

# *Torn Halves: Political Conflict in Literary and Cultural Theory*

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## Chapter 3 Poststructuralism—the Improper Name

Bakhtin thus operated as something of an elusive third term in the conflict between Marxism and post-structuralism, a struggle between transcendent and immanent critiques. Bakhtin was transformed into a discrete object of desire as each sought for a subsuming position, but he could only be used to show what the other lacked—a move which always incurred the risk of turning the original position inside out. In the institutional prevarication between insides and outsides, you cannot escape from either by recourse to its opposite—for each, in Stallybrass and White's terms, can always become a symbolic inversion of the other. The vacillation between them points to the operation of an anxiety, the entangling alterity of that which is outside the institution and which constitutes the condition of institutional production.

The pressure for criticism to get outside its object determines the paradigms of contemporary theory which

mirror and reproduce such compulsion at a theoretical level. The dichotomy of inside and outside is transformed into an interminable drive for theory to get outside itself, to step outside its own skin. Take, for example, the 'post-modernism' which has become the topic of such profuse discussion in the past ten years or so. Who felt the need to introduce the concept as a rival to modernism, which had virtually been forgotten about anyway, and why? What is the relation of postmodernism to the poststructuralism that preceded it, but which now constitutes a minor theoretical aspect of it? And what is its relation to that other more recent 'post' of contemporary theory, 'post-colonialism'? To say nothing of the notion of 'post-feminism'. Some such as Gerald Graff have argued that these movements involve a meaningless repetition of new theories versus old, meaningless because their only necessity is that they be new.<sup>1</sup> By defining itself against a past but also in a sequence of modernity, the new certainly marks a relation to history.<sup>2</sup> But it could also be maintained that the addition of the 'post' is symptomatic of the increasingly insistent institutional compulsion always to put oneself on the outside, the beyond: 'post', 'neo', 'new' are the names for the outside of (the other) theory, for theory being outside itself, attempting to put boundaries between itself and its putatively surpassed other. In Jameson's terms, they are themselves a symbolic displacement for critical distance, substituting a relation of time, of postness, of newness, for the lost relation of space. But even if time enables a distance, this postness is still always a self-reflective critique, that is, a difference between theories rather than a different critique of culture as such. The succession of modernities in theory betrays symptomatically the lost critical relation between criticism and the world. In its absence, criticism turns in

on itself to produce an endless succession of narcissistic, self-critical perspectives.

A larger version of this structure would be the claim that postmodernism can be defined by its critical and self-reflexive attitude to the enlightenment project. Zygmunt Bauman, for example, argues that postmodernism represents a break with modernism, a reflection on its goals, a critical self-consciousness about it and to that degree a revision of it.<sup>3</sup> This, roughly speaking, squares with Habermas' account, except that for him it amounts to a betrayal of the Enlightenment and its principles. The question that emerges here is whether postmodernism can be said to exist as such as a separable movement from modernism: the argument set up by Habermas, and increasingly followed by those sympathetic to critical theory, is that postmodernism far from being something new merely represents a negative reversal—Habermas' 'neo-conservatism'—that seeks to undermine the original emancipatory Enlightenment project of which Marxism is the most fully developed example. This assumes a view of the Enlightenment as 'a project', that is, a movement with a unified intention that was not in any way ambiguous, or divided against itself.

The dispute about whether postmodernism can in any meaningful sense be conceded as a separate conceptual entity exactly parallels the discussions that took place in the 1980s about whether poststructuralism was in any real respect different from structuralism. Today the argument might equally go the other way, namely, we might wonder whether structuralism was ever different from poststructuralism.<sup>4</sup>

## II

If the problem with Bakhtin was whether there was a real Bakhtin, the question with poststructuralism was whether it existed at all. A parallel case would be Walter Benn Michaels and Steven Knapp's polemic 'Against Theory' which, while not directed against poststructuralism as such, rested its complaint on the key characteristic of theory's 'tendency to generate theoretical problems by splitting apart terms that are in fact inseparable':<sup>5</sup> in other words, making difference out of sameness, but a difference that is somehow a false one, because the same really is just the same and identical with itself. The reluctance to admit that there was any difference between structuralism and poststructuralism was strikingly marked by the repeated insistence by critics on referring to '*so-called* poststructuralism'.<sup>6</sup> Structuralism, like modernity, was not to be given up so easily. Which is not altogether unrelated to the way in which attention quickly focussed on the issue of history. Rodolphe Gasché put it like this:

