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BACK TO THE FUTURE: RECONSTRUCTIVE TENSIONS IN CONTEMPORARY POST-CRITICAL METAMODERNITY

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The Structural Allegory: Reconstructive Encounters with the New French Thought. Edited and with an Introduction by John Fekete, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 269 pp., 1984.

> In the liquidation of one literary school by another the inheritance is passed down, not from father to son, but from uncle to nephew.
>
> *Viktor Shklovsky*

> Bertrand Russell warned that pragmatism could lead only to warfare. So be it.
>
> *Harold Bloom*

I

Re-thinking in the epoch allegorized by science

In philosophical tradition, reconstructive strategies would appear to arise at moments of intra-institutional response to catastrophe. In this century and on this continent, John Dewey's programmatic call for the reconstruction of philosophy came just after the first global technological war, while the second edition of *Reconstruction In Philosophy* (1948-49) was produced in the context of a lecture series at the Imperial University in Tokyo where Dewey spoke of "the forces which make intellectual reconstruction inevitable" from a land recently illuminated by the American technological institu-

tion's demonstration of the limited (though concentrated) efficacy of unreconstructed science.

The necessity for reconstruction in philosophy arose, Dewey argued, from

> the discovery that ... science is forced by its own development to abandon the assumption of fixity to recognize that what ... is actually 'universal' is *process*; but this fact of recent science still remains in philosophy ... a technical matter rather than what it is; namely, the most revolutionary discovery yet made.[1]

Dewey noted some of the implications:

> The present reach and thrust of what originates as science affects disturbingly every aspect of contemporary life, from the state of the family and the position of women and children, through the conduct and problems of education, through the fine as well as the industrial arts, with political and economic relations of association that are national and international in scope.[2]

However, Dewey's critique of contemporary science was that its reach and thrust were *not disturbing enough*; its development "is immature; it has not yet got beyond the physical and physiological aspects of human concerns, interests and subject-matters. In consequence, it has partial and exaggerated effects."[3] Above all, Dewey noted,

> The institutional conditions into which it (science) enters and which determine its human consequences have not as yet been subjected to any serious, systematic inquiry worthy of being designated scientific.[4]

Philosophical reconstruction, however, could produce a new "*relational* ... universality," "a generalized reconstruction so fundamental" it would subject "the 'morals' underlying ... institutional custom to scientific inquiry and criticism":

> ... (R)econstruction can be nothing less than the work of developing, of forming, of producing ... the intellectual instrumentalities which will progressively direct inquiry into the deeply and inclusively human. ...
>
> What will now be ... worked out (is) a method of inquiry so inclusive in range and so penetrating, so pervasive and so universal, as to

> provide the pattern and model which permits, invites and even demands the kind of formulation that falls within the function of philosophy. It is a method of knowing that is self-corrective ... The heart of the method is .... (i)ts similar centrality in every form of intellectual activity. ...[5]

In this sense, it may be possible to suggest that the development of the human sciences in the early twentieth-century would not only be formally and instrumentally American — since, as Dewey put it, "... American thought merely continues European thought"[6] — but, because of "the progressive and unstable character of American life and civilization",[7] would triumph concretely as the universalising anti-foundationalist allegory of modernity: the "reign of terror"[8] of scientific method as a perpetual techno-genesis.

Dewey, of course, was neither alone nor first nor last in proclaiming the heuristic universality of re-allegorized philosophy, a strategic paradigmatism already successfully instituted in Western tradition by Platonism (the Ideal, the philosopher, and the city), Christendom (God — the imitation of Christ — the Church), Cartesianism (*deus abscondidus* or the mechanical universe — the method of doubt — the individual), and Productivism (relational science — machines — the collective). Each paradigmatic shift in the anti-foundational allegorical terms, entailing on the one hand the re-vision (re-presentation, re-coding, re-production, re(con)textualization; ie., re-institutionalization) of the preceding foundational allegories, transmitted the de-vision (de-construction, de-coding, de-cadence, de-institutionalization) of the new anti-foundational allegory. For lateral to the allegory itself, were both the allegorizeable and allegorizers, though the relativism of each was always problematic. In Dewey's allegory, the crisis of contemporary existence was "due to the entrance into .... everyday affairs ... of processes" that originated "in ... relatively aloof and remote technical workshops known as laboratories."[9] However, much twentieth-century allegorization would generally be preoccupied less with the foundational allegory itself than with the geographical (spatial and contextual) and organizational (chronological and hierarchical) problematization of these "relatively aloof technical workshops" whose formal (non-local) existence was the subject of an implicit fundamental unanimity which, if anything, at least testified to the appropriateness of the contemporary allegory of the absolute domination of scientistic methodologism in the modern mind.[10]

