no external causality in this metaphysics.²¹

On this point of structure and immanence, Deleuze’s Interpretative Structuralism comes close to establishing a universal theory. Structuralists like Lévi-Strauss believe that one structure can help us understand another; for example, Buckland sets out to explain how kinship structures can help us understand Anderson’s films. I mentioned how this method is considered a means of accounting for the smallest amount of detail in a work, for every element is meaningful in so far as it is structured, and in terms of the relations of structures themselves. Orthodox structural analysis involves isomorphism, and the upshot is that structuralists recognize a universal concept of structure. Of course, the criticism levelled at structuralism is that isomorphism, ultimately, is homogenizing. Deleuze’s conception of structuralism and external relation also implies a universal concept of structure; such is the structure of the world and everything in it according

²¹ Deleuze (1990[1968]) famously develops the concept ‘expression’ in the place of causality.

to a philosophy of immanence. In ontology, universal structure for Deleuze is God as univocal substance, explained also in his work with the concept ‘plane of immanence’.²² Deleuze, however, makes it clear that while he is positing a universal structure, it is not universal in the sense it determines everything else in the world – in the manner of the binary logic of structuralists. Deleuze describes his reasoning below:

In effect, if relations are external and irreducible to their terms, then the difference cannot be between the sensible and the intelligible, between experience and thought, between sensations and ideas, but only between two sorts of ideas, or two sorts of experiences, that of terms and that of relations. (S: 55–56)

While a Deleuzian universal structure is “universal” according to the philosophy of immanence, there are no oppositions, and so universal structure is not distinguished as “universal”; instead, it is all-encompassing in its immanence. Deleuze further explains this through direct reference to Spinoza. There are no limits of univocal substance that would set it apart as universal. Moreover, given that there are no start or end points distinguishing universal structure, Deleuze explains structure with the concept of the ‘middle’. This is how he understands Spinoza and infinite substance: “Let us take him by the middle and not by the first principle (a single substance for all the attributes)” (S: 59).

To define his Interpretative Structuralism (and involved is his radicalization of relation), Deleuze uses two words in place of system: ‘assemblage’ and ‘signal’.²³ In terms of the nature of the relations binding bodies/elements in a system, he uses the concept ‘multiplicity’ as well as ‘structure’. An assemblage is any combination of heterogeneous bodies/elements, the nature of which is to function as a multiplicity – that is, according to non-binary relations (S: 69). Deleuze writes that these relations are not “filiations,” or “successions,” but “alliances” and “contagions” (S: 69). This terminology does not signal a dismantling of system/structure, but a revision – in fact, these terms mark the event of Deleuze’s own structural experimentation with orthodox structuralist concepts.

Interpretative Structuralism understands a system to be any combination of heterogeneous elements, and this follows from the principle of immanence, according to which one structure never determines another. Instead of one structure being used to interpret another (following Lévi-Strauss and orthodox structuralists), Deleuze explains how all things are structured, and at a particular

²² See also Deleuze, Guattari 1996.

²³ For a recent analysis of the signal, which I interpret to be broadly referencing the concept of ‘structure’ in Deleuze’s work, see Murphie 2019.

historical moment a specific structural relation may hold. An example he gives is the structure of man and animal and the invention of the stirrup, “a new man-animal symbiosis, a new assemblage of war” (S: 70).

What Deleuze is describing with this example is a sign – and with this concept of the sign we recall how a sign is *not* a signifier, as defined in orthodox structuralism. To backtrack slightly, a signifier in orthodox structuralism marks the moment of an interpretation where one understands an entity in terms of its negative difference from something else. This is a structural relation of things according to the logic of opposition. Deleuze radicalizes this relationship, explaining how the relation of two things – because the nature of relation is external – *produces* something from the elements themselves in relation. What is produced is a sign, and it is called a ‘sign’ – not a ‘signifier’ – because the production Deleuze describes does not involve, in principle, reference to transcendent concepts. It is a creative process. Charles Sanders Peirce describes a sign in the same way, with the relationship of a representamen and object, and the thought created (interpretant) for some person. For Peirce, ‘sign-action’ is the term that describes this whole process; for Deleuze, the term that describes this process is the ‘event’. Moreover, Deleuze explains that the subject does not determine this relation, but subjectivity itself is constituted in structural relations. Deleuze writes that there is no “subject” but a “collective agent” (S: 71), and in other texts he explains the role of the subject as one that “safeguards” the process of semiotic relation described a moment ago, creating “subjectivity” in and through this process (Deleuze 2004[1967]: 191).