As innocent as the prefix *post-* in front of *structuralism* may sound, it is burdened with the formidable task of blaming and overcoming structuralism's alleged ahistoricity. The mere linguistic event of a formation such as 'post-structuralism' alone suggests that history-in-person has come to belie the theoretical ambitions of the previous ahistorical doctrine.... Yet ... it is, in practice, not very easy to distinguish post-structuralism from what precedes it.<sup>7</sup>

As Gasché observes, the 'post' of poststructuralism itself gives the lie to structuralism's fabled emphasis on the synchronic, to its apparent ahistoricity. Either the

introduction of the post constitutes an event which, at a stroke, dismembers the entire structuralist theoretical machinery—or it marks a historicity that had up to that moment lain concealed.<sup>8</sup> If the latter is the case, then the problem becomes the fact that the post is entirely superfluous, excessive, in that it implies a real difference when in fact there was none. Interestingly enough, then, given its own obsession with the various versions of difference, when it first emerged as a term post-structuralism was taken as the sign of a false difference, of difference where there was no difference. This would be comparable to more recent arguments about post-modernity.

In fact, paradoxically given its alleged ahistoricity, structuralism had always emphasized its own temporality. As early as 1964, Roland Barthes forecast the end of a movement that at that time had hardly even begun, declaring that:

Structural man is scarcely concerned to *last*; he knows that structuralism, too, is a certain *form* of the world; and just as he experiences his validity (but not his truth) in his power to speak the old languages of the world in a new way, so he knows that it will suffice that a new language rise out of history, a new language which speaks him in his turn, for his task to be done.<sup>9</sup>

And sure enough, the death of structural man duly took place, doubtless to be laid in the grave alongside authorial man, whose demise he had brought about. The new language which showed that his task was done was that of poststructural woman—a bewildering succession for most people who had scarcely begun to understand structural man's curious babble of signifiers and

signifieds, synchronic and diachronic, *langue* and *parole*, *juzet* and *fabula*, enunciation and enounced, etc. etc.

The relation between the two remains an open question. Were they different or were they the same? Would structuralism have been the same if post-structuralism had never existed? Or did post-structuralism make it, retrospectively by a kind of deferred action, different? The connection between them is hard to assess because no one has ever really agreed on definition of poststructuralism, which remains to this day conceptually elusive, no more perhaps than an 'order word', in Deleuze and Guattari's term.<sup>10</sup> But then what, for that matter, was structuralism? And how is it that it seemed to involve many of the same thinkers—who subsequently reappeared as poststructuralists?

### III

The genealogy of the word 'poststructuralism' is itself instructive. It's interesting to note that the appearance of the word was preceded by talk of 'The End of Structuralism' (Jean-Marie Benoist, 1970), of 'Structuralism: The Aftermath' (Eugenio Donato, 1973), or the highly symptomatic renaming of the 1970 volume *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* as *The Structuralist Controversy* in 1972.<sup>11</sup> It is now widely agreed that Derrida's appearance at the Johns Hopkins Symposium with a paper entitled 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences', constituted the decisive intervention that in the USA produced a new critical relationship to structuralism.

Credit for this historic intervention must also in certain respects go to Eugenio Donato, who appears,

from his paper, to have been the only speaker who had understood the significance of Derrida's two articles 'De la grammatologie' that had appeared in the journal *Critique* in December 1965 and January 1966. Donato writes:

It should be possible to see, for literature, both the necessity and the dilemma of an enterprise such as [that of] Derrida, in as much as language in its being is difference, yet it cannot escape the tyranny of the linguistic sign; that is to say, identity and presence. It has the constant and interminable task of demystifying itself, but it can only do so from a position which it can never occupy.<sup>12</sup>

There has scarcely been a more succinct summary of the deconstructive premise—in which Donato emphasizes the way in which difference may undo identity but cannot escape it either.

