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The “Paris School” and the “Structuralist Invasion” in North America

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Charles H. Stocking

Si elle se retirait un jour, abandonnant ses œuvres et ses signes sur les plages de notre civilisation, l'invasion structuraliste deviendrait une question pour l'historien des idées. Peut-être même un objet. Mais l'historien se tromperait s'il en venait là : par le geste même où il la considérerait comme un objet, il en oublierait le sens, et qu'il s'agit d'abord d'une aventure du regard, d'une conversion dans la manière de questionner devant tout objet. Devant les objets historiques – les siens – en particulier (Derrida 1967, p. 9).

- 1 One might well believe that we are now at that very stage of intellectual history, to which Derrida refers, one in which the movement broadly known as “structuralism” has now become *passé* – no longer an object of interest in itself, structuralism and those who worked within that broadly construed intellectual movement are now a problem for the historian of ideas. Indeed, one could well interpret this volume dedicated to the “Paris School,” that is, Classical scholars working in Paris during the “rise and fall” of structuralism, as a symptom of this fact– an implicit declaration on the death of structuralism and a funeral oration for those who fought on its behalf. But as early as 1967, Derrida offered a warning to future intellectual historians, a reminder that it is impossible to reduce structuralism to an object of historical analysis precisely because the object of structuralism was always a question of meaning – to engage in the history of structuralism is to engage in the problem of the history of meaning itself. The

purpose of this brief essay, therefore, is to offer some broader contextualization on the role of 'structuralism' in North America and its relationship to the works of scholars who have been broadly classified under the exonym "Paris School." These scholars were not simply applying a particularly fashionable intellectual method, which can now be dismissed, but were rather engaged in the very problem of the relationship between meaning and history, a problem that is as pertinent today as it was when structuralism was first on the rise.

- 2 Derrida's particular turn of phrase "l'invasion structuraliste" is entirely appropriate for how it is that French scholars working generally under the aegis of 'structuralism' were received in North America. Indeed, one American journalist equated the popularity of French intellectuals in the US with the "Brit-pop invasion" of the 1960's (Moore 1999). The first such invasion on North American soil was the famous conference "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" held at the Johns Hopkins University in 1966. In a lecture two decades later in North America, Derrida himself asserted, albeit with intentional vagueness, that "What is now called 'theory' in this country may have an essential link with what is said to have happened there in 1966" (Derrida 1990, p. 80). In the 1972 publication of the Johns Hopkins conference, editors added the telling new title to the published proceedings: "The Structuralist Controversy". Richard Mackey and Eugenio Donato further explain:

Today we may question the very existence of structuralism as a meaningful concept, for not the least of the paradoxes generated by what has come to be known as the structuralist controversy is the fact that as an operative concept it is more evident in the language of its detractors and populizers than in the express statements of those who are supposed to be its main proponents. All those whose names have come to be associated with structuralist theory... have felt obliged programmatically to take their distance with relation to the term (Macksey and Donato 1971, p. ix).

- 3 As Macksey and Donato note, there is a continuous refrain throughout the twentieth century, "I am not a structuralist," which becomes the speech equivalent of Magritte's famous painting, *La trahison des images/Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. One can only arrive at a positive definition of structuralism by way of denial. In short, there is no structuralism, only a "structuralist controversy".
- 4 One can trace the inherently controversial nature of structuralism to two main concepts in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*.¹ First is Saussure's account of semiology and the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified in producing the linguistic sign (Saussure 1969, p. 97-113). The ultimate result of this idea, for Saussure, was the conclusion that there were no positive terms in linguistics, only relational differences (Saussure 1969, p. 166). The second key component of Saussure's approach is his argument that all scientific modes of analysis should process along two axes, an "axis of simultaneity" otherwise known as "synchrony" and "an axis of succession" or "diachrony". Although Saussure was a famously successful historical linguist, in the *Cours*, it seems, he presented a distinct preference for the synchronic over the diachronic mode.² And he further argued for an absolute division between the two modes of analysis: "L'opposition entre les deux points de vue – synchronique et diachronique – est absolue et ne souffre pas de compromis" (Saussure 1969, p. 120). If "structuralism" is always a "structuralist controversy," it is because Saussure introduced these two interrelated problems: the problem of how language conveys meaning and how meaning can be determined in the context of historical change.

