

*Structure: Human
Reality and
Methodological
Concept¹*

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First of all I would like to add a few things that I had left out of the text because they seemed so obvious.² I have tried to define the method of genetic structuralism using examples that could be easily understood: a cat hunting a mouse, two men lifting a table that would be too heavy for one man alone. These are events and it is a question of structure, but I am not saying that the behavior of these men or of this mouse, as such, constitutes a structure and that if the behavior were slightly changed we would have another structure. The problem of structure is also a problem of levels.

I have defined structure, as reality and as a concept of research, as originating from real behavior, but I must add that it originates from the solution of practical problems encountered by living beings.

Between the two extremes of individual problems concerning particular events and the most general categories of the human mind—which are purely formal and do not

¹“La Structure: Réalité humaine et concept méthodologique.” The text which follows is a translation and, in some instances, a paraphrase of the tape-recording of M. Goldmann’s lecture. The footnotes have been supplied by the translation.

²The reference is to a supporting essay (in French), distributed at the Symposium, which is printed as an appendix to this volume.

permit one to understand the difference say between a play of Racine and the *Iliad*—are situated all structures and structuralist analysis. It is impossible to situate them more precisely between these two extremes for two reasons. The first is that the transformation of a structure and the number of events that it can include depend on concrete situations: there are cases where social groups and individuals must change their mental structures very quickly in order to adapt to new situations. Next, on the level of research, it depends on the formulation of the problem and the type of solution that is sought. If I am studying the Jansenist group or the social context of a Pascal or Racine, I must—and this is the fundamental problem of all research—look for the group and circumscribe (*découper*) my object so that it can only be associated with a group which could solve a certain number of important practical problems with—and only with—a given set of mental structures, which, applied to the solution of imaginary problems, have resulted in the theater of Racine.

If I want to confront a much vaster problem such as foreign policy in the seventeenth century, I might have categories and structural patterns (*structuration*) which might include terms such as France or Holland or, inversely, at a much more limited level one might study segments of groups where a number of major structures would be involved. The *découpage* of the physicist's enterprise is different from the chemist's—the latter stops at molecules whereas the former goes all the way to atoms and particles. This

If we want to study a human phenomenon we must circumscribe the object in a certain way and try to determine the essential questions: Who is the subject? In whose life and practical activities (*praxis*) did the mental structures and categories and the forms of thought and affectivity arise which determined the origin and behavior of the object studied? At the level of the event there is neither sociology nor structuralism; for example, if we look at a play by Racine simply as a localized event it is impossible to explain and understand it. Inversely, if we go to the level of the most general structures it is history and transformation that disappear—and this is what is happening today in one current of structuralism.³ It is in this perspective that you must understand the two examples which I have taken as a point of departure.

³ For a further methodological discussion, see M. Goldmann's essay "Le Structuralisme génétique en histoire de la littérature," *MLN*, 79, 3 (1964): 225-39.

The fundamental thesis of all genetic structuralist sociology is that all human behavior, and more generally the behavior of any living being of some complexity, is significant [*a un caractère significatif*]. That is, it is a question of a subject who, within a certain situation, will change this situation in a way that is favorable to his needs and, on the human level, to his affective needs and concepts. In very general terms, there is a disequilibrium and the behavior is significant to the degree that it tends to re-establish an equilibrium. In man significant behavior is of course always accompanied by consciousness which introduces a complexity that must be taken into account in speaking of literature and culture. However it isn't always necessary to suppose consciousness. For example, a cat hunting a mouse behaves in a way that we can translate, when we study it, into a problem. The problem is how to find food and catching the mouse is the solution to this problem. Of course neither problem nor solution exists for the cat, but we can study the analogy between this behavior and cultural or social behavior. There are significant structures on this level: the behavior of the cat is not merely a sum of elements but a real structural pattern. The cat adapts itself; if there is an obstacle it will go to the left and then come back to the right. There is a structure of behavior and a physiological organization [*montage*] created in order for the cat to adapt to the situations that it faces. There is no consciousness here

History is constituted by the fact that, in the changing situation created by the action of the subject and by exterior interventions, structures, which have been developed as being rational and having a chance to fulfill their function to allow a group or an individual to live in conditions that existed previously, are no longer rational, and must be modified to fulfill their function. To forget—as a whole school of sociology has done—that, since all human reality is made up of overlapping structures, every structure fulfills a function within a larger structure and that a structure is defined as rational only by its ability to solve a practical problem, incurs the risk of denying history and assuming that everything takes place within one particular structure

It is within this dialectic that we find the separation of signifier and signified which, of course, is important only on the human level.

Here I would like to add a second, particularly important, distinction. Since psychoanalysis has familiarized us with the concept of the

unconscious, we too often, in speaking of the psychical, see only the [redacted]. However, for our analysis it is essential to distinguish [redacted]. I think it is best to leave to the word unconscious its psychoanalytical meaning which supposes a repression of things that are not accepted by consciousness. In addition to the conscious and the unconscious, there is a domain which is very important in our research and which can be called the implicit or [redacted]. This is obvious, for instance, where I talk of my physiology: I am not conscious of the physiological basis which determines the way I walk or run, but it is not unconscious. I have not repressed it and if a physiologist explains it to me, I will understand it and it will become conscious. The same situation exists on the psychical level; for example, I am not conscious of the structure of formal logic. [redacted]

I would now like to approach the extremely important problematic of the subject. When I say the cat catches a mouse, there is no problem: the cat is the subject of this behavior. However at the level where there is language and symbolic systems the situation is completely changed. A new element appears which makes it necessary to distinguish two different types of structures. This new element, which is made possible by communication, is the division of labor. Were one to take the subject in the very strict sense as the agent of the action, if this table is too heavy to be lifted by one person and if two people, say John and James, lift it, it is neither John nor James who lifts the table: it is John-and-James. This is very important, because when it becomes a question of transforming society, of modifying a whole combination of interior or exterior givens, there are no longer any individual subjects. [redacted]

[redacted] which must be distinguished. In the case of moving the table, between John and James lifting the table communication takes place *within the subject*; it is intrasubjective. If there were another person who didn't want John and James to remove the table, he would be the subject of another action, and they would speak as one subject to another. [redacted]

[redacted] E. Biological or libidinal behavior is transformed by communication; there is, for example, the interiorization of the other. But, however modified, there remains a domain of behavior in which, if one links consciousness and

symbolization to *praxis*, the subject remains an individual, intersubjective but individual. But with the division of labor, with a production that is related to a whole series of different behaviors, the situation is very different. Can we distinguish between the two types of subjects? In the first case we have an individual subject—intersubjective if you wish—for whom the other can be only an object—of love, of repulsion, of indifference, etc.—but not a subject. In the second case, what we have is a transindividual subject, in which the subject is made up of several individuals—transindividual signifying that the subject is always a group.

