Marxism, Structuralism and Literature.
ORIENTATIONS AND SCHEMATA

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Context

1. Structuralism essentially opposes Marxism, and it is used increasingly as an «alternative totalizing theory» to counter possible trends toward Marxist theory in the universities. But the irony is that, by its entry into polemics with Marxism, structuralism has served as a starting point for resolving certain problems Marxist theory has posed; it has led larger and larger numbers to a familiarity with certain aspects of Marxism, and it has frequently served as a «theoretical mediation» ultimately sending some students along a road that takes them to Marx and his followers. (What kind of Marxism results from this mediated approach is another matter: the suspect forms of Marxism emerging out of structuralism are themselves subject to further sublation, if other conditions combine to intensify the environment of Marxist perspectives and values.)

2. Thus the danger of the persistent and growing trend among many «advanced Marxists» (several of whom are at least partially indebted to structuralism as an influence at an earlier stage of their intellectual development) to now downgrade the significance and achievements of structuralism, to dismiss it too immediately and totally, to put aside the elaboration of a serious and full Marxist critique of structuralist premises and characteristics. If structuralism is to be ultimately negated, if it is to be seen finally as little more than the expression of a particular class or sub-class at a given stage of advanced technocratic monopoly capital, then, nevertheless, the value and limitations
of its "scientific rigor" for Marxism should not be overlooked, but transformed in function of a "higher" Marxist synthesis.

a) Structuralism may deepen Marxism in its areas of greatest difficulty. It may help account for historical resistances and continuities; it may give more scientific rigor to such notions as "uneven development," "relative superstructural autonomy," "mediations between social being and social consciousness," "reciprocal relations among base and superstructural 'levels,'" etc.; it may provide a totalizing method of formalization (semiotics) that, while subject to Marxist modification, can be used in dealing with these matters.

b) In effect, structuralism may give Marxism a more precise framework for plotting the "synchronic" interactions of a social formation which impede and yet potentially project "diachronic" developments. It may provide a more precise framework for considering the very elements — movement, tension, contradiction, objective-subjective interactions, praxis — which, because of its undialectal assumption of identity (or homology) between method and object of study (because of its acceptance of the ontological-epistemological force of the model-making method it employs), structuralism itself fails to conceptualize.

c) Now those elements narrowly or poorly perceived through the structuralist grid come to the fore, partially as a result of, partially as a reaction to, structuralism.

b) Driven to greater rigor and clarification by its structuralist encounter, Marxism should achieve an enriched stage of theoretical conceptualization.

B. THEORETICAL FRAME

1. Two aspects of Marx's theoretical development are central to the Marxist structuralist encounter: his reaction to Proudhon's static and abstractive method (Poverty of Philosophy), and his effort to achieve a method able to grasp historical and structural relations in terms of the development-producing interactions among the infra- and superstructural forces constituting a social formation ("Introduction to the Grundrisse").

a) Marx's critique of Proudhon is in fact the starting point for a Marxist critique of structuralist theory:

Just as by... abstraction we have transformed everything into a logical category, so one has only to make an abstraction of every characteristic distinctive of different movements to attain movement in its abstract condition — purely formal movement, the logical formula of movement —. If one finds in logical categories the substance of all things, one imagines one has found in the logical formula of movement the absolute method, which not only explains all things, but also implies the movement of things... What is this absolute method [by which reason recognizes itself in every object]? The abstraction of movement... What is movement in abstract condition? The purely logical formula of movement or the movement of pure reason...

b) However, Marx's own meditation on the manipulation of analytical categories in the study of history leaves a theoretical space that at once opens the possibility for human creativity in historical development, and yet makes the "scientific study" of that development problematic:

The uneven development of material production relative to, e.g., artistic development. In general, the concept of progress not to be conceived in the usual abstractness. Modern art, etc. This disproportion not as important or so difficult to grasp within practical-social relations themselves... But the really difficult point to discuss... is how relations of production develop unevenly... This conception appears as necessary development. But legitimation of chance. How. (Of freedom also, among other things.)

2. Marx's "how" specifies the theoretical space in his theory that haunts subsequent Marxisms; this space generates the oppositions between Marxism as a theoretically based "science of practices" and Marxism as a "philosophy (or 'ideology') of praxis"; it demarcates a possible incongruence between "dialectical materialism" and "historical materialism."

a) The space generates seemingly irreconcilable oppositions at every moment of theoretical intervention — oppositions between phenomena and consciousness, fact and concept, base and superstructure, perdurability and change, structure and history, necessity and freedom—that encourage one-sided economistic or idealistic interpretations, and question Marx's actual advance beyond Proudhon's theoretical stance.

b) Thus the space "invites" the "neo-Proudhonian" intervention of structuralism and raises doubts about the capacity of Marxism to sublate the intervention.

3. A proper grasp of Marxism requisite for the structuralist encounter must begin with the demonstration of how (in Capital, I), Marx himself answered his question (B-1-b) and thus crossed the theoretical space by conceptualizing structure and praxis (and all the oppositions signalled in B-2-a), in terms of the commodity form and the circuit of its production-exchange-consumption-reproduction, in relation to other
forms and their circuits. We must also demonstrate the importance Marx gave to intellectual and artistic production in grasping these relations. But we must stress the basis for the Marxist/structuralist encounter itself — the space Marx left by not fully theorizing or articulating his means of passage.

a) The basic coordinates of structuralist theory in relation to the Marxist problematic must be set forth and evaluated; also their appropriation by Goddier, Althusser and the Tel Quel group, in an effort to construct a structuralist Marxism; finally, the attempts by Sartre, Vilar, Lefebvre, Sebag, Coldmann and others to answer structuralist Marxism and come up with alternative formulations.

b) One of the primary concerns of this endeavor should be with current efforts to resolve Althusserian/Hegelian-Marxist differences in terms of a synthetic structural-historical Marxism consonant with Marx and yet fully viable today — this at the level of general theory and work on specific phenomena, including literary ones.

c) A tentative thesis for this work should be that further development of Marxist theory, general and aesthetic, comes not through non-structuralist but post-structuralist emphases — on forms as crystalized (structured and hypostasized) praxes, in relation to different subsystems of a complex interactional and yet hierarchical systemic whole.