- 5 Many of the talks at Johns Hopkins centered around these two Saussurian problems. Among the many well known speakers at Johns Hopkins was Jean-Pierre Vernant, who has been considered the central figure of the "Paris School." At the conference, Vernant presented a paper titled "Greek Tragedy: Problems of Interpretation", which would serve as part of his later work, co-written with Pierre Vidal-Naquet. This was in fact one of Vernant's first appearances in North America, and the importance of this fact cannot be overstated: the original context of Vernant's work was never the discipline of Classics per se but was always part of broader debates in the Humanities and Social Sciences, even in North America.³ In his presentation at Johns Hopkins, Vernant made use of Greek tragedy in order to present a unique challenge to the Saussurian claim for an absolute division between the synchronic and diachronic, between meaning and history. Vernant frames the problem of Greek tragedy as a structuralist problem by first articulating two modes of interpretation, what he calls the "authentic sense" and the "counter sense" of Greek tragedy. According to Vernant, the "authentic sense" of tragedy is the significance of the work which belongs to the historical moment and context of its performance in Classical Athens. In his inaugural lecture as chair of Comparative Studies of Ancient Religions at the Collège de France, Vernant would later call this general effort at reconstructing authentic meaning a "gamble on synchronism" (Vernant 1991, p. 279). For Vernant, the synchronic in antiquity is understood as a period of time specifically bracketed off from our own. At the same time, however, Vernant acknowledges the necessary existence of what he terms the "counter sense" of Greek tragedy: "each of us has the right to read it in a way different from which the Greeks read it" (Vernant 1971, p. 274). Hence, in addition to a synchronic reading from the purportedly ancient Greek perspective, there is the possibility of a diachronic reading which acknowledges the very time period of the modern interpreter. Because Greek tragedy is performative (and therefore allows for both an original performance as well re-performances), tragedy perfectly encapsulates the more general Saussurian conflict between synchrony and diachrony. It is a problem every Classical scholar must face.
- 6 Vernant's observation on the "sense" and "counter sense" of Greek tragedy could very well be applied to any genre or aspect of ancient Greek culture. But, according to Vernant, what makes tragedy unique is that the structural conflict between synchrony and diachrony, which exists between "the Greeks" and their modern interpreters, is in fact reproduced within the tragic genre itself. That conflict is represented through the *agôn* that occurs between the actors who are representative of a former heroic age and the chorus, who represent the "presence of the City on stage." Vernant thus explains:
- The dichotomy [dédoulement] of the chorus and the protagonists, the two types of language, the play between the community which officially represents the city as a magistracy, and a professional actor who is the incarnation of a hero from another age, the discussions – those whole form of tragedy was invented so to speak, both to call the City into question within a well defined context... and also to call into question a certain image of man, and I would say to indicate a change in man (Vernant 1972, p. 284).
- 7 From a broader theoretical perspective, what is most striking about Vernant's claim is that there is a *purpose* to this generic conflict between the diachronic and synchronic in Greek tragedy. That purpose is not a type of Hegelian synthesis. Rather the purpose is the very act of calling into question that which would otherwise be considered timeless and essential, namely "man" – "l'homme." As such, Vernant's observations on Greek

tragedy at Johns Hopkins in 1966 parallel Foucault's effort to question the status of "man" in *Les Mots et les Choses*, also published in 1966: "L'homme est une invention dont l'archéologie de notre pensée montre aisément la date récente. Et peut-être la fin prochaine" (Foucault 1966, p. 15).⁴ Although Foucault and Vernant both call into question the status of "man," there remains a marked difference. For Vernant would deny that "man" is a recent invention of modernity but claims instead that he is an invention of antiquity.⁵ In other words, what Vernant seems to suggest is that the very activity in which Foucault himself engages – the questioning of the status of man as an individual subject – is already at work *within* Greek tragedy. Thus, according to Vernant, the Greeks themselves were already structuralists.

- 8 Vernant's work on the structuralist thought of the Greeks – what he termed "historical anthropology" or "historical psychology"⁶ – can in many ways be viewed as a direct response to the synchronic structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss. One of Vernant's earliest discussions of Greek thought in relationship to structuralism was a paper, "Genèse et structure dans le mythe hésiodique des races" delivered in 1959 at the conference *Entretiens sur les notions de genèse et de structure* at Cerisy-la-Salle, organized by Maurice de Gandillac, Lucien Goldmann, and Jean Piaget.⁷ This conference occurred just one year after the publication of Lévi-Strauss' *Anthropologie structurale*. Indeed, the very purpose of the conference at Cerisy was to re-introduce the problem of history into structuralist analysis.⁸ Similar to his arguments concerning Greek tragedy, Vernant's presentation on Hesiod at the conference in Cerisy ultimately served to demonstrate how the temporal organization of the myth is arranged according to structural oppositions, which result from the Hesiodic infix of the "race of heroes" into the races of Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Iron.⁹ Thus, on the first level of analysis, there is an implicit synchronic structure to a myth that is otherwise diachronically organized. But, it should be noted, Vernant added an additional diachronic level of analysis by further arguing that the Hesiodic organization of the myth into structural oppositions is itself representative of a unique historical moment. According to Vernant, the Hesiodic account of the double Eris in *Works and Days*, for instance, is symptomatic of an inherent moral ambiguity in the early Archaic period of Greek history. But after this stage of ambiguity, according to Vernant, there is a shift:

À un stade ultérieur de rationalisation, on tentera de dépasser l'ambiguïté. À une logique de l'ambivalence se substituera une logique de l'alternative, de l'exclusion des contraires, qui conduira à l'affirmation du principe de contradiction (Vernant 1965a, p. 22).