After all, until mid-century, Dewey's relational universalism was still somewhat local and confined to a mainly American discursive anti-universe or world, though whether through the strong poetry of American modernists like Pound or Eliot or other structuralizing influences, the Americaniza-

tion of British literary studies was underway by the '20s as I.A. Richards would embrace the new allegory with the discovery that "A book is a machine to think with. ..."[11] If continental philosophy was also beginning to internationalize, Husserl, reflecting further on the crisis of the European sciences, would inadvertently expose the limitations of European (and Mittel-European ones in particular) conceptions of exterminism in universalising philosophy:

> Thanks to philosophy, one can determine whether European humanity is the bearer of an absolute idea and not simply an anthropological specimen such as 'Chinese' or 'Indian', and on the other hand the Europeanization of all alien forms of humanity is evidence favoring the power of its absolute sense ... and not an accidental absurdity of its history.[12]

Still further east, in the mid-1920s Soviet revolution in literary studies, Nicholas Gorlov, after observing of the epoch that "just when technology, the machine and mechanized living were crushing ... man, the same man begins to sing the praises of ... technology," would thus break into song:

> In order to transform the whole world into the kingdom of the machine, one must not only possess the machine, but become oneself part of a single machine — the world-wide human collective.[13]

For, and as perhaps only an American neoclassicist could grasp, the Russian Formalists "were positivists with a scientific, almost technological ideal of literary scholarship."[14] The Russian formalist revolt (as too the American anti-formalist revolt) replaced "form" "by a mechanistic concept of the sum of techniques ... which could be studied separately or in diverse interlocking combinations."[15] Though as Wellek also notes, the technological ideal, in its reexportation westward between the first and second global technological wars, was lightened by its "contact with the German tradition of ... totality," and in Prague became the linguistic doctrine called structuralism "because ... the term 'structure' does more justice to the totality of the work of art and is less weighed down by suggestions of externality. ..."[16] In postwar France, the softened linguistic formalism or doctrine of structuralism, re-classicized by academic Cartesianism on the one hand, and on the other furiously (and often para-academically) modernised by its belated encounter with American New Criticism, would congeal into syncretic doctrinal formulations some aspects of which the present collective work under review generally designates as the New French Thought.

II

A Babel of tongues

An efficient approach to the texts of *The Structural Allegory* might begin with Marc Angenot's "Structuralism as Syncretism: Institutional Distortions of Saussure" which, perhaps with some of the ironizing that the Belgian mind has derived from close proximity to the French (and possibly deserved if one compares, say, the work of Magritte with the elucubrations of Breton), usefully and amusingly reminds one that if the transmigrations of what he calls "those blurry, fuzzy sectors of knowledge made out of conflictual traditions, as literary studies are ..." (150), are curious indeed, it may be due, as Harold Bloom has written elsewhere, to literary studies' deep "origins in satire and farce."

For one, as Angenot relates, the *Cours de linguistique générale* (posthumously published in 1915 by three of Saussure's former students) — and which drew together under the influence of the structural label Barthes, Bremond, Greimas, Kristeva, Genette, Todorov, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Althusser, Foucault, and later Derrida and Baudrillard — was built into "a more consistent theoretical apparatus" (153) by Saussure's editors (who contributed creative and novel accretions such as the work's final sentence as well as "the confusing equations '*signifiant* = acoustic image' and '*signifié* = concept'", 152-153), together with other contributions from the work of subsequent linguists (Trubetzkoy, Jakobson, Hjelmslev, etc.) and other commentators.

Secondly, "Saussure's paradigm took forty years to travel from Geneva to Paris" (153). Blocked from entering French linguistics by Antoine Meillet's "hegemonic influence" (153), Saussure's book migrated eastwards to Russia, then westward again in the '30s to linguistic circles in Prague and Copenhagen. As Angenot notes, except for Belgium, Saussure did not reach French linguistics until just after the Second World War (153).

Significantly, however, Lévi-Strauss, whose anthropological theories were "a kind of synonym" (154) for structuralism as applied Saussurean linguistics, was "initated to Saussureanism in the United States" (154) (together with the Russian Formalists, particularly V. Propp). A parallel break with conventional approaches to literature, briefly coded as the "Nouvelle critique" (Barthes, Mauron, Goldmann), is seen by Angenot as a "polemical ... model ... in which marketing practices are combined with ideological misapprehensions" (154), though the Nouvelle critique was rather more explicitly an attempt to catch up to American New Criticism (understood by Doubrovsky as Spitzer, Auerbach, and Wellek) and its perceived 20-year jump on French critical methodology.