It is the group that is in charge of satisfying the need to appease hunger or to provide shelter and, at the other extreme of the scale, of building the Empire State building.

It is very important to add that in reality things are not separate. Taking our simple example again, let us say that there are six people lifting a table. It could happen that two of the six have complexes that will interfere with the action of moving the table or, inversely, individual intersubjective actions might be favorable to the moving of the table. The important point is that, in order to conduct a scientific study, I must first make distinctions. It is impossible to make an analysis of or to establish a dialectic from a mixture. Of course even at the transindividual level two groups which are opposed in one context might be united in another. Imagine for instance a conflict between workers and businessmen in a country which suddenly finds itself at war. A new solidarity between the two groups might arise. The overlapping is permanent and all individual consciousnesses are mixtures. However, the historian or the sociologist must always separate first the larger group from the individual and then the various sub-groups within the larger unit. If I am studying Jansenism, relating it to the *noblesse de robe*, I know very well that each individual Jansenist belongs to numerous other groups; but what interests me, in analyzing the Jansenist group, is whether what they have in common, in comparison to what separates them, will allow me to understand certain patterns of behavior which result precisely from the fact that they are together. What we have here is the conceptual necessity to divide our object of study and such a division is indispensable if our work is to be scientific.

Another very important problematic which I should like to take up

is that of the relationships between Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation and genetic structuralist sociological explanation. Here the importance of the concept of the subject becomes obvious. First, is the question of the subject purely a conceptual game, a matter of ideological sympathy? No, the question is essential from a scientific standpoint. In relationship to what does the object that I propose to study—the theater of Racine or the French Revolution—become comprehensible and intelligible? I should also like to ask what may sound like a naïve question, but think about it and try to take it seriously. Why should it be inconceivable that Racine could write a play which might express his individual, unconscious, and biographical problems while using a formal pattern (*schema*) which does not manifest an unresolvable contradiction, where there might be a predominance or a preference for reasons as in the great Cornelian dramas? I don't think that at an individual level you could say this to be impossible. But if the mental categories, the fundamental structures of Racine's tragedies, stem from a concrete historical situation such as that of the French parliamentarians, who were dissatisfied with the monarchy's centralist politics but who could not oppose the monarchy because they were dependent on it, one can hardly conceive of Racine taking a positive position or displaying Cornelian *générosité* at a time when his group was in a fundamentally unsatisfactory position in society.

The structural configuration of research is much different in the case of collective creation from that in dream analysis, where interpretation and explanation are inseparable. There are many common elements in psychoanalysis and genetic structuralism: the affirmation that all human behavior has a meaning; that to understand this meaning one must refer to a larger context—to the biography of the individual in one case or to history in the other—which goes beyond the level of the manifest. But there is a fundamental difference in that it is impossible in Freudian psychoanalysis to separate interpretation from explanation. That is, in interpreting a dream one must at the same time have recourse to the psychological category of the unconscious and to the whole totality in which the dream is inserted. I should like here to make a parenthesis.

Both are purely conceptual procedures in spite of the fact that comprehension is often thought of as being related to identification, empathy, sympathy, etc.

[redacted] For example, if I describe Jansenist mentality, thought, theology, I understand Jansenism; I am making an effort of comprehension; I am not explaining anything. But in understanding Jansenism I explain how the works of Racine and Pascal originated in Jansenism. I describe the relationships of the classes in seventeenth-century France; I am again in the process of describing a structure and making it comprehensible; but I am also explaining how Jansenism was born. Explanation is the insertion of the structure that we have described and understood into a larger structure in which it has its function and where I can understand the nature of its unity.

Let us note then th [redacted]

[redacted] Freud links interpretation to the unconscious, that is, psychological categories are necessary for interpretation. This may be because all forms of behavior of the individual subject originate in structures where consciousness enters only as an auxiliary element and has no autonomous structure.

In sociology the situation is very different. Here consciousness tends to create autonomous structures, structures that can be written, understood, and interpreted in themselves. I need sociology to see how they originated, but, for example, once I understand the genetic origin of French tragedy in the seventeenth century, I can explain the life of *Phèdre* without adding anything to or taking anything away from the text, which, by the way, gives us a quantitative criterion by which to judge an interpretation. An interpretation can be considered satisfactory only if it takes into account a high enough fraction of the text to be the only possible one—if one for instance is satisfied with accounting for only 60 per cent of the text, then there are at least six or seven interpretations.

I would say that all phenomena of consciousness are situated on a line with two extremities and that by understanding the two extremities we can understand what goes on between them. At one end we have the transindividual behavior of the group in which the individual subject's behavior produces no distortion—the individual either having sufficiently repressed his personal needs and drives or being remarkably well adapted. In this case the text can be interpreted autonomously, without explanation or recourse to symbolism. There is no need to extricate the subject in order to determine the mental structure which has created it, but it is there and it has its meaning. For example, in *Britannicus*, Narcissus is killed; Julie retires to the vestal virgins; Nero cannot enter. "Absolutely improbable!" the critics cried immediately.