I will return to the concept of the sign in the next section, but for now the principle of immanence in Deleuze’s vision of a structured world ensures the heterogeneous relation of elements *and* safeguards a potential for the creation of signs, of which a stirrup is only one example (who would have expected this invention from the structure of man and animal!). Importantly, too, while structures do hold and some semiotic events are specific to historical epochs, structural relations by their nature are ongoing and dynamic. There is a temporal dimension of structure – an ongoing duration without beginning or end. Deleuze (from Kafka), uses the term ‘K-function’ to describe the dual function of structuralism: the momentary halting of structure in historical epochs, yet the continuous production of signs from an absolutely immanent depth of structural production (S: 71–73).

The first reference point of a Deleuzian model of structuralism can, for now, be summarized as follows: the world, and its bodies, are structured, and a structural analysis involves recognizing structure, “seeing it”. However, in recognizing structure, one must understand that elements of structure, no matter the system one perceives (assemblages of humans and animals; assemblages of images in cinema; assemblages of concepts in philosophy and literature; assemblages of

videos on social media news feeds) are positive terms without negative difference. Identifying the mediator of structure makes this easier (see below), but in principle it is up to the analyst of a work, and a person going about their ordinary life, to “get it”: to grasp immanent structure. We should not understand one thing in relation to another when we go about the world, watch a movie, interact socially. Of course, there are times when this is important, and needed, but the point is that the logic of opposition, from orthodox structuralism, is not natural or necessary. Indeed, those who create works – writers, filmmakers, etc., should also avoid the logic of comparison.

How one produces signs according to the logic of positive difference in structuralism, in a work and in thought, is the subject of the second reference point of Interpretative Structuralism. For now, the following passage where Deleuze (in a nod to Lévi-Strauss, even perhaps foreshadowing his later analysis of Robert Flaherty’s documentaries in the cinema books) performs his own structuralist version of anthropological analysis, offers a neat summary of the first reference point and an introduction to the second:

You are not the little Eskimo [Inuit] [...] you do not need to mistake yourself for him. But you may perhaps put yourself in his shoes, you have something to assemble with him, an Eskimo-becoming which does not consist in playing the Eskimo, in imitating or identifying yourself with him or taking the Eskimo upon yourself, but in assembling something between you and him, for you can only become Eskimo if the Eskimo himself becomes something else. (S: 53)

2. Combine elements of a structure and create the power of life

To flee is to produce the real, to create life, to find a weapon. (S: 49)

#film #opposition #relay #sign #trickster

The first pages of “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature” explain, in detail, how Deleuze suggests we actually approach the world and everything in it (bodies, in systems) – including of course works such as literature and philosophy. These pages outline Deleuze’s structuralist vision, but do this particularly in terms of how he wants us to see bodies and interact with bodies and, most importantly, what he wants us to *do* with bodies. These, however, are challenging pages, and this is because they hinge on grasping what appear to be overlapping concepts in an ethics of life and living. These include: ‘to escape’, ‘flee’, ‘exit’ and ‘make flight’; and related are concepts specific to relation, including ‘cut’, ‘thrust’, ‘true break’, ‘relay’ and ‘double turning-away’. All this is peppered with references to literature,

my favourite being George Jackson's famous words: "It may be that I am fleeing, but throughout my flight, I am searching for a weapon" (S: 36). In what follows I will take these concepts as my starting point in a discussion that ultimately outlines a structuralist vision for living our lives and a method for analysing bodies/works – as structured. The first reference point explained above outlines a radical structuralist vision of the world, and here in the second reference point I outline stage one of a structural analysis method. Stage two is the subject of the third reference point.