- 9 The Hesiodic version of the myth, with its structural organization, was thus interpreted by Vernant as an attempt to go beyond the ambiguity of his own era. Through structural oppositions, Vernant argues, one sees the beginnings of rational and philosophic thought.¹⁰ Thus, where Lévi-Strauss had specifically championed structuralism as a uniquely ahistorical phenomenon, Vernant by contrast, believed that structuralist thought itself had a history. Such a history began with Hesiod, while Greek tragedy was positioned between myth and philosophy, between Hesiod and Aristotle.¹¹
- 10 The question of synchrony and diachrony introduced in Vernant's early work on Hesiod and tragedy further served as an implicit guiding theme for Marcel Detienne. Where Vernant's work on tragedy historicized the universal concept of "man," Detienne undertook a similar historicization of the even more universalizing concept of "truth" through his ground breaking work, *Les maîtres de vérité en Grèce archaïque*, published in 1967. As Detienne argues, it is the very term *Alētheia* and its role both in

early Greek poetry and later philosophy, which "est aussi, par d'autres traits, au sein de la même pensée, le signe le plus spécifique de la rupture fondamentale qui sépare la pensée rationnelle de la pensée religieuse" (Detienne 1967, p. 146). In making a distinction between religious and rational "truth" in early Greece, a distinction that is simultaneously historical and structural, Detienne further underscores a second level break between ancients and moderns by denying the modern "scientific" presupposition that rational truth is a historical constant (Detienne 1967, p. 3). From a broader theoretical perspective, therefore, Detienne's early work, much like that of Vernant, anticipates Michel Foucault's general approach to what he would term "discontinuous history," the purpose of which is to question "tout ce qu'on avait cru immortel chez l'homme" (Foucault 1971b, p. 159). Indeed, Detienne's *Les maîtres de vérité* seems to have served as a foundation for Foucault's first lecture series at the Collège de France, *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir* (1970-1971), which were only recently published.¹² In his inaugural lecture, published separately from the lecture series, Foucault asserts:

Un jour est venu où la vérité s'est déplacée de l'acte ritualisé, efficace, et juste, d'énonciation, vers l'énoncé lui-même : vers son sens, sa forme, son objet, son rapport à sa référence. Entre Hésiode et Platon un certain partage s'est établi, séparant le discours vrai et le discours faux ; partage nouveau puisque désormais le discours vrai n'est plus le discours précieux et désirable, puisque ce n'est plus le discours lié à l'exercice du pouvoir (Foucault 1971a, p. 17).

- 11 Although never explicitly stated by Foucault himself, the reliance on Detienne's *Les maîtres de vérité* is clear.¹³ Nevertheless, there remained a crucial difference between Foucault and Detienne, despite the common ground. Where Detienne focused primarily on the poetic pre-history of rational truth, Foucault was more interested in the precise practices that would bring about that shift from the poetic to the rational realms, from performative to objectivized truth.¹⁴

- 12 Where Detienne's early work brought out diachronic complexities in the concept of "truth," his later work would apply a similar approach to the very category of myth. Indeed, thanks to the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, myth served more generally as the ultimate paradigm for synchronic structuralism.¹⁵ Detienne first took up a purely synchronic approach to Greek myth, inspired by Lévi-Strauss in *Les jardins d'Adonis*. From the perspective of intellectual history, the synchronic approach in *Les jardins d'Adonis* was intended to respond to the universalizing approach to the story of Adonis from Frazer in the *Golden Bough*, which brought into account the myth's possibly historical origins in the Near East. Detienne's book itself set off a mini-controversy, dubbed the "Lettuce Wars," because of the different symbolism possibly attributed to lettuce in Greek and Near Eastern cultures.¹⁶ It was first reviewed extremely positively by Lévi-Strauss himself in the journal *L'Homme*, and then negatively reviewed by Geoffrey Kirk in the *Times Literary Supplement*, but only to be defended yet again by the anthropologist Edmund Leach. In the 1994 English translation, Detienne added an afterword in which he defended his approach. His first point was not to abandon the comparative method in the study of myth, but to emphasize:

More than ever, comparative study must be differential... With such changing patterns, multiple historico-ethnographical contexts and strata of meanings that are rich in different ways, structuralist analysis cannot be reductive, and nonvariant elements are not some hasty and premature generalizations" (Detienne 1994, p. 139-140).