According to Angenot, then, structuralism was a "semantic inflation ...

embracing in a catchall term ... in a suspect way ... all ... the social sciences, philosophy and literary disciplines" (154-5), an inflation that suddenly deflated in 1969-70 with the new inflation of semiotics. If Saussure, as Angenot argues, was, in fact, "the antistructuralist *par excellence*," a gnoseologist whose paradigm for a theory of knowledge was based on the axiom that linguistic praxis does not operate with sounds to communicate, but "with classes determining the identity of sounds, classes ... determined ... by other classes determining the identity of messages," (155)

> French structuralist preaching may be aptly described as a covering apparatus concealing confused skirmishes of incompatible points of view ... serving as a label for major attempts at syncretism. (157)

Angenot conjectures that "Saussure was ... a pledge of non-aggression at a time when ... contradictions between twentieth-century theoretic traditions were stirring ..." (157) and that "this atmosphere of *entente cordiale* ... was something new in the republic of scholarship" (unlike the violent, Byzantine intrigues of modern German or Slavic scholarship). Furthermore, in the postindustrial division of intellectual labour, literary criticism became the "commonplace" of the new friendly syncretism or "factitious amalgamation of dissimilar ideas ... that look incompatible ... insofar as they are not clearly conceived" (159). Syncretism, writes Angenot, "was (and still is) the common horizon of literary scholarship," "a substitutive simulacrum to Marxism" (161-2) against whose "encompassing framework" the liberal societies, swinging wildly in an "ideological stampede" (162) from triumphalism to manic-depressive skepticism, have deployed the strategic defensive initiatives of universities, the humanities, and modern cultural phenomena from movies, TV, to mass literature and other superstructural allegories.

Except for his sudden *ekstasis* of "Marxism," Angenot's tracing of the intellectual and institutional vicissitudes of Saussure does offer one possible path for entering what editor John Fekete, in his introduction to *The Structural Allegory*, calls the "new maelstrom," the dis-orient of "the widening spaces between concept and action" (xi) that "is the Western mind itself" (xii), where if the traditional, classical disciplinary foundations have been destabilized and eroded by the invading ideas of the books of and commentaries upon Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, Althusser or Foucault, whose new organising subjects have repatterned intellectual attention, at least "the structural allegory" (now in its second or post-structuralist phase) is "building upon a firm base in a variety of disciplines": linguistics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, literary and cultural studies, philosophy and history "increasingly share ... metatheoretical parameters and a common method of formalization" (xii). Upon this firm allegorical base, however, the post-

structural formalization or second-stage structural allegory, with its common method in the just-mentioned seven disciplines, "cannot tell if a cup is half-empty or half-full. ...", "cannot differentiate ... and cannot adequately conceptualize ..." (xv): vengeful, nihilistic, marginalized "against the individual and associated selves and their capacities for ... quasi-efficacious self-articulation" (xv-xvi), the post-structuralist critique "in psychological terms (is) the *ressentiment* of the defeated who have no values to affirm. This is not a position to be condemned or dismissed without sympathy ..." (xvi). It might seem that sometime prior to the structural allegory, a profound reversal of sympathy in the form of a radical mutation, de-revaluation or metastasis of language had occurred; indeed, Fekete writes of the "collective drama," (xvi), or allegorical analogization, of "the paradigm shifts of modern biology and quantum physics" (xiii) into the humanities and social sciences from "the worlds of quantum mechanics, genetic variation, and semiotic play (which) form a single major family of regulative metaphors that face us as an unavoidable modality of the contemporary scientific mythos" (xiii).

But in this allegorized mythos, there are no "things"; between "words" and "things" are only structural relational languages — thought (Derrida), custom (Foucault), production (Althusser). "Meanings" are "prior" regularities and processes of signification that de-center and de-construct articulation. Historical and institutional particularities are functions of (re)textualization: "... the structural allegory directs attention to a combinatory dimension ... in the formation of objects: it both denaturalizes and demythologizes, on a methodological principle. By virtue of the ... method, ... inquiry into the 'reality' of 'things' is ... transformed across the range of professional discourse" (xiii). The method of New French Thought "provides the most powerful modernization of theories .... central to Western Marxism. ... The structural allegory renders problematical all ... self-betraying affirmations of the human individual or the progress of history, and ... serves as a valuable critique of sentimental humanism and evolutionary historicism." "... (W)e are provided a stunning intellectual reminder that the power of structures is more effective today than any individual or associated human agency" (xiv). "We", then, might be the *post*-post-structuralist survivors, the de-mean(ing)ed, and so purely relational structural languages of a more effective network of non-local power metaphorically regulated in a transformist professional discourse. Yet as Fekete observes, "A poignant pathos marks the post-structuralist adventure each time it reaches the self-cancelling terminus of its itinerary" (xvi). In a word, there are flaws: "the relationship between microflaws ... in mental structures ... and macroflaws ... in organization ... cannot be assumed to be direct. This distance ... may offer space and time for creativity and novelty" (xvi). And thus, in "a complex of modalities" that can be "romantic, comic, tragic