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One doesn't enter the vestal virgins at eighteen years of age, and Nero entered the temple whenever he wanted to. Of course, but that is not the point. Within the mental structures of the Jansenist group, to which Racine belonged, the King, the temporal power, does not enter the temple. This doesn't mean that the temple in the play symbolizes the Christian Church or heaven. It does mean that the mental categories of the tragedy originated in a certain group of *noblesse de robe* and were formulated more precisely by the Jansenist group from which Racine came. Great cultural works are those which can be interpreted without adding anything—and where the interpretation takes into account 80 or 90 per cent of the text, that is to say, the only reading possible. Inversely, at the other end of the line, individual, libidinal problems intervene so forcefully that they completely deform social logic; for example in the case of dreams. Although dreams have a meaning, it cannot be communicated or autonomously interpreted at the explicit level of the dream. It is by explaining it that one interprets it, and even then one cannot interpret a dream without having recourse to the symbolic order, the unconscious and other similar categories. Between these two extremes, the great cultural creation and the dream or neurosis, are situated the enormous majority of individual consciousnesses and behavior, which are mixtures and mixtures cannot be analyzed. Social reality is always a mixture. Any historian will tell us that pure capitalism or pure feudalism are nowhere to be found. But these essential instrumental concepts are based on the structure of reality and allow us to understand the mixture.

Roland Barthes's talk is entitled "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" I believe he was right to raise the question but only at the individual level. As he once said, the writer writes for the sake of writing and as such he is different from the man of action who speaks or writes in order to act upon society. But if the question of writing is raised within the context of the logical structures of a collective subject, then the question as to whether "to write" is an intransitive verb is eliminated, for the problem of writing for its own sake is now raised in relationship to the collective subject of social life. Did Racine's works act upon society? For there is a division of labor and the problematic of literary history, like that of history, is to situate all human behavior in a framework within which it becomes necessary and comprehensible. And I remind you that this is only possible at the level of a transindividual subject. An analysis that remains on the personal level is equivalent, for instance, to the assertion that the workers that built The Johns Hopkins University worked only for their salary. This cannot

be derived. They were not interested in Hopkins. Yet through a division of labor and the elimination from consciousness of certain factors this University, a society, and social concepts have been constructed, and these workers have participated in this construction. The Cartesian ego, the theory of autonomous thought, the psychology of intransitive writing cannot be understood unless we situate them within a structure through which we can comprehend them and see them as one part of a collective subject which must be related to all the rest.

I would like now to pose a series of methods—logical problems. First, there exist two distinct levels of form. Beyond the pure form spoken of by the linguist or the semiologist, there is what could be called the form of content. Some might call this content, but it *is* form; it is the significant structure of the universe created by the writer. In both *Théophile* and *Faust* we are told the story of a man who has sold his soul to the devil. In *Théophile* such an act should lead to hell, and it is only through the intervention of the Virgin that the man gets to heaven. Whereas in *Faust* this very same act is the only way to heaven—as the fact that Marguerite gets to heaven after Faust clearly shows. The difference between the two is essential and makes for distinct structures. For another concrete example of this problem, consider the two plays: *Haute Surveillance* and *Les Bonnes*, both by Genêt. In each case we have two groups of individuals composed of a superior who is absent and two subordinate characters, one of whom kills the other at the end which leads to a new configuration symmetrical with the first—i.e., two new groups are formed one absent the other present. However there are also differences between these two plays. The characters are women in one case and men in the other. In *Les Bonnes* by killing one of the subordinate partners the maids arrive at a triumph, an apotheosis, while *Haute Surveillance* ends with a defeat. The universe of *Les Bonnes*, which does not exist in *Haute Surveillance*, can be exactly defined by the opposition between the dominated and the dominating, the impossibility of killing the dominating, and therefore the necessity—which did not exist in the other play—for the ritual murder of the absent mistress within an imaginary dimension (*dans l'imaginaire*).

It is the semantic material that we have analyzed, not the linguistic form of the message. The problem is whether one can analyze the structure of form, within a narrow linguistic or stylistic context, before knowing what the pure linguistic forms served to express, or what universe the writer wanted to convey. Personally, I have never

been able to do it, even though it should be theoretically possible. But from the perspective in which I am working I can point to a few cases where problems that stylists had encountered in working with certain formal structures have become clear once the form—meaning, as I indicated, form of content or form of a particular universe—was extricated. My first example will be taken from Pascal and will deal with the nature of the fragment and the structure of “the wager”; my second will deal with a line from Racine’s *Phèdre* which a whole series of French critics have considered either devoid of content or independent of the content of the play: “*la fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë*” [*the daughter of Minos and of Pasiphaë*]. You are familiar with all that was written about the “true outline” of the *Pensées*, until a structuralist analyst showed not only that the fragment as a literary form was necessary to Pascal but that—and this is far more important—he used it intentionally and that it was a Cartesian perspective that had prevented considering fragments as ends in themselves. For Pascal’s message is that Man is great in that he searches for absolute values but small in that, without ever ceasing to search, he knows that he can never approach these values. The only form to express this content is, of course, one which does not prove the contrary: which doesn’t show either a man who has abandoned the search or one who has approached the goal. The fragment is such a form. Let us not forget that in Jansenist literature there is a great deal of discussion about the relationship between content and form. What hasn’t been written about the dialogue of the wager and the question as to who is the partner? There is supposed to be a partner who is a libertine, because it is said that Pascal couldn’t bet with himself. Yet the text tells us that he does, for Pascal’s faith is a wager that is a total commitment to God, with the permanent possibility of its not being kept—an uncertain certitude. The text itself must then show both aspects of total commitment and of the refusal of such a commitment by him who bets in the void. We can see why the form in which Pascal cast his “wager” is a necessary one and perfectly adapted to its content.⁴

Now let us briefly turn to Racine’s line “*la fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë*” which has been considered by some to be pure sonority. In a sociological study of Racine I defined *Phèdre* as a being who does not seek her values in a world which is based on separation and compromise; *Phèdre* demands both extremes: Venus and the Sun, love

⁴For an extended discussion of “Le Pari de Pascal,” see *Le Dieu caché* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), pp. 315–37.

and glory, values which cannot be reconciled in Racine's universe. At this point the line "*la fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë*" suddenly becomes much clearer in its relationship to the play. Minos and Pasiphaë are opposites: not only is Pasiphaë in heaven and Minos in hell, but Minos is a judge in hell and Pasiphaë a sinner in heaven. These oppositions in turn correspond to the contrasting sonorities which characterize the composition of the verse. These examples were rather sketchy. I mentioned them only because I wanted to show that there was a possibility of bringing together abstract linguistic or stylistic forms with what I have chosen to call the form of content.

