

Some remarks on historical-libidinal materialism

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Last week we discussed one wing of contemporary French philosophy, the post-phenomenological philosophy of radical difference. This week I'll lecture on the other wing, the one to which Foucault and Deleuze/Guattari belong, historical-libidinal materialism. Terminologically, hist-lib mat is often called a "post-structuralism," so we'll begin with structuralism.

Structuralism

Structuralism is in some sense the polar opposite of phenomenology. Cultural meaning is grounded in social structures, not subjects. There's a good sense in which Foucault's work in the 60s is akin to structuralism, although he will vehemently deny that he IS a "structuralist" in the preface to the English edition of OT.

Structuralism was a widespread "movement" of 20th C thought, reaching its peak in 50s-60s France. Notable figures are Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Noam Chomsky in linguistics; Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology; Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis; Jean Piaget in developmental psychology; and Roland Barthes in literary criticism.

Hallmarks of structuralist thought, according to Piaget (*Structuralism*: NY: Basic Books, 1970): wholeness, transformation, self-regulation. 1) wholeness: the usual opposition is between emergent properties vs. atomistic compounding of prior and independent elements; Piaget however prefers "operational structuralism" = focus on relations [on processes by which whole comes about], not on whole OR on elements. Problem of genesis is key point. 2) transformations: laws of composition of structures are simultaneously structuring and structured: they structure the system actively, but they can only be ("passively") defined in terms of that system (they are "structured"). 3) self-regulation: self-maintenance and closure. In math/logic, by operations; in social systems by feedback (regulation); in biological systems by rhythm.

Let's look at social systems, primarily at Levi-Strauss. Piaget begins by distinguishing global from analytic structuralism. Global structuralism studies emergent wholes; analytic structuralism elicits deep structures of transformational laws that explain empirical systems; structures are not facts but logico-math models that explain facts (thus social actors are unaware of deep rules that explain social actions.)

Piaget describes L-S as being "the very incarnation of the structuralist faith in the permanence of human nature and the unity of reason," (106) and quotes him as writing, "all social life, however elementary, presupposes an intellectual activity in man of which the formal properties cannot, accordingly, be a reflection of the concrete organization of society" (*Totemism*, 96; quoted on 107). It is this "unconscious conceptual structure" of societies that L-S seeks to discover, locating it between infrastructure and superstructure in the Marxist senses.

L-S is firmly synchronic: history is only the holding-pen of elements of structures, the starting point for the quest for intelligibility. L-S was inspired by linguistics, but the real take-off for him was being able to give mathematical form to social systems.

The ontological status of these structures is problematic. Piaget offers the following: "the collective intellect is the social equilibrium resulting from the interplay of the operations that enter into all cooperation. ... [I]ntelligence ... is the equilibrated form of all cognitive functions " (114).

Summary of structuralism: 1). linguistics: emphasis on the code as prior to the message; 2) reduction of content and history; 3) reduction of subjectivity to effect; 4) differential production of meaning; 5) "Kantianism w/o TUA": conditions of possibility of unified meaningful experience; 6) synoptic gaze on totality: structures as self-sufficient; 7) system of transformations governed by self-regulating laws.

Post-structuralism

The study of bodies politic

If structuralism was, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, "Kantianism without the transcendental subject," - a search for structures of intelligibility located in cultural systems rather than in a subject - then post-structuralism is the French response to German philosophy after Kant, that is, to Hegel. In other words, post-structuralism as historical-libidinal materialism turns Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud against Hegel.

Why against Hegel? Because he offers a total history: nothing can exceed or resist the march of spirit. This emphasis on totality, endemic to Western philosophy and science, is shared by the structuralists. Structuralism was expanded by Lévi-Strauss to the structuralist study of cultural systems in general: all human endeavor. Using the chess analogy common to structuralist self-explication, we can say that structuralism elucidates the synchronic oppositional rules that render a game (language or cultural system) intelligible to an observer, though not to its pieces (speakers or actors): the knight or bishop can know what is expected of him, but not understand the totality of the "rules of the game." The structuralist will model these rules using the oppositions in which each piece fits: the knight, which is not the bishop, moves one way, while the bishop, which is not the knight, moves another way.

To arrive at a structure of intelligibility via oppositions between rules governing pieces, the structuralist observer-modeller practices a grand meta-opposition between internal structure and external history. Hence the historical forces that produced different social actors (the bodily training of real knights and bishops) in order to fulfill social aims - e.g., the production and distribution of surplus value - are neutralized into rules that produce intelligibility for an observer.

Here we see the arena for historical-libidinal materialism: the production of bodies. For post-structuralism, cultural oppositions rely on the forceful production of bodies trained to fulfill the expectations of the group into which they are placed. In other words, the great social oppositions which render a system intelligible to a structuralist observer: male/female, adult/child, white/black, owner/worker, are for post-structuralism the result of appropriately-behaving and -labelled bodies produced by such loci of historical forces as families, schools, churches, and workplaces.