and ironic," onwards, ever onwards in possible (simulational) space and time, "*beyond*" (xvii) structurality, towards "a less one-sided analogue of the natural (sic) scientific paradigms, drawing, for instance, on the *nonskeptical* implications of quantum mechanics" (xviii), drawing "from the antiobjectivist implications of the new physics a *participatory* theory of the universe ... to promote self-conscious reprogrammings of ... life ..." (xix). For not to press onwards, when biology is opening an era of evolutionary leaps in the extension of life and intelligence, would be "a sign of the most profound crisis of the Western mind, a most profound loss of nerve" (xix). But what is needed, first, before going "beyond the structural allegory" is "a dialogue with the structural tradition, a conversation of many voices" (xx). As John O'Neill recommends to the grand-nephews of Dewey: "We must learn ... a Babel of tongues" (198). Perhaps it was something more than mere wisdom that lead Wellek, conventionalist that he was, to dread the horizon he could see structuring itself where "Literary scholarship is to become a branch of biology."[18]

III

Allegorical voices

In *The Structural Allegory*, one gets one's pick of voices or articulated complexes of modalities. Making use of Fekete's introductory categories of romantic, comic, tragic and ironic, surely Angenot's contribution is comic-ironic, as is John O'Neill's study of the polymorphous perverse politics of Barthes' "homotextuality" (193), while ironically comic might be Andrew Wernick's metatheoretical survey of the eight-centuries-old post-scholastic "fundamental paradigmatic confusion that haunts the entire intellectual context in which the drama of the 'structuralism controversy' has had to unfold" (130-131).

Under the tragic rubric, one could definitely place Baudrillard's desperate argument for "symbolic disorder" and "speculation to the death" (59) from his masterly *L'Echange symbolique et la mort* (1976). And for a less despairing, but nonetheless bleak, assault against professionalizing discourses, Arthur Kroker's powerful mirror-image confrontation of Foucault with Talcott Parsons. D'Amico's anti-extremist belief in the convergence of Derrida and Foucault, "to the extent that discourses or texts are treated as objects in the world. ..." (180), doesn't exactly fall into one of these categories. And if there's a certain romantic *tragique* to Charles Levin's contention that in our time "Only the community challenges with its unpredictable heterogeneity. ..." (224), in his deconstruction of the cupidity of the Derridan text, it would be leaving much out to lump under the general

romantic heading the remaining post-Marxist contributions, from the "meta-observer" (37) Castoriadis' imaginary institution of society, Mârkus' gently ironic study of the "romantic anti-capitalist" (122) ambiguities of the diverse linguistic structurations of Wittgenstein, Lévi-Strauss and Gadamer, to Fekete's challenging multi-paradigm construction of the continental shift in current "intra-institutional" strategies.

If all of the contributions to *The Structural Allegory* roam macrotheoretically throughout the vast empty spaces of Western tradition, there is a relatively unanimous microtheoretical "frustration" (D'Amico, 181) that arises to occasion calls for the transformalization of structuralism/post-structuralism's "criminal" complexifications. In Castoriadis' formulation

> It would be a most serious error, a crime equivalent to the object's murder — *structuralism's crime* — to claim that this (identitarian or ensemblist) logic exhausts the life, or even logic of society. One would have to give up thinking ... (31, emphasis added).

For D'Amico, both Derrida and Foucault share "a fundamental hesitation or impossibility at the heart of thought and representation — we cannot both represent and represent ourselves representing ... One might then ask, in frustration, if there is finally no way to read a book, no way even to judge a reading?" (181). Regardless, each contribution does manage to posit the possibility of an *hors texte* in the text from which it might be conceivable to continue reading, judging, etc. beyond structuralism/post-structuralism's apparent dead-ends: for Castoriadis, the "meta" reality of the social imaginary itself (24); for Angenot, "Marxism" (162); for Mârkus, "the 'practical materialism' of the Marxist viewpoint" (128); for Baudrillard, "death" (56); for Levin, "the community" (224); for Wernick, a "Buddhized *dispositif*" (146); for D'Amico, an autonomous "dispositional character" (Popper) that cuts across "our traditional dichotomy between the sciences and the humanities" (181); and for O'Neill, "the university ... is the institution of last resort ..." (198) for the production of subversive discourse. Only Kroker and Fekete actually name the locus of contemporary reconstructive strategies as North America, and in so doing at last contribute to freeing the debate from its Babylonian exile on that other continent. For this reason, as well as for their profoundly antithetical strategizations, both are worth considering in greater detail.

