ANTI-STRUCTURALIST STRUCTURES: THE AVANT-GARDE STRUGGLES OF FRENCH FICTION*

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"Structuralism" has come to mean many different things to representatives of the various disciplines to which it has contributed an attitude, a methodology, and even an ideology. However, the vast array of attempts to describe what "structuralism" is or was [1] has taught us that "structuralism" has evolved into a pluralistic phenomenon having various identities within various disciplines. Since the suffix /ism/ implies a congealed and static movement with a readily discernable identity, "structuralism" may also be a misnomer in the development of French literature, especially in association with the creative understanding of "écriture," that is "scripture." About the year 1958, "structuralism" was very much part of a French avant-garde and was used to identify the kinship studies of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the neo-Freudian speculation of Jacques Lacan, and the states of child-development identified by Jean Piaget. These three did not cooperate in their ventures. Yet their works reflected an awareness for something called "structure." In his *Le Structuralisme* (1968), Piaget identified three traits characteristic of the French notion of "structure": wholeness, self-regulation, and transformation. [2] These three traits were to influence the spiralling development of French "scripture" by reinforcing the position of the text in relationship to its "scriptor" and reader. "New realism" was losing the attention of French society as it no longer had the impact it once had in the early 1950's. Especially the group associated with the "nouveau roman" was being relegated to a vantage-point which, as portrayed by Lu-

* This study has been supported by a 1976 grant from the National Endowment for the humanities.

cien Goldmann,[3] observed society from the outside and dit not engage it in debate or discussion. The practitioners of "scripture" became increasingly unconcerned with their lack of acceptance by the dominant French ideology. For example, after the first decade of "scripture," Robbe-Grillet's texts only recorded a sale of 5,000 to 6,000 copies in 1960 while Françoise Mallet-Joris could claim best-seller status with the 40,000 copies of her traditional narratives of love, marriage, and divorce.[4] "New realism" had to be strengthened if it was to continue to provide avant-garde directions for "scripture."

The studies of Lévi-Strauss borrowed the notion of "structure" from linguistics and pre-empted a French revival of interest in the science of language, especially as it was presented by Ferdinand de Saussure. And there was a renewed interest in using "structure" as a means of exploring the ties between the humanities and the sciences of man.[5] The patterns discovered by Lévi-Strauss were tied together by a method called "handicraft" (*sic* "bricolage"). This method was an analysis of myths by re-creating their nonconscious "structures." Roland Barthes — who was later to be joined by Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Tzvetan Todorov, and Gérard Genette — introduced such a "handicraft" into the realm of "scripture" in order to produce a science of the literary artifact. Indeed, as Robert Scholes was to later assert, there existed "the need...for a 'coherent system' that would unite the modern sciences and make the world habitable for man again."[6] With the increased demand for technologically qualified workers, the French educational establishment was especially marked by the diversity of scientific directions during the late 1950's and early 1960's. "Structuralism" could thus provide an opportunity for "scripture" to continue its avant-garde posture by exploring the possibilities for a coherent system uniting man and the sciences. The three-pronged "structure" of wholeness, self-regulation, and transformation identified by Piaget promised to give a coherence to "new realism," which was quickly becoming a passing fancy since it did not offer viable alternatives to the French dominant ideology. In order to change society, "new realism" had to lead it somewhere. The sheer iconoclasm of past forms would be recognized as immature rebellion. The notion of "structure" promised a forward direction for "scripture," in that the traits of wholeness, self-recognition, and

transformation could provide parameters by which relationships, rather than recoverable formal properties, could be explored within the text. The text became, by means of its "structuralist" posture, an organic myth whose holism had yet to be demonstrated. Let us therefore explore "scripture" in light of the three traits of wholeness, self-regulation, and transformation that it has borrowed from the "structuralist handicraft."

A. Wholeness — The bio-logy of the text

Such texts as *Moderato Cantabile* by Duras, *La Mise en scène* by Claude Ollier, *L'Herbe* by Claude Simon, and *La Jalousie* (1957) by Robbe-Grillet were creating a critical mass of tautological and holistic samples of French fiction in 1958. French "scripture" was tautological in that it postulated self-reflexive texts which generated their own vital activity. While "structuralism" had not yet imposed its dogmatic hold on the avant-garde, the avant-garde practitioners of "scripture" were ripe for its influence. "New realism" had given a privileged position to the text as the touchstone of the writers' and the readers' identities. And the text began to assume an organicism of its own, a vital cohesiveness which united the apparently random nature of its "content." Some of the critics of "scripture" accuse its practitioners of implementing an "art for art's sake" which has little or nothing to do with French society. However, the modifications of French society and commentaries on its identity are the very life of these literary products. They need not be sterile and empty texts. Philippe Sollers' *Drame* (1965) and Nathalie Sarraute's *Les Fruits d'Or* (1963) and *Entre la vie et la mort* (1968) especially exemplify the literal "bio-logy" of the text. The text seeks a life of its own struggling to be independent of its "scriptor" and its readers. *Drame* demonstrates the struggle between the text and its "scriptor" to control one another. Within Sarraute's two works, professional critics combine with the "scriptor" and pretentious readers to try to control the specific identity of the text. Yet those texts attempt to influence others with the "life" they have been given from the moment the pen or typewriter of the "scriptor" touches paper.

