THE QUIET REVOLUTION:
THE TRANSFORMATION AND REINTEGRATION OF THE HUMANITIES

"O Where are you going said the reader to rider"
W.H. Auden

Beth A. Casey
Bowling Green State University

ABSTRACT

A transformation has occurred in the humanities during the past four decades which has permitted the humanistic disciplines to reintegrate with each other and with the social sciences. The gradual absorption of Saussurean linguistics has brought about a profound change in our understanding of the relationship between language and the world. This, in turn, has resulted in an age of theory and in the production of metalanguages which reinforce the connective power of the humanistic disciplines. Linguistic models have replaced models borrowed from the natural sciences in partial recognition of the fact that culture is discursively constructed and rooted in specifically historical situations. Imagery, theory, method, and style are borrowed from humanistic disciplines to aid the social sciences as the natural sciences provide fewer relevant models. We are moving toward a new philology or the study of culture as text.

★

Raymond Williams argues that we are passing through a long revolution which began toward the end of the eighteenth century and which is transforming humankind and its institutions.[1] This revolution he divides into three concurrent ones: a democratic revolution which is making it increasingly clear on a global basis that people must and will govern themselves; a cultural revolution which is extending the skills of literacy and advanced communication to all people; and an industrial revolution utilizing scientific and technological developments. The separated disciplines of politics, economics, art, and communications prevent our correlating cultural discoveries; thus, the transformation, Williams notes, is difficult for us to understand and describe. As a resolution, he postulates a concept of creativity which would remove the boundaries between aesthetics and economics and return us once again to a Renaissance conception of art as craft or skill -- all cultural forms becoming

examples of creative activity different only in intensity from works of art. Such a sociology of cultural forms would enable us to perceive society presenting itself to itself in various symbolic practices -- whether economic, political, literary, or social. The world of interacting relationships which is our common associative life could then be more accurately perceived, and insights into our most common human problems more readily achieved.

I will argue in this essay that another revolution has quietly been taking place during the past four decades -- and gaining extraordinary impetus during the past two --which is, indeed, a contributing stream of Williams' "long revolution" of democracy, technology, and communicative competence. I shall also argue that it may create a kind of cultural philology not unlike Williams' desired form, enabling us to perceive our human situation with greater scope of understanding. I am speaking of the gradual transformation in the humanities which is permitting the humanistic disciplines of linguistics, literature, rhetoric, philosophy, aesthetics, history, and art history to reintegrate with each other and with the social sciences. New developments in philosophical, literary, and historical theory have created metalanguages, reinforcing the connective power of the humanities and, thus, bringing about this transformation. This age of theory has evolved largely as a result of profound changes in our understanding of the relationship between language and the world. Our gradual absorption of the more radical elements of the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, whose Course in General Linguistics was first published in 1916 is, perhaps, the most intellectually catalyzing contribution to this cultural event.

This spring, the New York Times provided interesting social evidence of this humanistic change taking place among faculty across the country in an article entitled "Scholarly Disciplines: Breaking Out."[2] From Bryn Mawr to Berkeley, study groups from such disciplines as literature, philosophy, art history, and anthropology have been forming in an attempt to address issues larger than disciplinary specializations intend them, at present, to ask. The groups gather to study such "non-scientific" European thinkers (termed "the European Mafia"), as Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Marx, and Freud in an attempt to learn more of how different disciplines interpret the world of human culture, knowledge, or language. At Berkeley, Stephen Greenblatt, co-editor of the interdisciplinary journal, Representations, noted, "It seems absurd to think that the simple act of getting together to discuss things should be so surprising, but it is."[3] Most of the scholars being discussed can be termed humanists, as are most of the faculty, and what they have in common is a deep interest in language.

However, the Times article failed to report on a concomittant event: the emergence of such interdisciplinary areas as popular culture -- sometimes, termed the "new humanity" -- and the humanistic involvement in ethnic

studies, women's studies, and writing across the curriculum. All of these academic social formations evolve from an interest in methodologies applicable in many areas: textual interpretation, semiotics, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction. A curricular rhetoric is obviously a need.

Susan Suleiman in a survey of recent developments in literary theory and criticism has characterized the transformation in the humanities as "a quiet revolution," one which suddenly enables us without fanfare or upheaval, to see what has always been there.[4] It is from her description that I have taken the title of this essay, for such an extraordinary number of theories were generated with such rapidity during the past two decades that the transformation was upon us without our notice. Suleiman focuses on the terms "reader" and "audience" in a quest for a unifying rubric or code for understanding the manifest varieties of theory. Though the term "audience-oriented" may not be as functionally comprehensive for speaking of the humanities as a whole, the audience can, indeed, be said to have made its way to the stage.

