

To Write:
An Intransitive
Verb?¹

Roland Barthes
Ecole Pratique
des Hautes Etudes

For centuries Western culture conceived of literature not as we do today, through a study of works, authors, and schools, but through a genuine theory of language. This theory, whose name, *rhetoric*, came to it from antiquity, reigned in the Western world from Gorgias to the Renaissance—for nearly two thousand years. Threatened as early as the sixteenth century by the advent of modern rationalism, rhetoric was completely ruined when rationalism was transformed into positivism at the end of the nineteenth century. At that point there was no longer any common ground of thought between literature and language: literature no longer regarded itself as language except in the works of a few pioneers such as Mallarmé, and linguistics claimed very few rights over literature, these being [limited to] a secondary philological discipline of uncertain status—stylistics.

As we know, this situation is changing, and it seems to me that it is in part to take cognizance of this change that we are assembled here: literature and language are in the process of finding each other again. The factors of this *rapprochement* are diverse and complex; I shall cite the most obvious. On one hand, certain writers since Mallarmé, such as Proust and Joyce, have undertaken a radical exploration of writing, making of their work a search for the total Book. On the other hand, linguistics itself, principally following the impetus of Roman Jakobson, has developed to include

¹"Ecrire: Verbe intransitif?" The translation which follows is a composite of the communication which M. Barthes distributed in advance to the Symposium participants and the actual transcription of his address. The footnotes have been supplied by the translator.

within its scope the poetic, or the order of effects linked to the message and not to its referent. Therefore, in my view, we have today a new perspective of consideration which, I would like to emphasize, is common to literature and linguistics, to the creator and the critic, whose tasks until now completely self-contained, are beginning to inter-relate, perhaps even to merge. This is at least true for certain writers whose work is becoming more and more a critique of language. It is in this perspective that I would like to place the following observations (of a prospective and not of a conclusive nature) indicating how the activity of writing can be expressed [*énoncée*] today with the help of certain linguistic categories.

This new union of literature and linguistics, of which I have just spoken, could be called, provisionally and for lack of a better name, *semio-criticism*, since it implies that writing is a system of signs. Semio-criticism is not to be identified with stylistics, even in a new form; it is much more than stylistics. It has a much broader perspective; its object is constituted not by simple accidents of form, but by the very relationships between the writer [*scripteur*, not *écrivain*] and language. This perspective does not imply a lack of interest in language but, on the contrary, a continual return to the "truths"—provisional though they may be—of linguistic anthropology. I will recall certain of these truths because they still have a power of challenge in respect to a certain current idea of literature.

One of the teachings of contemporary linguistics is that there is no archaic language, or at the very least that there is no connection between simplicity and the age of a language: ancient languages can be just as complete and as complex as recent languages; there is no progressive history of languages. Therefore, when we try to find certain fundamental categories of language in modern writing, we are not claiming to reveal a certain archaism of the "psyche"; we are not saying that the writer is returning to the origin of language, but that language is the origin for him.

A second principle, particularly important in regard to literature, is that language cannot be considered as a simple instrument, whether utilitarian or decorative, of thought. Man does not exist prior to language, either as a species or as an individual. We never find a state where man is separated from language, which he then creates in order to "express" what is taking place within him: it is language which teaches the definition of man, not the reverse.

Moreover, from a methodological point of view, linguistics accustoms us to a new type of objectivity. The objectivity that has been required

in the human sciences up until now is an objectivity of the given, a total acceptance of the given. Linguistics suggests, on the one hand, that we distinguish levels of analysis and that we describe the distinctive elements of each of these levels; in short, that we establish the distinctness of the fact and not the fact itself. On the other hand, linguistics asks us to recognize that unlike physical and biological facts, cultural facts are always double, that they refer us to something else. As Benveniste remarked, the discovery of the "duplicity" of language gives Saussure's reflection all its value.²

These few preliminaries are contained in one final proposition which justifies all semio-critical research. We see culture more and more as a general system of symbols, governed by the same operations. There is unity in this symbolic field: culture, in all its aspects, is a language. Therefore it is possible today to anticipate the creation of a single, unified science of culture, which will depend on diverse disciplines, all devoted to analyzing, on different levels of description, culture as language. Of course semio-criticism will be only a part of this science, or rather of this discourse on culture. I feel authorized by this unity of the human symbolic field to work on a postulate, which I shall call a postulate of *homology*: the structure of the sentence, the object of linguistics, is found again, homologically, in the structure of works. Discourse is not simply an adding together of sentences: it is, itself, one great sentence. In terms of this hypothesis I would like to confront certain categories of language with the situation of the writer in relation to his writing.

The first of these categories is *temporality*. I think we can all agree that there is a linguistic temporality. This specific time of language is equally different from physical time and from what Benveniste calls "chronicle time" [*temps chronique*], that is, calendar time.³ Linguistic time finds quite different expression and *découpages* in various languages. For example, since we are going to be interested in the analysis of myths, many languages have a particular past tense of the verb to indicate the past time of myth. One thing is sure: linguistic time al-

² Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de la linguistique générale* (Paris, 1966), p. 40. "Qu'est-ce donc que cet objet, que Saussure érige sur une table rase de toutes les notions reçues? Nous touchons ici à ce qu'il y a de primordial dans la doctrine saussurienne, à un principe qui présume une intuition totale du langage, totale à la fois parce qu'elle embrasse la totalité de son objet. Ce principe est que le langage, sous quelque point de vue qu'on l'étudie, est toujours un objet double, formé de deux parties dont l'une ne vaut que par l'autre.

