

Roland Barthes--*The Structuralist Activity*

Structuralism is an activity--it is "the controlled succession of a certain number of mental operations.

The goal of all structuralist activity is to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the "functions") of this object."

This reconstruction is called the **simulacrum**. "**The simulacrum is intellect added to object.**" The simulacrum is essentially **the representation the critic makes of the sensuous manifold which is the object.**

Structuralism involves **two operations:**

- 1) **dissection**--"find[ing] in it [the simulacrum] certain mobile fragments whose differential situation engenders a certain meaning"; and
- 2) **articulation**--discovering or establishing for the units posited by the above activity "certain rules of association."

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For Barthes, structuralism is "not a school, nor even a movement." Barthes defines **structuralism as an activity**--it is "the controlled succession of a certain number of mental operations. . . . **The goal of all structuralist activity**, whether reflexive or poetic, **is to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the "functions") of this object.**" In the structuralist activity, "creation or reflection are . . . a veritable fabrication of a world which resembles the first [original] one, not in order to copy it but to render it intelligible." This copy of the original world or object is what Barthes refers to as the *simulacrum*. "**The simulacrum is intellect added to object.**" The simulacrum is essentially **the representation the critic makes of the sensuous manifold which is the object**; the critic selects out of an infinity of perceptual possibilities inherent in the object a certain number of characteristics on which to focus, thus building a critical response to the object on the basis of the reconstruction or re-presentation of the object.

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The simulacrum, analyzed in this manner, "does not render the world" as it is found by the critic--in its sensuous entirety. This is impossible; no one of us can process with equal attention all of the sense data we receive each second--if we were unable to filter out the vast majority of such data we would be functionally insane. The simulacrum, therefore is a kind of representation of the world as seen through such a selective filtering process; "it manifests a new category of the object, which is neither the real nor the rational, but the *functional* . . . it highlights the strictly human process by which men give meaning to things. . . . Ultimately, one might say that **the object of structuralism is not man endowed with meanings, but man fabricating meanings.**"It is this meaning-making activity which is the structuralist--and *human* activity.