Meyer Abrams has noted that a pragmatic audience-oriented criticism existed from the time of Horace through much of the eighteenth century.[5] During that time, mimetic theories of art held sway, with the mind often compared to a reflector or the work of art to a mirror. The romantics brought about a reversal of the mimetic concept of art by substituting a protective, creative concept of mind, and proclaiming, as an analogue, an expressive theory of art. The artist was the focal point of discourse who half-created, half-perceived the objects of his or her intent. In the early thirties, the New Criticism loosened the stronghold of a naive realism by emphasizing a formalism sufficiently strict to allow for the conception of the work of art as autotelic – wholly divorced from context. At present, a transactional model of mind and world, an evolution of romantic expressive and objectivist theories, constitutes a new subjectivity. With this critical focus the audience has emerged as a central coordinate.

In classical times, an audience orientation produced pragmatic principles destined to achieve certain effects, i.e., to delight, to teach, or to persuade. Such imperatives recall the functions of the classical art of rhetoric, which has, also, made a reappearance on the contemporary scene. Pragmatism often resulted in competition among humanistic disciplines with, perhaps, the poet who has the responsibility of moving the audience to virtue, being exalted above the philosopher or historian. The work of art was an instrument for achieving particular ends with genres being classified according to whether they achieved these ends. The romantic orientation to the artist and the objectivist orientation to the work brought about a cultural interruption which appears to have concluded with a return to the view of art as functional – as a particular process in the general human process of communication, thus, redefining its

status and linking it with our ordinary social life. Though the status of genres may not be our concern today, anymore than an interest in the hierarchy of the disciplines, the interest in rhetoric and a renewed emphasis on the rules and the maxims of art which characterized a pragmatic, classical era have returned with considerable force.

What is most central, at present, to the varieties of humanistic theory; rhetorical, semiotic, structural, deconstructionist, phenomenological, or hermeneutic, is a desire to conceive of human phenomena as a language. This in itself lends impetus to a view of the humanities as language-oriented connective disciplines, raising the issue of the contextual nature of all thought. At the threshold of this language-mediated world stands Wittgenstein's contention in Philosophical Investigations that such acts as ordinary questioning, chatting, or commanding stand behind such structures as war or commerce and that the "facts" of any matter are always relative to the framework in which they occur. Language games presuppose intersubjectivity, and ways of knowledge are in themselves forms of life. The intersubjective community of discourse is the ground of knowledge.

It is the seminal work of Ferdinand de Saussure which first enabled linguists and other humanists to realize that the social world is discursively constructed and rooted in specifically historical situations.[6] Prior to Saussure, language had been viewed as the representative of thought with the scholar an Adam naming entities in the Garden of Eden. Saussure's discoveries of the nature of language allowed us to realize that language is the condition of thought and not its representative; thus, his work broke a fissure in the empiricist position and confounded attempts to view mimesis empirically. According to Saussure, signs function through their relative position in the language and not through any intrinsic value. Languages divide the world, differentiate between concepts -- such as male and female -- classify, and construct. Signs function in Saussurean linguistics through their relative positions and not through intrinsic values. Since words do not have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to the next, they obviously do not stand for pre-existing concepts. The arbitrary nature of the sign explains why the social fact alone can create a linguistic system.[7] The individual is incapable of fixing a single value. Only through the examination of an interdependent whole can one, through analysis, obtain the elements of that system. Social organization is impossible without language, for only through the categories of a symbolic order can knowledge become possible. All signifieds are socially-constructed. Feminists, for example, have been quick to point out the way in which the masculine pronoun, as preferred, bears witness to ideology and politics inscribed in discourse. On a simpler level, even colors vary from language to language and are created by the differentiated sign. In a prophetic passage Saussure writes:

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable, it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology. I shall call it semiology (from Greek semion, "sign"). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance.[8]

After Saussure, it is natural to consider the historic and intertextual expectations of readers and to recognize, since language constructs social realities, that a plurality of meanings is a necessary expectation of any text. Deconstructing a text to examine the process of its construction or its metaphorical nature is essential. The plural text cannot be consumed, is not an object for consumption, but exists for the production of meaning. As Catherine Belsey has argued, "The task of criticism is to establish the unspoken in the text, to decentre it in order to produce a real knowledge of history."[9]

