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STRUCTURALISM IN HISTORY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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MYTH AND SYMBOLS, COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS, NATIONAL OR GROUP consciousness—these remain the focal point of a great deal of research in American Studies. Yet there has been evidence of considerable dissatisfaction with the methods by which the discipline has traditionally approached these phenomena.¹ Impressionistic literary analyses and equally impressionistic historical attempts to relate texts to some underlying social reality have proven unsatisfactory. There have been calls for some new way to approach the basic data of American Studies, some new method more satisfying than that of the myth and symbol school.

Quite naturally, those dissatisfied with methods within the discipline have looked to other fields of scholarship for models. The most common recourse has been to quantitative statistical methods borrowed from the social sciences.² But quantitative approaches have limited use in American Studies. It has become increasingly clear that what is needed is a systematic method of qualitative analysis which will be not only more satisfying than traditional impressionistic approaches but also fit the basic concerns of American Studies more closely than do quantitative methods.

There have been suggestions that American Studies turn its attention to those approaches which were specifically designed to deal with problems of

¹ See, for example, Bruce Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," *American Quarterly*, 24 (Oct. 1972), 435-50; Cecil Tate, *The Search for a Method in American Studies* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1973); Robert Sklar, "The Problem of an American Studies 'Philosophy': A Bibliography of New Directions," *American Quarterly*, 28 (Aug. 1975), 245-62.

² See Richard Jensen, "Quantitative American Studies: The State of the Art," *American Quarterly*, 26 (Aug. 1974), 225-40; Stanley Bailis, "The Social Sciences in American Studies: An Integrative Conception," *American Quarterly*, 26 (Aug. 1974), 202-24.

meaning. David Hall in a paper at the 1974 American Historical Association Meeting suggested that intellectual history should change its focus from ideas to language itself and recommended that intellectual historians turn to the work of anthropologists such as Mary Douglas.³ And Cecil Tate in *The Search for a Method in American Studies*⁴ has specifically pointed to contemporary French structuralism as a source for new methods in American Studies.

Structuralism would, indeed, appear to be a reasonable place to seek models for the understanding of American culture. Structuralists have demonstrated that if cultural systems are treated as languages and are systematically analyzed through methods borrowed from linguistics, then the covert meanings of the systems may be made explicit. This method has been applied to literary texts, folktales, myths, social organizations, kinship systems, and psychotherapy, often with impressive results.

Unfortunately, structuralism has not been immediately accessible to most scholars trained in American Studies. Until recently many key structuralist texts had not been translated into English, and, even in translation, many structuralist writings are couched in an esoteric and demanding continental philosophical form which is quite unfamiliar to those trained in the Anglo-American tradition.⁵ Moreover, because structuralism has been disseminated through departments of French literature and to a lesser extent of anthropology and philosophy, in the United States this body of theory has often been kept from American Studies by the disciplinary barriers which hinder the transmission of new ideas in American universities.

This division between American Studies and structuralism, however, is no longer a necessary one. Most of the classics of French structuralist theory have now been translated into English and are available even to those unprepared to struggle through the esoteric French originals. And there are a number of introductions to the field and commentaries on particular structuralists which also may serve to ease the transition from more traditional modes of thinking into a structuralist mode.

In the pages which follow I will examine the literature on structuralism available in English, with special emphasis on those structuralist studies which are of particular interest to those in American Studies. I will deal

³ Professor Hall's address was described in Sklar, p. 255, and Professor Hall kindly confirmed Sklar's impressions of his still unpublished comments.

⁴ Tate, 133-49.

⁵ For a discussion of the differences between the intellectual styles of continental and Anglo-American social thought see Bob Scholte, "Epistemic Paradigms: Some Problems in Cross-cultural Research on Social Anthropological History and Theory," in E. Nelson Hayes and Tanya Hayes, eds., *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Anthropologist as Hero* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1970), 108-22.

with structural linguistics, anthropology, Marxism, folklore, popular culture, and the archaeology of knowledge, leaving the broad field of structuralist literary criticism to Professor Blair.

There is no privileged entry into structuralist theory, no simple set of precepts which one can memorize. What is required of someone trained in an Anglo-American intellectual milieu is nothing less than a new gestalt, a radical paradigm shift. But there are a number of guides to this intellectual territory which present a notion of the major landmarks of structuralist theory and some sense of where a scholar might find points of particular relevance. Professor Blair's essay describes most of the important general introductions and collections of this sort. In addition, there are two general bibliographies which can assist one in exploring this body of literature. José V. Harari's *Structuralists and Structuralisms: A Selected Bibliography of French Contemporary Thought*⁶ provides a guide to the period between 1960 and 1970. For the more recent period *The Structuralist Review*, a new journal devoted to structuralist theory, criticism, and pedagogy, is publishing in its winter 1978 issue a bibliography of structuralist works which appeared between 1974 and 1977. The journal will update this bibliography on a yearly basis.