- 13 It is by imposing constraints that divide one cultural system from another that "Structuralist analysis is a heuristic enterprise" (Detienne 1994, p. 140). But it is a heuristic enterprise whose object is not a single story or piece of cultural knowledge. Rather it engages in an interpretation of the broader network of meanings on a given topic within the culture. Detienne concludes: "A mythology then is a system of symbolic representations that would always exceed the narrative genre of a mythic story" (Detienne 1994, p. 143). Thus, if a synchronic structural analysis is constrained, it is not constrained by the bounds of a given text or time period, and this is because, as Detienne acknowledges, mythology is "to be constructed by interpretation" (Detienne 1994, p. 143). At first glance, therefore, *Les jardins d'Adonis* seems to run contrary to the methodology of discontinuous history that was implicit in Detienne's earlier work. It would appear as though he had abandoned diachrony in favor of synchrony.
- 14 Ultimately, however, Detienne proved himself committed to the diachronic dimensions overriding structuralism with his even more controversial work, *L'invention de la mythologie*, first published in 1981. If mythology was "constructed by interpretation," as Detienne insisted, this work offered a history of those constructions. In the first place, Detienne details a history of the role of myth in the history of anthropology. He focuses especially on the Victorian anthropologists as well as the founding figures in the French tradition such as Durkheim, Cassirer, and Mauss, while bringing the question squarely into the twentieth century through further engagement with Lévi-Strauss. In part, his objective is to show how the very category of "myth" in modern thought and the discourse upon which it is based are largely a function of direct engagement with ancient Greek material, in which such discourses already exist. Thus, where Detienne's early work suggested a transformation from religious to rational truth, *L'invention de la mythologie* stresses that the earlier and supposedly non-rational or mythic aspects of Greek culture never disappeared entirely but existed simultaneously with the rational and philosophic: "Certes les Grecs sont bien comme les autres mais avec une légère différence qui n'est pas à vrai dire sans portée: ils ont deux têtes" (Detienne 1981, p. 212). What remains constant in the history of structuralist thought is the very theme of "doubling."¹⁷ Indeed, with regard to the problem of diachrony and synchrony, the image of "two-headedness" was specifically invoked by Lévi-Strauss to describe the structuralist endeavor as a whole: "Véritable Janus à deux fronts, c'est, en tout cas, la solidarité des deux disciplines qui permet de conserver sous les yeux la totalité du parcours" (1958, p. 38). Prior to the Roman Janus, however, Detienne suggests that all Greeks have this unique two-headedness which has in turn informed the anthropological endeavor throughout Western history.
- 15 Detienne's effort to historicize structural analysis was interpreted by many scholars as an explicit attack on the work of Jean-Pierre Vernant.¹⁸ Yet Detienne himself has insisted that this was not the case and that Vernant eventually welcomed Detienne's overall project.¹⁹ Indeed, I would note that one can quite easily observe in the broader argument structure of *L'invention de la mythologie* the very same moves enacted by Vernant. Thus for instance, if we return to the very argument of Vernant at the Johns Hopkins conference of 1966. Vernant first noted the possibility of a double reading of Greek tragedy, between its historical ancient Greek context and that of the present. But Vernant further showed that such double interpretation is something that was also part of the ancient Greek sense of tragedy, represented by the conflict between the individual actors as figures from a prior heroic era and the Chorus as a representation

of the present moment of the "city on stage." In other words, the dichotomy or *dédoublement* in tragedy as argued for by Vernant is but one instance of the more general "two-headed" nature of the Greeks, as suggested by Detienne. Just as Vernant's work had historicized and destabilized the very category of "man" in ancient Greek culture, so Detienne's work did the same not just for "truth," but also for "myth." Through intellectual history, Detienne connected the ancient and modern practices of doubling between the past and present, which are part of nearly every interpretive endeavor, but especially so in the case of ancient Greece.

- 16 The double engagement between past and present is perhaps nowhere more manifest than in the work and life of Pierre Vidal-Naquet. As far as the reception of French scholarship in North America is concerned, he is known primarily for his work with Vernant on Greek tragedy and also for his work, *Le chasseur noir. Formes de pensée et formes de société dans le monde grec*, a thematic collection of earlier works first published in France in 1981 and in the US in 1986. At the same time, there is perhaps no one in the "Paris School" who was more active in current events; he was a major voice for opposition to the Algerian war, a key player in the events of May 1968 in Paris, a founding member of the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons* together with Michel Foucault and Jean-Marie Domenach; and being of Jewish descent, he wrote extensively on post-war Jewish history and broader themes of historical revisionism and the relationship between memory and history, among other contemporary issues. It would indeed seem that Pierre Vidal-Naquet himself also had "two-heads" much like Detienne's Greeks. Always working within two realms simultaneously, Pierre Vidal-Naquet also refused to be identified by a single area of specialization. In his *Memoires*, he offers a detailed account of his many non-identities:

Je n'étais pas un linguiste... Je n'étais pas un philologue... Je n'étais pas un philosophe... mais je n'ai jamais cessé de lire Platon... je ne suis pas un épigraphiste de terrain même si j'ai passé de longues heures d'enseignement à commenter de difficiles inscriptions... Je ne suis pas un papyrologue mais j'ai passé de nombreux mois à l'institut de papyrologie de la Sorbonne... Que suis-je alors ? Un esprit ironique dirait peut-être que je suis un "polymorphe souple" (Vidal-Naquet 1995, p. 215-216).