The "scriptor" does impose limitations on the nature and extent of such literary organicism by his choice of its components. Hence,

the text vies for its own existence with the limitations attributed to it by generic qualifiers such as "novel." Some recognizable forms remained in the French practice of "scripture." Dialogue or monologue remained so that narrators or voices could be isolated within a text, thereby channeling its activity somewhat. The French verb-tenses were still being used so that time could vaguely be oriented in blocks of past, present, and future even if temporal lines could not be established. Yet the historical past (*passé simple*) and the imperfect subjunctive began to fade away in usage. Some writers such as Duras (*Hiroshima mon amour,* 1960) and Robbe-Grillet (*L'Année dernière à Marienbad,* 1961) began experimenting with the film, thus facilitating the use of the present tense to convey dream-states which would destroy the reliance on grammatical tenses as formal categories of past, present, and future (e.g. Robbe-Grillet's *La Maison de rendez-vous,* 1965, and Duras' *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein,* 1964). Nevertheless, the strength of the text's internal coherence or organicism resides primarily in its "scriptor" from whom the text receives its linguistic form and limits. The French practitioners of "scripture" have shown versatile talents in expanding these limits within themselves and their texts.

The pervasive holism of the text is a necessary quality of its organicism. This "necessity" demonstrates that the life of French society does not have to be mandated by external literary forms. Indeed, the determination of the text is a pervasive principle which cannot be superficially separated from its content. Similarly, the "structuralist" text provided social leadership to a French *doxa* whose very life was being distinguished by such superficial codes as de Gaulle's conciliatory policy toward Algeria or the official acceptance of the Russian invasion of Hungary. The "structuralist" fiction was demonstrating that forms actually condition human behavior by controlling how man can respond to his environment. The formal restraints of fiction were analogous to the political restraints of de Gaulle's form of government. Hence, "structuralism" exemplified the isomorphic unity of fiction and society according to a goal later mentioned by Lévi-Strauss in *Le Cru et le cuit*: "We are thus not pretending to show how man thinks within myths, but how myths are conceived in man without his knowing about them." [7] The "myths" of Lévi-Strauss are forms which seem to have an innate sense of self-determination despite man's conscious activ-

ities. And French "scripture" was an attempt at revealing some of these "myths" and demonstrating their capacity for formal change. Jean Pierre Faye's texts especially reflect a concern that a metafiction has historically governed human events (e.g. *Théorie du récit*, 1972; *Langages totalitaires*, 1972). Under his leadership, the French journal *Change* (founded in 1968) has investigated various methods for exploring the relationship between fiction and such formal change.

One of the "myths" exposed by French "structuralist" fiction is that of a universe retrievable in language. Through a return to Saussure's linguistics, the disparity between the referent and its linguistic sign was studied and exemplified by texts which began to exemplify the possibility of reproducing the universe in language. Robbe-Grillet's *Instantanés* (1962) gave literally fascinating "snapshots" of a coffee-urn and a dummy studied from various angles. Yet as the reader appreciates the complexity of detail from various perspectives, so he also learns that the camera's eye is only one of a certainly infinite number of angles by which either the coffee-urn or the dummy could be described. The text has inscribed some of these in its own fashion. And "scripture" begins to develop various techniques of *montage* to create its own reality independent of the world of referents. For example, Claude Simon's *Le Palace* (1962) is presented in a fashion which approaches that of a movie-camera in its alternation of well-focused and blurry images. This focusing of the whole visual picture is part of the "structuralist" concern with the innate ability of language to create its own vitality rather than to present a mirror-image of other lives. The process of creating an organic life of its own is not merely the sum of a text's parts. In fact, the "structuralist" text is equal to more than the sum of its parts, since some of its organic strength is gathered from the extension of its life into the lives of its "scriptors" and its readers. Such a concept of the text precludes its total identification with any of its elemental constituents. The text is in continual process and metamorphosis from the moment of its conception by a "scriptor." Appropriately Thibaudeau insists that "the text must be recognized as the product of an individual desire (scripture being desire itself) in that it is written according to an 'authentic feeling' which probably acknowledges a 'primitive moment' when its author would agitate about its existence."[8] This

"product of individual desire" is thus given a life of its own whereby it can create a world without any of the coordinates of geographical place or linear time. On the one hand, Michel Butor's *Mobile* (1962) is an intriguing example of the fluidity of geographical place demonstrated by a text's onomastic game with names which have been assumed to be means of identifying specific geographical location. On the other hand, Claude Simon's *Histoire* (1967) is a complex mosaic whereby the text creates its own imaginative time-scheme through a visual collage of mnemonic associations.