The historical-libidinal materialism of post-structuralism thus analyzes the de-centered, multiple, conflictual, and overlapping differential and historical force networks productive of "bodies politic": the medicalized, disciplined, racialized, gendered, capitalized - the objectified and subjectified - bodies of people and the body politic of corporations, families, sects, gangs, classes, genders, races, nations, Reichs.

German Predecessors: Marx, Nietzsche, Freud

Despite DG's and Foucault's hatred of the PCF and the Eastern bloc--their hatred of totalitarianism--and Foucault's relegation of Marx's political economy to the 19th century *episteme*, Marx's term "historical materialism" is still a useful term for much of Foucault's work in DP and HS 1 and DG in AO and MP.

Marx showed how networks of differential force, the material and social relations of production, produce the seemingly natural identities of social categories: "owner," "worker," "product," "tool," etc. What seems a stable unity is the product of an historically relative system of production, a system put in place by the revolutionary force of the bourgeoisie. The productivity of the network of historical labor is masked by the seeming solidity of the thing and the vampiric "productivity" of capital, which Marx showed was simply the coagulation of past labor. [D/G break with Marx here on the notion of "machinic surplus value."] Marx's insistence on dissolving the certainties and identities of everyday common sense by reference to networks of historical force reveals a "deconstructive" Marx purged of the eschatological promises of the inevitability of "The Revolution" into which he sometimes lapsed in his popular addresses and on which the PCF "bureaucrats of the revolution" pounced as if scripture.

Despite their surface opposition on political issues, Nietzsche has some striking similarities to the Marx we sketched above, for Nietzsche also dissolved received pieties through analyses of their construction by historical forces. Simply put, both thinkers are historical materialists; they both show material forces producing identities--in Nietzsche's case the identity of the responsible individual, as in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Crudely put, then, Marx dissolves "objective" identity and Nietzsche "subjective" identity by reference to historical force networks.

I have used the term "historical-libidinal materialism" to discuss the Foucault and D/G wing. To appreciate the libidinal qualification, we turn to Freud. It's often said that there are two Freuds, the scientific materialist of the drives (the "energetic Freud") and the investigative hermeneut of the unconscious (the "linguistic Freud"); the struggle to articulate the two is notoriously difficult, both for Freud himself and his interpreters.

The key for post-structuralism is to distinguish Freud's diagnosis of the patriarchal etiology of the neuroses from his prescriptions for their treatment. In the working out of his diagnoses through his case studies, Freud points to the historical, political, economic and social milieu of his patients, even if his thematic focus on family dynamics often obscured the class and race contributions to the neuroses of his patients those case studies describe. Together with the materialist orientation of the energetic analysis of drives, we see here the elements of a historical-libidinal materialism, which, is brought out in the explicit politicizations of Reich and Deleuze and Guattari.

Although Freud is important in these other post-structuralists, Foucault doesn't have much good to say about him, ultimately implicating Freud in the modern construction of bio-power; DG have a more complex relation, as we will see in reading AO.

20th century French predecessors of post-structuralism

To escape Hegel is the self-acknowledged task of French 20th C thought--to be non-totalizing, non-spiritual, and non-teleological. The French reception of Hegel is very complex: it began in earnest in the late 20s, continued throughout the 30s, and reached a peak in the immediate post-war years. The major figures are Alexandre Kojève, Jean Hyppolite and Georges Bataille.

The break with Kojève's anthropological and progressive Hegel, and with Hegel himself, paradoxically begins with the greatest French Hegelian, Jean Hyppolite, who taught and mentored Deleuze, Foucault, and Derrida. (See F's moving tribute in "The Discourse on Language," his speech upon being elected to Hyppolite's chair at the *Collège de France* [Appendix to English of AK].) Generally speaking, post-structuralists reject the anthropologism, the historical narrative of progress, and the emphasis on the work of the negative found in Kojève by taking up the hints in Hyppolite

Hyppolite translated Hegel's *Phenomenology* (1939-41) and wrote a great commentary, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (1947). Of more interest to us is *Logique et existence* (1953), Hyppolite's second major work, which comments on Hegel's *Logic*. In this work, Hyppolite poses three questions of importance for post-structuralism: non-dialectical difference (diversity rather than opposition), philosophy's appropriation of its other (sense and non-sense), and the centrality, priority, and self-referentiality of language (rather than disembodied thought) in constituting meaning. Hyppolite's locating of language between logic and existence, between thought and bodies, provides the seeds of Foucault's *dispositif*, which sets forth the relation of discursive and non-discursive practices, and Deleuze's notion of *sens*, as in the *Logique du sens*.

Next, Georges Bataille, who attempts a strange interweaving of Nietzsche and Hegel in focusing on communion, sacrifice, waste, intensity, and economy. Bataille's investigations into the construction of the ego or consciousness through social and bodily practices, the converse experience of the dissolution of the ego in madness, the themes of non-productive expenditure, of excess and outrage to common sense, resonate in both Foucault and D/G.