It was only in the Preface to the renamed version of the Johns Hopkins symposium, written in November 1971, that the editors Macksey and Donato concede a decisive indication that something had changed in their perception of the structuralist activity, beginning their Preface with the comment that 'the republication of a symposium connected with structuralism perhaps deserves a word of explanation' (ix). The assumption in the English-speaking world that structuralism was an avowedly scientific project has now to be qualified. They observe that Barthes, whose name was one of the first to be linked with the concept of 'structuralism'

has left little doubt in his recent works that the avowed scientific end which Parisian structuralism had assigned itself constitutes more a strategic moment in

an open-ended process than an attainable goal. Although the intellectual inheritance was clear, with its preoccupation with articulated sign-systems and the repudiation of the hermeneutic enterprises of the last century, evidence was already available in the Johns Hopkins symposium of the ensuing moment of theoretical deconstruction. [ix]

For Macksey and Donato that act of ‘theoretical deconstruction’ takes the form of the decline in methodological importance of linguistics—that is to say, Saussure—and the replacement of Hegel by Nietzsche in the central position of French thought. Declaring that the deconstruction of structuralism does not just take the form of a change in the pantheon of intellectual gods, Macksey and Donato note a new element of negativity, of ‘philosophical metaphors of defeat’:

Today’s task for thinkers within this climate thus seems to reside in the possibility of developing a critical discourse without identities to sustain concepts, without privileged origins, or without an ordered temporality to guarantee the mimetic possibilities of representation. [xii]

What is striking here is the way in which the end of structuralism is not associated exclusively with Derrida and deconstruction, but equally with the work of Foucault and Deleuze; Macksey and Donato’s ensuing description develops into a distinctly Foucauldian discourse which stresses the event, ‘adrift in radical discontinuity’, and singularities, the ‘fundamental entities of such systems’.<sup>13</sup> It is the Nietzscheanism of Foucault that constitutes the way of the future. Ominously, this already seems to produce a sense of futility and

disempowerment. At the same time, the title of their Preface, 'The Space Between', implies that it is written at a time (1971) that comes after the strategic moment of structuralism, but before its successor can be imagined. 'We are left', they announce, 'with the necessity of articulating what Said has called "the vacant spaces between things, words, ideas"'. It is as if they are waiting for some terrifying monstrosity to arrive. Macksey and Donato are left adrift in the interval, unable to posit a new moment of comparable definitiveness, unable to *comprehend* that which is to follow: 'the times are not propitious', they announce, 'to another symposium which would attempt to *circumscribe* this new topology' (xiii). Circumscribing what followed would always be the difficult thing.

Seven years after 'The Space Between', twelve after the original symposium, Josué Harari was preparing an anthology of contemporary criticism, to be called *Textual Strategies: Criticism in the Wake of Structuralism*. When it appeared the next year, 1979, however, its subtitle was changed to read *Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*.<sup>14</sup> The first announcement of the advent of post-structuralism had been made. The new topography had arrived. Or had it? If we allow that with Harari's title, poststructuralism had at least appeared *de facto* if not *de jure*, let's look at his definition of what his anthology was about. What is most noticeable is Harari's uncertainty as to whether he is discussing anything specific at all. Beginning with a lengthy discussion of structuralism, he concludes that 'there is no unified view of structuralism' and that as a movement it is 'most clearly defined on the basis of the transformations it has wrought in the disciplines it has affected'. He then asks, 'what is post-structuralism?', which begs the question to the extent that

it already posits its existence. Perhaps this is why a hesitant note immediately follows: 'the question is less ambitious than it may appear; it does not seek a clear or unified answer, but only tentative answers that may perhaps be reduced, in the end, to nothing more than a panorama only slightly different from that offered by structuralism' (27). Despite this qualification, Harari then offers the following definition:

The fundamental difference between the structuralist and poststructuralist *enterprises* can be seen in the shift from the problematic of the subject to the deconstruction of the concept of representation. I refer here to Jacques Derrida, whose work constitutes a systematic critique of structuralism.... (29) [my emphasis]

A shift from the critique of the subject to the critique of the sign: in other words we are dealing here with a thematic change, a conceptual and temporal shift, as well as a change of analytical object.<sup>15</sup> Whereas structuralism, according to Harari, had problematized the subject, post-structuralism has moved to a 'deconstruction' of representation. Poststructuralism, it is implied, had developed as a response to Derrida's critique of structuralism in 'Structure, Sign, and Play': the deconstruction of structuralism produced post-structuralism, which would explain why in the early years, the distinction between poststructuralism and deconstruction was often hard to gauge. However, as Philip Lewis was to point out in an important review-article of Harari entitled 'The Post-Structuralist Condition' (1983), in many ways structuralism was still subject-centred, and was 'even in its tamer forms'

'already well along with the deconstruction of representation'.<sup>16</sup> Which doesn't leave much change out of Harari's definition—except, importantly, the name, and work, of Derrida.