C. Initial Summary and Projections

1. To say the above on another level:

a) The theoretical question for Marxism is the confrontation, assimilation and transcendance of, the struggle for hegemony with, the various forms of bourgeois ideology as they proliferate and affect Marxist constructs during distinct phases of capitalist development. If, for example, structuralism stresses the linguistic sign as a basic mediation between consciousness and reality, and if, as in Jean Baudrillard's extension, emphasis today should be given to the signifying network of commodities as the dominating feature (no longer, or rather, in Baudrillard's retrospective study, never a mere mediation) of every day life, then the analysis of reification by Lukács, Lefebvre, and Goldmann may begin to merge with certain insights of the structuralists and Althusserian Marxists on structural displacements and condensations.

b) All theoretical strands may be reconceptualized in terms of macro- and micro-structural modulations in a complex international world systems model (model conceived in the provisional, Marxist as opposed to the ontological, structuralist, sense), in which emphasis seems to have shifted from alienation in production to a generalized reification in consumption, from revolution in the metropolis, to the interplay of oppositional and revolutionary forces in all world sectors.

c) This apparent effort of further scientizing will not exhaust (and hence negate) the ultimate object of investigation, which is not metonymy but genuine diachrony, not «functional deviance» but genuine oppositional praxis — in consciousness, in sign-making and revolution-making action. The effort must be to specify the possibilities and limits of a theory for determining the conditions of praxis.

d) Only such a framework can provide a basis for identifying, situating and criticizing literary forms, subsystems and systems (if such ever did or still exist integrally) in a Marxist perspective.

II. THE MARXIST CRITIQUE OF STRUCTURALIST APPROACHES TO LITERATURE

A. Analytical Frame: The Circuit of Forms

1. In the context of literature, the structuralist/Marxist encounter may be viewed as centered on the two terms that were also vital for Marx's encounter with the classical bourgeois political economists of a previous period: the contrast and relation between theories centered on exchange and on production. Just as Marx criticized Smith, Ricardo and company for focussing too much on phenomenal market relations, and on the eternalization of present, ephemeral patterns, so recent Marxists have criticized structuralists for focussing too readily on mere or less overt patterns of symbolic and even kinship exchange relations — on the communication of signs (goods, commodities themselves seen as signs) over the human labor and alienation involved in their production.

2. But, ironically, certain members and followers of the Frankfurt School and certain partisans of Baudrillard have joined in criticizing an over-emphasis on production in economic and alienation-centered Marxists, but also in Marx himself.
3. A proper dialectical grasping of the circuit of commodity production implies a theoretical basis for determining what aspect of the circuit becomes dominant in given historical periods, as well as the basis for determining the efficacy of commodity production in relation to the production of other—in this case, literary—forms. If circulation is dominant in the present period, this domination must nevertheless be seen in terms of a more totalizing historical view which involves other moments (and spheres of exception even in the present moment) when circulation is not dominant.

4. In this sense, the structuralist emphasis on the communication of signs can only emerge as no more than a very important expression of a historical moment, when the circulation of communicating signs has great significance and relative autonomy, but this view must be given a Marxist totalization. On the other hand, it would be foolish to believe that structuralist views have no effect on the Marxism which incorporates them.

B. PROGRAM OF RESEARCH

1. A critical survey of structuralist developments from linguistics to total semiology to literature should involve also an examination of the recent Marxist attempts to utilize at least elements of structuralism to go beyond its premises. The effort should be not only to perform a Marxist ideological critique of structuralism, but to map out some possible Marxist exits from what Frederic Jameson has called The Prison-House of Language.

2. This survey should show how Saussure conceived a closed, synchronic science of linguistics, and how the Saussurean approach later served as a model for the literary studies of the Russian Formalists and the total cultural studies of Lévi-Strauss—how it was then applied to literature and other sign systems by Barthes and others.

a) Crucial to this perspective (for his ties with Saussure, the Russian Formalists, Lévi-Strauss and literary structuralists) is Roman Jakobson. With Tynianov, Jakobson develops the formalist view of literary systems in relation to other systems and in relation to the totality of literary evolution; the creation of literary forms is seen as a result of a process of selection and combination within the framework of possibilities at a given stage in the life of literary and extra-literary systemic relations.

b) This process is seen to be based on a dynamism engendered and limited by what Jakobson conceived as binary polarities (are they genuinely dynamic or static?). Gradually Jakobson reduced this conceptual framework to a communications model, which, while useful for Marxist purposes, must be freed from its restricted emphasis on the verbal or semiotic context and adequate with the Marxist production model.