The loss of the notion of a text as competent to represent something, empirically, anterior to it -- the forsaking of a naive realism -- has been accompanied by the collapse of the natural sciences as the best and most relevant model for the practice of social and humanistic disciplines. In fact, the idea of a single formal scientific method itself seems to have vanished. The extent to which the literary world had been affected by scientific models is surprising. The New Criticism sought to create, by emphasis on an autonomous reader and an autonomous text, a strong disciplinary concept and a power base for literary study which would provide it with the ability to confront the natural sciences and, at last maintain an equilibrium. Many concepts of the objective New Criticism, as John Searle has recently pointed out, were curiously positivistic and clearly inadequate for the purposes they were supposed to serve.[10] Concepts such as intention in language and literature are culturally grounded in networks of linguistic and social practices and cannot be subjected to mechanical procedures of verification. An unconscious simulation of scientific methods -- a crude positivism -- had resulted in the separation of the humanistic disciplines of literature and language from the mainstream of society. The way back to that mainstream has been through a recognition of the centrality of language to all the humanistic disciplines and the inextricable connection of language and society. For most social theorists, seminal for today's humanists, society is established through the mediation of language and its codes. Some examples would be Claude Levi-Strauss (anthroplogy), Lucien Goldmann (sociology), Jacques Lacan (psycho-analysis), Michel Foucault (history), or Roland Barthes (semiotics and literary criticism).

This linguistic orientation can easily be amplified by noting, as Francois Lyotard has, that most technologies today have to do with language and theories of linguistics; mass communications, information theory, computers and computer languages, problems of translation, data banks, problems of information storage, telematics, and cybernetics. Data banks, far surpassing human memory, provide a new potential for solving problems and connecting previously independent units of knowledge. Lyotard has argued that the status of knowledge is fundamentally altered as societies enter the post-industrial, or technological age, thus, confirming Raymond Williams' version of "a long revolution." Society becomes a network of human discourse and the disciplines -- including the humanities -- constitute, themselves, the social bond. Thus, a praxis for action returns to the humanities curricula. Lyotard notes: "… language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist: even before he is born, only by virtue of the name he is given, the human child is already positioned as the referent in the story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he will inevitably chart his course. Or more simply still, the question of the social bond, insofar as it is a question, is itself a language game, the game of inquiry. It immediately positions the person who asks, as well as the addressee and the referent asked about: it is already the social bond."[11]

Humanistic discourse today focuses most often on an understanding of texts as forms of communication with the authors and readers and the interaction between the two serving as the central focus of a new pragmatic, historically grounded inquiry. The author and the reader of a text, as Roman Jakobson describes it in his influential essay on linguistics and poetics, are related to each other as the sender and receiver of a code or message.[12] Hence, the constitutive factors in any speech event, whether a lawyer's encounter or referential function, the code or metalinguistic function; the contact or medium and the message or poetic function. Such a formula, inevitably, opens a new avenue for a meeting of the literary act and acts of everyday language. It should also open avenues for discourse among the humanistic disciplines, for if language and rhetoric are at the fountainhead of humanistic inquiry, it is natural to perceive disciplines, as Richard Rorty perceives philosophy -- as matrices for continuous conversations with all disciplines.[13]

CONVERSATIONS AMONG DISCIPLINES

In October of 1966, Professors Richard Nacksey and Eugenic Donato of Johns Hopkins University gathered over one hundred humanists and social

scientists from the United States and Europe at the Johns Hopkins Humanities Center to participate in a symposium with the goal of exploring the impact of contemporary "structuralist" thought on critical methods in the humanistic and social sciences. The proceedings were published in 1971 in a volume entitled <u>The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy</u>.[14] The symposium inaugurated a two-year program of seminars which sought to explore the impact of contemporary structuralist thought on critical methods in the humanities and social sciences and to understand structuralism as a cross-disciplinary phenomenon. The disciplines of anthropology, classical studies, comparative literature, linguistics, literary criticism, philosophy, psychoanalysis, semiology, sociology, and history were represented. Behind this conference, which marked the demise of American formalism, was a recognition of the centrality of language to the individual worlds of the disciplines and of the consequent concerns common to every field of study: the general theory of signs and language systems, the use and abuse of models, analogies and transformations as analytic techniques, the status of the subject and the resulting possibilities for interdisciplinary cooperation.[15] We will examine some examples of the kinds of continuity of concerns noted at the conference in 1966 which are producing interaction in particular humanistic and social science disciplines today.