³ Cf. Benveniste, "Les Relations de temps dans le verbe français," *ibid.*, pp. 237-50.

ways has its primary center [*centre générateur*] in the present of the statement [*énonciation*]. This leads us to ask whether there is, homologous to linguistic time, a specific time of discourse. On this point we may take Benveniste's explanation that many languages, especially in the Indo-European group, have a double system of time. The first temporal system is that of the discourse itself, which is adapted to the temporality of the speaker [*énonciateur*] and for which the *énonciation* is always the point of origin [*moment générateur*]. The second is the system of history or of narrative, which is adapted to the recounting of past events without any intervention by the speaker and which is consequently deprived of present and future (except periphrastically). The specific tense of this second system is the aorist or its equivalent, such as our *passé simple* or the preterit. This tense (the aorist) is precisely the only one missing from the temporal system of discourse. Naturally the existence of this a-personal system does not contradict the essentially logocentric nature of linguistic time that I have just affirmed. The second system simply lacks the characteristics of the first.

Understood thus as the opposition of two radically different systems, temporality does not have the morphological mark of verbs for its only sign; it is marked by all the signs, often very indirect, which refer either to the a-personal tense of the event or to the personal tense of the locutor. The opposition in its fullness permits us first to account for some pure, or we might say classic, cases: a popular story and the history of France retold in our manuals are purely aoristic narratives; on the contrary, Camus' *L'Etranger*, written in the compound past, is not only a perfect form of autobiography (that of the narrator, and not of the author) but, what is more valuable, it permits us to understand better the apparently anomalous cases.⁴ Being a historian, Michelet made all historical time pivot around a point of discourse with which he identified himself—the Revolution. His history is a narrative without the aorist, even if the simple past abounds in it; inversely, the preterit can very well serve to signify not the objective *récit*, but the depersonalization of the discourse—a phenomenon which is the object of the most lively research in today's literature.

What I would like to add to this linguistic analysis, which comes from Benveniste, is that the distinction between the temporal system of discourse and the temporal system of history is not at all the same distinction as is traditionally made between objective discourse and

⁴ Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Explication de *L'Etranger*," *Situations I* (Paris, 1947), pp. 99-121.

subjective discourse. For the relationship between the speaker [*énonciateur*] and the referent on the one hand and that between the speaker and his utterance [*énonciation*] on the other hand are not to be confused, and it is only the second relationship which determines the temporal system of discourse.

It seems to me that these facts of language were not readily perceptible so long as literature pretended to be a transparent expression of either objective calendar time or of psychological subjectivity, that is to say, as long as literature maintained a totalitarian ideology of the referent, or more commonly speaking, as long as literature was realistic. Today, however, the literature of which I speak is discovering fundamental subtleties relative to temporality. In reading certain writers who are engaged in this type of exploration we sense that what is recounted in the aorist doesn't seem at all immersed in the past, in what has taken place, but simply in the impersonal [*la non-personne*], which is neither history, nor discursive information [*la science*], and even less the *one* of anonymous writing. (The *one* is dominated by the indefinite and not by the absence of person. I would even say that the pronoun *one* is marked in relation to person, while, paradoxically, *he* is not.) At the other extreme of the experience of discourse, the present-day writer can no longer content himself with expressing his own present, according to a lyrical plan, for example. He must learn to distinguish between the present of the speaker, which is grounded on a psychological fullness, and the present of what is spoken [*la locution*] which is mobile and in which the event and the writing become absolutely coincidental. Thus literature, at least in some of its pursuits, seems to me to be following the same path as linguistics when, along with Gustave Guillaume (a linguist not presently in fashion but who may become so again), it concerns itself with operative time and the time proper to the utterance [*énonciation*] itself.⁵

A second grammatical category which is equally important in linguistics and in literature is that of *person*. Taking linguists and especially Benveniste as my basis once more, I would like to recall that person (in the grammatical sense of the term) certainly seems to be a

⁵ Gustave Guillaume, *L'Architectonique du temps dans les langues classiques* (Copenhagen, 1945). The work of Guillaume (who died in 1960) toward a "psycho-systématique" has been continued in the contributions of Roch Valin (*Petite introduction à la psychomécanique du langage* [Québec, 1954]). For a statement by Guillaume about his relation to the tradition of Saussure, see *La langue est-elle ou n'est-elle pas un système? Cahiers de linguistique structurale de l'Université de Québec*, I (1952), p. 4.

universal of language, linked to the anthropology of language. Every language, as Benveniste has shown, organizes person into two broad pairs of opposites: a correlation of personality which opposes person (*I* or *thou*) to non-person, which is *il* (*he* or *it*), the sign of absence; and, within this first opposing pair, a correlation of subjectivity (once again in the grammatical sense) which opposes two persons, the *I* and the *non-I* (the *thou*). For our purposes we must, along with Benveniste, make three observations. First, the polarity of persons, a fundamental condition of language, is nevertheless peculiar and enigmatic, for this polarity involves neither equality nor symmetry: *I* always has a position of transcendence with respect to *thou*, *I* being interior to the *énoncé* and *thou* remaining exterior to it; however, *I* and *thou* are reversible—I can always become *thou* and vice versa. This is not true of the non-person (*he* or *it*) which can never reverse itself into person or vice versa. The second observation is that the linguistic *I* can and must be defined in a strictly a-psychological way: *I* is nothing other than "la personne qui énonce la présente instance de discours contenant l'instance linguistique *je*" (Benveniste ["the person who utters the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance *I*"]).⁶ The last remark is that the *he* or the non-person never reflects the instance of discourse; *he* is situated outside of it. We must give its full weight to Benveniste's recommendation not to represent the *he* as a more or less diminished or removed person: *he* is absolutely non-person, marked by the absence of what specifically constitutes, linguistically, the *I* and the *thou*.