What I briefly tried to show in this analysis is that our research deals with intrasubjective structures with transindividual subjects. If I am asked, not why Racine's tragedies could be written from Port Royal but why it was Racine who wrote them, that is a problem for the psychoanalyst. Among twenty-five or fifty Jansenists it was Racine who found in this world-view the possibility of expressing his personal problems in a coherent manner. Another who might have arranged them a little less coherently would not have created a masterpiece. But the essential fact is that if I want to understand the meaning of Phèdre or of Genêt's plays, I must refer them not to the individual Racine or Genêt but to the social groups who worked out the structures with which the plays (which have no symbolic meaning) have created a rigorously coherent universe, the same structures which on the practical level facilitated the group's possibility for living. Therefore the important thing is to know with which *collective subject* one is dealing. To transfer problems with an individual subject to a collective social context—and vice versa—is absurd and dangerous even if the separation between the individual and the collective is clear only to the analyst.

I have already mentioned what I consider to be a fundamental contemporary problem: Can studies of the linguistic type be extended to the totality of signifieds, the thought or the universe that a work is intended to express? I doubt it very much. Valid and exciting as these studies may be in their own domain, my example related to the two plays of Genêt ought to show how they methodologically eliminate both the basic content and the subject. If from an infinite possibility of choices people choose only one particular structural configuration it is because of the need to express certain things and, inversely, what is expressed depends on the fact that it must be expressed in language. However, it should be obvious that the two are not identical. If applied

to the meaning or content of a work, linguistic studies will surely fail to grasp the form of meaning.

Furthermore, I believe that any study which attempts to explain the literary work by an individual subject will always encounter at least two fundamental difficulties. Most often it will be able to deal only with a limited number of elements of the work, namely those in which the writer has expressed his individual problems, perhaps in a symbolized form, but the structural configuration of the universe of a literary work is transindividual and it is this unity which will be missed. Even admitting that such an analysis might succeed, in an exceptional case, it will never be able to explain the difference between a masterpiece and the work of a lunatic which has an analogous individual function.

It is equally beside the point in the field of aesthetic sociology to do what nine-tenths of sociologists continue to do: to attempt to relate the content of a work with the content of the collective consciousness. It can be done. There is no writer who has not put in his work something of what he has seen or lived through, but the more mediocre a writer is, the less he has invented.

There is no Jansenist theology or morality in *Phèdre*; there are only *Phèdre*, Hippolyte, and Bérénice.

It is of little interest if I say that Racine is a representative of the *noblesse de robe*. He is much more. Great literary works, such as those of Racine, originate from a certain social situation but, far from being the simple reflection of a collective consciousness, they are a particularly unified and coherent expression of the tendencies and aspirations of a given group. They express what the individual members of the group felt and thought without being conscious of it or without being able to formulate it so coherently. They are a meeting of the personal and the collective on the highest level of

significant structuring. Their function is analogous to that of thought and action: to organize social structures so that life becomes more acceptable.

Discussion

ALBERT COOK: I think that the causal connection between John and James around the table is very simple, but the literary work transforms these meanings, even social meanings. Even if you account for Racine's work through genetic structures and even if your analysis maintains a perfect coherence between the individual and society, in any case, your question implies your answer. There are other questions as well, questions which, in fact, you have raised. For example, the question of Pascal. I am in perfect agreement that for Pascal the necessity of the fragment is clear. This question is independent of the social origins of Pascal's thought. Also your categories of closure and opening on Minos and Pasiphaë, with which I believe I am equally in agreement, are independent of your social analyses. What, then, is the necessity of sociology for such an analysis?

GOLDMANN: First allow me to make my thought a little more explicit. There is no causal connection between John and James. What there is, more exactly, is a common subject, a subject which is in the process of moving the table. Starting from there, if I want to understand what John is thinking and what James is thinking, there is a subject. There is no *we*; *we* is a pronoun which means *I* and *you*. In any case the relationship is not a causal one. This much is to specify and to eliminate a preliminary misunderstanding. But take the example of the daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë. Of course, I said myself, if I know that what is expressed in the work is a universe in which man must re-unite two opposite values or in which he must always search for absolute truths which he cannot find, then I don't need sociology. It remains to be seen, first of all, how I could have known this. For there is an enormous literature on both Racine and Pascal which has not known this. I don't believe there has been any coherent interpretation of Pascal. Now in order to know this, I would have had to ask myself first of all where the social group that thinks in a certain way is: it is in the *noblesse de robe* and in the Jansenist group that I found it. It is only within this group that this vision of the world came into being. It was a social group which, in translating its way of feeling and of thinking, worked out a theology and a morality, and then a genius arrived who gave it

an imaginary form in a play. But as I said, this is one of the theses. Once I have it, I can very well interpret the play and explain the fragment and Racine's verse without sociology. There is no sociology in the play.

JEAN HYPPOLITE: I simply wanted to say that what I can't understand is the relationship between structure and function. It seems to me that M. Goldmann's whole analysis is oriented toward function, rather than toward structure. Personally, without solving the problem in the same way that he does, I look for the structure before looking for the function. For you, there is no function except when it applies to a structure and no structure except when the structure is made for a function. When I take structure in the algebraic sense of the term, there I know what it means: there are commutative and distributive properties which belong to certain wholes; these are structures. When I take Proust's work and I see the way in which the sentences are organized, climbing one out of the other in a sort of perpetual re-ascent toward the past, to stem the irreversibility of time, I analyze a structure. When I take Proust's admirable work, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, and I see Proust imagining that he is speaking to his mother, I discover there a *structure* that exists elsewhere. But the discovery of the relationship of this structure in Proust to a general social function—I don't say that one is wrong to do it—I say that it is abusing the word *structure* to connect structure to function before analyzing the structure itself. That is what I want to say.