3. Within this context, the structuralist enterprise in literature emerges as a reduction and then elaboration of Vladimir Propp by Lévi-Strauss, Barthes and other through the medition of Jakobson.

a) According to this view, the work of art functions to express, obfuscate or «symbolically resolve» contradictions; the aesthetic standards of the West (inherited and coopted by bourgeois society) are shown to stress the equilibration of oppositions (on disequilibrated, modernist forms, see III-E-4-g). This view is basic to a «normative» Western aesthetics of literary forms, which the reductive method of structuralism «demonstrates» to be «universal and eternal expressions» of a fundamentally unchanging «human spirit», or meta-structure, ultimately relatable to all other phenomena—and hence ultimately not human or historical at all.

4. Structuralism emerges as the expression, or ideological justification, of the equilibration achieved or sought after under advanced capitalism (at least, during the post-World War II Keynesian period), while Marxism emerges as the most advanced theoretical-practical weapon to point up and channel the forces of disequilibration hidden behind the balancing polarities of apparently eternal structures.

5. From this perspective, the difference between formalization and the object formalized emerges as the difference between structuralism and a Marxism which can grasp the relation of the model to its object. In literary terms, the dynamics framed by the reductive methods of a Bremond or a Greimas (the most extreme reducer of Propp) are exposed and may be worked upon.

6. In effect the work of Hegelian and non-Hegelian Marxists converges on the question of the commodity form and commodity production—the question of a bound binary polarity as the phenomenal form of dynamic and contradictory forces. It becomes necessary to examine recent developments toward Marxist literary theory from structural historicism, to and hopefully beyond, the efforts of the Tel Quel
a) Our survey must touch on Fernand Braudel’s theory of multiply rhythmmed historical structures, and the efforts by Claudio Guillén to modernize the Jakobson-Tynianov approach in terms of Braudel’s theories. Here we have an initial transition from structure back to history.

b) This in turn leads to a critique of structural historicism from a post-structuralist Marxist perspective — i.e., to Althusser, and then the literary developments out of Althusser, Macherey and the Tel Quel group.

c) Next, a critique of these approaches in terms of the macro-historical systems models projected or theoretically prepared for by the work of Pierre Vilar and now Immanuel Wallerstein.

d) A critique of even these positions in terms of the Hegelian-Marxist view of praxis, becoming and subject-object totality (or partial identity).

e) Within this framework, the Marxist production and the structuralist communication emphases may find some proper point of convergence. The genetic emphasis in a Goldmann may meet with the reception emphasis in contemporary East German theorists, to provide the basis for a theory that totalizes all elements stressed in prior constructions and that proves useful for future work.

III. SCHEMATA, DIAGRAMS AND SPECULATIONS

A. EPistemology, Signs and Production

1. For Saussure and the structuralists, signifier and signified are internal to the sign system, and are only to be grasped within the semiological field. How does the «real» enter? By displacement, rupture (Foucault, Althusser).

2. For Goldmann, Lefèvre and other Hegelian Marxists, there is a structural nexus—a matter of approximative though never completed adequation—between the sign, the thought and the real. They do not accept the closed system essential for structuralist thought:

   **Structuralism**

   Signifier/Signified = Sign/World

   **Hegelian Marxism**

   Signifier → Signified
   (symbolic → real)

   World

3. For Baudrillard, Marx’s form-commodity becomes the form-sign: the sign of the commodity, not the commodity, is what we exchange under monopoly capitalism. Signifier and signified are internal to the semiological field; there is no longer any «external referent» beyond the sign world. As with signs, so with ideological and literary forms—and with all commodity forms. They are all cut off from any genetic, productive sources, as commodities are distanced from any producers. We enter this total, reified sign world, in which Lefebvre’s Critique of Everyday Life reaches out to embrace Barthes’ semiology.

   a) On this basis, Baudrillard makes the following Marxist-structuralist synthesis:

   Signifier ≠ Signified; Wage ≠ Labor; Use value ≠ Exchange value.

   Wage = Exchange Value = Signifier

   Labor = Use Value = Signified

   / Symbolic exchange

   b) The slash above (/) indicates «the radical exclusion of symbolic exchange from the field of value», the separation of sign from the object world; that is, Sign ≠ Reality

   c) Thus Baudrillard gives a semiotic conversion to the implicit Marxist view that exchange value represents, but is not equal to (≠) use value.

4. Appealing to other structuralist perspectives, we may say that the movement from C-M-C to M-C-M’ signalled a «crisis of representation» (Foucault)—a movement from metaphor to metonymy (Jakobson), as unequalized equivalent expression of the fact of capitalism’s perpetual necessity (as basic to its structuration) to produce instability and change in order to survive. In Althusserian terms, capitalist metonymy is the basis for the very synchrony of capitalism; until rupture, contradictions are neutralized into polarities which maintain the structure.

5. The very fact that Base ≠ Superstructure maintains distortions facilitating the relation between a developing and changing capitalist base and a wide variety of superstructures. The latter are not homologous, but in functional relation, to that base. Hence we have possible movements in the service not of praxis, but its negation or cooptation—movements then, which assure the reproduction of capitalism and its supportive social, ideological and artistic forms.

6. Structuralist and semiotic discourse emerges as a means of binding the disparate ideological impulses generated by capitalist me-
tonymic synchrony: post-structuralist (as distinct from Althusserian structuralist Marxism) must intervene to de-ideologize, use and sublate the structuralist stress on exchange over production. This requires: (1) a questioning of the structuralist core, as schematized in Jakobson’s communication model (see III-B); (2) a critique of Baudrillard’s extreme, post-structuralist (and ultimately anti-Marxist) meta-theory (see III-c); (3) an examination of the premises involved in the post-structuralist formulation of reception theory as an answer to the productive-genetic tendencies of most Marxist formulations (see III-D).