Secondary works, however, can never provide the kind of direct encounter with the structuralist mentality which is a prerequisite for the application of the method. For this one must struggle directly with one of the central structuralist text. Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*,⁷ (which Blair discusses at length earlier in this volume) provides a particularly good place to begin. Saussure's linguistic theories may seem very abstract and irrelevant to those in other academic disciplines, but they represent a major conceptual revolution with far-reaching implications. As Jean Piaget has effectively argued,⁸ before structuralism social thinkers were faced with two alternatives: they could be atomists, who assumed that reality exists only in the elements and that collective entities are abstractions; or they could be holists, who discovered reality in the collective (*Zeitgeist* or *gestalt*) and saw the particular elements only as manifestations of broader patterns. But since the work of Saussure there has been a third alternative—an approach which concentrates upon the manner in which individual elements mutually define one another within a system. It is this basic conceptual shift from collections of entities to systems of differences which Saussure has presented with great clarity.

⁶ *Structuralists and Structuralisms: A Selected Bibliography of French Contemporary Thought (1960-1970)* (n.p.: Diacritics, 1971).

⁷ *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959).

⁸ Jean Piaget, *Structuralism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 3-16.

The task of transferring the principles of Saussure's structural linguistics to the broader field of semiology was not seriously undertaken until the 1950s, when French intellectuals such as the literary critic Roland Barthes and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss began to grasp the possibilities present in Saussure's conceptual revolution. But since that time there has been a massive attempt to reexamine a wide variety of cultural phenomena from a structuralist point of view. The advantages and complexities of this movement from linguistics to general semiology can best be seen in Barthes' *Elements of Semiology*.⁹ In this brilliant work Barthes reexamines each of the major principles of Saussure and discusses the difficulties involved in applying them to the study of cultural systems such as clothing, automobile design, furniture, etc. In the process he demonstrates that human culture can be conceptualized as the intersection of a vast number of different "languages." These communication systems, which operate much like speech but which use such objects as hem lengths and hubcaps as signifiers, can be analyzed with the methods developed by Saussure and an area of human experience can be viewed with a new precision.

MODELS FROM STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, more than any other structuralist, has forced non-linguists to recognize the implications of Saussure's method. As a refugee in New York during the Second World War, he was first introduced to structural linguistics by Roman Jakobson, a linguist, literary critic, and folklorist, who himself had made major contributions to the development of the field after the death of Saussure. Lévi-Strauss realized that these linguistic models could be applied to anthropology, and he began to produce a steady stream of structuralist studies which has continued down to the present. This body of work is massive, demanding, and extremely varied, ranging from technical analyses of Australian kinship systems to elegant essays on the masks of the Indians of the American Northwest.¹⁰ Some of it is probably of interest only to the

⁹ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* and *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968).

¹⁰ The scholar attempting to assimilate this massive body of theory can find assistance in the numerous secondary studies of Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology. Edmund Leach's *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (New York: Viking, 1970) and the fourth chapter of Howard Gardiner's *The Quest for Mind: Piaget, Lévi-Strauss and the Structuralist Movement* (New York: Vintage, 1972) provide good introductions to the principle concepts of Lévi-Strauss. Octavio Paz's *Claude Lévi-Strauss, An Introduction* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970) and James A. Boon's *From Symbolism to Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss in a Literary Tradition* (New York: Harper, 1972) both provide fascinating insights into the French anthropologist's work from a

professional anthropologist. But contained in this corpus of writings are penetrating insights into the nature of culture and brilliant applications of sophisticated qualitative methods which may rival those of the most brilliant thinkers of our century.

Linguistics appealed to Lévi-Strauss because he believed that it was the only social science which had attained the precision of the natural sciences.¹¹ And he came to believe that cultural systems of all kinds could be viewed as languages. He argued that every aspect of culture has not only a functional role, but a sign value as well. An axe is not just a tool with a particular function, but also a sign which can be juxtaposed to other signs to construct complex systems of communication.¹² In itself this notion of the sign value of concrete objects was not new. But Lévi-Strauss pushed it much further than his predecessors had. He argued that non-literate societies express thoughts and feelings not by inventing special abstract concepts but by juxtaposing concrete objects borrowed from their environment. Thus, such concrete oppositions as high/low, red/black, north/south, or raw/cooked may be used to express the abstract differences between social groups, the roles of men and women, and the concepts of nature and culture.¹³