Homology between a social structure and a literary structure is a mathematical abuse, for I know what *homology* means in mathematics. I don't see what homology between a social and a literary structure means. That is why I don't contest what you are looking for; I look elsewhere. That is, I carry forward the analysis of structure before being predetermined by the notion of function. What I recognize as infinitely valuable in what you are doing is the sense of totality over or against any method which would consist in isolating the elements. The search for the totality in a structure is fundamental, but you abuse the word *structure* through a functionalism which is different from what we call analysis of structures, it seems to me. There you are; this is a remark rather than a criticism, strictly speaking.

GOLDMANN: Of course, it's not a matter of terminology. If we reserve the word *structure* for mathematical structures, then I will have to find another for literary structures. There is no doubt about that. But let's go beyond words and get to realities. What interests me is

that in a social group certain relationships are found which have the peculiar property that a certain change—to maintain their meaning—carries with it a whole series of other changes, which may be indicated. I shall take an example from Genêt. When, in the combat between the dominated and the dominating, the dominating cannot be beaten, ritual appears. Whereas it disappears with Saïd [in *Les Paravents*], because Saïd isn't beaten by anybody. The necessity for the revolutionary [in *Le Balcon*] to go into the house of illusions and ask to play the chief of police appears after the defeat. Of course these transformations take place inside a structure—call it a structure or a totality—but I want to say that this totality is not vague.

Now let us come to the relationship between function and structure. In research, of course, I don't begin with function because I must have the situation. I begin with a work of art and I look for its structural analysis. But in concrete research I go very quickly: it suffices to compare two articles, one which I published previously on *Le Balcon* and one that I am publishing now, to see the progression. A whole series of problems appears together which are difficult to solve, unless one has extraordinary intuition or is exceptionally lucky. That happens, unless one asks where and for what reason this way of seeing things was born. If you like, this manner of seeing wasn't born, at least not arbitrarily. I am not going to understand it from the perspective of individual biography, but rather from a group situation, which could have happened only as it did. Genêt is incomprehensible without taking into account the situation of the Left in Europe, in which his behavior begins to have the value of ritual, precisely because, whether for the moment or for a foreseeable future, social transformation has become difficult.

I didn't say what you attributed to me. There is only one thing which is valid. I said that the vital functions of the individual or trans-individual subject in a world situation cannot be satisfied because one never succeeds in obtaining complete satisfaction of needs and aspirations except with the aid of global attitudes in which similar changes can be established, attitudes which I call structures. I didn't say that the structure searches out function or that there is no function before structure. There is function: there is the need for the cat to eat; but that depends on where it is, in a cage or a field, or elsewhere. Perhaps there are also biological transformations and I am not enough of a biologist to take on this problem. But in the social domain it is clear. At a certain time it is forbidden for Christians in the West to charge interest. Then, one fine day, it becomes normal and is introduced

among the Protestants. This happens through modifications in European Christian thought, but I think that it is connected with a change in the situation. Previously loans were given to unfortunate and poor people during a strike, but now loans are given to rich people to carry on business affairs, because a certain economic structure has developed. Therefore it is inside this new situation that certain attitudes are changed. Without relation to function the transformation disappears. All writers have said the same thing, except at a very formal level, and if I find common structures and common elements in all stories, I don't know when there is a difference between Perrault's tales and Grimm's tales. However, it is very important to know. It is a matter of knowing why forms of thought are transformed. I must deal with groups which try to live, which must behave in a certain manner on the level of reality, of conception, of imagination, and that is all I said.

HYPPOLITE: It is not a retraction when I say that it is an effort; there is always a fundamental primacy in thought.

GOLDMANN: Ontologically yes; for research one begins with structure, because one doesn't have the thought.

HYPPOLITE: I am not sure of your ontological primacy. Yet, I am sure that research must start with structures. Everything is constructed from the beginning.

GOLDMANN: Most of my students will tell you that that is not what I teach them first.

HYPPOLITE: But I wanted to make you say that everything is ordered by you; yes, by an ontological investigation of functions. That is what is fundamental.

GOLDMANN: Yes, I can reply to you. What I want to say is very simple. When you are dealing with mathematical structures, you can define them, define their coherences precisely. They seem to be general forms for every human mind. And I am dealing with questions of this type. For example (let us suppose that it is well formulated—I haven't prepared my text), why is there no rigorous opposition for Montaigne between different forms of individualism, scepticism, stoicism, epicurianism, etc., while in the seventeenth century it would lead to total incoherence to mix them. It is a completely different world from that of Molière, Gassendi, Descartes, and Corneille. The answer is not immanent. It is not a unity; the unity is not of the logical type. The unity results from the existential situation. The essential problem was

to find the forms of individualism at a certain moment in the seventeenth century when individualism is acquired by all the fundamental groups. It is a matter of finding out how. It is beginning from the situation and from the necessity of a functional reply that you have coherence at the cultural level which is not mathematical.

RICHARD MACKSEY: This is just an aside, but without engaging the larger question of immanent hermeneutics, I did want to suggest that your example of the identity of Grimm's tales and Perrault's tales will not wash with the history of folklore studies. It was precisely when, in the 1920s, the emphasis of ethnographic studies was shifted *away from* speculations about origins *toward* the synchronic, formal aspects of the folktale that the great morphological achievements we associate with the names of Propp and Shklovski (on the prose of the Russian fairy tale) were at last possible. Here in North America, Dundes, using both Propp's pioneer work and Kenneth Pike's structural model, has extended the method to native materials. Of course, the original studies were the result of an international co-operation in synchronic analysis, stemming from the Finnish-American ethnographers as well as from the Russian Formalists, but I'd readily admit that the subsequent assimilation of such elements as Pike's model introduces into questions of structure new functional considerations (if not quite in your sense of the term). Pace Lévi-Strauss.

PETER CAWS: I find myself in almost total agreement with Mr. Goldmann on the nature and even on the necessity of structural analysis. The thing that is perplexing me is the status of the transindividual subject, and I can see that the *we* is a linguistic device—we have to use it this way—or I can see it as part of a hypothetical reconstruction of human behavior, but I wonder if Mr. Goldmann wants to push it to an ontological status so as to say the transindividual subject is a real subject having in that case to revert to what he spoke of at the beginning, the possibility of a transindividual consciousness, a transindividual unconscious, a transindividual nonconscious perhaps?