The linguistic explanation provides several suggestions for an analysis of literary discourse. First, whatever varied and clever forms person may take in passing from the level of the sentence to that of discourse, the discourse of the literary work is rigorously submitted to a double system of person and non-person. This fact may be obscured because classical discourse (in a broad sense) to which we are habituated is a mixed discourse which alternates—very quickly, sometimes within the same sentence—personal and a-personal *énonciation*, through a complex play of pronouns and descriptive verbs. In this type of classical or bourgeois story the mixture of person and non-person produces a sort of ambiguous consciousness which succeeds in keeping the personal quality of what is stated while, however, continuously breaking the participation of the *énonciateur* in the *énoncé*.

⁶ Benveniste, *Problèmes*, p. 252.

Many novelistic utterances, written with *he* (in the third person), are nevertheless discourses of the *person* each time that the contents of the statement depend on its subject. If in a novel we read "*the tinkling of the ice against the glass seemed to give Bond a sudden inspiration,*" it is certain that the subject of the statement cannot be Bond himself—not because the sentence is written in the third person, since Bond could very well express himself through a *he*, but because of the verb *seem*, which becomes a mark of the absence of person. Nevertheless, in spite of the diversity and often even the ruse of the narrative signs of the person, there is never but one sole and great opposition in the discourse, that of the person and the non-person; every narrative or fragment of a narrative is obliged to join one or the other of these extremes. How can we determine this division? In "re-writing" the discourse. If we can translate the *he* into *I* without changing anything else in the utterance, the discourse is in fact personal. In the sentence which we have cited, this transformation is impossible; we cannot say "*the tinkling of the ice seemed to give me a sudden inspiration.*" The sentence is impersonal. Starting from there, we catch a glimpse of how the discourse of the traditional novel is made; on the one hand it alternates the personal and the impersonal very rapidly, often even in the course of the same sentence, so as to produce, if we can speak thus, a proprietary consciousness which retains the mastery of what it states without participating in it; and on the other hand, in this type of novel, or rather, according to our perspective, in this type of discourse, when the narrator is explicitly an *I* (which has happened many times), there is confusion between the subject of the discourse and the subject of the reported action, as if—and this is a common belief—he who is speaking today were the same as he who acted yesterday. It is as if there were a continuity of the referent and the utterance through the person, as if the declaring were only a docile servant of the referent.

Now if we return to the linguistic definition of the first person (the one who says "I" in the present instance of discourse), we may better understand the effort of certain contemporary writers (in France I think of Philippe Sollers's latest novel *Drame*) when they try to distinguish, at the level of the story, psychological person and the author of the writing. When a narrator recounts what has happened to him, the *I* who recounts is no longer the same *I* as the one that is recounted. In other words—and it seems to me that this is seen more and more clearly—the *I* of discourse can no longer be a place where a previously stored-up person is innocently restored. Absolute recourse to the instance of discourse to determine person is termed *nyn-egocentrism*

by Damourette and Pichon (*nyn* from the greek *nun*, "now").⁷ Robbe-Grillet's novel *Dans le labyrinthe* begins with an admirable declaration of *nyn-egocentrism*: "Je suis seul ici maintenant." [I am alone here now.]⁸ This recourse, imperfectly as it may still be practiced, seems to be a weapon against the general "bad faith" of discourse which would make literary form simply the expression of an interiority constituted previous to and outside of language.

To end this discussion of person, I would like to recall that in the process of communication the course of the *I* is not homogenous. For example, when I use [*libère*] the sign *I*, I refer to myself inasmuch as I am talking: here there is an act which is always new, even if it is repeated, an act whose sense is always new. However, arriving at its destination, this sign is received by my interlocutor as a stable sign, product of a complete code whose contents are recurrent. In other words, the *I* of the one who writes *I* is not the same as the *I* which is read by *thou*. This fundamental dissymmetry of language, linguistically explained by Jespersen and then by Jakobson under the name of "shifter" [*embrayeur*] or an overlapping of message and code, seems to be finally beginning to trouble literature in showing it that intersubjectivity, or rather interlocution, cannot be accomplished simply by wishing, but only by a deep, patient, and often circuitous descent into the labyrinths of meaning.⁹

There remains one last grammatical notion which can, in my opinion, further elucidate the activity of writing at its center, since it concerns the verb *to write* itself. It would be interesting to know at what point the verb *to write* began to be used in an apparently intransitive manner, the writer being no longer one who writes *something*, but one who writes, absolutely. (How often now we hear in conversations, at least in more or less intellectual circles: "What is he doing?"—"He's writing.") This passage from the verb *to write*, transi-

⁷ J. Damourette and E. Pichon, *Des mots à la pensée: Essai de grammaire de la langue française* (Paris, 1911-36), V, #1604 and VII, #2958. "Le langage est naturellement centré sur le moi-ici-maintenant, c'est-à-dire sur la personne qui parle s'envisageant au moment même où elle parle; c'est ce qu'on peut appeler le *nynéocentrisme* naturel du langage" [#1604].