Through such a process of demystification and a re-creation of its own organic order, the "structuralist" text has also created a chain-link pattern of signifiers (*signifiants*) whose origins (*signifiés*) cannot be recovered by formalist analysis. The text has integrated its form and content so well that neither is distinguishable from the other. As an avant-garde practice, this type of "scripture" may be accused, therefore, of having no relationship to French society since its process cannot be traced from signifier (*signifiant*), through the desired message (*signifié*) of its "scriptor," to an external referent in society. However, the organic process of the "structuralist" text demonstrated the threat that language posed to a French society mesmerized by de Gaulle's rhetorical claims for the grandeur of the Fifth Republic. As Fredric Jameson has shown at length, "so it is that our possession by language, which 'writes' us even as we imagine ourselves to be writing it, is not so much some ultimate release from bourgeois subjectivism, but rather a limiting situation against which we must struggle at every instant." [9] And so the "structuralist" text was implying the need for such a Marxist struggle by exemplifying the vital energy which the text could have and which could be substituted for living persons who apathetically ignore their roles of critical evaluation. Such a struggle with language is vividly portrayed in Sarraute's *Entre la vie et la mort* (1968) wherein a writer actively attempts to create a novel. All of his uncertainties, hesitations, and conscious deliberations are probed. Yet the text is to be written despite the gaps in its writer's conscious construction of a novel. Similarly, Philippe Sollers' *Drame* (1965) theatrically presents two voices that re-enact the tension between language and writer as the confrontation of two conscious entities struggling to produce a text, which

is probably *Drame* itself, as Roudiez has intimated.[10] Such incompleteness of the text is indeed significant, in that the text thereby allows a prospective reader to participate in its creative activity by continuing the work of struggling with the linguistic conditioning and determination of society.

In its organic process, the "structuralist" text often employs a motif as a metaphor for its internal cohesion. A theme or a consistent image re-structures a whole series of recurring settings with subtle variations of events, perspectives, or incidental personalities to convey a change or development that marks the text's process. For example, Robbe-Grillet's *Projet pour une révolution à New York* (1970) uses revolution as a metaphor to combine events whose primary participants change name as the events are re-presented several times [a technique which *La Maison de rendez-vous*, 1965, had employed in the oriental setting of Hong Kong]. This very motif of revolution as a metaphor is an insight into the commentary of the "structuralist" sensibility upon society. Within the Aristotelian heritage of Western civilization, the motif of consistency has often become a metaphor for the mythical structure of a type of cultural activity, whether it be literary or political. In contradistinction to such "consistency" as a secure means of establishing the formal property rights of human behavior, the motif of revolution substitutes a vital activity which is not based on historical precedent but rather on the need for change as a vigorous alternative to stifling habit. A motif, however, is based on repetition which forms habits anew. The motifs which recur as metaphors within the "structuralist" texts are not similar ones, but they do signal an underlying pattern of holism despite the appearances of heterogeneity among the various examples of "scripture" within the guise of "structuralist" aesthetic. Such motifs create an internal bond within each of the "structuralist" text as well as within the amorphous organism of "structuralist scripture." In effect, such internal cohesion approaches Georg Lukács' vision of a Marxist praxis whereby "since its ideological basis is an understanding of the future, individuals working for that future will necessarily be portrayed from the outside."[11] But let us see if the vital energy *within* "structuralist scripture" can lead French society toward a Marxist "understanding of the future" by examining in what manner a structure can be self-determined.

B. Self-Regulation: The Organization of a New Order

Professional literary critics were somewhat hesitant to acknowledge any effect of "structuralist scripture" upon French society. These exponents of traditional criticism, which Leon Roudiez aptly portrays as "a machine whose function is to integrate the new into the old, to perpetuate the dominant ideology...," [12] were threatened in their very livelihood by texts which were organisms unto themselves. The critical powers of anathema and blessing were being vitiated by texts that created their own readers. Hence, the claims made for texts with organic unity were rejected as frivolous arguments of "art for art's sake." Therefore, many of the exponents of "structuralist scripture" began to review the texts of their colleagues. The French journals *Tel Quel, Critique,* and *NRF* were among the first to publish the insiders' reviews. Other journals such as *Poétique* and *Littérature* became specific organs for the perpetuation of "structuralism." In order to present "structuralist" texts to the French dominant ideology, the texts have to be integrated into a human discourse and discussed according to the parameters of such generic terms as "novel," "drama," "poetry," and the like. In effect, these integrations set the limits of social form upon the lives of those texts as they are promulgated by readers of the reviews who may be prospective readers of the texts or who may simply accept the categories of the critic about the texts without attempting to read them. "Structuralism" has especially produced the latter reaction because of its complex, multiple manifestations. Umberto Eco points out one common misconception which resulted from the confusion between "structural linguistics" and "structuralism:"

> The superficial assonance in French, between the adjectives 'structural' and 'structuralist' has caused some to believe that the structural activity of the avant-garde is directly tied to the structuralist research of structuralism. And this includes those who saw the critically methodological tradition of the avant-garde's formal activity in structuralism. Often, it's simply been a matter of an ingenious sophism: structuralism is *an* avant-garde methodology, therefore, it is *the* avant-garde methodology. [13]

Once the label "structuralist" has been attached by a critic to a particular text, prior assumptions and definitions reduce the text's viability among its readers who accept that label.