Yet it was still widely felt that structuralism could not be thought of in the same ways any more as in the more scientific days of the sixties and seventies. This is the argument of my Introduction to *Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader* (1981), where I defined post-structuralism as structuralism's difference from itself, the wrinkling on structuralism's Apollonian brow; not a development of structuralism or something that can be defined in terms of a conceptual chronology so much as a displacement, a transforming of structuralist concepts by turning one against the other, so as to emphasize their difference rather than their sameness.<sup>17</sup> This process of decomposing structuralism was related to its characteristic autocritical mode which allowed Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault to push the implications of 'difference' beyond structuralism's own conceptual limits. The emphasis on an autocritical effect represented a similar argument to that which Baumann has recently proposed for postmodernism in its relation to modernism. But Lewis was equally sceptical of this idea:

One may then wonder if Derrida, by pursuing those implications, does not become, complicitously, more structuralist than the structuralists, if his post-structuralism is not finally an arch- or hyper-structuralism. If poststructuralism is nothing more than the advent in due course of structuralism's auto-critical moment, its pursuit of its own integrity, what sense does it make to insist on the notion of *post*-structuralism? Why denominate a new outlook, promote concerns about a new wave of Gallic

infiltration, if we simply confront an inherent evolution, a predictable change of accent or key? (5)

Lewis' objection demonstrates the difficulties in describing the difference between the two in terms of 'evolution', and yet the prefix 'post' suggests exactly that kind of evolutionary progression.

In an article published in 1982 I emphasized the argument about poststructuralism as a form of displacement even further, suggesting that the post in poststructuralism could operate as a form of space as well as time:

In relations of time, the prefix 'post' implies subsequently, or 'coming after', as in postpone. But oddly enough in relations of space—and if we switch to space we are switching to structuralism's own visual metaphor of a geometric or morphological structure—we find that the prefix 'post' now means 'behind'—as in 'post-jacent', 'post-scenium', or 'post-oral'. This uncanny antithetical doubling is rather humbly embodied in the word 'posterior', which means both coming after, later in time, as in posterity, as well as 'situated behind'—and hence its familiar use in the decorous British euphemism.

So 'poststructuralism' suggests that structuralism itself can only exist as always already inhabited by poststructuralism, which comes both behind and after. It is always already unfolding as a repetition, not of the same but as a kind of *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action. In this sense, poststructuralism becomes structuralism's primal scene—as Barbara Johnson describes it, 'the first occurrence of what has been repeating itself in the patient without ever having occurred'.<sup>18</sup>

This suggestion of a *beyond* which is also a *before* is reinforced, as Geoffrey Bennington has remarked, by the so-called 'materiality of the signifier' in the word 'poststructuralism' itself, for which the *post* is ineluctably *pre*:

it is a prefix, it thus comes before and not after. The post is at the beginning, it precedes, in a certain linear order of the signifier, that which it comes after.<sup>19</sup>

There is, in other words, a paradox in the prefix post, the same paradox that Derrida has elaborated in his well-known discussion of the Preface: that which comes after comes before. As Bennington suggests, the notion of the post in poststructuralism as a beyond which is also a before, comes close to a definition of 'postmodernism' given by Lyotard in 1982 in the article 'Response to the Question: What is Postmodernism?' Here Lyotard seems more or less to abandon the emphasis on grand narratives of *The Postmodern Condition* for an entirely different description of postmodernism which also forsakes any idea of a simple temporal progression between modernism and postmodernism. Lyotard argues that:

A work can become modern only if it is first post-modern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state.<sup>20</sup>

The post thus here becomes before, and the '*post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*)' (81). We recall Gasché's observation of the way in which the post of post-structuralism problematizes the relation to history, now

not only introducing the trace of its wake but disconcertingly making what should come after come before, turning narrative into a labyrinth of discrete impossible events.<sup>21</sup> As time and space begin to turn each other inside out, it begins to seem that, like the joke or the uncanny, poststructuralism can best be defined not so much by any intrinsic content as by the deferred action of its effect.