GOLDMANN: I would like to specify that I did not use the term transindividual consciousness. There is no consciousness except in the individual. But I say that to understand the consciousness of the individual, his youth, his transformations, I must link them to behavior, not to his behavior, but to behavior in which he does not have the status of subject. I return to my elementary example, but it is valid for all. Who carries out the table? Does John? Does James? In behavior, in a thought, there is a subject side and an object side. Is John or James

on the object side? In carrying out the table, does John think of the other end of the table as having the same status? Or does he know very well that his consciousness must take into account the fact that two men are carrying out the table? Inside the individual consciousness there are structurations in which every other is object—object of love, of desire, of hate—and elements in which there is no individual coherence because the coherence is situated on the level of the fact that the action is carried out by two. And I believe that that is a given, permanent reality. Then, when one tries to see the coherence of Racine's work in relationship to Racine, one doesn't succeed. But when one tries to see the coherence of Racine's work—and this is always valid for great works—in relationship to the group, then one finds coherences that Racine never even suspected, because he simply has the aesthetic need to construct a coherent universe, without knowing why. And coherence is achieved in relationship to the group. I said that all our knowledge implies a subject-pole and an object-pole. In my text I have three points concerning the subjective and the objective element of all knowledge. I'm sorry that I didn't read them because of the time.

RICHARD SCHECHNER: In regard to the theater, I wonder how you treat the real event of performance, including the audience, the theater building, and the entire environment of the theatrical event. What effect does this have on your analysis of the aesthetic event going on in that environment? Especially in regard to the modern theater, Genêt and Beckett and Ionesco, when the writer uses the mechanics of the theater, when the very fact of the theatrical event is introjected into the text, how does this affect your analysis?

GOLDMANN: All I can say about this is what I have already said, that this sort of thing can be done, but that I haven't done it. The problem is one of sufficient research. A whole series of research projects would be necessary, based on the total structure of the message and its relationship to all the modes of expression, not only language but the theatrical whole and the consciousness of the theater. That would assume a chair in the sociology of the theater in addition to another chair in the sociology of literature which would be concerned with the formal relationships between means of expression and that which is expressed. But here is a problem that I am dealing with in my own research. The problem is in regard to Sartre and Genêt: what they have to say and the questions that they ask are transformed at a given moment. And at this point both Sartre and Genêt change from prose

writing to the theater. Sartre first tries to write a novel with the new problematic, *L'Age de la Raison*, which everyone today agrees is not a masterpiece; it doesn't have the value of either *La Nausée* or *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*. He discovers very quickly that what he wants to say can only be said in a play. Genêt, who was a novelist, also changes suddenly to the theater in order to deal with a new problematic. Why? I don't know; but I think that an answer is possible, although it might require a year or two of work on the question.

EUGENIO DONATO: I would like to take up an old discussion in terms of what you have said today. It seems to me that your project can be defined as follows. I want to be scientific, therefore I must eliminate the problem of the observer. I must find a means of speaking of the object without taking into account the one who speaks of it. In this way, you end up confusing what I would call a distinction between the subject of the science and the science of the subject. For example, physics would amount to what is happening in this table. Whereas physics, as physics, is the knowledge that is being communicated, by means of certain signs and symbols, in a building near here, and which is independent of what is happening in this table. I think you are taking an absolutely empirical notion of structure. To begin with, you want to consider any situation as a structure and then to look for its functions. Personally, I don't see how we can define a structure without beginning with functions which put the terms of the structure into relationship. To return to the question of science, it is obvious that through the precise formulas of each scientific language one can give any element the status of subject. Let us say that in a certain formula the atom functions as subject. But the collective *we* can also be taken in that sense. It becomes a very different *we* from that which is spoken in communication through a subjectivity which thinks this science. You speak of physics and chemistry as if they spoke of the same subject, but they don't. And they constitute their subject through the different languages that they speak.

GOLDMANN: Do you mean subject or object?

DONATO: Object.

GOLDMANN: To indicate that I didn't intend to eliminate subjectivity and that everything that you have just said on science and the significant and subjective structure of science is an important problem, I will read a few passages in my talk that I skipped for purely temporal

reasons. I begin by saying that scientific results obtained from human facts can be neither purely subjective nor purely objective for two reasons. The first reason is that which you have indicated: science is itself a significant structure. The second reason which reinforces the first is that the same collective subject studies objects which it has made by means of concepts which it has made. Furthermore, I said that the fundamental difference between the human sciences and the physico-chemical sciences is that the latter have values which, although not absolutely objective, are at least objective in the general sense that is valid for everybody today: mastery of nature. For the moment, however, it is absolutely impossible to conduct the human sciences in this perspective because the values of structures are still specific and particular. The three reasons you give for the impossibility of objectivity are, therefore, briefly outlined in my text. However, it is at this point that the problem begins. I also said that these elements do not mean that our efforts are purely arbitrary, and in spite of them we must attempt to conduct scientific research, for which the empirical fact is the only criterion. You know that I have dealt with this problem elsewhere and that it is very difficult to discuss it here in this short period of time. In order to conduct scientific research one must be perfectly conscious of the difficulties and try to overcome them. The objectivity that is not that of an object without a subject, but that of validity for all men, is what all science must try to approach as nearly as possible, while realizing that it can never really attain it. But this difficulty is different and much greater for the human sciences than for the natural sciences.

DONATO: How do you distinguish these three levels: the empirics of physics, physics as a language of signs, and physics as the control of nature?

GOLDMANN: I am quite willing to admit one thing which doesn't change my position at all. Today the relationship between empirical problems and theoretical problems in physics is very mediated because the science is made up of research apparatus and conceptual operations which, for the most part, are concerned with internal problems. But the science had its origins in the problems of life. On the level of research, it is obvious that every theory must be experimentally confirmed, even if we have to wait fifty to one hundred years to be able to conduct the experiment. Anyway, I think it is obvious that modern physics serves to control nature; you have only to take an airplane

from here to Paris to see that, in spite of the fact that the physicist may be a pure theoretician who is not at all interested in the mastery of nature.