⁸ *Dans le labyrinthe* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1959). For essays by Roland Barthes bearing on the fictional method and theory of Robbe-Grillet, see *Essais critiques* (Paris, 1964), pp. 29-40, 63-70, 198-205.

⁹ Cf. Jakobson, *Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb* (Cambridge [Mass.], 1957). [Translated into French by Nicolas Ruwet in *Essais de linguistique générale* (Paris, 1963), pp. 176-96.] For the origin of the term "shifter," see Otto Jespersen, *Language, its Nature, Development and Origin* (London, 1922), p. 123, and *ibid.*, *The Philosophy of Grammar* (London, 1923), pp. 83-84.

These remarks suggest that the central problem of modern writing exactly coincides with what we could call the problematic of the verb in linguistics; just as temporality, person, and diathesis define the positional field of the subject, so modern literature is trying, through various experiments, to establish a new status in writing for the agent of writing. The meaning or the goal of this effort is to substitute the instance of discourse for the instance of reality (or of the referent), which has been, and still is, a mythical "alibi" dominating the idea of literature. The field of the writer is nothing but writing itself, not as the pure "form" conceived by an aesthetic of art for art's sake, but, much more radically, as the only area [*espace*] for the one who writes.

It seems to me to be necessary to remind those who might be tempted to accuse this kind of inquiry of solipsism, formalism, or, inversely, of scientism, that in returning to the fundamental categories of language, such as person, tense, and voice, we place ourselves at the very heart of a problematic of *interlocution*. For these categories are precisely those in which we may examine the relationships between the *je* and that which is deprived of the mark of *je*. Inasmuch as person, tense, and voice imply these remarkable linguistic beings—the "shifters"—they oblige us to conceive language and discourse no longer in terms of an instrumental and reified nomenclature but in the very exercise of language [*parole*]. The pronoun, for example, which is without doubt the most staggering of the "shifters," belongs structurally to speech [*parole*]. That is its scandal, if you like, and it is on this scandal that we must work today, in linguistics and literature. We are all trying, with different methods, styles, perhaps even prejudices, to get to the core of this linguistic pact [*pacte de parole*] which unites the writer and the other, so that—and this is a contradiction which will never be sufficiently pondered—each moment of discourse is both absolutely new and absolutely understood. I think that, with a certain amount of temerity, we could even give a historical dimension to this research. We know that the medieval *septenium*, in its grandiose classification of the universe, prescribed two great areas of exploration: on the one hand, the secrets of nature (the *quadrivium*) and, on the other, the secrets of language [*parole*] (the *trivium*: *grammatica, rhetorica, dialectica*). From the end of the Middle Ages to the present day, this opposition was lost, language being considered only as an instrument in the service of either reason or the heart. Today, however, something of this ancient opposition lives again: once again the exploration of language, conducted by linguistics, psychoanalysis, and literature, corresponds to the exploration of the cosmos. For literature

is itself a science, or at least knowledge, no longer of the "human heart" but of human language [*parole*]. Its investigation is not, however, addressed to the secondary forms and figures that were the object of rhetoric, but to the fundamental categories of language. Just as in Western culture grammar was not born until long after rhetoric, so it is only after having made its way for centuries through *le beau littéraire* that literature can begin to ponder the fundamental problems of language, without which it would not exist.

Barthes–Todorov Discussion

GEORGES POULET: I would like to express the very great pleasure that I felt in listening to Roland Barthes and also a certain feeling of melancholy, for there seems to exist between us a sort of misunderstanding. We are a little like people who live in the same building but on different floors. This difference can be seen in our use of the word *language*, a word that I, myself, never like to pronounce—and this was perhaps the tendency of thinkers of an earlier period—but one which has recently become an extremely important word. The current popular regard for this word is accompanied by a certain number of corresponding negative phenomena. For example, you seem to avoid the word *thought* as if it were becoming rapidly obscene. Nearly every time you use the word *language*, I could replace it by the word *thought* almost without incongruity. I think that if you tried the same exercise, inversely, you would make the same discovery. For example, you said that in a certain perspective of science, which is not your own, there is an objectivity of the given. I think your idea was that there are much more interesting things than objectivity of the given, namely, objectivity of the giving (*donnant*), that is, objectivity of language. Now that seems to be exactly the position that I hold in relation to thought. When you speak, along with Saussure, of the signifier (*signifiant*) in relation to the signified, and of a signifier that could be spoken of even without speaking of the signified, you could speak, in the same way, of a container (*contenant*) without content or with all contents. I would say—but would you—that there could also be a thinker (*pensant*) who might have all thoughts. Therefore it seems to me that we are at the same time very close and yet separated by an abyss—an abyss that we could leap if we wanted to.

ROLAND BARTHES: I am very touched by what you have said, but I can't really reply because, as you said, there is a separation and, if I

may say so, what separates us is precisely language. But having said that, I see that there are a number of digressions suggested by your remarks, notably, the fact that we all perhaps reveal more by the words that we *avoid* than by the words that we use. In literature it would be extremely interesting to have a statistical analysis of words avoided by an author. But if I don't use the word *thought*, it is not at all because I find it obscene; on the contrary, it is because it is not obscene enough. For me, language is obscene, and that is why I continually return to it.