#### IV

As Jonathan Culler has pointed out, in fact in the USA poststructuralism virtually did precede structuralism. This is because in many respects poststructuralism (a word that has begun to be used in France only recently) represents the American translation of that non-scientistic form of structuralism that Culler himself separated off from structuralism proper in his highly influential *Structuralist Poetics* (1975). The chapter on *Tel Quel* is called 'Beyond Structuralism', which perhaps made it inevitable that those whose work fell under the rubric of structuralist poetics (Lévi-Strauss, Jakobson, Greimas, Genette, certain Barthes, Propp, Todorov) would be called structuralists, with those treated in this chapter (later Kristeva, and Barthes, Derrida) as beyond or 'post' structuralists. Those whose work evidently found little place in Culler's scheme—Lacan, Deleuze, Foucault, Irigaray etc.—naturally tended to be placed into the second category as they were gradually discovered by Anglo-American readers. Poststructuralism, in this case, would amount to a form of translation, of metaphoricity, its 'post' denoting the crossing of national and conceptual frontiers that had served to separate structuralism from

itself. Nevertheless, what Culler had done in dividing up structuralism in *Structuralist Poetics* was to detect a certain tension within structuralism as such.<sup>22</sup> Culler himself declined to pursue this further: at the beginning of *On Deconstruction* (1983), he introduced the question only to conclude that 'the distinction between structuralism and post-structuralism is highly unreliable'.<sup>23</sup>

At this point, it is worth returning to Lewis' argument that despite everything structuralism and post-structuralism really amount to the same thing. How does he deny their difference? Naturally by arguing that structuralism itself is best defined in terms of certain differences. Lewis takes the tripartite definition that Vincent Descombes offers in his *Modern French Philosophy* (1980), where structuralism is delineated as

- 1 The method of structural analysis
- 2 the semiological account of meaning and communication
- 3 the philosophical critique spawned by structuralism, which targets semiology as well as phenomenology.<sup>24</sup>

Pointing out that 'the critical revisionary strain of structuralist theory is subject to entrapment in the positions and models it challenges', Lewis then produces the following redefinition of Descombes' definition:

- 1 a concept of structure and method of comparative analysis
- 2 a disciplinary base in semiology that furnishes models for the pursuit of interdisciplinary enquiry
- 3 a critical orientation or strategy alert to the

anomalies of theory and ultimately sceptical of its own theses. (9)

In terms of this scheme, Lewis suggests, the majority of essays in *Textual Strategies* could pass for orthodox structuralist texts.<sup>25</sup> A separate poststructuralism would have to depend on the relation of no. 3, critical structuralism, to the basic, orthodox structuralism of 1 and 2. The question, says Lewis, is

whether the auto-critical, counter-theoretical impulse we have encountered in no 3 has developed to the point of taking us out of the structuralist arena into distinctly different territory. (10)

As we have seen, Lewis argues that it has not. Post-structuralism has not separated itself from structuralism, has not crossed any frontiers.

It is noticeable, however, that the schema which Descombes sets up, in which 3 is critical of 1 and 2, and yet depends on them, closely corresponds to a conceptual effect often articulated in deconstructive analyses, namely 'a displacement that indicates an irreducible alterity'.<sup>26</sup> Derrida calls this 'spacing', which, he argues, consists in 'the impossibility for an identity to be closed upon itself, on the inside of its proper interiority, or on its coincidence with itself'.<sup>27</sup> The problem with structuralism begins with this impossibility, and the conflict between the identity and difference of structuralism and poststructuralism can be seen to correspond to a certain temporal and spatial movement indistinguishable from spacing as such:

spacing is a concept which also, but not exclusively, carries the meaning of a productive, positive, generative force.... It marks what is set aside from itself,

what interrupts every self-identity, every punctual assemblage of the self, every self-homogeneity, self-interiority.<sup>28</sup>

If structuralism, on this analogy, has less a homogeneous identity than a differential one, it's important to emphasize that this is not difference in any static form, nor even just an internal difference, its difference from itself, but a conflict of forces in a movement of setting aside that is the product of non-identity. This paradoxical structure describes much more effectively than any binary opposition the relation of structuralism and post-structuralism. The difference between them cannot be grasped in terms of opposites, or in terms of any interval between objects. Both terms exist, in Samuel Weber's words, in a state of 'irreducible dislocation' in which 'the other inhabits the self as its condition of possibility'.<sup>29</sup>

Since, as Weber puts it, 'the identity of a theory is determined by the objects it constructs', then we would expect poststructuralism to include within itself the dynamic of conflict that it isolates. Such a dynamic, in fact, could be said to constitute the identity of poststructuralism as such. Poststructuralism eludes definition because it cannot be defined through a certain conceptual content, but only through its insistently deranging pressure. Poststructuralism comprises nothing less than 'the form of which it speaks': any definition must isolate the particular logic which it enacts, whilst no definition will be adequate while it uses the very categories and forms which poststructuralism subverts.<sup>30</sup> This enforcing power of dislocation explains why structuralism can be said to have been always already inhabited by the tension of poststructuralism; and why neither can be disassociated from each other. At one and

the same time they *appear to be different and to be the same thing*. It is impossible to separate the two.