Beginning with such concrete oppositions, Lévi-Strauss argued, the savage mind constructs vast grids of differences through which extremely complex philosophical or social ideas can be expressed. The natural world around a non-literate society is transformed into a kind of grand conceptual abacus through which the society can express its ideas about itself, nature, and

more literary perspective, but these are of less use to someone attempting to apply the principles of structural anthropology to another field. E. Nelson Hayes and Tanya Hayes, *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Anthropologist As Hero* is of some interest, but most of the essays in this collection are too journalistic and too light weight to be of very much assistance. By contrast, Ino Rossi's collection, *The Unconscious in Culture: The Structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss in Perspective* (New York: Dutton, 1974) may be a bit difficult for the beginner, but it provides some very insightful commentaries on structural anthropology for those who have mastered the basics. Similarly, *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism* (London: Tavistock, 1967), edited by Edmund Leach, offers some very interesting reactions from sympathetic anthropologists to Lévi-Strauss' theories. Finally, one can turn to Bob Scholte's excellent guide to "The Structural Anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss" in John J. Honigman, ed., *Handbook of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973), 637-716.

¹¹ "Language and the Analysis of Social Laws," in *Structural Anthropology* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 54-65.

¹² "The Scope of Anthropology," *Structural Anthropology, II* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 9-11.

¹³ In *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss develops his own concrete metaphor around the contrast between French tinkers or "bricoleurs" and engineers to express the difference between "primitive" concrete thought and Western scientific theories. *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), 1-33.

human relationships. Using the methods of structural linguistics we can decode these concrete languages, translating them into terms more understandable to our own culture. This process of decoding can best be seen, perhaps, in Lévi-Strauss' studies of totemism (the custom among many non-literate societies of relating clans to particular animals, plants, or other natural objects). Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropologists had attempted to explain this phenomenon by studying the connections between the clan and its totem. But Lévi-Strauss, drawing from Saussurean linguists, argued that this was as ridiculous as analyzing the sound "dog" in order to understand why we associated it with the concept of a particular animal. The connection between the clan and its totem was as arbitrary as that between a concept and the sound-image associated with it.

Lévi-Strauss' analysis shifted the emphasis from function to communication and from the individual elements to the relationships between them. He argued that it is the difference between various totemic species which is important, not the nature of the species itself. Totemic societies use the difference between species to represent the difference between clans, just as we use the difference between the sound-images "dôg" and "kat" to represent the difference between our concepts of two different animals.¹⁴

Using this type of structural analysis, Lévi-Strauss has studied kinship,¹⁵ social organization,¹⁶ and art.¹⁷ But his studies of mythology are probably the most useful for students of American culture. His analysis of "The Story of Asdiwal"¹⁸ provides a good example of his method. In this study of a Northwest American Indian myth he demonstrates how oppositions between concrete entities such as upstream and downstream, mother and daughter, father and son, mountain and sea, or candlefish and salmon serve to establish a grid of subtle contrasts through which these Amerindian societies express their view of social interactions, their relationship to the environment, their experience of geography and of the seasons, their religious beliefs, and so on. Since his analysis of the Asdiwal myth Lévi-

¹⁴ *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon, 1963); Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 35-74.

¹⁵ *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon, 1969); "The Family" in H. L. Shapiro, ed., *Man, Culture, and Society* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956), 261-85; "Reflections on the Atom of Kinship," *Structural Anthropology*, II, 82-112.

¹⁶ "Social Structures of Central and Eastern Brazil," *Structural Anthropology*, 116-27; "Do Dual Organizations Exist?" *Structural Anthropology*, 128-238.

¹⁷ "Split Representations in the Art of Asia and America," *Structural Anthropology*, 239-63; "The Serpent with Fish inside his Body," *Structural Anthropology*, 264-68. Unfortunately, Lévi-Strauss' brilliant and accessible study of Northwest Amerindian masks, *La Voie des Masques* (Geneva: Skira, 1975) has not yet been translated into English. For those who read French it is one of the best introductions to his method.

¹⁸ "The Story of Asdiwal" in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, 1-47. Reprinted in *Structural Anthropology*, II, 146-97.

Strauss has completed the *Mythologiques*,¹⁹ a massive structural analysis of some 813 myths told by the Indians of North and South America. Moving from myth to myth, he slowly unravels the armature of concrete oppositions which structures Amerindian myths.