MACKSEY: This is just a qualifying aside on the relation of empirics to theory, but I think that those of us outside the natural sciences too readily assume, with Bacon, that confirmation is simply a matter of adequate quantification, instrumentation, and "crucial experiment." After all, within the hypothetico-deductive framework there has been, since Duhem, increasing scepticism about experiment as a means of establishing and, even more recently, disconfirming theory in the natural sciences. The shadow of Hume is a long one, despite even such modern ruses as using probability inference, and some would simply argue that the abandonment of any theory is really a problem for the sociology of knowledge and not empirics.

JEAN-PIERRE VERNANT: I would like to make three related points. The first is the necessity of separating, more than you do, the ideas of structure and meaning [*signification*]. You say, for example, that the behavior of a cat chasing a mouse is structured and consequently has a meaning. This behavior has a meaning for you, just as the structure of a crystal has meaning for a physicist, but this is obviously not *meaning* as the word is used in relation to human phenomena. In other words, what must be taken into consideration here is what certain psychologists call the symbolic function. This is the fact that man is set apart from animal conduct as well as physical facts by language, by the fact of meaning. This is the human reality which cannot be reduced to biological or physical elements.

My second point is that the notion of *subject*, which you have brought into the discussion, is a very confusing one. In the case of human phenomena we are dealing with a level of meaning rather than of subject. On the linguistic level, I know what *subject* means. It is a grammatical form in relationship with the verb. (Even here, there are languages which don't have this system.) But when you say *subject* there is a whole series of implicit contents. There is the notion of *subjectivity* which arose at a certain period in the western world when an 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. I think that instead of saying *subject* we should say the *human level*.

The third point is the relationship between structure and function.

In your discussion with M. Hyppolite you both seemed to use *structure* as the internal structure of the work, as a work, and *function* as something social. That doesn't seem to me to be exactly the nature of the problem. If you want to maintain, in opposition to certain structuralists, that structures cannot be stated independently of functions, then functions cannot be social, but as functions they must be linked to structures. It was the linguists who first emphasized structural studies, but certain linguists say that the structures of language cannot be analyzed apart from the function of language: communication, the need to decipher a message following binary rules. The function of mathematical signs is not communication but to permit definite operations through a language in which each word has an exact signification. In analyzing the structures of kinship, as Lévi-Strauss does, one might ask what, apart from communication, is the function of kinship. When you analyze the structures of myth you might ask if the function of these structures is communication or something else. And when you examine aesthetic structures the problem is, I believe, to determine their functions within the work, and not simply their social functions.

GOLDMANN: I think that we are entirely in agreement on the first point. I said very explicitly that the behavior of the animal is *translatable* in terms of problems to be resolved, but that there is no differentiation of signifier and signified and no communication. One of the central ideas of my talk was that, at the moment when communication appears, the nature of what I call the subject is transformed: in place of the individual subject we then see the transindividual subject in which subjectivity is only an internal element. Therefore I did make this distinction, although I also spoke of intersubjectivity. I also emphasized the fact that there is no consciousness. But I believe there is also a danger of forgetting that through language and the detours of civilization (division of labor) and technology (the transindividual subject at more and more complicated levels) all of this is still linked to praxis. The cat must live and, in spite of everything, men think and act, with all the complexity that that implies, in order to survive and solve their problems. I emphasized the difference just where you indicate it by saying that the problem does not exist for the cat, but only in my study of it. But I think we must also emphasize the relationship in order to avoid arriving at the idea that thought can be independent of praxis.

All I want to say about the subject is that in order to understand the cat's behavior I must relate it to a being who acts and brings about

transformations. Every time I approach a human problem, at whatever level, I must—if I don't want to see it as a purely intellectual or aesthetic phenomenon—establish its intelligibility in relationship to behavior. A certain case of behavior, thought, or imagination becomes intelligible only when I relate it to a group situation. For the natural sciences this group situation may be mankind in nature, but in other cases it must be a much more specific group. In this sense I am speaking of a subject and a very mediated action because, finally, I believe that Racine's work is only immediately written by Racine. To write it he needed a whole world-view, a whole group of problems, and an orientation of solutions which had been worked out at various levels by 400 Jansenists and, before them, thousands of Parlementarians in France. That is what I refer to when I speak of the subject, not to the individual subject but to the subject with intelligible behavior. There is always a subject which is not an expression of individual subjectivity, but of a group with mental categories to conceive the world and to resolve aesthetic problems. Individual behavior does exist; it is primarily biological, eating for example. However, producing food is cultural behavior.

I think we should be in agreement on functions. I said that every human phenomenon is a structure in that it is found within a larger phenomenon and in a relationship which I can understand only in terms of functions. To be sure, there is a function of the element within the work, this element being a very reduced structure inside a global work. However, the work itself is inserted in a larger totality and I see no reason to stop at the last page of Racine's *Phèdre*. The larger structure in which *Phèdre* is inserted is multiple. First there is its meaning for the individual, which is studied by the psychologist or the psychoanalyst. There is also its meaning in the structure of the seventeenth century. Finally, it has another meaning at each later point in history. Each element in each structure has a function in each totality, and this continues indefinitely. Thus there is an internal function but also an external function.

JACQUES LACAN: M. Goldmann has just shown how difficult it will be for me to communicate to you tomorrow what I have, just this morning, with the kind help of my translator, begun to put into a form worthy of this present meeting. M. Goldmann is already well known to you, having taught here for several months. What I may have to contribute will be less familiar. I have tried to prepare something which will represent the first cutting-edge of my thought. Since

this project is something I have been working on for fifteen years, you will understand that tomorrow's exposé cannot be exhaustive. However, in order to facilitate my task and to prepare your ear, I should like to say this: A few words concerning the *subject*. I feel that they are necessary since I interjected the term yesterday and since even M. Derrida here asked me at dinner, "Why do you call *this* the subject, this unconscious? What does the subject have to do with it?" In any case, it has nothing whatsoever to do with what M. Goldmann has talked about as *subject*. Of course it is only a question of terminology, and M. Goldmann can use the term *subject* to mean anything he likes. But what I should like to emphasize is the fact that what characterizes M. Goldmann's subject (which is very close to the commonplace definition) is the function of *unity*, of a unifying unity. His subject is the subject of knowledge, the support (false or not) of a whole world of objects. And M. Goldmann carries over this function of unity into fields other than that of knowledge, into the sphere of action for example, when he calls John and James carrying a table a single subject in so far as they are united in this common action.