B. COMMUNICATION AND PRODUCTION MODELS 25

1. What is the relation or distatniation between Jakobson’s communication model and Marx’s production model? —Grossly:

   Context
   Addresser — Message — Adressee (sign)
   Producer — Product — Consumer (Form)
   Contact
   Code
   Base

2. Can these two models be adequately, or does one cancel or dominate the other? Jakobson’s model gives emphasis to context, but context is held within the communications (exchange) system—it is a context of signs. Is communications the only mode of (or model for) production?

3. Possible thesis: The Jakobson model reproduces the Marxist production model under the sway of an increasingly passive, semiotic consumer world of advanced capitalism. We have an antithesis between:

   Literature-as-sign / Literature-as-product

   This reproduces the antinomies:
   System / History, Systemic function / Social function.26

C. TOWARD A CRITIQUE OF BAUDRILLARD

1. Baudrillard begins by accepting the structuralist epistemological thesis that we can only know the world through its multiplistic semiological codification.

a) Hence a totalizing semiological model, one accounting for hierarchical and relational shifts among semiological subsets, is our only means for grasping the structural coordinates of historical reality—is the ultimate basis of anything human beings can call reality.

b) By this thesis, Marx was so caught up in the dominance of one code (production) which happened to dominate his historical moment, that he based his entire conception of reality upon it. In effect, Marx was trapped in a subset of the total semiological field. Hence, he was unable to conceptualize the totality of relations extant in his own time (see I-B-1-a).

c) Marxism was further distorted by subsequent emphases on one or another subset of the total (and yet incomplete) Marxist subset (see I-B-2-a) that its viability became increasingly suspect, especially as, in the course of the 20th Century, the dominance of production receded in its determinant importance and its consequent explanatory power.

2. Baudrillard is thus able to give technical, theoretical expression to historical displacements (mainly from production to consumption) which various «neo-Marxists» have long emphasized (cf. Frankfurt School members, certain «existential» Marxists, dependency theorists and the spokesmen for literary reception theory).

a) Baudrillard’s approach has the virtue of providing a language which can unite varied critiques—most principally, those of structuralism and Marxism (for evidence, compare III-A-3 with Lacan’s view of the phalus).

b) The approach has the further virtue of pitting the ontology of semiological theory against the fetishism of production found in the structuralist Marxism of Althusser and the Tel Quel group (see note 9).

3. However, Baudrillard re-reads Marx through Althusserian eyes, he fails to grasp the full implications of Marx’s non-representational mode of discourse (see III-A-3-c), and hence fails to grasp the full weight of Marx’s view of consumption as having potential determinacy in a social totality, and as involving subjective as well as objective significance.27

a) More so than Baudrillard, Marx has conceptualized this totality: only his vocabulary (production rather than something else) betrays a possible historical limitation—but one that would seem valid for capitalism in all its successive stages.
b) More successfully than Baudrillard, Marx avoids a total conceptual relativism which levels all distinctions (including the basis for making any).

c) Baudrillard’s explanation smuggles in a historical, nonsemiological dimension to account for Marx’s supposedly faulty critique; Marx develops a theory which can account more adequately for historical shifts, relations and «transformations», including the one which generates Baudrillard’s «revolution» and the anti-Marxist «new philosophy» which draws on it.

d) One may «enrich» Marx in multiple (though determinate) ways; one cannot say the same about Baudrillard because his semiological field in so indeterminately rich as to be ultimately barren.

e) Marx’s theory can account for his own «short-comings» and for the emergence of structuralism and Baudrillard; Baudrillard’s theory can only account for itself by drawing on a variant of the very theory he purports to refute—even to clear the space for what might be (within a non-Baudrillardian frame) valid in his work.

4. To fulfill a critical reconstitution of what is partially tenable in Baudrillard, to do so out to the dimensions of general and literary theory, we complete our questioning of the Jakobson communication model by a turn toward reception theory.

D. Reception Theory and the Productive Dialectic of Sender-Receiver

1. Robert Weimann notes that Marxist literary studies from Plekhanov to Goldmann have too often centered on genesis (the class-ideological factors leading to the content or structure of literary forms), and have frequently reduced the multiplicity of a given literary work to the expression of its dominant, genetically-determined ideological tendency. In effect, literary geneticism studies the work in terms of the dominant forces producing it; we read back from the work to the social sources of its production:

   $\rightarrow 0$

2. By their one-sided emphasis, genetic studies are unable to account for literary reception—how given works are received in given ideological-artistic formations subsequent to their emergence; i.e., what in these works accounts for their subsequent function and potential praxis:

   $0 \rightarrow$

3. By their stress on the signifying-signified unity of the sign, structuralist analytical developments under the aegis of the communications model have allowed for the codification of Bakhtine’s formalist insight into the «multiple voices» of a literary work, and have thus opened the door to possible relations with a developing theory of literary reception.

4. Drawing on structuralism and other sources, reception theory bypasses a sociology of readership to constitute a developing dialectical science of the literary sign which determines the multiple possibilities in a literary work and its possible modes of functionality for given groups in given future contexts.

5. On the other hand, reception theory, by underplaying literary genesis, tends to break with the capacity to place the literary work in the total evolutionary development of class and ideological struggle. However necessary it may be to go beyond Goldmann’s sociological geneticism, it may still be important to develop a theory keeping faith with his view (bolstered by Piaget) that a study of structures without a study of their genesis leads to an empty technologistic formalism (i.e., semiotics) that blocks all sure paths back into history.