JAN KOTT: During dinner Mr. Donato said, "Les avocats sont durs." (The lawyers [avocados] are hard.) This was an *énoncé* oriented toward me, a message oriented toward the recipient. This sentence has something poetic about it. I think it was an *énoncé* which has become *énonciation* and a message which, in the terms of Jakobson, is "oriented toward the structuralization of the message." It is an example of the "duplicity" spoken of by Barthes. Another example of this duplicity in language would be this phrase of the Surrealists that I remember from my youth: "Elephants are contagious" (*Les éléphants sont contagieux*) [*Les oreillons sont contagieux?*]. But what is characteristic of our own time is that literature has become deliberately, consciously, the criticism of language. This is obvious in poetry, but perhaps also in the case of drama. I was especially interested in the problem of dissymmetry in language: the *je* (I) which is always new, but always the same for the recipient. We might say that the great break between the theater of Chekhov and the theater before him is based on this phenomenon. In Chekhov there is a new *je* (I) which is the *tu* (thou) of the other characters. For another example, I recall a telephone conversation with Ionesco, one afternoon in Spoleto. He said, "Come to my house." I said, "No, come here to my house." He said, "No, here is here and not there. I'm here; you're there." "No," I said, "I'm here; you're there." This conversation is very typical of Ionesco's plays. Although it is impossible to say "*Je suis mort*" (I am dead), I can very well imagine a play by Ionesco ending with the *passé composé*: "J'ai mort" (I have deeded).

JEAN HYPOLITE: I agree with you almost too much to take the floor, and, yet, in view of the title of your paper, I wonder if the *pacte de la parole*, a "complicity of speech," that you mention at the end of your talk, is wholly maintained in writing. Or, when one writes, doesn't interlocation undergo a sort of transformation, so that writing often becomes a phantasm of interlocation? To cite again the example of Proust in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, how does Proust succeed in writing? By

addressing the phantasm of his mother in an interlocation which profoundly changes the *pacte de la parole*, transforming it into a sort of mimicry of the *pacte de la parole* in writing. What transformation does the *pacte de la parole* undergo in a creation like writing which, paradoxically, is capable of uniting with a sort of monologue, curiously cut off from real interlocation? This is my question—the aspect that you simply mentioned in bringing us back to the *pacte de la parole*.

In *La Jalousie* is there interlocation or is there phantasm, with changing of the past and of beings in relation to interlocation? Is the *pacte de la parole* maintained or do we have an imitation of this *pacte de la parole*? I am purposely taking *La Jalousie* for my example, as a type of work which questions the poetics of the novel.

BARTHES: So, an homological analysis of person at the level of the signs of discourse in *La Jalousie*—I can't really prejudge the answer. I remember that you have a very high opinion of *La Jalousie* and I share this judgment. It would be a magnificent subject for a "troisième-cycle" doctorate to ask someone to find out what becomes of the proper signs, the indications of person at the level of discourse. We are beginning to concern ourselves with these problems at the level of the story and of the analysis of the story, and to look for the discursive signs of the one for whom the story is intended; for even in a story of the monologue type there are always specific signs of the *thou*, of this recipient (*destinataire*). I think you have pointed to the area of a very important problem: the relation between the story, or phantasm, and interlocation.

LUCIEN GOLDMANN: I speak as a sociologist, and I believe that it is important to look at the situation and the movement of an idea from the outside. For the past six days, during the seminars which preceded this colloquium, many important thinkers here have spoken of a radical breaking-point within French culture. For me this was made most clear in Charles Morazé's talk which compared two plays, Sagan's *Château en Suède* and Sartre's *Séquestrés d'Altona*. Both plays have the same factors, the same problematic: the fact that history has disappeared. However, while this fact constitutes a tragedy in Sartre's play, Sagan's play affirms that it doesn't matter and that one can very easily live without history. M. Hyppolite mentioned that it is very difficult to find an unbroken line of continuity between thought in France from 1945–50 and intellectual life today: there is a breaking point between existentialism and structuralism. For Sartre the essential point was to accede to history, and, starting from the *cogito* of the individual ego, it was

very difficult to put history back into the center of things. However, for the present intellectual posture history doesn't matter, the essential is to avoid history or historicity. The perspectives are very different. Barthes also spoke very clearly of a breaking point. He differs from Todorov in that he emphasizes the *modernity* of the present situation rather than the scientific perspective. I might also mention Althusser who has managed in his two books, *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital* to eliminate history from Marxist thinking. Here there is obviously a mutation, and I would say that that accounts for M. Poulet's intervention and Barthes' reply. Poulet feels sympathetic toward Barthes rather than Todorov because both Barthes and Poulet are aware of the non-scientific character of their positions. All this is to say that we are faced by a very important ideological phenomenon.