But what prompts me to speak is the fact that I have had just this experience. I did not myself (although my name is "James" [*Jacques*]) move a table together with John, but I did not do so only for reasons of personal fatigue and not because I lacked the will to move it myself, as you will see. However what happened was quite different.

I was in a local hotel whose name I won't mention (known to all of you) and I wanted to have a table, which was against a wall, moved in front of the window, in the interest of working for this meeting. To the right of the window there was a chest of drawers which would have prevented this. I picked up the telephone and asked for some one to help me. There appeared a very dignified, white-haired character who had on his uniform the designation (which still has no very precise meaning for me, although things have since changed) "Bellman" To this name, which must mean "beautiful man," I did not pay attention right away. I said to the "Bellman" in my English (imperfect, as you will see tomorrow, but sufficient to communicate a request) that what I wanted was to put this table by the window, and the chest in the place of the table. Those here who belong to the American community will not be surprised at the simple gesture I got in reply. "See here. I'm the Bellman. Whom do you take me for? That's a job for the Housekeeper." I said "No matter. All I want is to get the job done. Please be kind enough to notify the housekeeper, so that it won't be too late." I must say that in an exceptionally short time for this hotel

I got the housekeeper and was then entitled to the service of two blacks (again without waiting too long, since I was able to explain myself on the subject of my wishes). They arrived and, apparently paying very little attention to my request (they even seemed to be listening to something else), they did what I asked. They did it, I would say, *almost* perfectly, for there remained a few little imperfections in the job, but such definite imperfections that they could not have been unintentional.

Now where is the *subject* of this little story? At first glance (but you will quickly see why I do not stop at this) the subject is obviously myself, in so far as I was found wanting in the whole situation, for the important point in the story is obviously not the fact that I was the one who gave the order and, finally, got satisfaction, but rather the way in which I failed altogether by not asking, in the first place, for the proper person among the reigning hotel hierarchy, in order to obtain this service without too great a delay. Anyway this gives me an opportunity to point up the difference between subject and subjectivity. I might assuredly be the subject if it were only a question of this *lack*. I am the subjectivity in as much as, undeniably, I evinced throughout the affair a certain impatience.

On the other hand what seems to me to be the subject is really something which is not *intra* nor *extra* nor *intersubjective*. The subject of this affair seems to me (and don't take it amiss; I say it without the slightest derogatory intention, but fully aware of the weight of what I will propose): What sort of subject characterizes a style of society in which everyone is theoretically as ready to help you as the question "May I help you?" implies? It's the question your seat-mate immediately asks you when you take a plane—an American plane, that is, with an American seat-mate. The last time I flew from Paris to New York, looking very tired for personal reasons, my seat-mate, like a mother bird, literally put food into my mouth throughout the trip. He took bits of meat from his own plate and slipped them between my lips! What is the nature of this subject, then, which is based on this first principle, and which, on the other hand, makes it impossible to get service? Such then is my question, and I believe, as regards my story, that it is here, on the level of this *gap*—which does not fit into *intra* or *inter* or *extrasubjectivity*—that the question of the subject must be posed.

CARROLL PRATT: One final comment is perhaps relevant to Lucien Goldmann's paper and the lively discussion aroused by the ideas ex-

pressed in that paper, especially the insistence that a literary work, or for that matter any work of art, cannot be properly understood and criticized apart from the social, ethical, religious, and economic milieu in which it was created and produced. This argument is an extension and application of the doctrine of *Gestalttheorie*. The Gestalt psychologists maintain that the whole—the *Gestalt*—has a property that cannot be deduced from the parts, and that the parts are meaningless unless perceived in relation to the whole, e.g., a melody. The last three notes of *God Save the Queen* are the same as the first three notes of *Three Blind Mice*, provided the two melodies are sung or played in the same key. Yet it is highly unlikely that either melody has ever served as a reminder of the other, although the old law of association might lead one to suppose that the beginning of *Three Blind Mice* would immediately suggest the cadence of *God Save the Queen*, or vice versa, because of the presence in both melodies of identical elements arranged in a familiar sequence. The fact that such is not the case lends support to the Gestalt view that wholes and parts are inextricably interrelated in perception, and especially to the insistence that the parts of a perception acquire significance only when they are studied in relation to the total configuration.

It is questionable whether *Gestalttheorie* is applicable in this fashion to the analysis and criticism of works of art. The theory was formulated largely as a protest against the methods by which classical psychologists studied perception. *Sensations* were regarded as the elements of mind, and since perception was thought of as the sum of sensory elements, the way to study perception was to make a minute quantitative inventory of the elements and then find out how they were pieced together in perception. The Gestalt psychologists produced powerful evidence and arguments against this atomistic doctrine. But *Gestalttheorie* does not argue that a perception, which is itself a *Gestalt* or whole, can only be understood in relation to still larger wholes. If such were the case, nothing could be understood apart from the totality of human experience, which is obviously absurd. Every whole, even if part of a larger whole, has intrinsic, self-contained properties that can be fruitfully studied in their own right, which of course does not preclude the possibility that the appreciation of those properties may be enhanced by a knowledge of their context or setting. But the latter are not necessary conditions for appreciation. The symphonies of Mozart and the novels of Tolstoi are self-contained units that possess intrinsic miracles of creativity which do not depend for their existence on the context in which they were produced—a situa-

tion quite different from the individual notes of a melody which have little significance apart from their place in the melody. It is worthy of note that the Gestalt psychologists often speak of *segregated* wholes, as if to emphasize the independence of such units. A melody is a segregated and independent whole, whereas the notes that go to make up the melody are dependent elements. The same distinction does not apply with equal force, if indeed it applies at all, to the relation of a whole to still larger wholes. If it did, literary and artistic criticism would never be able to get under way.