- 17 Vidal-Naquet's denial of self-identification with any sub-discipline in Classics and his polymorphic approach came to define his attitude toward structuralism more generally. In an essay, "The Black Hunter Revisited," published in 1986 at the same time as the English edition of that work, Vidal-Naquet insisted, not that he was the first Classical scholar to take up structuralism, but the first to do so in the capacity of a "Greek historian": "my problem was the study of the relation between some mythical data and a historical or, rather, a political society" (Vidal-Naquet 1986, p. 127). To be sure, in that same essay, Vidal-Naquet acknowledges some of the problematic uses of textual data in reconstructing history, but this too leads to a broader methodological point. First, he notes that it not so entirely possible to separate the historical and cultural practices of a given society from its literary representations. At the same time, Vidal-Naquet would not adopt an entirely "constructivist perspective": "The equivalence sometimes proclaimed, under the influence of linguistics and specifically of Roland Barthes, between a fact of language and a fact of society leads to absurd conclusions" (Vidal-Naquet 1986, p. 132). There remains much that is problematic and rightly criticized in *Le chasseur noir*, which Vidal-Naquet himself acknowledges. Nevertheless, his attempt therein to integrate structuralist paradigms with historical

events and practices reflects broader theorization on the very real effects of the "imaginary" in social and cultural history.²⁰

- 18 Yet, Vidal-Naquet's most profound contribution to broader theoretical issues born out of structuralism comes in his work as a historian of contemporary events, a fact not yet fully appreciated by North American classicists. This was especially the case with *Les assassins de la mémoire*, a collection of essays published in 1981, and in English in 1990. The book targeted the historical problem of revisionism as a negation of the memory of the dead and of survivors of historical atrocities. As François Hartog has noted, the work allowed for Vidal-Naquet to work simultaneously as historian and witness to the memories of his parents, "pour intégrer la mémoire à l'histoire, évoquer, incarner : transmettre."²¹ Indeed, this particular work can be seen as part of a larger group of works which interrogated the very methodology of historiography, including Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973), Michel de Certeau's *L'écriture de l'histoire* (1975) and Paul Ricoeur's *Temps et récit* (1985). As Vidal-Naquet himself notes, it was de Certeau who brought about a keen awareness in Vidal-Naquet of his own mediating position as a historian: "aujourd'hui nous avons pris conscience, grâce à Michel de Certeau, de la dimension inévitablement subjective de l'écriture de l'histoire" (Vidal-Naquet 1987, p. 72). Hence, Vidal-Naquet's later work shows a greater interest in the historian as *subject*, which mediates present and past. In part, the structuralist project of calling into question the subject, as seen in the work of Vernant and Foucault, has its origins partly in the observations on subjectivity and language by the linguist Émile Benveniste. Benveniste famously stated, with regard to the more general theory of *énonciation* that "Est 'ego' qui dit 'ego'" (Benveniste 1966, p. 260). And prior to that, he explains, "C'est dans et par le langage que l'homme se constitue comme *sujet* ; parce que le langage se fonde en réalité, dans sa réalité qui est celle de l'être, le concept d'"ego"" (Benveniste 1966, p. 259). If we extend Benveniste's observations to Vidal-Naquet's claim, then one might suggest that the historian does not merely construct the object of his or her writing, but it is the very act of writing history which in turn establishes the reality of the historian as a historical *subject*. To write history, therefore, is an action, similar to that of *énonciation*, whose very effectiveness is determined by the conditions (time and space) under which that action occurs. And yet, Vidal-Naquet is not so vain as to believe that the only effect of writing history is the self-construction of the historian as subject (and this is perhaps also why he continually identified himself in the negative "I am not..."). For he insists that there remains a reality that exists beyond the writing of history. Thus, for instance, in the same letter about de Certeau's influence and in relation to the discourse on Nazi gas chambers, Vidal-Naquet insists:

Mon sentiment était qu'il y avait un discours sur les chambres à gaz, que tout devait passer par le dire, mais que au-delà du dire, ou plutôt en deçà, il y avait quelque chose d'irréductible que, faute de mieux, je continuerai à appeler le réel (Vidal-Naquet 1987, p. 72).