The birth of French historical-libidinal materialism in the 1960s

The key text at the origin of historical-libidinal materialism is Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962). Here Deleuze shows the productivity of the non-dialectical ("affirmative") differential forces termed by Nietzsche "noble." These forces differentiate themselves first, and only secondarily consider that from which they have differentiated themselves. Deleuze's reading rescued Nietzsche from Heidegger's narrative of the history of metaphysics; the thought of differential force would in turn, in *Anti-Oedipus*, rescue Marx and Freud from the institutional prisons of their "isms," the orthodox parties and schools that appropriated their charisma.

Through the 60s, while Foucault was writing his archaeologies, Deleuze and Derrida led the way in theorizing a "philosophy of difference." The key is to show difference producing identity, but a non-totalized, non-spiritual, and non-teleological difference--in other words, difference freed of Hegel (and, minus the "spiritual" bit, official Marxism). Key texts: *Difference and Repetition* and *Of Grammatology*.

(In)famously, the events of May 1968 accelerated the post-structuralist movement. The story has often been told, but bears repeating. A threshold of social unrest was passed, as turbulent post-war affluence and concomitant life-style experimentation was countered by a government backlash in the guise of education reform. May '68 included students and workers, to the befuddlement of the established guardians of the revolution, the French Communist Party. Days of general strikes and standoffs with the police led de Gaulle to call a general election. Shockingly, de Gaulle's call for a parliamentary solution to the crisis was backed by the Communists, who were evidently as scared of any revolution from below - which by definition would lack the party discipline they so craved - as were the official holders of State power, to whose position they aspired. The worker-student movement eventually collapsed, leaving memories of non-scripted social interactions and revealing the investments of the Party, lampooned thereafter as "bureaucrats of the revolution" (Foucault's Foreword to the English translation of AO).

The response changed French academic life: 1) institutionally, by the creation of Paris VIII (Vincennes) where Foucault was chair briefly, and where Deleuze and Irigaray taught later; and 2) in the direction of the post-structuralist movement. The second change concerns us here. Although it was certainly never apolitical in its first incarnation, the philosophy of difference became (explicitly) political post-1968. It became, in fact, a politics of philosophy dedicated to exposing the historical force relations producing identity in all its ontological and epistemological forms. In other words, post-structuralism now set out to show how the unified objects of the world, the unified subjects who know and hence control them, the unified bodies of knowledge that codify this knowledge, and the unified institution of philosophy that polices the whole affair, are products of historical, political forces in combat with other forces.

The most immediately provocative politicization of the philosophy of difference was Deleuze and Guattari's 1972 *Anti-Oedipus*. A rip-roaring attack on the tame Marx-Freud synthesis that was the mother's milk of the bureaucrats of the revolution, *Anti-Oedipus* is historical-libidinal materialism par excellence: the explosive result of using the Nietzschean thought of differential force to expose the production of the socio-political identities of race, class, nation, and - most threateningly - gendered personal identity.

In the mid 70s the politics of philosophy reaches a critical mass, with major works published every year: Derrida's *Glas*; Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy*; Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman*; Cixous and Clément's *The Newly-Born Woman*; Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*; Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*; Baudrillard's *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. All of them to one extent or another show how philosophy has served to legitimate forceful constructions of identity in racial, religious, economic, political, and sexual contexts. By analyzing the interrelations of these registers, and by showing differential force as productive of identity, these works set the stage for Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), arguably the high-water mark to date of post-structuralism.

In 14 plateaus, or points of intensity - productive connections between forces without reference to an external governing source - Deleuze and Guattari develop a new materialism in which a politicized philosophy of difference joins forces with the sciences explored in *Difference and Repetition*. *A Thousand Plateaus* is a book of strange and terrifying new questions: "Who Does the Earth Think It Is?," "How Do You make Yourself a Body Without Organs?," "How does the war-machine ward off the apparatus of capture of the State?" and so on. To over-simplify, Deleuze and Guattari take the insights of "complexity theory", which explores the mathematics of the various thresholds at which matter achieves self-organization (e.g., turbulence or oscillation), and extend the notion of self-organizing matter - matter with no need of transcendent organizing agents such as gods, leaders, capital, or subjects - to the social, linguistic, political, and economic realms. The resultant "rhizome" or de-centered network that is *A Thousand Plateaus* provides hints for experimentation with the more and more de-regulated flows of energy and matter, ideas and actions - and the attendant attempts at binding them - that make up the contemporary world.

A stunning work, nothing after *A Thousand Plateaus* by any post-structuralist author has the same potential for inciting new flows of ideas and action. Yet this is not the end of the story. Perhaps the most fruitful area of on-going post-structuralism will prove to be feminism, especially as that work interacts with Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Levinas et al.

This interchange is not a simple case of feminism learning from philosophers who remain untouched. Rather we have here a "becoming" in the Deleuzian sense, for both terms change in the encounter: for instance, "Deleuze" or "Derrida" - what those names mean as potentials for inciting flows of ideas and action - are not the same after their encounter with the "corporeal feminism" of Elizabeth Grosz or the theory of performative gender in Judith Butler.