In the first several pages of "On the superiority of Anglo-American literature", Deleuze is explaining what he sees as "the power of life". He explains what such a power of life means and how it can be achieved. Both hinge on his structuralism, are guided by his reading of Spinoza's ethics (among other philosophers), and are his ammunition in his critique of French literature. The following passage is a useful reference point:

Fitzgerald puts it even better: "This led me to the idea that the ones who had survived had made some sort of clean break. This is a big word and is no parallel to a jail-break when one is probably headed for a new jail or will be forced back to the old one. The famous 'escape' or 'run away from it all' is an excursion into a trap even if the trap includes the South Seas, which are only for those who want to paint them or sail them. A clean break is something you cannot come back from; that is irretrievable because it makes the past cease to exist". (S: 38)

The power of life involves achieving a better state of living, in fact, the best possible state of living. From Spinoza, this would mean an adequate knowledge of oneself and the world – the highest kind of knowledge. Part and parcel of such an achievement of a better state of living is "getting away" from an experience of the world that is not as good as it could be. The passage above explains getting away as "run[ning] away from it all". The "all" that is being fled might be a state of living that is restrictive, a state of feeling and knowing that is limited, "inadequate". Yet this attempt to flee toward a better life is not just about escaping something bad, like a failed relationship; the idea is that life is always about moving towards better things, meaning one needs to keep moving, keep creating. Deleuze's main point is (and Fitzgerald's explanation above makes this clear) that one cannot live the power of life, reach a higher state, by ignoring where one is coming from. To do so, to ignore where one is coming from, is to run away, to flee, to cut oneself off. To do so, is to fall into a trap.

The idea of heeding where you are coming from is complex, and that is because Deleuze also explains how one achieves the power of life by *not* thinking in terms

of a “historical past and future” (S: 37). There seems to be a contradiction here: on the one hand we should *not* ignore our situation that we are attempting to “escape” from, but on the other hand we *should* ignore the past. To be clear, when Deleuze explains that to “create life” one should not think historically in terms of past and future, he is explaining that we should not allow what has happened (i.e. the past) to determine the present – and neither should we allow an idea of the future to determine our path forwards. However, this is not to say that when we are living, or being with someone, or doing something, we should block completely the conditions of our experience and any thought of where we might go. Instead, for Deleuze, to reach a better state, to create life, we need to transform our conditions of experience. Why? Because without doing so we will inevitably repeat what we already know – which is the trap spoken of above. Put in even simpler terms, the argument is this: in aiming for a different state of some sort, we need to turn what we already have and what we have had into something else, or else our creation of something “different” from scratch can only result in another version of what we already had. To create a better version of oneself, one should create a new “combination” of oneself. In the context of his critique of literature, Deleuze says French authors consistently fail to create characters like this (S: 40).

This concept of transforming one thing into another (as the means to create life, reveal and revel in the power of life), is the nub of relation in Deleuze’s structuralism. In explaining the process of transformation, a vision for life is revealed as is a method of semiotic relation. Deleuze is referring us to the concept of external relation, where relation itself has an ontological presence. Such a concept of relation means that one body is what it is regardless of another – in what Deleuze (1990[1968]) describes from his reading of Spinoza as a “real distinction”. This means that one thing is not defined by another. Without a relation that is a relation precisely because it is more than a “cut” between things, whatever happens in this system will necessarily depend on something else. Every event will involve a repetition of sameness, and this is a predicament befalling any notion of “making an exit from the world” since an exit implies one thing is cut off from another (there is no relation). Also, Deleuze is describing the signifier in structural linguistics, where the signifier represents pre-given knowledge. In this case what is produced from structures defined by cuts and negative difference is signifiers. In Deleuze’s vision of structure, therefore – and as I mentioned earlier – the sign marks a genuine transformation and production of newness in a semiotics of external relation. We can also describe this as a semiotics of middles where the sign is an event of beginning again without a point of origin: “One begins again through the middle” (S: 39).