6. The effort in these schemata is to sketch the basis for a dialectical method uniting literary genesis and reception in a total pattern of social production and consumption. If successfully constituted, this method should be able to account for the social determinants of aesthetics and the aesthetic determinants of social life.

E. Form, System and Literature: Toward a Critical Synthesis

1. All forms are concealed labor, crystallizations of alienated or non-alienated activity—that is, activity—that is, activity structured by given conditions of social production and reproduction; they are also crystallizations which prefigure or condition future developments:

   $\text{Social} \rightarrow \text{Same or Changed Social} \rightarrow \text{Social}$

   $\text{Formation} \rightarrow 0 \rightarrow \text{Formation}$

2. In keeping with a view of the commodity’s relation and differentiation to and from artistic forms (which predominantly tend toward
commodity status) under capitalism, the following diagram attempts to embody the diachronic, synchronic and synthetic aspects common to Marxist constructs:

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{diagram}
\end{center}

a) Under capitalism, forms are «resultants» of alienated praxis, quantified and reified into homogeneous labor time. The alienation and hypostatization of praxis into a «value» which is to be seen only as a quantity is achieved by forms under capitalism — also, the distortion or negation of future praxis.

b) The reification emanating from the commodity and its fetishism \(\rightarrow\) works on the reception or consumption of artistic forms \(\left(\text{?}\right)\) — an effect more powerful than its inverse \(\left(\text{?}\right)\), the effect of art forms on (other) commodities; and this reception-consumption process sets up or affects \(\rightarrow\) the reproduction or changed production (change signifying a movement from metonymy to genuine diachrony) of the social formation and its own processes at the next «moment» in the cycle or historical transformation or production.

c) Any moment in this total production-reproduction/change process can become dominant over any other. Further, one synchronic dimension or relation can come to dominate over and even re-organize the other dimensions and their relations. Under modern capitalism, politics in the form of «the ideological aparatuses of the (capitalist) state» generally acts as the «structure in domination» required to maintain the socio-economic relations and their ideological reinforcement, and to determine all relations, including those between material, artistic and ideological production. However, it should be noted that this abstraction becomes very complicated as applied to the economic determinants of political domination in dependent capitalist countries, especially since the early 1970's when structural relations have been largely determined by conflicting tendencies between established state structures and the developing structures of large scale multi-national corporations.

3. As for the artistic form itself:

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{diagram2}
\end{center}

a) The commodity form is a determinate instance of a determinate production, a condensation of many determinations, which helps to reproduce and thus determine the entire system of relations which produce or determine it.

b) The artistic form is a parallel product of a parallel process, itself a sub-form of a sub-system of artistic production, which historically becomes a sub-system of capitalist production.

1. As such, the artistic form may be subordinated by and be differentiated from other commodity forms according to the relation and differentiation between artistic and other commodity production systems, and the degree and nature of the sway of the latter over the former, or the degree and nature of the autonomy of the former in relation to the latter — that is, according to the relation of the artistic form and its sphere of production and function, and the commodity and its like sphere, within the structure of the social formation which produces, and is reproduced (or potentially «deproduced») by, both.
c) The form itself is a hypostasis of structured, determined praxis setting forth a new (distorted, alienated) praxis. It thus has its own structure, an input of potentially sublative praxis equilibrated (negated) in the form itself. As form, then, on the first, phenomenal level, the artwork manifests itself as a praxis negated.

1. An analysis of this level (c) lends itself to one which discovers polarities and coordinates—or «semiotic constraints», as Greimas and Rastier would have it.

2. The form's potential, totalizing praxis (that is, an artistic praxis as synecdocically expressive of and contributory to the praxis of a social group in one or more given historical instances) can only be discovered by first determining (through formalization) and then negating the negation of praxis by the conventional constraints (generic, stylistic, etc.), imposed by the systematized means of artistic production available to the artist—i.e., by reading back through the structural tension present in the form, to the social forces (frequently underexpressed or even absent) which generate this production (and the counter-production of equilibration factors) and which may actually (in the distanced real world) lead to a production destructive of the constraints themselves.

3. The final stage of analysis would be that of the efficacy embodied in a form as a praxis—as a material force contributing to the fulfillment of the praxis it can only partially and distortedly express.

4. The analysis of these perspectives affects our conceptualization of both «commercial» or «mass» art and «elite» art: the latter is in a dialectical relation to the former, yet generally seeking to transcend and break out of that relation, which is structured in part through the need created by commodity production for a product which is not or does not seem to be a commodity in production terms: by a need for a supposed disalienation, which actually maintains and extends (i.e., reproduces) the sources of alienation in production itself.

In the context of the commentaries which accompany them, the above diagrams are meant to be suggestive of modes of theoretical synthesis; they have pedagogical or illustrative, rather than firm theoretical value, and are subject to examination and criticism in a variety of ways. The effort is to give graphic representation of many of the dimensions useful for Marxism resulting from its encounter with structuralism:

a) They embody tendencies issuing from Propp, Jakobson, Tynianov, Greimas, etc.; they point to the Marxist view of differentials and relations between artistic and other kinds of material production. Clearly there is an effort to merge Althusserian and Lukácsian critiques.

b) They maintain the determinate importance (and relative autonomy) of literary and semiotic systems—and the way these systems evolve and project forms which affect and are affected by other forms produced by other systems or a relatively systematic totality.