IV

The continent of the will

For Kroker, who mirrors Foucault in a reflection upon Parsons' grim

realism, the event that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century and clearly divided the modern bourgeois sociology of power from its nineteenth-century counterparts, a division from which Parsons and Foucault follow, was

> the movement from classical physics to ... the new genetic biology ... as the mode of theoretical knowledge that constitutes power ... (75).

This bourgeois discourse claimed "for the first time" that power was "in fact, beyond all specific contents, the form ... or medium, through which the life of the social species was to be prolonged ..." (75). The three combinative threads of the new genetic biology, cybernetic theory, and linguistics emphasized that power as a specialized language "is a 'medium' of exchange ... in the sense that the grammar of power (the 'code' of authority ...) is the discursive form ... within which ... the 'disciplining' of the social species takes place" (76), in the order of difference of a social management of the species that "finds in the need to work on behalf of ... *life* ... a discursive validation for the extension of its order of normalizing practices" (76-77).

As its more intensive, philosophical level, the reconstructive thesis of bio-power — and where the continents of universalizing thought meet — "is profoundly structuralist because it is radically Kantian; and it is Kantian to the extent that the new genetics, language theory and cybernetics are strategies ... for suppressing ... sensuous experience" (78), because the power-discourse "produces objects in respect to its form, not in respect to its existence" (Jaspers). What appears in Parsons and Foucault is "a power ... that operates by transforming its conditions of possibility ... into a methodology of political practice" (79), while insisting that its transformationalist management of the life-functions of society "is 'limitless'" (80). This dynamic instrumental activism — or what Dewey called "instrumental experimentalism" — is Kant's "transcendental reduction" — Kant, writes Kroker, "sensed the terrorism (he insisted that this was freedom) of truth" (80) — re-theorized by Foucault, "the first theorist of power of the modern century," as "an endless play of interventions upon the population and within the body" (81).

"At the heart of power is a war-like relation," writes Foucault, that Parsons specifies as the "contentlessness" of a generalized medium. As Kroker explicates, in its actual operations and circumlocutions, the modern "power apparatus" has developed critical implications "so transformative in its logic, so comprehensive .... that the *noumenal forms* of the life-order

... may have broken free of their anchorage in sensuous experience, moved now by the dynamic impulse of an autonomous life-will" (82). It was the "magnitude" of Foucault's discovery of the "relational" character of modern power to be the "mirror" of "a new continent of the will ..." (82). The "new Magna Carta of power" written by Foucault and Parsons was struck upon four insubordinations or upheavals that retrojectively "undermine ... the *whole* foundation ... of the classical representation of power" (83). Thus, according to Kroker, modern power is non-representational (i.e., constitutive); non-distributive (collective); non-sovereign (multi-disciplinary; i.e., technical); and non-symbolic (pragmatic) — in short, "a pure instrumentality without signification" that has committed "its fate to the amnesic language of formalism. ..." (89), or what Kroker, with Baudrillard, terms a fascist or dead power, a "resurrection effect" or form that, despairing of its rational foundations, violently reactivates the social (Baudrillard). But what makes this dead, fascist power so fascinatingly modern, finally, is that it is "never ... anything but the sign of what it was"; namely, after Parsons, "the product of an 'institutionalizing' discourse that wedded politics to the biological canon" (90), so as to, in Parsons' words, "manufacture a behaviour that .... create(s) a nexus of habits through which the social 'belongingness' of individuals to a society is defined; that is, it manufactures something like the norm" (90). Which is why Kroker states that the modern "mirror of power can be reflected in its production of discursive knowledge" (91).

The "fluctuating medium" (Parsons) of modern "ahistorical and de-ontologized" (92) power, Kroker suggests, is carried forward by the life-managers or technocracy, allegorically: "The primary line of theoretical convergence between Parsons' and Foucault's *images* ... lies in their mutual recognition that power now justifies itself on the basis of an appeal to a biological ethos" (93, emphasis added). But this "mimicry of natural life" (96) is a simulation, "a radical structuralism ... in which all 'events are evacuated of their contents'" (96). "... (T)he secret of power is its transparency" as a relational network or field of relations that "always manages to evade localization in the terms that it mediates" (96). "Power has its own grammatical-syntactic structure" (97) embodied in a professional ethos, where "there is to be found the governing idea that power should speak now, not in terms of transgressions and prohibitions, but ... on behalf of life" (98), a power that expresses itself in the practice, "dull and prosaic", of the human sciences where "a developing technocracy ... prides itself on being a major site for the deployment of 'theoretical knowledge' ..." (99). Kroker concludes this profound deconstruction of reconstruction with Octavio Paz's cry: "*Your image persecutes you.*"