- 19 For Vidal-Naquet, the historian thus not only mediates between synchrony and diachrony, between present and past, but also between language and a reality that exists beyond language.
- 20 It was Nicole Loraux, however, who would offer a more formal theorization for the complex, mediating role of the ancient historian.²² For Loraux adds a third category to the structuralist dichotomy of synchrony and diachrony, namely *anachrony*. In 1993, Loraux published a famous and controversial essay, "L'éloge de l'anachronisme," which

was born out of an interdisciplinary research program at EHESS "Usages modernes de l'Antiquité." Loraux's essay builds off of Jacques Rancière's work on anachrony and history in *Les mots de l'histoire* (1992), and an abbreviated form of his argument is presented in the essay, "Le concept d'anachronisme et la vérité de l'historien" (1996). Rancière's project may be viewed as a type of reaction to the more general project of the *Annales* school to integrate models of synchronic structuralism into the study of history.²³ In particular, Rancière begins by pointing out that among ancient historians such as Lucien Febvre, a founding member of the *Annales* school, anachrony was considered "le péché des péchés, le péché entre tous irrémédiable" (Febvre 1968, p. 15). It is the worst of sins because anachronism was understood as the practice of applying a category of thought to a particular time period that was outside the thought structures or *mentalités* of that period.²⁴ For Rancière, however, the *Annales* approach, broadly understood as *l'histoire événementielle*, placed too great an emphasis on continuity and not enough on those thoughts, actions and disruptions, which would otherwise appear to be out of joint with their own time period. Thus, for Rancière, the idea of anachrony solves a problem of history, but only with a more specialized understanding:

Une anachronie, c'est un mot, un événement, une séquence signifiante sortis de 'leur' temps, doués du même coup de la capacité de définir des aiguillages temporels inédits, d'assurer le saut ou la connexion d'une ligne de temporalité à une autre (Rancière 1996, p. 68).

- 21 In her essay, Loraux extends Rancière's work by further suggesting that anachronism is always a part of the ancient historian's practice only because the object of study is so far removed from the historian's own time period. For Loraux, some level of anachronism, used in a modified and responsible way, is necessary in order to make the ancient world comprehensible. But Loraux further suggests that anachronism is operative in the work of Classical scholars in Paris such as Vernant at the same time that their works seek to deny any anachronistic thinking. Such denial of anachronism is enacted by reinforcing the maximum distance between "the Greeks" and their modern interpreters.²⁵ The purpose of this denial, according to Loraux, was threefold in terms of the modern context: 1) to wrestle with an eternal humanism through a Marxist perspective; 2) to demonstrate that human psychology was impossible to disassociate from material social conditions; and 3) to impose a new form of alterity that was "the Greeks" into modernity, thus following along the general program of anthropology at the time.²⁶ Loraux recollects her initial enthusiasm for the project but then admits that she started to question the process: "Par quel miracle – or nous récusons le 'miracle grec' de nos études classiques – nous pouvions ainsi avoir accès sans médiation, directement et sans distorsion, aux pensées de l'homme grec" (Loraux 1993, p. 26-27). In other words, the arguments which were motivated by a desire to do away with eternal, presentist categories of the western tradition of humanism were actually giving way to new forms of essentialism. The category of "Man" was simply replaced by "The Greeks."
- 22 Rather than deny anachronism, Loraux instead suggests a controlled and selective approach which takes seemingly anachronistic categories as a starting point to delve further into points of difference and continuity between ancients and moderns. Her prime example in the essay is that of "democracy," where the anachronism of the concept is further developed in *La cité divisée* (1997). First, Loraux acknowledges the Finleyan perspective regarding a fundamental difference between ancient and modern democracy. But Loraux further demonstrates that even ancient democracy cannot be so

easily essentialized as a single unified concept. In the first place, following Benveniste, Loraux notes that the very term democracy resists singularity because the concept of *kratos* itself, upon which democracy is based, implies *contest* – it suggests that one part of the city will be victorious over another, and therefore undermines the idealized notion of a unified city, which she also referred to as the “anthropologist’s city” (Loraux 1993, p. 33; Benveniste 1969, p. 72). In addition, Loraux notes that in the fifth century, democrats avoided the word *dēmokratia*, because of its populist associations. Thus, Loraux considers both the etymology of democracy and its use, or lack thereof, in ancient contexts to be an indication of a will to forget conflict. And finally, Loraux suggests that the same will to forget is further reflected in modern discourse on democracy, especially in France (Loraux 1993, p. 35). According to Loraux, therefore, the very concept of democracy is anachronistic, but in a way that is counter to what is typically thought. It is anachronistic in the literal sense, as a way of turning back, a return, precisely because modern invocations of democracy constantly return back to the very problems which arose when the term was first used in ancient Greece. Where the earlier approaches of Vernant, Detienne, and Vidal-Naquet challenged the essentialism of “Man,” “Truth” and “Myth,” Loraux offered a challenge to what might be considered second-level essentializing categories, which occurred within the study of antiquity itself, categories such as “The Greeks,” “The City” and “Democracy”.