Clifford Geertz in an article entitled "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," has described in some detail the analogies drawn from the humanities which are coming to play a role in sociological and anthropological understanding. Geertz argues that it is no longer possible for the social sciences to be considered "underdeveloped natural sciences," and. as a consequence, the ideals of explanation are gradually changing from ones involving laws and instances to those of cases and interpretations.[16] Thus, imagery, method, theory, and style must be drawn from the humanities for a critical consciousness to be developed. Geertz notes, also, that neither humanists nor social scientists are really adequately prepared for this. Humanists are needed to teach social scientists how to construct a representation, express an attitude, or form an intention, since explanation issues most frequently in a construction like Burckhardt's rather than a law like Darwin's. Geertz notes that terms such as text, drama, ritual and game are of equal importance to social scientists and humanists.

Richard H. Brown, in <u>A Poetic for Sociology</u>, has called for a cognitive aesthetic which would allow the pioneering artist and scientist to converse in a sociology which is neither science nor art, but certainly a discipline capable of making scientifically valid judgments which are simultaneously humane.[17] Since sociology is a discipline which concerns itself with structure and symbol systems, Brown returns to the humanities to begin a conversation with aesthetics as the privileged language of discourse. In discussions of point of view,

metaphor, and irony, Brown seeks an intersubjective community of discourse. Positivism, in his linguistically-oriented view, distinguished between reality and the symbols that represent it and failed to grasp the function of metaphor in an attempt to preserve the kind of subjective-objective dichotomy which would render poetic language "untrue." Wittgenstein's language games as forms of life, Husserl's descriptions of the life-world, Pierce's mediation of sign processes, and even Cassirer's concept of art as an organ of reality rather than a mirror of it are some of the theoretical understandings structuring Brown's effort to heal the old dichotomies of explanation and interpretation, determinism and freedom, or even truth and beauty. Brown succeeds to a credible extent in portraying the way in which an understanding of language and history in a post-Saussurean world can structure explanation in the discipline of sociology in a reflexive, non-solipsistic manner.

In the discipline of philosophy, it is surely Richard Rorty whose seminal text, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, deconstructs the mimetic tradition of philosophy from the seventeenth century to the present day, who has most opened that discipline to conversation with social sciences and other humanities. Analytic language philosophy could not construct for Rorty a permanent groundwork for inquiry let alone a revolution. For Rorty, it is the notion that philosophical inquiry takes place within a framework which can be isolated prior to the conclusion of the inquiry -- implying a priori presuppositions -- that has come to an end. Thus, he invalidates the tradition of Descartes, Locke, and Kant. Philosophy is arguably distinct from science only with the Cartesian claim that by turning inward we can find truth -- that the nature of the knowing subject or the nature of the medium in itself can impose the framework of inquiry. He notes: "The only point on which I would insist is that the philosopher's moral concern should be with continuing the conversation of the West, rather than with insisting upon a place for the traditional problems of modern philosophy within that conversation."[18]

Rorty is convinced that a picture of the mind as a great mirror has held philosophy in thrall and, thus, created a disciplinary argument as to what philosophy "should consist of." In recreating a disciplinary matrix he turns to an interesting modern triumvirate: Wittgenstein, Dewey, and Heidegger. These philosophers, he argues, reminded us that traditional philosophy had enabled us to escape from history -- that other erstwhile member of the humanities. Dewey's pragmatic conception of knowledge as "that which we are justified in believing," his notion of society and his seeking justification in society as a social phenomenon rather than in a transaction between the knower and the known eliminates the Cartesian idealism of the earlier philosophical tradition. Wittgenstein's recognition of language as a tool and not a mirror eliminates the possibility of linguistic representation and brings Rorty to a rapprochement with Wittgenstein's idea of metaphysics as a "disease" of language. Heidegger's

argument that the nature of the knowing subject cannot be a source of necessary truths -- that the cogito constitutes an act of self-deception causing us to lose that openness which initially tempted us to think -- assists him to break the ideal of objective cognition and embrace, instead, aesthetic enhancement. Like Rorty, Brown emphasizes the arts and sciences as symbolic constructs. The notion of knowledge as that assemblage of accurate representations is, herein, replaced by a pragmatic conception of knowledge which eliminates the contrast between <u>representing</u> the world and <u>coping</u> with it.[19]

Rorty, in his most recent work, <u>Consequences of Pragmatism</u>, argues that philosophy is first of all a language-based discipline. "If there is one thing we have learned about concepts in recent decades," he writes, "it is that to have a concept is to be able to use a word, that to have a mastery of concepts is to be able to use a language, and that languages are created rather than discovered."[20] Analytic philosophy, certainly the dominant interest in our philosophy departments, began as a way of moving from speculation to science -- from an historically-based discipline to one centering around logical analysis. Today, however, analytic philosophy is a technique of argumentation with no agenda for central philosophical questions. Ordinary language philosophy has simply ended this agenda. Philosophers work to enlarge a linguistic and argumentative repertoire and, thus, do only what good lawyers do -- provide arguments for what their clients have decided to do, making the chosen decision appear better.