Hence, "scripture" had to break away from what Roland Barthes has called the "market-place value of words." [14] "Structuralism" provided "scripture" with an identity and an avant-garde nucleus of followers. But that identity had to be refined and re-directed so that fiction could maintain an avant-garde leadership. "Scripture" needed a positive thrust to redirect its movement from the past integration of literary artifacts into the mechanism of traditional criticism. The field of cinematography provided the inspiration necessary for the survival of "scripture." While Scholes and Kellogg argued that "the novel, a form dominated by the mimetic impulse, has always borrowed its plot materials from other forms," [15] French "scripture" borrowed from the forms of film in order to question the viability of "plot" and "novel" as methods of regulating the limits of fiction. Indeed, "scripture" even adopted the modified scenario or *ciné-roman* as a generic term to include those experiments with film and writing (e.g. Robbe-Grillet's *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961; *L'Immortelle*, 1963; *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 1973). French film-makers were themselves offering to the public a series of avant-garde experiments which would later be grouped as the "New Wave" (*la nouvelle vague*). Herein lay the opportunity for "structuralist" texts to create self-regulating parameters for "scripture." The discipline of cinematography offered its repertoire of techniques as a source of avant-garde literary inspiration. The technological experiments with temporal and geographical alternatives combined with the mass influence of the film through television to provide promise of a means whereby "scripture" could define definite directions for the future of French society. The "structuralist" avant-garde could learn and borrow much from the film which continually manifested its organic process while regulating itself through the eye of the camera. Even though many exponents of "scripture" have not specifically experimented with the *ciné-roman*, most have borrowed such techniques as montage, simultaneity, strabism and fading, dialogue and aural reinforcement, as well as games of reflexive perspective focused upon the recipients of human vision.

But does the poetic ordering of "scripture" within the cinematographic mode constitute a forward direction for "structuralist" fiction? Many critics think that the momentum gained from the film has been too destructive and therefore negative in "scripture." The British have been especially skeptical of the French experiments with "scripture." The uncomprehending attitudes of the French and English to one another have been even more underscored by the French theorizing on the phenomenon of "scripture" which just seems to run counter to the empirical and behaviorist orientations of the English, among others. Some focus upon where the exponents of "scripture" have been to the neglect of where they are going to go. In Sartre's introduction to Sarraute's *Portrait d'un inconnu* (1947), he had portrayed this text as an "anti-novel." Ironically, some twenty years later, many opponents of French "scripture" have adopted this label and perpetuated a stereotyped view of the French "anti-novel." The French were therefore in need of an ideology that would rebut their critics and feature the forward appeal of their literary avant-garde. The professional critics were uncomfortable with the cinematographic techniques in French "scripture" in that they could not detect its momentum for providing formal self-regulation in fiction. However, the French "structuralist" writers of fiction had provided an avant-garde precedent through their experiments with the film. The film provided the French with a means to lead their culture in a positive literary direction and to respond to their Marxist theoreticians who were echoing Lukács' directive that "it is the view of the world, the ideology of *Weltanschauung* underlying a writer's work that counts." [16] This "underlying ideology" reminds us of Lévi-Strauss's "myth" in that it was perhaps already there waiting for others to delineate its organizational control.

It is the philosopher Michel Foucault who provides an ideological basis for "structuralist scripture." In his *Les Mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (1963), he postulates the existence of various "épistémès" throughout history as a means by which various types of discourse are arranged to account for the relationships of the objects within its scope of interest. The twentieth century, according to Foucault, is witnessing the development of its own "épistémè": that of the opacity of language, of language's inability to characterize human behavior. According to Foucault,

there is now a need to return to the pre-linguistic era before language concealed the nature of human existence. And the experiments with cinematographic techniques by the exponents of "scripture" appear to be exploring that pre-linguistic era where the forms of language did not divide human behavior into arbitrary units. Through the use of sequential frames, a fictional exposition can physically portray the fluidity of movement and change in a graphic a-linguistic manner. Painting-styles which focus upon fluidity also contributed to the graphics of French "scripture." Both Beckett (*Bram Van Velde,* 1958) and Butor (*Répertoire* II, 1962) have been concerned with the similarities between painting and writing. Simon's *Femmes* (1966) provides commentaries to paintings by Joan Mirò. Jean Ricardou has attempted to portray the nouveau roman as a baroque manifestation (*Problèmes du nouveau roman,* 1967) while Robbe-Grillet's geometric style recalls the Cubist intersections of angular lines. [17]

The practitioners of "scripture" thus tried to situate man within a poetic context with respect to his universe since prose had not been able to articulate man's condition linguistically. Of course, this poetry did not rely merely upon words, but rather upon the relationships among the individual units in man's universe which create their own poetic order alongside words. It was the French journal *Tel Quel* (founded in 1960) that promised to give an ideological direction to such a poetic aesthetic in its first issue: "We must remark these days that scripture is no longer conceivable without a clear prospectus for its possibilities, a cold stare at the dimensions of the chaos from which it is originating, and a determination which will place poetry on the highest spiritual order." [18] The need was established. "Structuralist scripture" had yet to provide its own coherent ideology for avant-garde leadership. By contrast, some members of the *Tel Quel* editorial board attempted to fill that void with remarkable incisiveness and coherence. The 1971 symposium at Cerisy-la-Salle was organized by Jean Ricardou in order to mold "scripture" into a theoretical model. He was concerned with propounding the words of Jean Thibaudeau (*Ouverture,* 1966), Marcelin Pleynet (*Comme,* 1965), Jean-Louis Baudry (*Personnes,* 1967) and Philippe Sollers (*Le Parc*; *Drame*; *Nombres*) — all part of the Tel Quel Group — as unified alternatives to the *nouveau roman* thus: "while the Nouveau Roman works with the deterioration of the