The relation between structuralism and post-structuralism can best be understood through the operation of these ambivalent conflictual forces. There is such a thing as poststructuralism, if we choose to name that difference. If we consider such difference in conventional terms, however, by asking, as Lewis does, 'whether the auto-critical, counter-theoretical impulse ... has developed to the point of taking us out of the structuralist arena into distinctly different territory'—that is, attempting to define its status according to notions of evolution and topography, of insides and outsides, of differences between rather than within—then inevitably any significant distinction will be lost. Both structuralism and poststructuralism can articulate themselves only in a relation in which each can neither altogether incorporate nor fully detach itself from the other. Each can only define itself in contradistinction to the other, but cannot entirely separate itself from that other, continually bringing to light the traces of the other which should have remained hidden. Poststructuralism may in certain respects undo structuralism, but it cannot escape it either: each persists as the haunting difference within the other.

It turns out then that poststructuralism is indeed 'so-called', its very activity a form of impropriety (a word which, suitably enough, finds its place in OED's 'List of Spurious Words'): poststructuralism is, quite properly, an improper name—which is what, almost, everyone said about it in the first place.

## V Poststructuralism, Culture and Hybridization

And after all, what does poststructuralism consist of but an improper, melange of all kinds of different discursive practices, of philosophy, psychoanalysis, criticism, semiotics, history, Marxism, anthropology, translated into a kind of illegitimate, hybrid philosophy?—which explains, perhaps, its frequent conflict with other disciplines within the institution. Whereas structuralism's great appeal was that it was a method that could be used with spectacular success by all these different disciplines, poststructuralism turned this round and juxtaposed them, jeopardizing and exceeding the limits of disciplinary boundaries. The predictable reaction to this was a widespread attempt to *exclude* poststructuralism, to put it outside the academy (onto the very streets which according to its critics poststructuralism itself excluded), and it was doubtless for this reason that resistance to poststructuralism often attempted to use institutional power rather than intellectual authority.<sup>31</sup>

If poststructuralism's hybridity means that it must also remain in its own way internally flawed, permanently stalked by its tragic differential error, as Adorno has shown this situation of torn halves that don't add up need not necessarily be a cause for concern or dismissal. This impropriety may help in an understanding of the politics of poststructuralism. For poststructuralism has also enabled a new kind of ability to cross disciplinary and cultural boundaries, to make innovative and disconcertingly improper connections, that can also be called 'the political'. The question of the political when posed to theory is characteristically situated from the outside, in terms other than its own, which means that it can always be rejected in the grounds that it only offers a challenge on the basis of its having posited a second incommensurable term. In other words,

'the political' generally takes the form of a transcendent critique. What we find in poststructuralism is not an antithetical immanent critique, although at times literary accounts of 'textuality' have certainly fallen into this trap. Rather it consists of an improper discourse which poses its questions from outside as well as inside, from the outside operating within the inside, and the inside on the out. Those questions should inevitably involve the political, because they will always be ones that transgress boundary divisions, and therefore pose a challenge in the terms of the other. But they cannot simply be dismissed because they come from the other, because by definition they are never entirely other either. Poststructuralism, in other words, is about the break down of the very dialectic of immanence and transcendence.

Poststructuralism has always been distinguished by the heavy premium which it has placed on alterity, inverting structuralism's tendency to put theory itself into the transcendent position of scientism, authority and mastery of theory. But in its breaking down of conventional inside-outside oppositions, it has generally been the critics of poststructuralist theory who have demanded to know its relation to, and implications for, political practice, and who have reasonably refused to be satisfied by demonstrations of the difficulty of grounding and legitimating political action in language. For a long time, the conceptual undoings and complexities characteristic of poststructuralism were held by those on the left to involve problems for identity politics, as it was assumed that all politics had to be predicated on a form of agency that required an undivided subjectivity. More recently, it has become clear that such a structure while problematizing assumptions about political agency in fact corresponds to certain forms of contemporary identity: it

best describes the situation of all those, commonly though not necessarily accurately described as 'minorities', who find themselves simultaneously inside and outside a community or a culture, included but excluded, their identity not simply a question of double consciousness, of a grafting of two cultures on to each other like a well-cultivated vine or apple tree, but rather one of diaspora, of permanent spatial and temporal dislocation, of hybridized identification with two or more cultures each of which dwells within the other both as its disavowal and as its condition of possibility and of potential.