To explain how external relation works in Deleuze's vision of life, in his semiotics of middles, I need to first introduce additional terminology, which will also be the focus of the third reference point below. For want of a better word, Deleuze *personifies* relation in his structuralism. He identifies external relation with the figure of the traitor in literature, also unequivocally stating that the traitor is not a trickster. His reference to the trickster is not surprising, for Deleuze is referring to Lévi-Strauss' (1963) concept of the mediator, of which the trickster is one example. Recall that mediators in Lévi-Strauss' account of structural relations resolve oppositions by creating new ones. Therefore, in stating that relation is not aligned with the work of the trickster, Deleuze is making it clear that structural relations in his perspective on the world, and literature and other works, are not binary. Instead, and aligned with his philosophical method of radicalizing rather than dismantling structuralism, he maintains this personification of relation, but installs the figure of the traitor. Traitors abound in the literary examples Deleuze describes, and a traitor can be understood as a person whose allegiance or stance changes from a previous status – for example in Werner Herzog's film *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (1972), mentioned by Deleuze in "On the superiority of Anglo-American literature", Aguirre is a traitor who betrays his allegiance to Ursúa. A traitor, as a figure of external relation, does not resolve an opposition, but enacts change, bringing about new combinations (in Herzog's film, bringing about a new structure of men – the sign of which is mutiny).

Deleuze explains how external relation works: "The movement of betrayal has been defined as a double turning-away" (S: 40). He gives an example, explaining one idea of man produced from a relation with God, in terms of a "double turning-away" – in other words, Deleuze is describing what might also be called a "man of God" or prophet. Deleuze writes: "Man turns his face away from God, who also turns his face away from man. It is in this double turning-away, in the divergence of faces, that the line of flight – that is, the deterritorialization of man – is traced" (S: 40). What is important here is that the elements in the structural relation (man and God) are not opposed, meaning one does not define another as subject and object; instead, in turning-away, each element is "really distinct". From this event of turning-away, from the "divergence", a new combination of man-God is created (Deleuze describes this as the "deterritorialization of man", S: 40), the sign of which would be a "prophet". External relation is necessary here because external relation maintains the space of the turning-away. A later passage explains the nature of the combination occurring here, between elements – and enabled by external relation: it is "a system of relays and mutations through the middle", where one thing combines with another, "neither of which resembles the other, neither of which imitates the other" (S: 50).

To be clear, the sign formed from the event of the relation of two elements in a structure (a body) is the creative production of both of those things, and this is because the interval is a thing, with ontological consistency, and sign-action is a double turning-away. Yet there are more details to be included that are useful for any future structural analysis. Again, Spinoza is the source. In Part II, Deleuze describes relations of bodies in Spinoza's ontology as encounters; in fact, "everything is simply an encounter in the universe, a good or bad encounter" (S: 60). He continues, describing bad encounters in terms of being weakened, while he also describes good encounters in terms of affects, but a good encounter makes us stronger and brings us joy. Much has been written about Deleuze's reading of affect in Spinoza's work, and affect studies is a burgeoning area in the academy. My point here is that the concept of affect, in a semiotic context – and specifically in terms of Deleuze's structuralism – makes clear how the event of the production of the relation of bodies (sign) involves affects as well as ideas and knowledge. And of course, to jump briefly to another context, this range of experience naturally involved in sign-action is precisely what Peirce's semiotic phenomenology brings to Deleuze's later creation of a taxonomy of signs of cinema, that followed "On the superiority of Anglo-American literature" by some years. Peirce's semiotics both provides Deleuze with a concept of relation, or Thirdness, and a range of phenomenological categories of sign and their mixtures.