V

From the republics of scholarship to the commonwealth of receptive communities

In his concluding essay, "Modernity in the literary institution: Strategic Anti-Foundational Moves," John Fekete suggests that the modern critical nexus has five institutional dimensions (228-229) — discursive, intentional, modular, and methodical, the fifth being its ethic: "the institution of an anti-foundationalist ethos as a ... mode of justification and legitimation for a succession of theoretical adventures" (229). Fekete characterizes this intellectual institution in formation in North America over the past few decades as "*an anti-foundationalist language paradigm*" whose opening move was New Criticism with J.C. Ransom's 1939 announcement of "The Age of Criticism" (or, as Fekete observes less grandly, in a footnote, what Ransom also called "Criticism Inc."),[19] a critical and speculative revolution founded on the structure and constitution of an object. Ransom's "anti-foundational program" meant the exclusion from *all prior criticism* of everything but literary specificity — "that is, all that would have reduced literature to foundations on which a literary institution could *not* have been built" (230, emphasis added). The exclusion of foundational factors extrinsic to the text was an important strategic move that would not be re-raised until Foucault and then only within a formalization "by then firmly established and looking for socio-political density" (230).

After the New Criticism, Northrop Frye and his network contributed "a momentous institutional reorientation ... to integrate literature structurally as a decisive internal principle ... in Western civilization. ..." (230), while McLuhan "culminates" (231) the Anglo-American tradition by introducing, via recent French imports, the key mutations of "a cybernetic world on the analogy of the digital language of the text and ... regulatory metaphors of the media of communications" (231), an anti-speculative dissolution of the subject-object dualisms in a monism centred on cultural objectifications that the structuralist phase of institutional development continues in variant forms. French analytic rationalism, imported into North America, however, contributes to the transformation of the native pragmatism, among other traditions English and German. As a result,

> The North American literary institution, in a critical ecumenical spirit, may become the site of a larger intellectual life. The crisis in contemporary intellectual practice suggests that such ecumenicism may prove the most radical strategy (232).

Institutional ecumenicism, then, naturalizes the language paradigm (the

space of literary discourse) with ever greater priority and scope of formalization, for it allows the consumption of the analytic-empirical (structuralism), cybernetic critical and con-textual (post-structuralism), as well as customary (pragmatism), strategies:

> The place of the languages of criticism, meanwhile, is firmly assured, because they can be seen not as supplements but as necessities for the objective existence of the texts, not exterior to the texts but veritable intertexts moved into the gaps within the texts (238).

The shift toward consumption begun by Frye and McLuhan, which makes the role of criticism "indispensable" (239), also prepares the way for reception theory, "a field which ... has ... been gaining importance" (239), though it is only the "gentle" strain in American pragmatism (Stanley Fish's anti-utilitarianism) that completely shifts "the site ... of meaning (and) textuality itself" (239) to reception and its institutions, in a maneuver that "removes the last vestiges of parasitism or inferiority from criticism which (now) ... produces the very objects of its attention" (240). Thus completed as "the thing itself", criticism not only produces its own objects, but also its own communities of consumption that "provide for a full round of practical activities that we are always able to perform" (241).

It may thus be possible, cautiously and skeptically, on the basis of such an anti-foundational variant of pragmatism outside the language paradigm ("value axioms are prior to the practical valuations", 242), to: i) start up a form of history again, ii) articulate universal validity, and iii) "target a future" (242). Or at least this would be "desirable" (243), though "only time and the play of historical practices will prove the truth or give it the lie" (244). In the present *entente cordiale* of intra-continentalism, a

> multi-paradigm anti-foundationalist program can best redeem Saussure's call to study 'the life of signs' if to that study is attached a meliorist project to denaturalize, problematize and revalue the signs of life with practical emancipatory intent (246).

Dewey couldn't have said it better.