Even a sampling of these volumes or of the essays collected in *Structural Anthropology* and *Structural Anthropology, II* can introduce the student of American culture to a new method. If one can decode the concrete oppositions in the story of Asdiwal, one can also analyze the concrete oppositions in Puritan sermons, revolutionary political tracts, the Constitution, nineteenth century diaries, Presidential addresses, reform pamphlets, even in the architecture of American houses. Using structuralist methods, scholars can translate the rhetorical imagery of the past into a language of social change or psychological drives which is understandable today. If the savage mind can be tamed, there is every reason to believe that the artifacts of our own past can be made more intelligible through the systematic application of the principles of structural anthropology.²⁰

STRUCTURALISM AND MARXISM

Thus far we have been concerned only with the structural analysis of texts isolated from their socio-economic context. Many proponents and critics of structuralism have assumed that the method must remain in such an idealistic limbo and that it has no relevance to the analysis of the social foundations of culture. But there is increasing evidence that structuralism may be a useful tool not only in studying texts, but also in relating them to their economic and social infrastructure.

Lévi-Strauss himself has suggested this possibility. In his memoirs, *Tristes Tropiques*, he described Marxism as one of the "three mistresses" who had helped him realize that truth lies in the structures hidden beneath the surface of phenomena. And in *The Savage Mind* he wrote that his aim was "to out-

¹⁹ *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York: Harper, 1969); *From Honey to Ashes* (New York: Harper, 1973); *L'Origine des Manières de Table* (Paris: Plon, 1968); *L'Homme nu* (Paris: Plon, 1971).

²⁰ The student of American culture seeking models from structural anthropology should not restrict his or her purview to the works of Lévi-Strauss. There are at present a number of other anthropologists producing important studies in the field. Edmund Leach, for example, has written a number of interesting structural analyses. His essay on "The Legitimacy of Solomon" in Lane, *Introduction to Structuralism*, 248-92 is of particular interest to those in American Studies because it demonstrates how a linear account of historical events can contain hidden structural oppositions which express ideological claims. Roy Willis' "The Head and the Lions: Lévi-Strauss and Beyond" *Man*, II (1967), 519-34 provides another good example of the basic structuralist method. Others have attempted to go beyond the theoretical foundations laid down by Lévi-Strauss and develop new approaches to language and culture. See, for example, Dan Sperber's *Rethinking Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974).

line a theory of superstructures" and "to contribute to this theory of superstructures, scarcely touched upon by Marx."²¹ The rough outlines of a kind of structural theory of superstructures may be seen in Lévi-Strauss' analyses of American Indian mythology. In these studies he has demonstrated that the concrete oppositions within Indian myths reflect contradictions within the infrastructures of their societies. The conflict between the role of women as economic "goods" and their participation in society as human beings may, for example, be expressed on the level of myth as the conflict between two different species of animal.

Unfortunately, Lévi-Strauss has not developed this aspect of his thought very systematically, and his relationship to the Marxist theory of superstructures has been further confused by his long polemical struggles with contemporary French Marxists. In his writings on history and evolution Lévi-Strauss has assumed a strong cultural relativist position. He has denied that all of human history may be seen as progress towards some single goal, and he has insisted that our value systems are not applicable to non-Western societies. These positions have alienated French Marxists, who have argued that Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology is an expression of a decadent bourgeoisie, anxious to deny historical evolution because of its own imminent demise. Such Marxists as Maxime Rodinson, Henri Lefebvre, Lucien Goldman, and Jean-Paul Sartre have denounced Lévi-Strauss in particular and structuralism in general as counterrevolutionary. In *The Savage Mind* Lévi-Strauss counterattacked, systematically criticizing Sartre's notion of history. This furor has tended to obscure Lévi-Strauss' real concern with the development of a structuralist theory of superstructures and his attempts to relate the structures of myth to those of economic and social relations.²²

Lévi-Strauss has not been the only thinker to write on the possible union of structuralism and Marxism. In works such as *Reading Capital* and *For Marx*,²³ the French philosopher Louis Althusser has systematically reevaluated Marx's writings from a structuralist perspective. Althusser's approach,

²¹ *Tristes Tropiques* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 57-58; *The Savage Mind*, 117, 130.

²² For Marxist attacks on Lévi-Strauss and on structural anthropology see Maxime Rodinson, "Racisme et civilisation," *La Nouvelle Critique*, No. 66 (June 1955), 120-40; Maxime Rodinson, "Ethnographie et relativisme," *La Nouvelle Critique*, No. 69 (Nov. 1955), 46-63; Lucien Goldmann, "Structuralisme, Marxisme, Existentialisme, un Entretien Avec Lucien Goldmann," *Homme et société*, No. 2 (1967), 105-08; Henri Lefebvre, "Claude Lévi-Strauss et le nouvel Eleatisme," *L'Homme et la société*, No. 1 (1966), 21-31; "Jean Paul Sartre réponds," *L'Arc: Sartre Aujourd'hui*, No. 30 (1966), 87-91. For Lévi-Strauss' response see Lévi-Strauss, "Postscript to chapter XV," in *Structural Anthropology*, 329-42; Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 245-69.