The profession of philosophy, Rorty argues, will continue to flourish, as professions generally survive their originating paradigms. Students in Rorty's view will continue to read speculative and systematic philosophy from Plato to Whitehead, but, nevertheless, metaphysics and epistemology have been set aside as possible disciplines, bringing philosophy into a revolutionary period in Kuhn's sense of the term. Rorty may, unlike Kuhn, fail in his conclusions to grasp the possible cultural and historical readings given metaphysical systems and epistemologies, and appear to be throwing the entire past of this discipline aside, but his ideas are clearly representative of current thinking in the humanities.

Quentin Skinner, in a recent survey on theoretical influence in the social sciences argues that there has been a reaction against the natural sciences as an adequate model for the social sciences and that the explanation of human behavior unlike that of natural events, should include, for example, some attempt to interpret the meanings of social actions from the point of view of the agents performing them. If human behavior is always to be perceived in lawlike, scientific terms, questions about abnormal behaviors must always be geared to the malfunction which is promoting it. The fact that such behavior

may be strategic and the result of trying to cope with the world may be entirely missed as a result. Again, Wittgenstein's insistence that all attempts to understand facts are relative to the framework in which they are considered has influenced the social sciences as profoundly as the humanities. The demise of classical philosophy and its cultural role among the disciplines which we have noted above left social scientists with an empirical science of society as the only possible goal. In the past two decades, most remarkably, Marxism and psychoanalysis have both revived, and such figures as Thomas Kuhn, Michel Foucualt, Jacques Derrida, Hans-Georg Gadamer, not to mention Jurgen Habermas and the Annales historians have had enormous influence on theory in the social sciences. These figures are equally valorized by literary critics and rhetoricians seeking to build a bridge to the world of social functioning.[21]

Ironically, Skinner titled his anthology of essays The Return of Grand Theory in the Social Sciences. C. Wright Mills in The Sociological Imagination once labeled Grand Theory any belief that the primary goal of social science should be that of constructing a systematic theory of the nature of man and society and castigated it as inimical to imagination itself. But the scholars who are the subject of Skinner's anthology of essays are completely disinterested in this kind of system which is inimical to their varied conceptions of reality. He also omits linguistically-oriented critics like Lacan, Althussur, or Deleuze in a failure to recognize the kind of linking to the humanities which is taking place.

LANGUAGE, STRUCTURE, AND DECONSTRUCTION: FOUR SEMINAL PRACTITIONERS

The age of theory and metalanguages has witnessed an influx of innovative scholarship in many disciplines. I wish to single out the work of four scholars in order to demonstrate the manner in which relationships to language have structured the foundations of their work and to note some of the analogies among their widely different endeavors. The four I have selected have had extensive influence on scholarship in the humanities. They, also, represent two significant critical movements: structuralism and deconstruction. These are Claude Levi-Strauss in anthropology; Roland Barthes in semiology; Jacques Derrida in philosophy; and Michel Foucault in history.

The major work of Claude Levi-Strauss, including The Elementary Structures of Kinship, the volumes on mythology beginning with The Raw and The Cooked, and The Savage Mind, arose directly from the translation of linguistic categories to a domain normally thought of as non-linguistic. This translation allowed the narrative structures of myths, for example, to be related to the structures of the society in which they functioned. In an essay entitled "Linguistics and Anthropology," Levi-Strauss demonstrated the applicability of

models taken from structural phonetics to the description of human phenomenon and, in particular, to kinship systems. He recognized, however, major problems in the methodological transfer. The relationship between language and culture in post-Saussurean linguists is complex and too new for certainties. Levi-Strauss himself wrote: "I would say that between culture and language there cannot be no relation at all, and there cannot be a 100 percent correlation either. Both situations are impossible to achieve."[22] He insisted, further, that if linguists and anthropologists worked together, important results of such cooperation would follow for both disciplines … The possible reward might be some clues to the manner in which the human mind works – that mind which Levi-Strauss called "our invited guest."