c) They present a framework for seeing the value and limits of the Tel Quel critique (writing as «structured scription» toward reproduction or revolution); they also situate and perspectivize the Goldmannian stress on genesis—and Goldmann's overall emphasis on forms as structurally homologous or functionally related to forms of class consciousness or (under advanced capitalism) to forms exchanged in the market.]

d) They point to Baudrillard's view of the circulation of signs in interacting systemic relations, but point also to a view of agens—or the effort (also structured and made simultaneously possible and problematic) to transcend and transform a given system or the systemic field as a whole (here the Goldmannian and Sartrean emphases on the intervention of the subject and the subject's project in the social totality: modern perspectives from the early Marx are so integrated into an image of system as to constitute and internalize a critique of the limits of formalization and systems theory).]

e) They incorporate reception theory's emphasis on the impact and praxis potential of achieved forms in different social formations.

f) These constructions must be further elaborated in terms of Wallerstein's global model, attempting to establish the bases for relating forms in different social formations at the same historical moment or at different moments. But they already implicate dependency theory, as well as its potential reformulation in productivist terms.

g) They project the view of traditional artistic forms as closed, bound, integrated and equilibrated, embodying the antinomies, polarities and praxis negation implicit in normative Western (bourgeois) aesthetics, and pointing as well to the praxis limits of most anti-symmetrical, anti-mimetic modernist forms.

h) Designed in terms of artistic or literary forms, the diagrams may also have application to the critical forms—i.e., to criticism in and of forms. Critiques must not only be Marxist in perspective, but must be subjected to Marxist historicization.
I) The imperative for art: to create open, unequilibrated, but carefully directed forms, struggling against commodity status and effect—and against the mediating distortions and constraints imposed by class, political and other determinations in this struggle.  

j) The imperative for criticism: to grasp literature's relative systemicity and a given work's systemic relations as a prerequisite to criticism. But in criticism: to negate the appearance of equilibrium and contradiction-resolution in even those forms which are most apparently conformative. Instead of pointing to anticipations of utopia (as in the hermeneutic constructs of Ernst Bloch and, at times, Marcuse), such criticism seeks to unmask the distortedness of such anticipations, the alienation preserved in most efforts aimed at some form of disalienation, the absences structured by presences; it attempts to negate the negation of the diachronic. de-cancel the cancellation of praxis. The goal, then, of post-structuralist Marxist art and criticism would be, to destroy structural utopias.  

IV. FINAL THOUGHTS: WHY BOTHER ABOUT STRUCTURALISM?

A. THE USUAL MARXIST REDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS AGAINST STRUCTURALISM

1. Structuralism originates from an imperialist situation which places the Western anthropologist in a position of privilege in relation to the last «primitive» groups.

2. As ideological projection—the «end of ideology», Marxism being one of the ideologies—structuralism serves to reinforce the efforts of socio-economic, political and ideological equilibration generated by Keynesian economic development in the 1960's.

3. It is an ideology of abstractionism and stasis, reducing history and praxis to so much illusory sound and fury, dazzling and hypostatizing thought and action by means of a tyranny of «science», technique and even mathematical reductionism. etc.

4. As for the Marxists who have attempted to utilize and «transcend» structuralism:

a) Althusser represents an effort to rescue and give theoretical respectability to the most reified aspects of Marxist theory, attempts to clear a space for the intellectual within the French CP. His effort to deny the early Marx, his attraction for structures stem from his function as «apologist for revisionist practice», «champion against bourgeoisie (i.e., anti-Soviet) humanism».

b) If there is a revolutionary side to Althusserian thought, well, it is a kind of pseudo-revolutionary theoretical Maoism, such as we find in the Tel Quel group—a kind of high mimic of Godard's Maoists: an appeal to the masses to justify the most absurd posturing and elitism.

c) And if we have a taste for pure reformism, we can examine the «passive, schematic» genetic structuralism of Lucien Goldmann, whose theory has so much to tell us about the dominating social groups who produce «great works of art», and virtually nothing about the «masses»—except to the degree that they themselves become part of a «new working class» struggling for a revisionist market socialism.

B. THE POLITICS OF STRUCTURALISM AND THE NEED FOR CONCERN

1. The above arguments and ones similar to them, while often made in the most obtuse, anti-intellectual manner, are nevertheless worth some consideration, for one of the clearly dangerous aspects of the «structuralist revolution» is its neglect, neutralization and even negation of the political level of discourse.

a) It is indeed the case that structuralist theories and even Marxist structuralist theories must be understood, at least in part, as political reactions to a socio-economic, political situation. That situation does indeed correspond to the period from the late 1950's to the early 1970's (namely, to capitalism's struggle to maintain its hegemony during a time of increasing political opposition and anti-imperialist agitation).

2. Structuralism's battle against one-dimensional geneticism should remind us that we cannot grasp the ultimate value of a theory merely by tracing its origins.

a) Non-Marxist theory has frequently been the «vessel» for developments of great value to Marxism, especially given the conditions governing the development of Marxist theory itself.

b) It is important to grasp the often programmed and subliminal implications of a theory, but it is also important to distinguish the potential (including positive political) value of a theory from its politics.
3. If Keynesian economics have at least partially or temporarily broken down, if the peoples of Southeast Asia and Angola have had their victories, then structuralism may have a changed relation to a changed totality, and we should be concerned about what the use of structuralism can possibly mean today.

C. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE U. S.

1. Structuralism hit the elite U. S. universities in the late '60s, winning all sorts of disciples and champions. Given the academic pinch of the past few years, many of these students who have survived in the profession are now assistant professors dispersed to the four winds, teaching large numbers of students, spreading structuralist and semiotic concepts—even as the most elitist among them (including some Marxists) grow tired of structuralism and think they have long gone beyond or outgrown it. 6 Doesn't structuralism still affect their teaching? Do they not incorporate and then try to transcend it in their pedagogical practice—even with non-elitist and working-class students?