²³ *For Marx* (New York: Vintage, 1970); Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: New Left Books, 1970). For studies of Althusser's thought and its relationship to structuralism see Miriam Glucksmann, *Structural Analysis in Contemporary Social Thought: A Comparison of the Theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss*

however, is so abstract and so philosophically oriented that it would be very difficult to apply his ideas directly to research in American Studies. The work of two younger Marxist anthropologists, Maurice Godelier and Jonathan Friedman, promises to offer more concrete contributions to the development of structural Marxism.²⁴ Godelier and Friedman are clearly more Marxists than structuralists, but both have used structuralist insights to redefine Marxism, just as Sartre used existentialism for the same purpose in the 1950s.²⁵ They wish to relate the organization of the means of production to the kinds of structures which Lévi-Strauss has revealed in non-literate societies. Their concern with structures and with the mediations between productive forces and culture places them in direct opposition to Marvin Harris and other contemporary anthropologists who seek to interpret Marx as a simple technological determinist.²⁶

This discussion of structures and superstructures should be of particular interest to scholars in American Studies. It suggests a new way of relating cultural creations to their social and economic context. Using the suggestions of Lévi-Strauss, Godelier, and Friedman, Americanists may be able to demonstrate how the basic contradictions within American society at various points in its history have been translated into concrete oppositions within a wide range of cultural artifacts.

STRUCTURALISM IN FOLKLORE

Folklore is one of the American academic disciplines in which a consciousness of structuralism has developed. This is largely due to the almost

and Louis Althusser (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974); Henry Veltmeyer, "Towards an Assessment of the Structuralist Interpretation of Marx: Claude Lévi-Strauss and Louis Althusser," *Science and Society*, 38 (1974-75), 385-421; Norman Geras, "Althusser's Marxism: An Account and Assessment," *New Left Review*, 71 (1972), 57-87.

²⁴ Maurice Godelier, "System, Structure, and Contradiction in Capital," in Lane, *Introduction to Structuralism*, 340-58; Maurice Godelier, "Modes of Production, Kinship, and Demographic Structures" in Maurice Block, ed., *Marxist Analysis and Social Anthropology* (London: Malaby, 1975), 3-27; Maurice Godelier, *Rationality and Irrationality in Economics* (New York: Monthly Review, 1972); Maurice Godelier, *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977); Jonathan Friedman, "Marxism, Structuralism, and Vulgar Materialism," *Man*, 9 (1974), 444-69; Jonathan Friedman, "Tribes, States and Transformations," *Marxist Analysis and Social Anthropology*, 161-202. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977).

²⁵ Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975).

²⁶ For an interesting example of this debate see Allen H. Berger's "Structural and Eclectic Revisions of Marxist Strategy: A Cultural and Materialist Critique," *Current Anthropology*, 17 (1976), 290-304. Berger attacks Godelier, Friedman, and Marshall Sahlins from the perspective of Marvin Harris' cultural materialism. There are responses from anthropologists with a wide range of views and a rebuttal by Berger.

simultaneous appearance in this country of French structuralism and the somewhat related method of Russian formalism, each of which reinforced the impact of the other. The formalists began to study Russian folktales in the 1920s, but it was only in 1958 with the publication of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*²⁷ that formalism became widely known in the United States. Propp's approach superficially resembles that of structuralism, in that he sought to discover the hidden patterns which underlie Russian folktales. But, unlike the structuralists of Western Europe, he found this pattern in the fixed linear sequence of the elements of the tale. He believed that Russian tales were constructed from some subset of thirty-one elements or functions, which were always presented in the same order. Each tale was simply a group of these functions, arranged in an invariant order and fleshed out with various concrete details.

This approach is quite different from structuralism. Most structuralists, for example, are not tied to a fixed linear sequence. Moreover, as Lévi-Strauss himself has pointed out, formalists separate content and form and concentrate only upon the latter. In a Proppian analysis of a folktale the specific details with which the story is fleshed out are irrelevant; only the succession of formal functions is significant. For structuralists, by contrast, form and content are inseparable. As Lévi-Strauss has written, "*Form* is defined by opposition to material other than itself. But structure has no distinct content; it is content itself apprehended in a logical organization conceived as a property of the real."²⁸ Unfortunately, in their desire to discover new methods folklorists have not always remained sufficiently aware of the difference between these two approaches. Alan Dundes, for example, in *The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales*²⁹ presents an essentially Proppian analysis, but he frequently uses the term "structuralist" and refers to the work of Lévi-Strauss in a manner which confuses structuralism and formalism. Dundes has compounded this confusion in "Projection in Folklore: A Plea for Psychoanalytic Semiotics."³⁰ In this article he appeals for merger of semiotic and/or structuralist methods with the psychoanalytic notion of projection, but he does not clearly define any of these terms.