Two structural studies in particular among Levi-Strauss' work captivated the imaginations of humanistic scholars. First, his structural studies of myth deepened comprehension of a cultural phenomenon by allowing it to be understood as an example of a universal language, a part of human speech, constructed of particular elements. Then, his analysis of the Oedipus myth startled a generation of scholars in literature, classics and anthropology who were prepared to scoff at the more elaborate explanations of myth in such studies as The Raw and the Cooked, where structures appeared chosen in order to allow myths to explain themselves. Levi-Strauss' study of Sophocles' tragedy revealed a profound cultural insight. Through a structural analysis of the Oedipus cycle, Levi-Strauss was to connect this ancient tragedy with the original denial of the autochohonous origin of man and, thus, reveal a logic hitherto unknown in mythical thought.[23] The second instance of influence was his interpretation in The Savage Mind of mythical thought as a kind of intellectual "bricolage" or "a making do" with whatever is at hand in a closed universe of concrete instruments. Literary critics began to speculate on the relationships of literary works and mythological structures to cultural forms, to recognize the relationship of literature to other kinds of discourse, and to note the function of particular works rather than concentrating on classical imitation.

Levi-Strauss, like many other social scientists and humanists, seized upon the discontinuity opened up by Saussure's division of the linguistic sign into signifier and signified, and the difficult concept resulting of a binary unity. In modern linguistics, the signifier is prior to the signified. Levi-Strauss argued that he had learned from Freud, Marx, and from geology that to reach reality we must first repudiate experience, even if later we reintegrate it in an objective synthesis. It is the naive vision of the mirror of reality that is repudiated in such a statement.

Thought about language does not lend itself easily to a separation of the signifier and the signified, but it is the gap between the system of signs and the structures in the world to which they may or may not correspond which

provided an opportunity for thinkers such as Levi-Strauss and Foucault to avoid the problem of the individual subject -- a highly controversial decision. In Post-Saussurean linguistics, the relationship of the world of things and the world of words -- the gap between signifier and signified -- is one of difference -- the concept from which Jacques Derrida was to construct his <u>Grammatologie</u>, and Foucault <u>The Order of Things</u> -- a new archaeology of the human sciences. Such a concept has unusual implications for the study of discourse. If literature cannot <u>represent</u> reality in some metaphysical way, it will become a contested concept. Critics begin to ask if literature might, itself, then be conceived as a form of criticism, or philosophy, or psychoanalysis. The reverse is also possible -- producing Geertz's "blurred genres" -- criticism, in so much as it attempts to interpret literature, may, paradoxically, be perceived as a form of literature.

For literary critics and historians, in particular, the preeminent theorist of structuralism has been Roland Barthes. For Barthes the object of structural inquiry is man fabricating meanings, and the new man of structural inquiry is, therefore, <u>Homo Significans</u>. Barthes restores an aesthetic vision to structuralism by defining it not as a philosophical movement but as a practice or an activity whose goal is to reconstruct "an object" in such a way as to manifest the rules of its functioning. In some sense, therefore, literature or any process of art is a structural activity based on a mimesis of functions. Structural analysis links the intelligible to the material and the aesthetic to the ideological. For Barthes, when Levi-Strauss discovers the homologic functioning of the totemic imagination, or Granger the formal rules of economic thought, or Richard produces a phenomenological analysis of a poem of Mallarme's, each person is doing nothing different from what Mondrian was doing when he painted a picture. We reconstruct objects in order to make something intelligible or to make certain functions appear. What we are doing in Barthes' terms is highlighting the strictly human process by which men give meaning to things. Structuralist activity seeks, however, not to assign meanings to things but to discover "how meaning is possible, at what cost and by what means."[24] The process of the creation of meaning is the focus. Literature to Barthes is a "mantic" activity that is both engaged in the world by the course of meanings which it remakes with it and disengaged from the contingent meanings which the world elaborates: it is "an answer which questions and a question which answers."[25] Literature for the structuralist is a language, i.e., a system of signs. Its being is not in its message but in its special semantic system whose goal is to put meaning in the world. The goal of criticism is not to decipher the work's meaning, but to reconstruct the rules and constraints of that meaning's elaboration.

When asked if he saw a new synthesis beginning to appear between science and art, since he seemed to see no difference between a structural

anthropologist like Levi-Strauss and an artist like Mondrian, Barthes chose instead to expand on the possibility of a new anthropology. "A map of human praxis," he noted "is being redrawn, and the form of this enormous modification (but not, of course, its content) cannot fail to remind us of the Renaissance."[26] This map of praxis originates for Barthes as for other humanist scholars in the loss of the positivist obsession. Science and art both can acknowledge the relativity of object and inquiry.