2. In the proliferation of structuralist discourse throughout higher education institutions—especially at the time when U. S. capitalist interests have programmed and demand a general restructuring of all aspects of campus life—we have a very good reason for at least attempting to grasp structuralism, for attempting to utilize its best qualities for ends very different from what may be intended or programmed by the theory as a whole—and there are riches in structuralism, readily utilisable in Marxist work.

   a) As we see how structuralism begins to dominate more and more journals, conferences and MLA sessions as the new hegemonic ideology for literary studies, as we see the latest offshoots and advances «beyond structuralism» and into greater and greater densities of ideological obfuscation and distortion, we must still ask: How many sympathizers with Marxism has structuralism helped to provide? For how many, after all, has structuralism been (by virtue of its limitations, of the questions it raises but cannot answer) a road to Marxism, however a «high» and initially abstractive one?

3. For many years Marxist literary work in the U. S. was so influenced by the theoretical positivism dominating literary studies (and by Zhdanovism) that its oppositional stance was no more than a strident sociology of literary content.

a) In the wake of the student movements, Marxist literary studies were reborn, but dominantly in terms of a «New Left» theorization which skirted concrete critical dimensions and constituted itself as a grand, abstractive anti-capitalism (see note 32).

b) The reasons for this are to be found primarily in the mediation of McCarthyism on U. S. thought—manifested in a fear that one's theoretical or critical activity could be reduced to a party politics.

4. The initial impact of structuralist theory on Marxist studies was to raise the troubling possibility of a rival or enemy totalizing theory. A persistent division emerged in literary studies between those non-Marxists who appropriated structuralist theory and the Marxists who rejected it out of hand.

   a) This situation still persists to a degree; for obvious reasons, Marxist student of literature with backgrounds in French, comparative literature or linguistics are most likely to assimilate structuralist theory.

5. But as structuralism made its headway into the curriculum, many Marxists began to value its formalization methods as a means of transcending a sociology of content.

6. With the advent of Althusser, these Marxists found a convenient means of conceptualizing their historical analyses in a way that (given the Althusserian approach to the relative autonomy of superstructural «levels») left a space for a non-reflectionist materialist «science» of literature making use of Formalist and structuralist analyses. 47

7. In spite of the objections one might raise to Althusser’s entire project (see II-E-c and note 32), it is nevertheless true that the Althusserian intervention is precisely the one which provides the point of departure of an at least potentially political Marxist literary analysis that while respecting literature's relative (but historically determinate) autonomy, can still place literature and literary criticism (as well as academic departements of literature) in relation to capitalist state functions and oppositional activity.

8. The work of English Marxists (notably Terry Eagleton 48) on Althusser and Macherey has opened the door to a new stage of U. S. literary activity to which the structuralist revolution has contributed.

D. DEVELOPMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA

1. The case for the importance of confronting structuralism can be strengthened by a look to other places (the U. S. is not the only target
for Parisian *haute-couture* commodities. Henri Lefebvre had to admit with a shock that structuralist and Althusserian theory was exerting great influence in Latin America. How is it possible, he asked. 42

a) Structuralist texts have been broadly circulated and studied throughout Latin America.

b) A student of Althusser, Régis Debray, becomes a would-be theorist of Latin American revolution. All of Debray's "revolutionary shifts", his *foco* theory and even his later disclaimers were based theoretically on an application of Althusserian "displacements". 43

c) Marta Harnecker's Althusserian *Conceptos elementales del materialismo histórico* has sold over a million copies in the Spanish-speaking world.

d) In 1976, Françoise Perus's *Literatura y sociedad en América Latina: el modernismo*, an Althusserian retotalization of structural historicism and dependency theory, wins Cuba's *Casa de las Américas* prize.

2. The answer to Lefebvre's question is highly complex, but it would involve these hypotheses among many others:

a) The first wave of structuralist influence has to do with the customary Latin American interest in French theory in opposition to the vast and determinate U. S. import business of books, ideology and other commodities throughout Latin America. The fact that the role of France in the international division of labor involves theoretical production is also significant.

b) The initial Althusserian wave was tied to rising hopes for revolution in Latin America and a search for theoretical reinforcement and orientation.

c) A later structuralist and Althusserian (though anti-Debray) intervention is tied to a decline of revolutionary hopes, a recognition of the need to theorize more adequately before seeking to transcend persistent structures, and more specifically, the need to constitute a fundamental re theorization of dependency theory which (partially on the wings of developments in French structural historicism 44) had established itself as the theoretical basis for the guerilla movements that had now seemingly failed. 45

3. Doubts about structuralism and yet reasons to continue dealing with it can be illustrated in relation to two instances:

a) Mexico, 1975. Several Marxist professors were removed from their positions in the state of Guerrero, at a moment of intensive political struggle, and were sent to form part of a new faculty in Baja California, where the situation has been generally calm. Recently these veteran (and "pre-structuralist") Marxist professors complained that they were losing student support in a methodological-ideological struggle with a group of semioticians who had joined the faculty at roughly the same time as the Marxists.

b) Caracas and Mexico City, 1977. The diaspora of left intellectuals from the Southern Cone has generated a structuralist-Marxist reorientation in Latin American studies. In literature, the dominant project seems to be the elaboration of a Marxist science relating socioeconomic and literary practices, incorporating the latest advances in semiotics and reception theory and aiming at a total re-evaluation of Latin American literary history. 46

E. A LAST WORD

1. It seems clear that there are political implications in the Marxist appropriation of structuralist developments, and there is a constant need for a Marxist critique of the appropriation process —of what Marxists are doing with structuralism, and what structuralism is doing to Marxists.