character, *Tel Quel* evacuates character by implementing a certain use of pronouns . . . grammatical persons whose identification with any character is precluded by the text." [19] But Ricardou's hopes of uniting the *nouveau roman* (*Problèmes du nouveau roman,* 1967; *Pour une théorie du nouveau roman,* 1971) were too dogmatic. At Cerisy, he alienated may of the potential collaborators present. Later that same year, he resigned from *Tel Quel*'s editorial board. Meanwhile, *Tel Quel* elaborated several directions of its own for "scripture" (*Théorie d'ensemble,* 1968; Sollers' *Logiques,* 1968) based on concepts introduced by Jacques Derrida (*L'Écriture et la différence,* 1963; *De la grammatologie,* 1967) who was preaching a gospel of "differance," spelled with an "a" to focus upon its *active* sense. Derrida would have "scripture" seek out its pre-linguistic existence as "archi-scripture," which need not be dependent upon the *logos* of Western civilization, that is, a closed theory of the sign which models the written word upon the spoken word and a signifier (*signifiant*) upon something being signified (*signifié*). Derrida has presented a whole inventory of jargon which explains how "scripture" can "disseminate" (sic) itself and insist upon its literal presence within society. But the Tel Quel Group isolated itself from the other practitioners of "scripture." Although Philippe Sollers pontificated as *Tel Quel*'s organizing force to elaborate precisely honed theories of "scripture" and the "text," *Tel Quel*'s revolutionary posture among the practitioners of "scripture" isolated its small community from the attention that its ideology deserved. Rather than attract others to its well-conceived system of an "inter-text" (texts infinitely commenting and opening into other texts), *Tel Quel* has repelled many by its dogmatic editorial concerns under the leadership of Philippe Sollers. The exponents of "scripture" needed an avant-garde identity, but even more, a *French* avant-garde identity. They seemed to realize that a revolutionary posture, similar to the Maoist position within the *Tel Quel* editorial staff in June 1971, would be inimical to their very existence *within* French society. "Scripture" reformed itself from within because it was only by questioning its own assumed values, as reflected in the French "dominant ideology," that "scripture" could change and grow with a more viable relationship (i.e. that of leadership) to the society about it.

During the late '60's, Robbe-Grillet became involved in a debate with *Tel Quel.* He had been attacked by the journal for his experiments with the narrative. While the Tel Quel Group insisted that narration as a formal criterion was creating a stifling atmosphere for "scripture" because of its reliance on causal and sequential relationships, Robbe-Grillet insisted that an avant-garde had to work *within* cultural forms in order to communicate to its society. This debate was a crucial one because French "structuralists" since Lévi-Strauss had been studying the "myths" of culture as organic, self-regulating entities which were inherent in a given cultural unit. Hence, in order to reveal the parameters of those "myths," French "scripture" had to explore the inner reaches of its cultural forms. *Tel Quel* challenged the adequacy of portraying these "myths" by staying *within* them. Yet it is the French who are going to change their own culture. Hence, they must be able to recognize something within the avant-garde's literary exploits if they are going to react to its leadership.

Of course, many practitioners of "scripture" had their own personal style which did admit to a collective identification. Michel Butor and Claude Simon seem to have especially been oblivious of group labels such as "nouveau roman," *Tel Quel,* etc. These writers were non-dogmatic in that they did not evidence any commitment to one ideology or another. Their concern was to indicate avant-garde directions in "scripture." Thus, "scripture" provided an adhesion among the many heterogeneous texts that appeared during the late 1960's. There was a faith in the power of that heterogeneous practice called "scripture" to re-"structure" French society so that the French could better understand their own culture. Butor and Simon had their own individual styles of generating such an understanding. Yet both of them were also influenced by the camera as a means of exploring the imagination in fiction. Their techniques of using a serialized type of montage to juxtapose images not logically but mnemonically associated (e.g. Simon's *Histoire,* 1967, and Butor's *Mobile,* 1962) create visual units to be presented to the reader's imagination. This reliance of French fiction upon a cinematographic vision provided a certain amount of internal cohesion to the texts. The science of semiology would later save "scripture" from a subordinate role to that of film by re-instating the language of the text as a primary concern in the act of writing. Meanwhile,

"structuralism" had yet another salient feature which prevented the text from being reduced to stereotyped "myths" — that of "transformation," a feature in which the reader was to play the crucial role of recognition.