- 23 Overall, then, at the risk of being “anachronistic” myself, I would suggest that the “structuralist invasion” is far from complete, especially when we analyze the work of the “Paris school” from a broader theoretical context. Indeed, many of the questions and issues posed by the scholars briefly discussed in this chapter have not yet been fully appreciated by Anglophone classicists, although that is rapidly changing.²⁷ Of course, I am not suggesting that the specific analyses of the scholars discussed here are not without their own problems. Indeed, there remains much to productively criticize in their specific readings and broader historical interpretations.²⁸ But what can and must be appreciated is the fact that each of the scholars discussed here was deeply engaged in the most current debates concerning history, meaning, and the human subject. And even though Vernant was part of the original “structuralist invasion” at Johns Hopkins, much of the theoretical context of Classical scholars working in Paris has simply been lost in translation.²⁹ But as long as one contemplates how historical meaning is produced, a fundamental task of any Classicists on any continent and from any city, the “structuralist controversy” remains relevant. As Derrida claimed half a century ago, in that essay with which I began:

L’attitude structuraliste, et notre posture aujourd’hui devant ou dans le langage, ne sont pas seulement des moments de l’histoire. Étonnement, plutôt, par le langage comme origine de l’histoire. Par l’historicité elle-même (Derrida 1967, p. 10).

- 24 To be sure, “Paris school” is a type of export equivalent to the category “French Theory” – not so much a native grouping but a function of their reception from elsewhere.³⁰ One could say there is no “Paris School” but only the “Paris School Controversy.” But if there is any internal logic to grouping the “Paris school” scholars beyond their geographic location, it is that continued contemplation of how the Greek tradition interacts with historicity writ large.

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NOTES

1. For Saussure's influence on the history of the structuralist movement, see, among others, Lévi-Strauss 1958; Benveniste 1966, p. 91-98; Jameson 1972; Dosse 1991; Ungar 2004.

2. "Aussi le linguiste qui veut comprendre cet état doit-il faire table rase de tout ce qui l'a produit et ignorer la diachronie. Il ne peut entrer dans la conscience des sujets parlants qu'en supprimant le passé. L'intervention de l'histoire ne peut que fausser son jugement" (Saussure 1969, p. 117). "Only by suppressing the past can [the linguist] enter into the state of mind of the language user. The intervention of history can only distort his judgment" (Saussure 1983, p. 117).

3. Vernant's earlier work on Hesiod was also originally presented in an interdisciplinary symposium in Cersy-la-Salle, France, *Entretiens sur les notions de genèse et de structure*. On which see Stocking 2017b.

4. For an in depth discussion of the relationship between the approaches of Vernant and Foucault on the human subject, see Leonard 2005, p. 32-95. The questioning of "man" as individual subject has been taken as one of the defining features of so-called "post-structuralism." Of course, "post-structuralism" is not a native French term, but is itself a North American form of categorization (on which see Angermüller 2015). When Foucault himself was asked by a North American about his own position in "post-structuralist" thought, Foucault responded, somewhat annoyed, "autant je vois bien que derrière ce qu'on a appelé le structuralisme il y avait un certain problème qui était en gros celui du sujet et de la refonte du sujet, autant je ne vois pas, chez ceux qu'on appelle les postmodernes et les poststructuralistes, quel est le type de problème qui leur serait commun" (Foucault 1994, p. 447).

5. See for instance, Vernant's comments in the essay, "L'individu dans la cité" from *L'individu, la mort, l'amour*, where Vernant argues that the man as individual is an

invention of Classical Greece (Vernant 1989, p 211-232). At the Johns Hopkins conference, in response to Lucien Goldmann, Vernant further made a distinction between the “subject” and the “individual.” He explains, “There is the notion of subjectivity which arose at a certain period in the western world, when the interior dimension of man became the object of language in certain literary works. There is also the notion of the individual and the problem of recognizing the category of the individual when it appears” (Vernant’s response to Goldmann in Macksey and Donato 1972, p. 118).

6. On the intellectual genealogy of Vernant’s method of historical anthropology/psychology in Anglophone literature, see Redfield 1991 and Humphreys 2009.

7. The essay was subsequently published in Vernant 1965b.

8. In his introductory comments to the conference, Goldmann specifically cited Hegel and Marx as the founding fathers of the human sciences based on a ‘genetic structuralism’ that prefigured the linguistic structuralism of Saussure (Goldmann 1965, p. 10–11).

9. See Pucci 1971; Gros 2016; Judet de la Combe 2016; Stocking 2017b for the ways in which Vernant’s analysis of the Hesiodic ages of man differs from Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism. On Vernant’s approach and its relation to the French sociological tradition more generally, see Yu 2017.

10. The arguments at Cerisy would thus serve as the foundation for Vernant’s work, *Les origines de la pensée grecque* (Vernant 1962).

11. On Vernant’s positioning of Tragedy within the history of structural thought, see Vernant 1972, p. 289.

12. Published in 2011 in French and 2014 in English. Foucault makes no explicit reference to Detienne’s work, although the potential influence is noted by Detienne himself in the introduction to the 1996 English edition of *Masters of Truth*.