The work of Jacques Derrida disrupted earlier structural thought and significantly catalyzed imagination in the humanities. Derrida can be credited nearly single-handedly, with originating the movement we have come to call by the awkward name of deconstruction.[27] Deconstruction is fundamentally a way of critiquing the implications of the historicity of language and the intertextuality of all tests, After structuralist critics had demonstrated the analogies of language and society, deconstruction appeared on the intellectual horizon to unravel the metaphorical skeins of words themselves. The reader and the writer for Derrida are always at the command of the patterns of the language utilized and some of those patterns will naturally be unobserved. If the unconscious is structured like a "language" as Lacan would argue, or if a given historical period has an episteme or a grammar as Foucault would argue, or if myth is, as Levi-Strauss suggests, a kind of a language, then Derrida would argue that the status of the discourse chosen to deconstruct a problem will inevitably be involved in complications of its own making. One of Derrida's most significant contributions is to have pointed to the act of writing as an activity in itself rather than as the dress of speech or the sign of a reality beyond itself. In considering the relationship of signifier and signified it is usual to consider the differences between, speech and writing -- the two kinds of signs -- one oral and of time -- one visual and of space. Derrida finds the emphasis on the primacy of speech responsible for the insistence on a metaphysics of <u>presence</u> in Western Civilization from Plato to the present, which tends, too easily, to assume a transcendental signified or center. It is this issue which is, also, the central focus of most attacks on Derrida's work. Through his examination of the concept of writing, he does seek to undermine traditional humanism and to deconstruct traditional notions of presence: <u>eidos</u>, <u>arche telos</u>, <u>enargeia</u>, <u>ousia</u> (essence, existence, substance, subject) <u>aletheia</u>, transcendentality. consciousness, or conscience, God, man, and so forth."[28] By examining the metaphorical nature of these terms and the intertextuality of the texts in which they are utilized, Derrida suspends the reference of these concepts. However, the "center" for Derrida is an essential "function," even if it does not exist. Paradoxically, we must know how the subject functions and from whence it comes. This is the Derridean difference, the systematic play of differences, of <u>traces</u> of differences, of the spacing by which elements refer to one another. Metaphysics cannot, obviously, be attacked in a language lacking a history -- the history, in fact,

of metaphysics itself.

In his best known essay. "Structure, Sign, and Play." which was presented at the Hopkins conference on the languages of criticism, Derrida sought to provide an intellectual history for his sense of the absence of the transcendental signified and the inevitable result, for humanists, of the "free play" of signification. In it he points to the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, the Freudian decentering of self-possession -- or the simple lesson that the ego is not master in its own house -- ; and the Nietzschean substitution of the free play of metaphor for truth. Derrida turns to ethnology for his most significant illustration:

> One can, in fact, assume that ethnology could have been born as a science only at the moment when a decentering had come about: at the moment when European culture -- and in consequence, the history of metaphysics and of its concepts -- had been dislocated, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference. This moment is not first and foremost a moment of philosophical or scientific discourse, it is also a moment which is political, economic, technical, and so forth. One can say in total assurance that there is nothing fortuitous about the fact that the critique of ethnocentrism -- the very condition of ethnology -- should be systematically and historically contemporaneous with the destruction of the history of metaphysics. Both belong to the same era.[29]

Derrida's interpretations of the gap between the signifier and the signified have been productive of much creative thought. What history has repressed in language may come to be fruitfully revealed with such deconstructive technique.

For Michel Foucault the institutions of human culture are themselves a language whose grammar we must seek. In his works Madness and Civilization, Birth of the Clinic, and The Order of Things he examined the discourses of psychiatry, medicine and the human sciences, seeking the ways in which they perceived, inhibited, repressed, and restricted the sanity, health and knowledge of human kind in the West. Foucault engages with the oppositions, once again, of sign and signified, and the oppositions of discourse: madness and sanity, sickness and health, knowledge and falsehood. In doing so he deconstructs the centers of power which articulate these oppositions. Of each of the humanistic disciplines, Foucault asks: Who is speaking? By what right? What will constitute evidence? What will constitute reason? His goal is to

disclose the modalities and the pathology of the methods of control in social institutions. CASEY/ 85

In <u>The Archaeology of Knowledge</u>, he writes a discourse about discourses and raises consciousness of the way in which language may or may not disclose possible resolutions to our most human problems and enable us to see cultural objects and institutions in their contextual reality. Like Derrida, he would rid the history of thought of its corruption by a transcendental narcissism. Hayden White, in his analysis of Foucault's thought, argues that the <u>authority</u> of Foucault's discourse is derived from its style, that the style gives a place of privilege to the trope of catachresis; and that this trope serves as the mode of Foucault's "world view."[30] Catachresis is the misapplication of a term – as we might say "a tongue: for a language." Thus, Foucault's discourse <u>looks</u> like history, like philosophy, and like criticism but is really antithetical to them. For our purposes, however, it is important to observe that Foucault achieves some reintegration of their functions and then, critically, deconstructs this. The purpose of discourse for Foucault is to <u>end</u> it. He writes in "The Discourse on Language": "...if philosophy really must begin as absolute discourse, then what of history, and what is this beginning which starts out with a singular individual, within a society and a social class, and in the midst of struggle?"[31]