C. Transformation — The Reader Becomes Victim

As Lévi-Strauss had indicated, the very existence of a "myth" is not apparent to a culture. Hence, "structuralism" sought to make a culture conscious of those "myths" which created its very scaffolding. In "scripture," such a task was directed at the reader. It was the very reader of "scripture" who was being de-constructed by the work of the texts. In order to demonstrate the "myths" of reading as consumption, digestion, and defecation, the texts had to be transformed into cinematographic structures which would resist such a systematic dismissal and reduction as literary artifacts. Reading would also have to become a type of praxis, an activity which could always be refined and augmented. The reader of "scripture" must take the initiative and struggle with the text to produce that "virtual" dimension of reading identified by Wolfgang Iser thus: "As we read, we oscillate to a greater or lesser degree between the building and breaking of illusions. In a process of trial and error, we organize and re-organize the various data offered to us by the text." [20] Similarly, reading "structuralist scripture" entails an interaction of text and reader to produce a dialectical meaning which did not exist in either of the two entities prior to their confrontation. As an avant-garde artifact, the text dares the reader to approach it because it is an experiment by the enemy, that which is trying to prove and recast the very innards of the reader and his relationship to his culture.

An organic and self-regulated text is sufficient unto itself and hence represents a living being for the reader to confront. And the "structuralist" text is a rebellious creature which is in the process of creating its own identity within, and despite, the "myths" of French culture. Its reader must adapt to a fluid "form," in which cinematographic signs created by montage, fading, focusing, cut-up, splicing, etc. are creatively united, while also criticizing the "narrative" techniques which he may expect to find in fiction. The reader may be dazzled by the text's creatively serialized organization. And

that is one of the tricks which the text may perform upon the reader in order to demonstrate the "a-critical" attitude perpetuated by conventional narratives. In effect, the dazzling creativity of a text such as Butor's onomastic games in *Mobile* may preclude a critical examination of what the text is doing. Thus, the text gains the upper hand in its struggle with the reader. Philippe Sollers has portrayed such a reader, who approaches "scripture" with the expectation of finding a text which is mimetic in nature and finds instead that " . . . everything happens as if the form which he finds before his eyes had at once the density of a canyon-wall and the clarity of a mirror; he has less the feeling of looking at it from a bias than that of being its chosen victim." [21]

On the other hand, the reader can participate in the text's cinematographic structure while maintaining a certain critical distance. By refusing to be mesmerized by the dazzling succession of frames, the reader can slow the tempo of the text and begin to realize what the text is trying to do. Ihab Hassan has even begun to develop his own reading method which proceeds by frames, thus continuing the apparently fragmented yet associative messages of the creative text (e.g. his *Paracriticisms*, 1975). Such a reading approximates the challenges of writing the "structuralist" text in that both the reader and writer struggle for their identity with a text which is creating its own existence through a "scripture" which may also project the identities of its own writer and reader who have misgivings about the power of their individual consciousness. Philippe Sollers has described the work of "scripture" as if it too were a conscious attempt to control other entities within its area of operation:

> But scripture is exactly a constant struggle with repression and the forbidden. It struggles on the frontiers where the individual becomes someone other than who he is permitted to be. This unpardonable act is called acquiring a language. There, no distinction exists between the writer and the reader. Their experience becomes identical. [22]

The writer and reader are both actively involved in transforming the "myths" or "structures" of the text. The text threatens to open up and identify the reader and/or writer in its procession. The ties of the text to its writer and reader are similar to wavelengths which depict the struggle between the two entities of the text and its read-

er/writer. For example, in Michel Butor's *La Modification*, the narrating voice is on a train ride between Paris and Rome, between his wife and his mistress, between past and future affairs. That voice speaks to the reader about its time and place. Hence, the text and reader share in the struggle to pose similar questions to one another as both are engaged in the restructuring of their identities.

But what does reading a "structuralist" text demand from the reader in French society? The Roland Barthes-Raymond Picard debates of the mid-sixties underscored the fact that the Sorbonne was highly insulted by the arbitrary nature of reading as exemplified in such works as Roland Barthes' *Sur Racine* (1963), Charles Mauron's *L'Inconscient dans l'oeuvre et la vie de Racine* (1957), and Jean-Paul Weber's *Genèse de l'oeuvre poétique* (1960). While these readings do not focus upon contemporary works of fiction, they do illustrate a rising tendency to question the traditional university-bred reading based on the historicism of Gustave Lanson at the turn of the twentieth century. Instead, Barthes survives those debates with Picard, as the proponent of a free-spirited type of reading (e.g. his *S/Z*, 1970 and *Sade Fourier Loyola*, 1971) which demonstrates a reader flexible enough to discover the nuances latent in the text without being subservient to a pre-cast ideology or methodology of reading. This "structuralist" (insofar ar Barthes is concerned with discovering the "myths" operating within a text) practice of reading is also a practice of "scripture." In fact, Barthes' readings of other texts have prompted a renewed interest in the art of reading, so much so that "readability" is now a crucial concern of French "scripture." Reading itself participates in fiction insofar as reading and fiction share a common purpose, identified by Jean-Louis Baudry thus: "We have understood for a while that this scripture and this reading place the scriptor and the reader before the question of 'readability,' of their own 'readability' insofar as 'readability' is caught up in the desire to attain and to possess ulimate and immutable meaning."[23] The key words here are "the desire to attain and to possess" because "ultimate and immutable meaning" is an elusive thing glossed over by "myths" which the "structuralist" text, together with its reader, aspires to discover.