Suddenly it becomes apparent that poststructuralism's abstract theorizing, apparently divorced from the social and from history, in fact catches most accurately the forms of certain contemporary political and social situations relevant to the new radical democratic movements. If politics of the left have tended to presuppose and invoke forms of identification, the most significant political argument that has come out of poststructuralism is that identity does not have to be absolute: *it is possible to be both the same and different at once*. Another way of putting this would be to say that the fundamental basis of language in metaphor, the assertion of identity between two things that are unlike, can extend into identities and other forms of conceptualization. Its enabling conundrum has had far-reaching consequences for contemporary politics, particularly in the spheres of race, ethnicity and sexuality. It is not, of course, that Marxism itself had not perceived this possibility. Indeed the very basis of Marxist economic theory, that of exchange-value, is precisely predicated on the assumption that two unlike things can in certain respects be the same. At the moment of the exchange itself, they

are indeed both equivalent, of equal value, and different (otherwise there would be no point in exchanging them in the first place). The radicalism of this analysis of the exchange process can be seen to the degree that it exists in fundamental antithesis to the traditional law of identity, whereby an object cannot be A and not-A at the same time. But while the Marxian analysis of value was predicated on the ramifications of the fact that, in exchange or when metaphorized through money, objects can indeed break this law of identity, the fact that the same violent process, of yoking unlike things together and asserting an identity between them, occurs altogether effortlessly and uncontrollably in the linguistic realm was overlooked. To recognize the effects of this constitutive structure of metaphor, and therefore of conceptualization, involves a fundamental revision of the logics of, among many other things, human and political identity. Post-structuralism could be said to be the theory of such a different logic.

This identity of sameness and difference also holds for the relation between modernism and postmodernism, and even for that between postmodernism and post-structuralism. In *White Mythologies*, I argued that post-modernism involves the deconstruction of the cultural and historical hegemony of 'the West'. Postmodernism thus implies a certain relativity, problematizing the relation of Western to non-Western cultures. Post-structuralism, by contrast, addresses this question less overtly because it is concerned with a critique of the Eurocentric premises of Western knowledge. Unlike post-modernism, it does not privilege the diasporic standpoint of the periphery in order to achieve its critique of 'the West', but rather uses the alterity of Western culture to work critically against itself. Postmodernism and

poststructuralism are therefore positioned against each other as forms of transcendent and immanent critiques of their own culture. This is not to say that they are themselves individually totalized entities, which helps to explain why the productive relation to other cultures that is so marked a characteristic of postmodernist culture is also accompanied by their ruthless economic exploitation: so the West continues the long process of commodifying them, turning the primitive into an object of aesthetic consumption, deploring the loss of its purity, while producing its modern Westernized hybrid forms. Today this process has entered a new phase in Western societies with the commodification of ethnicity.

And what of that other post with which we started, the postcolonial: does it too share the disoriented hybrid structure of its companions poststructuralism and postmodernism? If post indicates a displacement of time and space, the post of postcolonial also includes the extremities of the outpost, the frontier territory which determines the identity of the metropolitan imperial culture even while it is simultaneously excluded from it. The inside-outside structure of institutional thinking is thus re-enacted in its own theoretical paradigms which produce the division between home and empire, the North and South, or 'the West' and the 'Third World'. But each inhabits the other despite the conceptual partition which separates the world into an inside and an outside. With the disappearance of the Second World, the description 'Third World' is now no doubt even more of a disempowering anachronism. The current tendency to simplify the division into the gap between the North and the South fails, however, to register the ways in which the postcolonial world is not simply positioned on the outside of the West but is also turned inside out. A post-

colonial culture, which has been at the very minimum twice deterritorialized and reterritorialized in the doubled movements of colonization and decolonization, will be severely riven, set against itself, in a productive, generative but difficult pattern of competing, intertwined cultures and histories. This is not only a question of the present-day consequences of the colonialism of the past. Today emigration and immigration, the effects of neocolonial economic investment, control and exploitation, of two-week packages of transcultural colonization (tourism), mean that such countries are simultaneously set up as inside and outside the First world, that they are living the dislocation of themselves by the West every day. It remains an open question whether the postmodern hybridization of the West as it draws its peripheries into itself will ever generate a comparable transformative force.