Let me now return to Deleuze's attempt at social anthropology where he describes one's effort to enter into a relationship with an "Eskimo" [Inuit]. He may be describing, perhaps, the context of a documentary film, or a photographic representation, a news report, or even virtual-reality film, and what he is describing – in structural terms – is the relation of, say VR film and Inuit. With this passage, it is clear he is doing three things at once: (1) encouraging a filmmaker to create a film, which is a series of signs, produced out of a "double turning-away", of themselves and the object, that also (2) guides the viewer (somehow) toward an interpretation that safeguards the same process of sign-action – a process Deleuze also famously calls "deterritorialization", "diagrammatic mapping", or following a "line of flight", and, (3) finally (but not necessarily in this order) encouraging a viewer, any viewer, to always try and interpret such bodies by producing signs in their phenomenological richness and diversity, rather than identifying signifiers.²⁴

²⁴ On the concept 'diagram' in Deleuze's philosophy, see also Vellodi 2014.

3. Joker: recognize the mediating element of bodies in relation, which enables combination and realizes the power of life

To want the event has never been to resign oneself [...] but to extract from our actions and passions that surface refulgence, to counter-effectuate the event, to accompany that effect without the body, that part which goes beyond the accomplishment, the immaculate part. (S: 65)

#event #joker #sign #subject #trickster

The third reference point of a model of Deleuze's radical structuralism deals with the part of structural analysis that involves remaining in the middle of elements of structure, from which the very experimentation and creativity of sign-action happens. This reference point describes what media creators can do themselves as much as it describes how we, analysts and plain old viewers/readers of films/literature/works in general, need to approach bodies as structured.

Proceeding from his reading of the Stoics, Deleuze explains how works can harness the power of external relation (a semiotics of middles) by "introducing" the "creative AND" (S: 59). He is referring literally to works that combine elements into novel signs, and he is pointing more abstractly to works whose plots involve such novel semiotic events. An example of the former is Lewis Carroll's portmanteau words; an example of the latter is the "whale-becoming" Deleuze describes in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Of course, in the cinema books, Deleuze describes the discontinuity edit of French New Wave cinema as another device which, rather literally, shows the space of relation: the space of the AND of structure.

I will return to these structural devices in a moment, but first let me explain a little more thoroughly the analyst's role in all of this (and the everyday subject of structure), and the role of the creator of works (such as film, literature, etc.). Deleuze is clear in "On the superiority of Anglo-American literature", especially with his personification of relation (using the figure of the traitor – not the trickster), that the "space" of relation is a thing, and so it can be "seen" by us if we look hard enough. External relation is a principle of every structure. In "How do we recognize structuralism?", Deleuze (2004[1967]: 184) calls external relation the "empty square" of structure.²⁵ And so Deleuze encourages us to look for it in works and "safeguard" the "displacements" of each semiotic event. Moreover, we need to look for the empty square when the creator of a work does not emphasize the ontological consistency of relation and draws no attention to the space of relation in a work (in "On the superiority of Anglo-American literature", Deleuze consistently makes this criticism of French writers, and in the cinema books, he

²⁵ For a discussion of the empty square as Deleuze's radicalization of the zero in linguistics, see Diehl 2008.

takes aim at Hollywood movies for the same reason). The point in all of this is that, while relation always is and always will be external to its terms, its function depends on the way an assemblage is interpreted and the way a given assemblage (work) is created.