In approaching such an "ultimate and immutable meaning," the reader of a "structuralist" text must be alert to the restructuring being performed by the text. Such restructuring can fool a pro-

spective reader by trapping him or her with false leads. For example, Duras' *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964) may appear to be about the rape of Lol V. Stein. However, as the event is re-told several times throughout the text, the reader can no longer be sure that a rape ever occurred or that such a person with the name Lol V. Stein still exists. Raymond Federman, who has written creative texts in both French and English (*Double or Nothing*; *Take It or Leave It*), has pointed out the situation of the reader before such a text: "There must be other ways for the reader to organize, to create his own order as he reads a work of fiction. I want the reader to have the same kind of freedom in ordering the space in which fiction is inscribed." [24] Such a freedom entails certain responsibilities. If the text is not allowed to create its own reader, then the reader will have to create his own text. But it is not an arbitrarily selective text which the reader creates. Rather the reader must create the holistic ensemble of the text from all the individual fragments he encounters. This includes the tricks and traps which lead the reader away from following a Daedalan thread through the text. Leon Roudiez's reading of Sollers' *Drame* (1965) may give us insights into the makeup of such a holistic ensemble: "What happens when one reads the text is that clusters of images gradually form, with meaning emerging out of the interplay of images within each cluster and also out of the juxtaposition of clusters." [25] Hence, the alert reader will thus establish a serial pattern by which to construct his reading of the text. This reading then leads the reader to think in new ways by forcing him to invent different parameters for his confrontation with various texts. Socially, the French reader of the "structuralist" text is then able to re-think the "myths" which had not heretofore been observed as conditioning French social behavior. The students' and workers' strikes of May 1968 were attempts at such re-thinking. The Gaullist codes for education and the consumer society were becoming too stifling for the French. Hence, May 1968 became a pivotal historical date in that French students in Paris, Nanterre, and at other universities — as well as the working classes — were incited to revolt politically, thus demonstrating a Marxist praxis which "structuralism" could not incite. A "critical mass" of human awareness within French society called for reform and began to lean toward socialism as a more viable and attractive form of government. It would be deceptive to say

that the avant-garde exponents of "scripture" directly influenced such a political awareness. However, "scripture" was also concerned that the "myths" of literature were propagating a naïve and stifling literary culture. Stephen Spender's documentation of the world-wide rebellions in 1968 offers some insight into just how stifling the dominant ideologies of Western civilization prior to those volcanic eruptions of disfavor were:

> So in the west the feeling is that although there is freedom, it is ineffective. It is surrounded by a vacuum. Society is arranged in concentric circles so that the inhabitants of each circle talk only to each other.[26]

These circles of society had to be broken so that society could restructure itself through communication in a viable architecture, perhaps in a spiralling manner that would provide access to the various strata of society. This insight is especially keen in regard to French society which has retained the social stratification established during the medieval era. Of course, some will say that restructuring fiction will not break through the strata of French society. However, the challenge of change posed by "structuralist" fiction to the reader can eventually change him as an individual and indirectly the society in which he leads his daily life. And therein lies the significant transformation of "scripture" because, through his act of creative reading, the reader transmutes the work of that text into another creation.

Many professional critics, such as Geoffrey Hartman[27] and Wayne Booth,[28] have considered "structuralism" to be little more than arbitrary, subjective games of language, or explorations into the ever-darkening cave of phenomenological hermeneutics. Others, such as Gerald Prince, pronounce: "structuralism (in literature) is dead; or, at any rate, it has probably outlived its usefulness as a critical expression, as a possible method, and as a movement of mind."[29] "Structuralism" has not demonstrated its viability to non-French bystanders as a methodology of reading. The help of science has been necessary to explain and organize the elements of the "new reality" it sought to perpetuate. Now that it has helped make us conscious of the structured myths that condition our writing and reading habits, "structuralism" can lead us to new horizons by providing alternatives for the survival of creative reading and

writing. Semiology and semiotics appear to be the heirs to "structuralism" in that they promise coherent perspectives for prospective readers. Nevertheless, the avant-garde role of "structuralist scripture" was to subvert the past "myths" of "committed literature" and to look forward to a science of literary forms which operate within fiction. This "science of literary forms" is to be provided by the reader of "structuralist" fiction who must first recognize the serial pattern of "scripture" identified by Lévi-Strauss (*Le Cru et le cuit,* 1964) and Umberto Eco (*La Structure absente,* French trans., 1972). The fundamental characteristics of serial thought, as Eco isolates them,[30] are that each message questions the code in which it is presented, that polyvalence questions the validity of a duality of meanings, and that its productive nature causes the codes to be evolved through the reader. Through the reader's participation in such a serial thought-process, the very notion of a "structure" closed unto itself fades away in favor of an open relationship. As Paul de Man has noted, "the structuralist goal of a science of literary forms . . . treats literature as if the fluctuating movement of aborted self-definition were not a constitutive part of its language."[31] Yet "structuralism" itself would succumb to that very hypermetropic vision which it gave to the composition of texts. Semiology, that science of language postulated by Saussure and reintegrated into literary criticism by Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957), would provide avant-garde leadership in recognizing the bases of French culture in language and exploring the tasks of fiction and reading as dependent upon those bases. "Structuralism" must also lead us beyond the structures which it identified because, as Sanguineti notes in his *Tel Quel* manifesto for a revolutionary avant-garde, "the context, which elucidates language, deciphers the ideology."[32] The heritage of "structuralism," with its many diversified exponents in "scripture," has been that it allows us to examine the social components implied by the language of a text. As those exponents have revealed the wholeness, self-regulation, and transformation of the "structure" of "scripture," their investigations point to the need to establish which inherent ideologies are contained within the language of avant-garde texts. Those revelations will give us much information about what is entailed in "reading" and how such an activity is conditioned by individual cultures.