## Notes

1. Graff, *Professing Literature*.
2. Cf. Lyotard, 'Reply to the Question: What is Postmodernism?', in *The Postmodern Condition*, 71-82; Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity: An Incomplete Project', and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.
3. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*.
4. However, concerned as it is with the relation between the name poststructuralism and contemporary attempts to conceptualize what it was, this account does not discuss recent historical assessments of post-structuralism, such as Easthope's *British Post-Structuralism Since 1968* which argues persuasively for a non-deconstructive British version.
5. Walter Benn Michaels and Steven Knapp, 'Against Theory', in Mitchell, *Against Theory*, 12.
6. For example, Gasché, 'Of Aesthetic and Historical Determination', in Attridge, Bennington, and Young, *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, 139; Zizek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 1.
7. Gasché, *Ibid*, 139.
8. For extended discussions of the question of historicity in poststructuralism see Bennington and Young, 'Introduction: Posing the Question' in *Poststructuralism and the Question of History*, eds. Attridge, Bennington and

Young, 1-11; and Young, *White Mythologies*.

9. Barthes, 'The Structuralist Activity', 154.

10. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 107-110.

11. Benoist; Donato, 'Structuralism: The Aftermath'; Donato and Macksey, *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man; The Structuralist Controversy*. Bennington cites a first appearance of the word, unexpectedly in French, from 1973 (Bennington, *Dudding*), 17. See also his discussion in 'Postal Politics', in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 122-4.

12. Donato and Macksey, *The Structuralist Controversy*, 95.

13. Their focus on Deleuze and Foucault is also indicated by the way in which, when attempting to indicate at the beginning of their Preface the common denominator of French intellectuals, they resort to Deleuze's description of Foucault (x).

14. Harari, *Textual Strategies*.

15. Cf. Harari, 'Changing the Object of Criticism'.

16. Lewis, 'The Post-Structuralist Condition', 7-8, 11. Interestingly enough, Lewis' attack on Harari is the product of second thoughts, for to support his argument about post-structuralism, Harari cites Lewis' earlier remark that in poststructuralism

Structuralist methods of analysis and modes of critical thinking continue to be employed, but with a difference: deployed at the expense of basic concepts and presuppositions that structuralism mobilized in its formative stages. (31)

So when Lewis later takes the opposite course of denying that there is any difference between structuralism and post-structuralism, he does so where he has, significantly enough, himself already introduced difference.

17. Young, 'Post-Structuralism: An Introduction', in Young, *Untying the Text*, 1-28.

18. Young, 'Post-Structuralism: The End of Theory', 4. For a discussion of this essay, see Easthope, *British Post-Structuralism*, 166-72.

19. Bennington, *Dudding*, 19.

20. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 79.

21. This disordering of temporality in which the event disrupts the system, constitutes, it will be recalled, the basis for Derrida's essay, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (in Macksey and Donato, *The Structuralist Controversy*, 247-65) that was to disrupt the mimetic possibilities of structuralism.

22. For Culler's later re-assessment of his characterization of structuralism in *Structuralist Poetics* see *On Deconstruction*. It is striking that when those who came

'beyond structuralism' were subsequently assimilated into the American academy it became equally popular to denounce the emasculation of this second importation as 'American deconstruction'.

23. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 30.

24. Lewis, 'The Post-Structuralist Condition', 6; Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*.

25. It is noticeable that Marxism or Feminism are given no place at all in Harari's *Textual Strategies*.

26. Derrida, *Positions*, 81.

27. Derrida, *Positions*, 96.

28. Derrida, *Positions*, 107.

29. Weber, *The Legend of Freud*, 33. In his book, Weber isolates this impossible, incompatible structure as the constitutive moment of the unconscious:

If the unconscious means anything whatsoever, it is that the relation of self and others, inner and outer, cannot be grasped as an *interval between polar opposites* but rather as an irreducible dislocation of the subject in which the other inhabits the self as its condition of possibility. (32-3)

As Weber puts it when describing the relation of the ego to the id, for each 'to define itself, it must simultaneously set itself apart from what it is not' and yet remain 'ineluctably

haunted by what it seeks to exclude' (33).

30. Weber, *The Legend of Freud*, 19; Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play', 257.

31. The two Cambridges provide two famous examples: the MacCabe affair at Cambridge, and W.J. Bate's notorious article calling upon Deans to deny poststructuralists tenure (Bate, 'The Crisis in English Studies').

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