I want to introduce one final term for the model created here: the joker. The term ‘joker’ refers to external relation rendered visible in a structure. This term aligns with Deleuze’s development of the term ‘traitor’, but it also signals my own reading of his structural semiotics and the potential of a work to guide our interpretation of signs (not signifiers). A joker is not a trickster, but a kind of harlequin.²⁶ In card games, a joker, despite being undetermined, moves between classes of cards, overturning cards and creating new orders (Hetherington, Lee 2000); in Interpretative Structuralism, the joker is the ontological space of relation rendered visible in a structure; it guides the subject of a work to create events and produce signs from immanent structure.²⁷ I have already noted examples from various historical and theoretical contexts of jokers: the discontinuity edit that I mentioned above (p. 37) in Deleuze’s “modern” cinema is one example of the joker in films; but also, Aguirre himself is a joker; and Deleuze’s writing in “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature”, where he goes off hither and thither on apparent tangents, is a joker too. Any element in a work or body which can be considered to shine a light on external relation and *encourage* an experimentation with signs, is a joker.

It is the joker, the semiotic mediator, that is most salient in Interpretative Structuralism. In this philosophy of structure, all relation is external to its terms. All relation is an “empty square”. When a work is being created and relation is *emphasized* by the creator as external to its terms, relation rendered visible this way is called a joker. Of course, there are many ways jokers can be created and many different examples of jokers; perhaps one creates a mediating element that does not connect structural elements, that creates a kind of pause, like what Schrader (1988) calls “pillow shots” in Ozu’s films. This may also depend on stylistic conventions, making the joker’s role subversive. When we, subjects, interact with the world, bodies, works..., and we “see” external relation (Deleuze 2004[1967]: 189–192, Deleuze calls this being heroic), relation rendered visible this way is also called a joker.

I want to bring this essay, and my efforts to create a model of radical structural analysis, to a close with the joker. To sum up, we need to see immanent structure

²⁶ Interestingly, Harley Quinn (harlequin) is the Joker’s sidekick in the world of DC Comics – see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harley_Quinn (accessed 30 October 2024).

²⁷ See Hetherington and Lee 2000: 170 for a discussion of the joker as a blank figure of social orders. While the authors equate the joker and the trickster, this is not specifically in the sense Lévi-Strauss posits the trickster as resolving oppositions by creating new ones.

and be on the lookout for external relation, in so doing creating jokers ourselves. We need to engage with the world and pursue a vision of life that involves creating jokers. If we make systems, we need to create the conditions for jokers to be seen. In a more formal setting, such as our analysis of works, our writing about film, or social media, we can pinpoint relations and catalogue jokers in a work,²⁸ but we also need to write in such a way that we create jokers in our own analyses. As Deleuze encourages, this is to keep our analyses open for the next person: in an ongoing process of experimentation.²⁹ This too will inevitably involve inserting oneself into the analysis, meaning one's experimentation is necessarily far from objective.³⁰

Fig. 1 shows what there is in the world, and what a structuralist perspective sees at a given moment: systems of bodies (circles, connected by lines, B^x), and external relation (jokers, J). A structure can be formed among any bodies, represented in the image by the dotted lines. To achieve the power of life, one creates signs, remaining themselves in the middle-space of the joker.

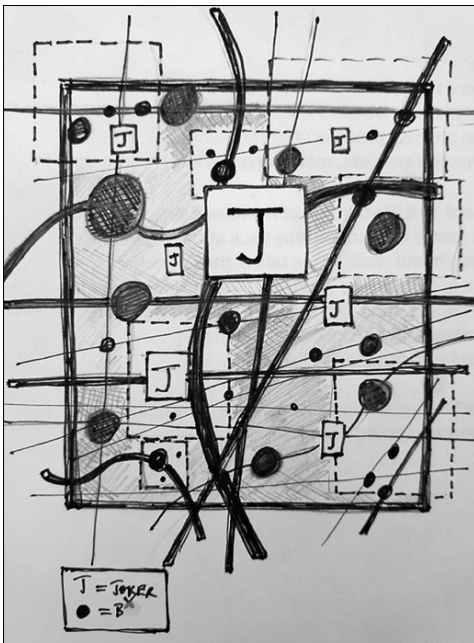


Figure 1. Interpretative Structuralism (author's sketch).

²⁸ I would argue that Kathleen Stewart's (2007) *Ordinary Affects* can be read as a catalogue of jokers in everyday life.