To approach it from the inside, we might ask the question—What is the subject that has changed? Why is language the common element of this new an-historical current of thought? Why has priority been given to the study of language? My hypothesis is that it is because language changes more slowly than content and literary structures. The problem was to eliminate thought and content, so there is only language left, and the speaking subject. Todorov sees language as the active element of the story. I would like to go even further. I agree that the *I* who speaks is not homologous with the *I* who writes. And as Barthes observed, we can distinguish the two types of structuralism on the basis of who uses diachronic methods and who uses genetic methods. We sociologists and historians have been saying that for a long time, but we also say that there is still an *I* who *becomes*, who is transformed, while there was no question of this in Barthes's talk. I also agree that man does not pre-exist language. But your conclusion that man must be defined in terms of language appears to me questionable. Man, as a whole, does not identify with language. To be sure, man speaks, but he also does other things that cannot be reduced to language, although language is, of course, involved—eating for instance. For me, what is interesting about this scientific perspective is to see what is ideological about it. The sociologist must analyze this current of thought which tries to eliminate the psychological and sociological subject, to see if it isn't a way for a collective subject to view the status of man in terms of a certain ideology.

TZVETAN TODOROV: I would like to reply to only two of M. Goldmann's numerous remarks. The first was on the definition of man according to language, or of language according to man. Of course, man

does not *only* speak, but he is the only creature who speaks, while there are many others who eat. Secondly, in regard to language changing more slowly than literature, if you say that, it is because you are reducing language to vocabulary and syntax, but beyond that, there is discourse. There is a typology of discourse, which remains to be elaborated, but which exists and which would account for the change in discourse, which is just as great as in literature, for literature itself is only a discourse.

RICHARD MACKSEY: This may only interest our French friends, but I think you have distorted Althusser's thought on history. Althusser never eliminated history; on the contrary, he is trying to rethink it within a coherent epistemology. But it would seem that he is trying to rescue Marx from Hegel's dialectical monism of the absolute subject as the single genetic principle. Now if you replace the absolute subject, indivisible genetic totality, with pre-existing, concrete structures, you escape some of the problems of Hegel's essentialism, but you undoubtedly open a different kind of development between ensembles. This has admittedly opened some *ruptures* in the historical process.

GOLDMANN: To be precise in regard to Althusser, he, himself, indicates in his books that the problem of change is the most difficult. The problem of history is the problem of becoming and of change. He says that it is treated by Balibar in the collaborative work. Balibar has three pages in these three big volumes which tell how the machine replaces "making by hand," but never how the machine, the new element, appeared. When I asked him about this problem, Althusser said it is a problem which will perhaps eventually be solved by research. He absolutely resisted saying that man defines himself from the relationships of production, which is the fundamental historical element of dialectical thought. Here there is obviously analysis of fact and elimination of becoming; there are no more classes—in these three volumes no element of becoming is clear except that it is a difficult problem.

BARTHES: I would simply like to recall that among the recent books of importance, the problem of history is often posed in new terms. Foucault's book on insanity is not lacking in historical dimensions, although it may be a new historical dimension. I don't believe we can dismiss what is being elaborated at the present moment, and in very different ways. We can't say that history is henceforth dismissed. I think

it is something that is in the process of evolving new definitions of the historical process.

PAUL DE MAN: I would like to speak a moment of Roland Barthes's treatment of history. I find that you have an optimistic historical myth (the same one I saw in Donato) which is linked to the abandonment of the last active form of traditional philosophy that we know, phenomenology, and the replacement of phenomenology with psychoanalysis, etc. That represents historical progress and extremely optimistic possibilities for the history of thought. However, you must show us that the results you have obtained in the stylistic analyses that you make are superior to those of your predecessors, thanks to this optimistic change which is linked to a certain historic renewal. I must admit, I have been somewhat disappointed by the specific analyses that you give us. I don't believe they show any progress over those of the Formalists, Russian or American, who used empirical methods, though neither the vocabulary nor the conceptual frame that you use. But more seriously, when I hear you refer to facts of literary history, you say things that are false within a typically French myth. I find in your work a false conception of classicism and romanticism. When, for example, concerning the question of the narrator or the "double ego," you speak of writing since Mallarmé and of the new novel, etc., and you oppose them to what happens in the romantic novel or story or autobiography—you are simply wrong. In the romantic autobiography, or, well before that, in the seventeenth-century story, this same complication of the ego (*moi*) is found, not only unconsciously, but explicitly and thematically treated, in a much more complex way than in the contemporary novel. I don't want to continue this development; it is simply to indicate that you distort history *because you need a historical myth of progress to justify a method which is not yet able to justify itself by its results*. It is in the notion of temporality rather than in that of history that I see you making consciousness undergo a reification, which is linked to this same optimism which troubles me.

BARTHES: It is difficult to reply because you question my own relationship to what I say. But I will say, very recklessly and risking redoubled blows on your part, that I never succeed in defining literary history independently of what time has added to it. In other words, I always give it a mythical dimension. For me, Romanticism includes everything that has been said about Romanticism. Consequently, the historical past acts as a sort of psychoanalysis. For me the historical

past is a sort of gluey matter for which I feel an inauthentic shame and from which I try to detach myself by living my present as a sort of combat or violence against this mythical time immediately behind me. When I see something that might have happened fifty years ago, for me it already has a mythical dimension. However, in telling you this, I am not excusing anything; I am simply explaining and that does not suffice.