²⁷ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1968).

²⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Structure and Form: Reflections on a work by Vladimir Propp," *Structural Anthropology*, II, 115.

²⁹ Alan Dundes, *The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1964). This same confusion of formalism and structuralism may be found in many of the essays in Pierre Maranda, ed., *Soviet Structural Folkloristics*, I (The Hague: Mouton, 1974).

³⁰ Alan Dundes, "Projection in Folklore: A Plea for Psychoanalytic Semiotics," *MLN*, 91 (Dec. 1976), 1500-33.

Other folklorists, however, have used structuralist concepts with more precision. In *Structural Models in Folklore and Transformational Essays*,³¹ Elli K ng s Maranda and Pierre Maranda explore the theoretical problems involved in applying the structuralist method to folklore materials, and Henry Glassie has commented upon the use of structuralism in the study of material folk culture in "Structure, Function, Folklore, and the Artifact."³² Many of the suggestions in Glassie's article have been developed more fully in his *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts*,³³ in which he demonstrates that structural analyses may be based upon architectural as well as oral or written materials. This last study is of particular interest, not only because it presents a fine model of the use of structuralist methods, but also because it applies them to the study of one of the most interesting aspects of American culture—the development of our folk architecture.

STRUCTURALISM AND POPULAR CULTURE

Popular culture has attracted the attention of structuralists since 1957 when Roland Barthes published his *Mythologies*,³⁴ a collection of short pieces on everyday life in contemporary France. Although these essays are not strictly structuralist, they do demonstrate that the cultural events and artifacts which constantly surround us may be viewed as systems of signs. Students of popular culture in the United States have been slow to realize the possibilities of structuralist theory, but there are increasing indications that this reluctance is disappearing. The way for the assimilation of the method was paved by Hayden White, who in 1974 wrote an excellent essay on "Structuralism and Popular Culture."³⁵ This article is not only useful to those interested in popular culture, but also it contains some important insights into the general advantages of the method.

More recently, several articles have appeared in *The Journal of Popular Culture* which indicate that other scholars are following White's lead. R. E. Johnson and Bruce A. Lohof have used structuralist methods to examine respectively a soap opera and a series of "fables" from *Good Housekeeping*,

³¹ Elli K ng s Maranda and Pierre Maranda, *Structural Models in Folklore and Transformational Essays* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971). These distinctions between formalism and structuralism are also clearly expressed by Bertel Nathorst in *Formal or Structural Studies of Traditional Tales* (Stockholm: Kungl Boktryckeriet P.A. Norstedt and S ner, 1970).

³² "Structure, Function, Folklore, and the Artifact," *Semiotica*, 7 (1973), 313-51.

³³ *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts* (Knoxville, Tenn.: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1975).

³⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Cape, 1972).

³⁵ Hayden White, "Structuralism and Popular Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 7 (1974), 759-75.

and Joseph Arpad has made explicit use of Lévi-Strauss' notion of structural mediations in an essay on the nature of popular culture studies.³⁶ If studies such as these continue, popular culture may become a major source for those interested in the application of structuralist methods to the study of American culture.

STRUCTURALISM AND HISTORY: THE CASE OF FOUCAULT

"In France certain half-witted 'commentators' persist in labelling me a 'structuralist.' I have been unable to get it into their minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis."³⁷ Thus the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault characterizes his relationship to structuralism. Why, then, is he to be included in the present essay? Foucault is quite correct in his self-evaluation. He has come to his view of history not through the works of Saussure, but rather through a diverse set of philosophers, including Marx, Nietzsche, Gaston Bachelard, and Georges Bataille. As he has written in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault's goal "is not to transfer to the field of history, and more particularly to the history of knowledge [*connaissances*], a structuralist method that has proved valuable in other fields of analysis."³⁸

Yet there is a kind of family resemblance between the work of Foucault and that of the principle structuralists. If we employ a usage developed by Morse Peckham,³⁹ Foucault may be labelled as "structuralistic," rather than structuralist—provided the suffix "istic" is not viewed as either derogatory or derivative. Although Foucault does not borrow directly from the structuralists, he shares their concern with systems of differences and with structures of knowledge, and a person accustomed to dealing with the structuralists will undoubtedly find the general approach of Foucault somewhat familiar.