VI

American pragmatism and the interrationalist wars

Desirable as all this may be, Fekete, of course, is perfectly aware of the

downside: namely, that what makes ecumenism desirable at all is the prior existence of what he terms "the interrationalist wars" (244). Secondly, as he puts it, "What tends to be unelaborated here is the nature of the intensely interested competition among ... (interpretive) communities that amounts to each being defined against the other" (240). Thirdly, if Fish's new pragmatism is gentle, the more native anti-theoretical American varieties are not so, but deeply war-like.[20] As Harold Bloom cites William James:

> ... if you follow the pragmatic method, you cannot look on any ... word as closing your quest. You must bring out of each word its practical cash value. ... It appears less as a solution ... than as a program for more work, and an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed.*
>
> Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest .... we move forward and ... make nature over again by their aid. Pragmatism unstiffens all our theories ... and sets each one at work. Being nothing essentially new, it harmonizes with many ... philosophic tendencies ... nominalism ... utilitarianism ... (and) positivism in its disdain for verbal solutions, useless questions and metaphysical abstractions.[21]

Or as Randolph Bourne would put it, in a remorseful comment upon the implications of the war-like, technical subordinationalism of the young Deweyites:

> There seems to have been a peculiar congeniality between ... war and these men. ... Dewey ('s) ... disciples have learned all too literally the instrumental attitude toward life ... making themselves efficient instruments of the war-technique ... because they ... never learned not to subordinate idea to technique .... it never occurred (to us) that values could be subordinated to technique. We ... had our private utopias so clearly in our minds that the means always fell into place as contributory.[22]

As Kristeva, no enemy of American pragmatism but no positivist either, recently observed, the utilitarianism of American university discourse "possesses an extraordinary ability to absorb, digest and neutralize all of the key, radical or dramatic moments ... of contemporary thought."[23] And Wellek too had not only remarked that "the selection of European writers which have attracted the attention of modern critics in the United States is oddly narrow and subject to ... distortion ...," but also its extreme nominalism.[24]

As an auto-regulative, anti-speculative technique that harmonizes nominalism, utilitarianism and positivism, pragmatism becomes the American philosophy *par excellence*, the technique of the will to will as prior formalizing instrumentality, without cease or foundation beyond the "interrationalist wars", since it is ambiguously 'grounded', at one extreme, in the American burden (meta-language paradigm) of the competitive personality, and at the other by the deep anti-paradigmatic "split in American high culture that will evidently never end,"[25] and so is axiologically etc. structured to swing wildly between triumphalism and despair, between universalising passion and instituted cynicism. If ecumenism there is to be, it is likely as the ecumenism of armies, which may, after all, be fine with Fekete as he says of his ecumenism that it is radical in its assumption of the "full heritage" (245) of Western tradition, which would include its opportunities as well as its horrors.

VII

Canadianizing the United States/Americanizing Canada

Yet it may still be that Fekete's pragmatic wager in *The Structural Allegory* is to introduce for American reception a broader conception of ecumenism. Such a strategy would not only be desirable, but might also be expected of an influential Canadian thinker, who, like Frye or McLuhan before him, subscribes to the traditional diplomatic strategy of Canadianizing the United States.[26] It is significant here that nine of the 13 contributions to *The Structural Allegory* are from Canadian thinkers who form a deeply coexistive (recombinative) network that has revitalized the structural allegory with the nomic and necessitarian insights of the transcultural structural existentialism original to this continent that is distinctive of both Canadian and Mexican intellectual responses to the United States.[27] In this sense, a much broader encompassing or ecumenical paradigmatization of America itself might be able to contribute the quadrilateral side to the Anglo-American triangulation of native, French and German thought in the emerging North American literary institution Fekete describes. Or at least that's a less overtly politicized view of the Feketian wager, and it is not to be dismissed without sympathetic awareness of the risks entailed, particularly in Fekete's own remarks that the inside of Frye's integrative impulse was an isolated, if visionary, idealism, while McLuhan's U.S. reception meant that he "cravenly embraced his culture after a certain point" (231).

In closing, it might not be out of place to recollect that one of the foundational anti-foundationalist texts in American literature was Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "Earth's Holocaust" (1844), in which Ameri-

can reformers, frustrated that mankind, or science, had not yet attained perfection, ignite a giant bonfire onto which they toss the discarded signifiers of unmodern tradition, including books. As the blaze rises ever higher, the reformers fan the flames with the war-cry of triumphant modernity: "Onward! Onward!" And had the fire kept burning, into it might have been cast, among other texts, Arnold's barbaric lines on the barbarians of his civilization:

> ... We admire with awe
> The exulting thunder of your race;
> You give the universe your law,
> You triumph over time and space!
> Your pride of life, your tireless powers,
> We laud them, but they are not ours.

The presence of *The Structural Allegory*'s Canadians, warming themselves at the bonfire of metamodernist meliorizing neo-futurism, may indicate an extraordinary confidence in the cooling powers of a vigorous speculatively critical tradition seeking greater intra-institutional density. Or it may be simply that another network of fascinated spectators has plugged into the spectacular circuits of consumption in the contemporary superstructural simulations of the science of the institutional soap-opera, where, as Wallace Stevens once put it, we "behold the academies like structures in a mist."