13. As noted by Detienne himself (1996, p. 19) and also noted by the editors of Foucault’s lectures.

14. Thus in his preface to the American edition of *Masters of Truth*, Detienne articulates his own approach to archaic Greek truth in relationship to Foucault as follows (1996, p. 16): “In the midst of their mythico-religious configuration, *Alētheia* pronounces a performative truth. She is the power of efficacy and creates being.” Further discussion of the details of Foucault’s lecture series and the role of Hesiod in particular, see Stocking 2017b.

15. See especially, Lévi-Strauss 1958 and his essay, “Structure des mythes.” Vernant’s work on tragedy may also be viewed as a reaction to Lévi-Strauss, since Lévi-Strauss offers his own interpretation of the Oedipus story in that chapter, on which see Leonard 2005, p. 38–68.

16. The issue is nicely captured in the series of reviews published in Nagy, Slatkin, and Loraux 2001.

17. See especially Jameson’s comments from *Prison House of Language* (Jameson 1972) on Saussure’s discourse of doubling in the *Cours*.

18. See for instance, Momigliano’s review of *L’invention de la mythologie* (Momigliano 1982).

19. See Detienne 1996, p. 29.

20. The “Imaginary” is perhaps most closely associated with Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire de la société*, first published in 1975. Unfortunately, the work of Castoriadis is beyond the scope of this paper. On recent work on the “Imaginary” see Godelier 2015.

21. Hartog 2011, p. 73.

22. Loraux’s work is copious and of profound significance on multiple levels from feminism and psychoanalysis to broader concerns in historiography, but the impact of her entire œuvre is beyond the scope of this chapter. Indeed, it is perhaps too early to offer a retrospective of her work from the perspective of the history of ideas only because her influence is still taking its effect.

23. On the role of the Annales school in relation to the history of structuralism, see Dosse 1997.

24. It was the very idea of historically specific mentalités, which was thought to solve the problem of irresolution between diachrony and synchrony. See, for instance, Bloch 1949.

25. Thus, Loraux notes Vernant’s insistence on using the Greek terms, *meson*, *peithō*, *mētis* rather than their translations “pour ne pas leur poser d’autres questions que celles qu’ils se posaient eux-mêmes” (Loraux 1993, p. 25).

26. On the Marxist perspective in Vernant’s work in relationship to debates on structuralism, see Stocking 2017b. On the *promesse d’altérité*, see Loraux 2005.

27. See especially Leonard 2005, as well as Neer 2010; Yu 2017; Stocking 2017b.

28. For instance, on rethinking arguments from the volume *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec*, see Geourgoudi, Koch Piettre, and Schmidt 2005 and Stocking 2017a; On Vidal-Naquet’s model of initiation, see essays in Dodd and Faraone 2003; On gender, see, among many other works, Sebillotte Cuchet and Ernoult 2007.

29. The reason for this is most likely related to what Paul Allen Miller sees as the “trouble with theory” in North America, namely that “Theory has become the property of English Departments” (Miller 2003, p. 8), a fact that is evident in Paul de Man’s essays, “The Resistance to Theory” and “Return to Philology” where De Man discusses the reception of French thinkers primarily by English departments (De Man 1986). Because ‘theory’ was primarily involved with its applicability to ‘literature,’ the role of antiquity in structuralist thought was largely missed in the North American reception of French thought. See further Miller 1998, 2003, 2007.

30. On the development of the category of ‘French Theory’ in North America, see Cusset 2003.

ABSTRACTS

This essay offers some broader contextualization on the role of “structuralism” in North America and its relationship to the works of scholars who have been broadly classified under the exonym “Paris School” including Jean-Pierre Vernant, Marcel Detienne, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, and Nicole Loraux. As this essay makes clear, these scholars were doing far more than merely applying

"structuralism" as a particularly fashionable intellectual method, which can now be dismissed. Rather, they were engaged, each in their own way, with the very problem of the relationship between meaning and history, a problem that is as pertinent today as it was when structuralism was first on the rise.

Cet article entend étudier, dans une perspective contextualisée, le rôle de la référence au structuralisme en Amérique du Nord et ses liens avec les travaux des chercheurs qui ont été rassemblés sous l'exonyme « École de Paris », parmi lesquels Jean-Pierre Vernant, Marcel Detienne, Pierre Vidal-Naquet et Nicole Loraux. Je montre que ces chercheurs étaient loin d'envisager le structuralisme comme une méthode intellectuelle à la mode qu'il s'agirait d'appliquer aux textes anciens, et dont les acquis mériteraient dès lors aujourd'hui d'être abandonnés. Chacun à sa manière, ils interrogeaient le problème essentiel du rapport entre historicité et signification – et cette question est toujours aussi pertinente aujourd'hui qu'elle ne l'était lorsque la théorie structuraliste apparut.

INDEX

Mots-clés: structuralisme, post-structuralisme, anthropologie historique, historicité, diachronie, anachronie

Keywords: structuralism, post-structuralism, historical anthropology, historicity, diachrony, anachrony

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