Foucault began his career in the late 1940s and early 1950s by obtaining degrees at the Sorbonne in philosophy, psychology, and psychopathology, and he drew upon all of these fields in his first major historical work,

³⁶ R. E. Johnson, Jr., "The Dialogue of Novelty and Repetition: Structure in 'All My Children,'" *Journal of Popular Culture*, 10 (1976), 560-70; Bruce A. Lohof, "A Morphology of the Modern Fable," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 8 (1974-1975), 15-27; Joseph I. Arpad, "Between Folklore and Literature: Popular Culture as Anomaly," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 9 (1975), 403-22.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random, 1970), xiv.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Random, 1972), 15.

³⁹ "Darwin and Darwinisticism," in Philip Appleman, ed., *Darwin* (New York: Norton, 1970), 385-92.

Madness and Civilization.⁴⁰ In this study of the experience of madness between 1500 and 1800 Foucault, like the structuralists, is concerned not with isolated concepts or institutions but rather with the system of relationships in which these elements came into being. In the process he abandoned one of the deepest assumptions of historians of ideas, in general, and of historians of science, in particular: the belief in some fixed reality behind the shifting images historians study. Foucault's concern is never with the relationship between a concept and some empirical reality, but rather with the relationships between different elements within the social reality of a period. For Foucault there is no reality outside discourse, no madness outside of a particular world view.

But in this search for conceptual patterns, Foucault does not restrict his attention to ideas alone. From his perspective madness is not only a medical theory, but a form of social classification, a procedure for confinement, and a prescription for a particular type of interaction between different social groups. The idea of madness is in no way separable from the organization of the asylum, the economic perception of work, or the definition of who is allowed to speak about insanity. It is this entire system of relationships, not the isolated symptoms, which are his concern.

In *The Birth of the Clinic*,⁴¹ published in 1963, Foucault applied a similar perspective to the creation of modern medicine at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Once again he refused to treat medical knowledge as a reflection of empirical realities. Instead, he viewed it as a particular configuration produced by nineteenth-century society's concept of the body, its organization of medical care, its attitude towards the relationship between doctor and patient, its notion of the connection between knowledge and curing, and its orientation towards death. What Foucault produced is not the history of an isolated complex of medical concepts, but rather an image of a structural transformation through which both the conceptual and social frameworks of modern medicine were created.

In 1966 Foucault produced an even more ambitious work, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, in which he studied the concepts of language, money, and living beings in European thought from the sixteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth. Foucault divided this period into three epochs (Renaissance, Classical, and Modern), each with its own "episteme" or structure of knowledge. These epistemes were fields, somewhat like those of Einsteinian physics, which shaped the space

⁴⁰ *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: New American Library, 1965).

⁴¹ *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Random, 1975).

within which ideas came into being and interacted with one another. Foucault's concept of the episteme required him to abandon the traditional search for historical continuities.⁴² In traditional histories the ideas of different epochs are linked by the common empirical realities they attempt to describe. Nineteenth-century botany, for example, is seen as a direct outgrowth of eighteenth-century plant studies because both deal with the same phenomenon: the life of plants. For Foucault, however, ideas are defined in reference to other ideas or to social institutions, not through their relationship to a fixed external universe. From his perspective the study of plants existed within such different contexts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that it is impossible to establish a continuous line of development between the two periods. To attempt to find the origins of nineteenth-century biology within the writings of the Classical period is to create an enormous anachronism:

Historians want to write histories of biology in the eighteenth century; but they do not realize that biology did not exist then, and that the pattern of knowledge that has been familiar to us for a hundred and fifty years is not valid for a previous period. And that, if biology was unknown, there was a very simple reason for it: that life itself did not exist. All that existed was living beings, which were viewed through a grid of knowledge constituted by *natural history*.⁴³

Since *The Order of Things*, Foucault has produced a stream of works, defining and developing his view of the past. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* he systematically reevaluated his earlier works and made both his philosophy of history and his method more explicit. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*⁴⁴ Foucault emphasized the radical political aspects of his approach to history by treating modern penology as a sign of ever increasing social control in modern societies. These concerns are developed further in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*,⁴⁵ a recently translated collection of essays, in which he explores the relationship between intellectuals and power. And, in the projected six-volume history of sexuality which he is presently writing, Foucault promises to explore the relationship between power and sexuality in Western culture.

⁴² This denial of the continuity of historical change is parallel to Saussure's rejection of a structural philology. Since Saussure believed that each element in language was defined solely in terms of its difference from other elements, it was impossible for him to trace the history of individual words or grammatical constructions over time. When the context changed, the element itself dissolved. See Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 79-100.