Montréal, Québec

Notes

1. John Dewey, "Reconstruction as Seen Twenty-five Years Later" (1948), *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, New American Library: New York, 1950, 12.
2. *R in P*, 16-17.
3. 19.
4. 19.
5. 13, 18, 20-21, 22.
6. John Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," in David Van Tassel, ed., *American Thought in the Twentieth Century*, Thomas Y. Crowell: New York, 1967, 25.
7. *Ibid.*, 26.
8. Morton White, *Social Thought In America: The Revolt Against Formalism*, Beacon Press: Beacon Hill, 1957, 241.
9. *R in P*, 17.

10. "... le signe linguistique n'est si purement et si totalement signe que parce qu'il assume radicalement sa fonction de substitut ...", Groupe Mu, *Rhétorique générale*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1982, 18-19. Pierre Fontanier in his tropological system defines allegory as "... une proposition à double sens, à sens littéral et à sens spirituel tout ensemble, par lequel on présente une pensée sous l'image d'une autre pensée, propre à la rendre plus sensible et plus frappante que si elle était présentée directement et sans aucune espèce de voile. ...", *Les Figures du discours* (1821), Flammarion: Paris, 1977, 114.

11. *Principles of Literary Criticism*, Harcourt, Brace & World: New York, 1925, 1. Cf. "... a novel ... is a machine for generating interpretations," Umberto Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich: New York, 1984, 1-2.

12. "Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transcendentale Phänomenologie" (1936), in Emile Bréhier, *Contemporary Philosophy Since 1850*, trans. Wade Baskin, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1969, 242.

13. "Futurism and Revolution" (1924), in Chris Pike, ed. & intro., *The Futurists, the Formalists & the Marxist Critique*, Ink Links: London, 1979, 183-184.

14. René Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols Jr., Yale University Press: New Haven, 1963, 67.

15. *Ibid.* Fredric Jameson's astonishment that Russian Formalism had "so little impact on American critical practices" may perhaps be attributed to the prior impact of such American Formalists as F.W. Taylor, Henry Ford, or T.A. Edison's United Film Protective Association of the Film Manufacturing and Importers of the United States. See *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1972, 87.

16. Wellek, 67.

17. Serge Doubrovsky, *Pourquoi la Nouvelle Critique*, Denöel/Gonthier: Paris, 1966, 19.

18. Wellek, 64.

19. Another American modernist poet, Randall Jarrell, found that after a few years the Age of Criticism was "beginning to frighten me a little" particularly its "almost-autonomous" style, "that strange sort of Law French which the critic now can set up like a Chinese Wall between himself and the ... reader," "The Age of Criticism," in *Poetry and the Age*, Vintage Books: New York, 1955, 85, 65, 76. Of Ransom's poetical technique, Wellek notes a favoring of, as Ransom put it, a "single extended image to bear the whole weight of the conceptual structure," Wellek, 99.

20. Whatever its other merits, Fish's new pragmatism has contributed to a revival of the University of Chicago's institutional strategy of critical pluralism, a strategy which has been pursued since the 1930s. Of far graver moment is the likelihood that such a critical pluralism would be founded upon the exclusion of all the antinomians, poets, literary dissenters and other American heretics that congregate in the New Haven region, and have already been collectively designated as "revisionary madmen." See W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1985, 31 ff.

21. Harold Bloom, *Agon: Towards A Theory of Revisionism*, Oxford University Press: New York, 1982, 40.

22. Randolph S. Bourne, "Twilight of Idols," in Van Tassel, ed. *American Thought in the Twentieth Century*, 89.

23. "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," in W.J.T. Mitchell, ed. *The Politics of Interpretation*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1983, 83.

24. Wellek, 312, 93.

25. Bloom, *Agon*, 331.

26. Northrop Frye, *Divisions on a Ground: Essays on Canadian Culture*, Anansi: Toronto, 1982, 82. For recent Canadian critiques of both Frye and McLuhan, David Cook, *Northrop Frye: A Vision of the New World*, New World Perspectives: Montreal, 1985, esp. 101 ff; Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant*, New World Perspectives: Montreal, 1984, 52 ff. Also John Fekete, *The Critical Twilight*, Routledge & Kegan Paul: Boston, 1978.

27. For a Canadian perspective, Gaile McGregor, *The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in the Canadian Landscape*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1985. For Mexico, Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Grove Press: New York, 1961, esp. ch. VII. For an American theorist with a profound sensitivity to both Canadian and Mexican thought, see the writings of Michael A. Weinstein, *The Polarity of Mexican Thought*, Penn. State UP: University Park, 1976, and *Culture Critique: Fernand Dumont and New Quebec Sociology*, New World Perspectives: Montreal, 1985.