²⁹ For a discussion of a method of ongoing experimentation in research, see Springgay, Truman 2018.

³⁰ For an example of film analyses regarded as subjective and personal in their approach, see Schefer 2016.

I realize I have come full circle, back to a description of Deleuze's very approach in "On the superiority of Anglo-American literature" and that elephant in the room I mentioned way back at the beginning of this essay – the elephant being that maybe I am not walking the talk of the radical structuralism I am advocating. That might, in fact, be the case, but I will leave it to you to decide. Maybe there is something about THIS context that prevents that, maybe there is something about academic writing in general that blocks a true, Deleuzian structuralism, but maybe that is a subject for another day.

It is true that one writes only for illiterates, for those who do not read or at least those who will not read you. (S: 75)

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Референтни точки: „Структуралистички“ пристап кон (радикалниот) структурализам и семиотика на Делез

Во овој есеј ја објаснувам радикална верзија на структурализмот и концептот на знакот, претставен од Делез. Мојата цел е да создадам модел на структурализмот на Делез, наречен Интерпретативен Структурализам, кој може да се примени на светот и сè во него („тела“). Објаснувањето на Делез може да се нарече структуралистичко, бидејќи пристапувам систематски кон радикалниот структурализам на Делез и создавам модел за идни примени. Сепак, тврдам дека моделот создаден од трите „референтни точки“ на Интерпретативниот Структурализам не е интерпретација на делото на Делез, туку толкување. Тоа значи, и покрај тоа што е модел, овозможува перспектива на телата и светот со иманенција и разлика - во согласност со радикалниот структурализам на Делез и филозофијата на разликата. Мојата анализа е насочена кон есејот на Делез-Парнет, „За супериорноста на англо-американската литература“. Го објаснувам структурализмот на Делез и во однос на својата структура, го покажувам структурализмот на Делез во контекстот на неговата теорија. Клучен за текстот е концептот на знакот, а најзначаен е семиотичкиот медијатор на структурализмот, кој (од концептот на Делез, надворешна релација) го нарекувам докер. За визијата на Делез за структурализмот, од суштинско значење е „перцепцијата на“ и размислувањето со докерот.

Tugipunktid: „struktuurialistlik“ käsitus Deleuze'i (radikaalsest) strukturalismist ja semiootikast

Käesolevas essees selgitan strukturalismi ja märgi mõiste radikaalset varianti, mille on välja pakkunud Gilles Deleuze. Minu eemärk on luua mudel Deleuze'i strukturalismist, mida nimetan tõlgendavaks strukturalismiks, nii et seda saaks rakendada maailmale ning kõigele, mis selles sisaldub (kehadele). Ka minu Deleuze'i-selgitust võib nimetada strukturalistlikuks, sest lähenen tema strukturalismi selgitamisele süstemaatiliselt ning loon mudeli, mida saab edaspidi rakendada. Ometi väidan, et tõlgendava strukturalismi mudel ei ole Deleuze'i loomingut tõlgendus või lugemine. See tähendab, et vaatamata sellele, et tegu on mudeliga, võimaldab see vaatenurka kehadele ja maailmale, millest näeb immanentsust ja erinevust – kooskõlas Deleuze'i enda radikaalse strukturalismi ja

erinevusfilosoofiaga. Keskendun oma analüüsis Deleuze'i ja Claire Parnet' esseele „Anglo-ameerika kirjanduse ülimus“, mis selgitab Deleuze'i strukturalistlikku lähenemist ning on oma struktuuri poolest näide sellest, kuidas tema strukturalism töötab. Selles tekstis visandatud märgi mõiste on oluline, kuid veel tähtsam on strukturalismi semiootiline vahendaja, millele (inspireerituna sellest, kuidas Deleuze mõistab suhete välisust) panen nimeks „jokker“. Deleuze'i radikaalse strukturalismi jaoks on esmatähtis „näha“ ja mõelda koos jokkeriga.