⁴³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 127-28.

⁴⁴ *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random, 1977).

⁴⁵ *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977).

Foucault's work has not received the attention it deserves in the United States. Many reviewers have simply cited counterexamples to his generalizations and have ignored or misrepresented his reevaluation of traditional historical approaches.⁴⁶ But there are signs that institutional and, to a lesser extent, intellectual historians are beginning to take his work seriously. Many historians have encountered Foucault through David J. Rothman's somewhat misleading references to *Madness and Civilization* in the introduction to his *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*,⁴⁷ but there are indications that at the very least the study of prisons, asylums, medicine, and other forms of social control in the United States will soon show the imprint of the archaeology of knowledge.

I have not devoted a special section of this essay to the possibilities of employing structuralism in psychohistory because the technical complexities of the question are immense. But there is reason to believe that a merger of the two methodologies might solve many of the problems which have been encountered in the attempt to apply psychiatric models to history. The unconscious patterns revealed by the structural analysis of texts might be related to the insights of psychiatry to produce a new structuralist psychohistory, which would be based directly upon primary documents, and not upon speculation about childhood traumas.

A structuralist psychohistory could take one of three forms: 1) The use of structural analysis in an orthodox psychoanalytic framework; 2) The use of structural analysis to reveal character structures or *gestalts*, which can be related to the insights of existential or phenomenological psychoanalysis, *gestalt* therapy, or neo-Reichian therapies; 3) The application to psychohistory of the theories of the structuralist psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. For those interested in the third alternative, the recent publication of several of Lacan's works in English facilitates the understanding of what is probably the most obscure area of structuralist theory. Jacques Lacan's *Ecrits: A Selection* (New York: Norton, 1977) provides access in English to the most important of Lacan's works. Jeffrey Mehlman's collection, *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale French Studies, 1972), offers a somewhat confusing perspective on Lacan, but Anika Lemaire's recently translated *Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge,

⁴⁶ For an example of a typical response to Foucault's work see G. Huppert, "Divinatio et eruditio: Thoughts on Foucault," *History and Theory*, 13 (1974), 191-207. For more perceptive responses see Hayden White, "Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground," *History and Theory*, 12 (1973), 23-54 and Clifford Geertz's recent review of *Discipline and Punish*, "Stir Crazy," *New York Review of Books*, 24 (1978), 3-6.

⁴⁷ David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), xvii-xviii.

and Kegan Paul, 1977) makes the work of this most demanding of structuralists much clearer.

STRUCTURALISM IN AMERICAN STUDIES

Is it really worth it, after all, for an American Studies scholar, already entangled in a complex web of existing methodologies and struggling in an ever growing jungle of secondary literature, to attempt to draw upon such a demanding and seemingly distant approach as structuralism? Can the student of American culture, who is neither linguist nor anthropologist nor philosopher, afford to grapple with these Gallic intricacies? For the majority of scholars in the field the answer to this question is probably no. They will continue to juggle myths and symbols without too much concern for the sign systems which allow these entities to exist. But to those who are already dissatisfied with the existing conceptual framework of the discipline, who are convinced that a new language is needed to deal with the artifacts of American culture, structuralism may prove to be of great value. It may allow them to penetrate beneath the surface of American culture and to reach new insights into the patterns which have structured and which continue to structure the life of this country.

Structuralism is particularly valuable because it is a tool which may be put to many uses. It may be employed to supplement traditional literary analyses or to aid psychohistory or ethnic studies. It may be applied to narrow textual studies or used to define the links between cultural artifacts and the social and economic infrastructure within which they were created. It might even be combined with such quantitative methods as word count analysis to produce a more effective procedure for studying large bodies of written materials. Perhaps of more value than the actual application of structuralist methods to particular problems are the general insights into the nature of culture itself provided by structuralism. Even a limited encounter with the classics of structuralist theory can produce a new awareness of the sign value of concrete objects, a new sensitivity to the ideological messages encoded in even the blindest of texts, and a new appreciation of the complex structures which lie beneath all aspects of our culture—high, popular, and folk.⁴⁸ Even if structuralism is not to be the all-encompassing wave of the future in American Studies, it is well worth adding to the discipline's collection of methodological tools. Like Marxism and psychoanalysis, it has become a part of our intellectual universe, and we can ignore it only at the cost of impoverishing our thought.

⁴⁸ The possibility of applying structuralist methods to the study of American ethnic groups was suggested to me by my colleague at Indiana University, Carlos Bakota, who has used insights borrowed from Jacques Lacan to examine the self-image of Chicanos.