NOTES

[1] Wide-ranging attempts to present "structuralism" include Jacques Ehrmann's (ed.) *Structuralism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), Jean Piaget's *Le Structuralisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), Macksey and Donato's (ed.) *The Structuralist Controversy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), Richard and Fernande de George's (ed.) *The Structuralists* from Marx to *Lévi-Strauss* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), David Robey's (ed.) *Structuralism* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1973), Robert Scholes' *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), and Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975). See Josué Harari's bibliography *Structuralists and Structuralisms* (Ithaca: Diacritics, 1971) for other works. Many of these conflict with one another, especially in specifying the contributions of "structuralism" to man's knowledge of himself and the universe. These conflicts are probably due to the fact that "structuralism" is still influencing us, especially in the developments of the sciences of semiology and semiotics.

[2] Jean Piaget, *Structuralism*, trans. Chaninah Maschler (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), p. 5.

[3] Lucien Goldmann, *La Création culturelle dans la société moderne* (Paris: Denoel/Gonthier, 1971), p. 41.

[4] As noted by Pierre Astier, *La Crise du roman français et le nouveau réalisme* (Paris: Debresse, 1968), p. 162.

[5] A Johns Hopkins University seminar attempted to establish the parameters of such a discussion. It has been published by Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato as *The Structuralist Controversy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

[6] Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 2.

[7] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le cuit* (Paris: Plon, 1964), p. 20. I have translated this French passage as well as all others in this paper unless I indicate another translator.

[8] Jean Thibaudeau, "Le Roman comme autobiographie," *Tel Quel*, No. 34 (Summer 1968), p. 68.

[9] Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 140.

[10] Léon S. Roudiez, *French Fiction Today* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972), p. 351.

[11] Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1962), p. 95.

[12] Léon S. Roudiez, "In Dubious Battle: Literature vs. Ideology," *Semiotext(e)*, No. 1 (Winter 1974), p. 90.

[13] Umberto Eco, *La structure absente*, trans. Uccio Esposito Torrigiani (Paris: Mercure de France, 1972), p. 351.

[14] Roland Barthes, *Critique et Vérité* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1966), p. 21.

[15] Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 233.

[16] Lukács, p. 19.

[17] See Elly Jaffé-Freem, *Alain Robbe-Grillet et la peinture cubiste* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1966).

[18] Anonymous, "Déclaration," *Tel Quel*, No. 1 (Spring 1960), p. 3.

[19] Jean Ricardou, "Le Nouveau Roman existe-t-il?" in *Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui,* I (Paris: 10/18, 1972), p. 20.

[20] Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," *New Literary History,* III, No. 2 (Winter 1972), p. 293.

[21] Philippe Sollers, "Logique de la fiction," *Tel Quel,* No. 15 (Autumn 1963), p. 4.

[22] Philippe Sollers, "Alternative," *Tel Quel,* No. 24 (Winter 1966), p. 95.

[23] Jean-Louis Baudry, "Écriture, fiction, idéologie," *Tel Quel,* No. 31 (Autumn 1967), p. 25.

[24] Raymond Federman and Ronald Sukenick, "The New Innovative Fiction," *Antaeus,* No. 20 (Winter 1976), p. 139.

[25] Roudiez, *French Fiction Today,* p. 354.

[26] Stephen Spender, *The Year of the Young Rebels* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 102.

[27] Geoffrey Hartman has especially voiced his opposition to reading according to a "structural" method, as exemplified in an exposé by Michael Riffaterre. See Hartman's "The Use and Abuse of Structural Analysis," *New Literary History,* VII, No. 1 (Autumn 1970), pp. 165-189.

[28] Wayne Booth has openly mocked Roland Barthes and French "structuralism" for its "fantasmatic nature" in the MLA seminar "The Reader in Fiction," San Francisco, Dec. 1975. See Michel Pierssens' editorial on the matter: "Golden Oldies or Of Baboons and Apes," *Sub-stance,* No. 13 (1976), pp. 3-7.

[29] Gerald Prince, "Practical Poetics," Diacritics, V, No. 2 (Summer 1975), p. 23.

[30] Eco, p. 352.

[31] Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 164.

[32] Edoardo Sanguineti, "Pour une avant-garde révolutionnaire," *Tel Quel,* No. 29 (Spring 1967), p. 90.