PIERO PUCCI: As a classical philologist, I am very happy to see that rhetoric has returned to a place of importance in modern literature and to hear this return of rhetoric spoken of and justified by a sort of discourse on rhetoric in the classical world. Finally, I hope it can be seen that while rhetoric in the classical world was essentially taught in secondary school, the classical world produced not only schoolmasters in rhetoric but also Plato, Longinus, and St. Augustine—and that Aristotle wrote a *Poetics* as well as a *Rhetoric*. What we have heard this evening has been interesting and these studies seem important to me. I also see that this modern rhetoric is much more sophisticated than the ancient rhetoric. I only want to recall again that the Ancients not only saw rhetoric in images, in figures, but also saw that poetry could be insanity and madness—that is also a form of creation. When Aristotle considered poetry and art, tragedy for example, he didn't limit himself to rhetorical categories. This is what I think must be added.

BARTHES: I thank you very much for the enlargement of the problem. I have always conceived rhetoric very broadly, including all reflections on all forms of work, on general technique of forms of work, and not only in the restricted sense of rhetorical figures. We know very well that Aristotle's *Poetics* is also a formal study, in the deepest sense, of all "mimetic" works. And it is obviously in that perspective that we must think of literary works today.

VERNANT: I would like to question Barthes on the problem of the middle voice. If I understood correctly, he was referring to an article that Benveniste published in a psychological journal and in which he showed that the original fundamental opposition is between the active and the middle voice and not between the active and the passive, the middle designating the type of action where the agent remains enveloped in the released action. Barthes considers that this furnishes a metaphorical model for the present status of writing. Then I would ask, is it by accident that the middle voice disappeared in the evolution of Indo-European? Already in ancient Greek the opposition was no

longer situated between the active and the middle voice but between the active and the passive voice, so that the middle voice became a sort of vestige with which linguists wondered what to do. If we look at a more fully developed version of Benveniste's study, called "Nom d'action et nom d'agent dans les langues indo-européennes" ["The Name of Action and of Agent in Indo-European Languages"], we see two cases, one in which the action is ascribed to the agent like an attribute to a subject, and another in which the action envelopes the agent and the agent remains immersed in the action—that is the case of the middle voice. The psychological conclusion that Benveniste doesn't draw, because he is not a psychologist, is that in thought as expressed in Greek or ancient Indo-European there is no idea of the agent being the *source* of his action. Or, if I may translate that, as a historian of Greek civilization, there is no category of the *will* in Greece. But what we see in the Western world, through language, the evolution of law, the creation of a vocabulary of the will, is precisely the idea of the human subject as agent, the source of actions, creating them, assuming them, carrying responsibility for them. Therefore, the question I ask you, Barthes, is this: Are we seeing, in the literary domain, a complete reversal of this evolution and do you believe that we are going to see, on the literary level, the reappearance of the middle voice in the linguistic domain? For, if not, we are at the level of pure metaphor and not at the level of reality in regard to the fact that the literary work is already a sign which announces a change of psychological status of the writer in his relationship to his work.

BARTHES: I believe that one of the tasks of militant literature is to try, often by extremely violent and difficult methods, to compensate for the falling away of linguistic categories, that is, those which have disappeared from the language in the course of history. One tries to rethink the lost category and to take it as a metaphorical model—I understand the ambiguity of my position but I maintain it—to reclaim it by raising it to the level of discourse. For the writer cannot act directly on the forms of language. He cannot invent new tenses. He has enough trouble inventing new words; he is reproached for every one that he invents. Yet when he passes beyond the sentence or discourse, he finds again a certain freedom for resistance and for violence. That is all I can say for the moment, but I think the question is a timely one and very well put.

RICHARD SCHECHNER: The theater was taken in by the Church in the Middle Ages and then some time around the Renaissance it was eman-

ipated, or thrown out from the Church, whence it was taken in by literature; and I think in these last few days it's being thrown out by literature. This may be advantageous both to literature and to the theater, but I come here because I truly believe that what the structuralists have to offer to literature they perhaps also, in a different mode, have to offer to the criticism of theater. I want to raise some general problems, because it seems to me that you describe language and literature as implusive, in other words, turned in on its own laws and explicated by its own laws, while in theater at least language is explosive—language is a matrix of action. It doesn't make any sense in the theater unless language gives rise to action, which is the performance. One reads a theater text and situates it in two matrices of action: first the matrix of action out of which the words come, and then the matrix of action which the words give birth to. One doesn't read a theater text purely as literature, but in relationship to the action out of which it was born and in relationship to the action into which it must be cast if people are to see it. I think this can be historically borne out because no closet drama that has not seen continuous performance remains in the consciousness even of literary critics. They constantly refer to these dramas being performed. In the United States for example, we do not write about Racine very much; in France you do, simply because Racine is performed in France and not in the United States. In the theater, therefore, there is a separation between text and gesture and a relationship between text and gesture and no way to consider one without the other. I don't think that what you've done here really helps me, at least, make this relationship clear because you're trying to tell me there is no gesture; and you tend to forget entirely about the spoken word. I watch MM. Goldmann, Barthes, Todorov, Poulet, and so on, arguing here, and there is something present which I could never find on a printed page.

What I want to ask you is whether you consider the realization of the text, the performance of the text, just an incidental adjunct to the literary product or an integral part of the literary project? If you consider it incidental, then we part ways; but if you consider it integral then you have to explain to me what insight you give to both the gesture and the language; you have to explain to me what relationship there is between these linguistic laws and this gestural world.