2. As in all such encounters, of course, Marxists face the danger of absorption and assimilation: in this particular case, there is a possibility that Marxist praxis, even at the level of its theorization, will lose ground in the process of deepening a "scientific" formalization of social and artistic relations.

a) In the appropriation of structuralist contributions, Marxists will have to continue seeking a means to interpret the world that does not negate the possibility of changing it.

3. But surely Marxists have the strength for the challenge of structuralism, if only because Marxism represents the dynamic and transformable theory and practice of human groups whose needs and aspirations lead to a constant effort to transcend the real and ideological limits imposed by the structures of capitalism.

NOTES

1 A shorter version of this article was presented at a conference on Social Theory and the Arts at Stockton State College, New Jersey, in April 1977. The article draws on several papers completed or in draft form, written on my own or with Héleana Rodriguez in the last few years; it is a provisional synthesis of
my total study-in-progress on the meeting of structuralist and Marxist currents in the 1960's as they center on literary theory and potentiate a post-structuralist Marxist approach that transcends a sociology of literature. Because of the theoretical, ideological and political issues at stake, I have thought it valuable to distill aspects of my research now to give a focussed picture and facilitate a critical examination of what I and fellow researchers have been up to, and thereby to place in relief possible errors, lapses and unexplored directions for further investigation.


4 For Grundrisse, see The Mirror of Production (St. Louis, 1975) — his only book thus far translated into English. Siglo Veintiuno Editorial has already published Baudrillard's major works in Spanish.
6 The Frankfurt School critique against production in Marx is continued in Habermas, Structuralists, Althusserians and Tel Quel Marxists have sometimes virtually fetishized «production» as a concept (literary production being a relatively autonomous mode of production in itself) — to be related to others: cf. Julia Kristeva «La sémiotique et la production», in Semiotica, 2; in Latin America, see the recent work of Noé Jirick). But they have theoretical difficulty in accounting for a production which is not merely a reproductive variation. Production without change is no more than exchange, the best conceptualization of which is a communications model. For more on this issue (which is also important for dependency theory and its literary applications), see III-B. C and D.
9 For this trajectory, see Robert Scholes, Structuralism in Literature (New Haven, 1974).
10 On the varied possible relations between narrative structures and cultures, see Lévi-Strauss, in The Structuralists, pp. 124-46.
11 Cf. the critique of Lucien Sève, «Méthode structurale et méthode dialectique», in La Pensée, 135 (October 1967).
14 A good starting point (perhaps better than Sarrre's, Lefebvre's or Goldmann's) would be with Karl Kosik, Die Diezaleitik des Konkreten. Lynne Layton of the St. Louis Telos Group has written a useful but unpublished paper which relies heavily on Kosik (in relation to a Hegelian interpretation of the Grundrisse) to constitute a critique of literary structuralism.
literary relations. But oppositional tendencies and cross-influences are often decisive. One must be very careful in applying Althusser "whose problems and problems are traceable to his anti-historicist, structuralist bias.

37 On these limits, see my article, "Sade et Lautréamont (sans Blanchot)", in *Boundary 2* (Winter, 1977), pp. 507-528.
38 Cf. the Frankfurt School on the culture or consciousness industry; also Dorfman, Matelart, etc. in Latin America. Here the Hegelian-Marxist concern for the relation between commodity and artistic forms is mediated by the Althusserian view of structural relations among distinct productions (see note 32). On the "unequilibrated, but carefully directed" forms of Bertolt Brecht, and his struggle against artistic commodification, see my article, "Brecht and the Dynamics of Production", in *Praxis*, 3 (Fall, 1977), pp. 115-37.
39 Here, a version of Derrida's deconstructivism, as integral to the *Tel Quel* position. The strongest argument for this approach is probably that of Roman Laperini, in "Las aporias del estructuralismo y la crítica marxista", in *Estructuralismo y Marxismo*, ed. Alberto Sánchez Mascallen (Mexico, 1967). An important recent treatment of the relations between Marxism and structuralism in terms of aesthetic theory is Stefan Morawski, *Inquiries into the Fundamentals of Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974).
40 Part IV integrates three efforts: a paper read at the French section of the Marxist Literary Group at the MLA Convention (San Francisco, Dec. 1975); a presentation (with Rodríguez) to the Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos "Rómulo Gallegos" (Carcas, October 1977), and the "Auto-Critique" (note 32).
43 The place left for literature in Althusser must in part account for his greater success among Marxist literature students than among their counterparts in the social sciences. In the world of Paul Piccone and Alvin Gouldner (*Telos, Theory and Society*), structuralism and Althusserian Marxism are subjects of ridicule. Negatively, we might note that Althusser's theory does provide a rather simple and schematic approach to Marxism that is useful to literary students; further, Althusserian "materialism" may console those Marxist literati who feel threatened by charges of effete subjectivity in their work.
44 Cf. Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology* (London, 1976), which is already exerting a great influence on U.S. Marxist literary studies.
46 For the Debray-Althusser connection, see Tom Good's review article on three post-foco theory books by Debray, in *Telos*, 25 (Fall, 1975), pp. 233-38.
47 The relations are established by Wallerstein—cf. note 18.