BARTHES: I can give you a preliminary, banal reply of "semiological common sense" which is, that human gestures constitute a semiotic system and that, consequently, we will find—when we concern ourselves

with this problem—on the level of gestures, approximately the same problems posed by any system of signs. But if I, myself, am not tempted by this problem at present, it is because the system of gestures (*la gestuelle*) in our bourgeois theater remains still entirely *naturalistic*. If we had to deal with a theater (as Brecht saw) such as the Chinese or Japanese, in which the gestures are denaturalized to the profit of a very strong code, then we might find an interesting problem. But, frankly, I find it difficult to be intellectually interested in the cinema, for example. Precisely because the cinema is an art that was born during a period dominated by an aesthetic and a general ideology of the naturalistic type. The cinema has still not made the experiment of a coded art. It is simply the problem of an entire code, of an entirely “constituted” code.

SCHECHNER: What would you say about Molière?

BARTHES: We don't know exactly how Molière was played. I don't respond to Molière very much myself, because I sense in Molière all the myths of modern, bourgeois dramaturgy.

SCHECHNER: My question was really methodological. Assuming that the theater is not naturalistic, how could your methodology, your approach to linguistics, to language, and to literature, be applied fruitfully to drama, without considering drama entirely a literary and therefore a nonproduced medium? Granting that drama must be produced to be an aesthetic object, how does your methodology apply to it, or are you, as I suspect you may be, separating drama and literature, as it was separated before the Renaissance?

BARTHES: I repeat, since it is a semiotic system like any other, the instruments and concepts of approach and analysis that are those of semiology in general should apply to it.

SCHECHNER: But in semiology you have a language in which the work of Saussure and the other linguists have given you an insight. Where is the similar insight into the “language of gesture”?

BARTHES: If you are to be the Saussure of theater, that will be wonderful.

MACKSEY: Pending Mr. Schechner's undertaking, I might add that you, M. Barthes, have already made an initial contribution, along with Christian Metz, toward a semiotics of that scapegrace art which you suspect, the film. When you talked in *Communications* of the “Rhét-

orique de l'image,” I was reminded of our own Peirce on indexical signs and the way in which he speaks of the photograph as a “quasi-predicate” composed by the “quasi-subject,” light.

DERRIDA: I also think, as Barthes said, that present-day literature is an attempt, not really to return to a buried experience under the name of the middle voice, but to *think* the adventure (voluntarist, if you will) that was Western history, the history of metaphysics. It cannot be a factual re-creation, but an effort to think history, and I think that history is less than ever neglected in that experiment. I was very much in agreement with what we have heard this evening, and I wouldn't have spoken except that what was said about “je suis mort” reminded me of that extraordinary story of Poe about M. Valdemar, who awakens at a certain moment and says, “I am dead.” Then I wondered if underneath my agreement with you there wasn't something that I would like to formulate, which would be perhaps a question or a disagreement. I still start from the difference which you drew from Benveniste between discursive time and historical time. This distinction appears unquestionable in the system where Benveniste states it. But when I look for the *present* of discursive time, I don't find it. I find that this present is taken not from the time of the *énonciation* but from a movement of temporalization which poses the difference and consequently makes the present something complicated, the product of an original synthesis which also means that the present cannot be produced except in the movement which retains and effaces it. Consequently, if there is no pure present, as tense of the pure *énonciation*, then the distinction between discursive time and historical time becomes fragile, perhaps. Historical time is already implied in the discursive time of the *énonciation*.

How does that lead us to “I am dead”? Regarding person, you said that when I use *je* in discourse, it is always new (*inédit*) for me but not for the reader or the hearer, whence the irreducible dissymmetry of language. However, I wonder if for me the *je* is not always already repeated, in order to be language, and if, consequently, when I pronounce the word *je*, I am not dealing with absolutely original singularity. I am always already absent from my language, or absent from this supposed experience of the new, of singularity, etc. That would mean that in order for my pronunciation of the word *je* to be an act of language, it must be a signal word, that is, it must be originally repeated. If it were not already constituted by the possibility of repetition, it would not function as an act of language. If the repetition is original, that means that I am not dealing with the new (*l'inédit*) in language. You

were reticent about saying "I am dead." I believe that the condition for a true act of language is my being able to say "I am dead." Husserl distinguished two kinds of lack of meaning in language. When I say, "the worm is off," it is obvious that this sentence does not make sense, because it is not in accordance with what Husserl called the rules of pure logical grammar. Husserl would say that it is not language. But when I say "the circle is square," my sentence respects the rules of grammaticality, and if it is a *contre-sens*, at least it is not nonsense. The proof is that I can say that the sentence is false, that there is no such object. The rules of pure grammaticality are observed and therefore my language signifies, in spite of the lack of object. That means that the power of meaning of language is, to a point, independent of the possibility of its object. "I am dead" has a meaning if it is obviously false. "I am dead" is an intelligible sentence. Therefore, "I am dead" is not only a possible proposition for one who is known to be living, but the very condition for the living person to speak is for him to be able to say, significantly, "I am dead." Consequently, the security in which you have placed the "dissymmetry of language" which is linked to the *pacte de la parole* in which writing, which can only function in the opening of "I am dead," would be somewhat effaced or held at a distance. I wonder if everything you have said about writing, with which I entirely agree, doesn't imply that the *pacte de la parole* is not a living *pacte de la parole* as M. Hyppolite said, in opposing it to the phantasm. Because I wonder if one can distinguish the *pacte de la parole* from the phantasm, and if things are really as clear as they seemed a little while ago after M. Hyppolite's intervention.