Foucault begins his archaeology with a criticism of the discipline of history, which has always turned its attention to long periods to reveal the stable systems of checks and balances, the processes which are irreversible, the underlying tendencies that gather force, and then, are reversed after centuries of continuity. Foucault would turn, instead, to the study of discontinuity in order to study transformation rather than tradition, and in particular, transformations which serve as foundations. Above all, he enjoys the willing suspension of disbelief in the boundaries between the humanistic disciplines in order to recover what he calls the specificity of items or statements, i.e. -- on the linguistic model -- the relationship between statements, or groups of statements, or the synthesizing operations to which they might be subjected.

TOWARD A NEW PHILOLOGY

The reintegration of the humanities with the social sciences directs our attention to the linguistic strategies which can be utilized to understand the differences and similarities among methodologies in the disciplines or to what Clifford Geertz has termed the ethnography of modern thought. Geertz quotes Alton Becker's call for a new philologist, "a specialist in contextual relations in all areas of knowledge in which text-building is a central activity -- literature, history, law, music, politics, psychology, trade, even war and peace." In a multicultural world, for example, we have different epistemologies, and we need specialists in contextual relations -- new philologists who

do more than annotate and make available ancient texts. Encouraged by the work of

comparative linguists, Geertz calls for a new philologist who would be interested in the study of culture as text -- in the way, for example, that an art work defines social relationships, or the way in which it is connected ideationally to the society of which it is part, or the way is which it functions symbolically in social action.[32]

         We are beginning to see valuable work generated by the idea of a human science of signs. There is evidence everywhere that the ethnography of modern thought is the central objective of large numbers of humanists today. It has become easier to view the literary system as one subsystem in a general system of cultural productions such as law, economics, or government. Readers themselves, we are aware, exist in a variety of general systems -- interpretive communities -- whose cultural and cognitive limits of reception we must learn to discern. It is interesting that much contemporary "meta-fiction" -- itself a metalanguage -- is designed to exercise the imagination of readers in the decoding of texts, and occasionally, even to lure them into becoming themselves participant authors in an odd switching of partnerships. We may note this in Nabokov's Pale Fire, Barth's Giles Goat-Boy, Calvino's If on a Winter Night a Traveler, or Borges' Labyrinths. Contemporary writers, as well as critics, take seriously the Joycean mandate: "My consumers shall be my producers."

         When literature is inserted in the stream of philosophical, historical, or ordinary discourse, critical considerations can include any of the following: the historical, or socio-political situation of the text in the world; the variability of group response; the constitution and character of interpretive communities; the concept of a discipline as a space in which objects emerge for critical examination; the genesis and genealogy of canons, genres and other disciplinary regalia; the relation of theories of self to theories of reading; the process by which meaning is produced in a text; the nature of the terms "text" and "author"; intertextuality; and the way in which the social and historical world can be read as a series of sign systems constituting a language.

         Philosophers, historians, or linguists may occupy themselves with the question of how culture is produced, or the conditions on which knowledge is made possible, rather than pursuing the continuity of representations. The humanist is clearly a person who can reveal the text-in-the-world as Edward Said would term it -- as well as locked in the archive of the discipline or department. Said notes that once we learn from such persons as Derrida or Foucault the importance of the signifier as the primary transmitter of knowledge, as an event that has left traces on the human subject, then "literature as an isolated paddock in the broad cultural field disappears

and with it, too, the harmless rhetoric of self-delighting humanism."[33]

Contemporary scholarship is possessed of brilliant instances of the application of interdisciplinary linguistic strategies to cultural situations. For example, Hayden White's Metahistory, an examination of historical consciousness in the nineteenth century, attempts to utilize rhetorical categories to examine "the deep structure" of the historical imagination itself, i.e., to create a poetics of history. White utilizes the tropological strategies of metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, and irony to postulate modes of historical consciousness, arguing that the dominant tropological modes constitute the metahistorical basis of every historical work.[34] In Derridean fashion, he notes that thought remains the captive of the linguistic mode in which it seeks to grasp the outline of its object, and criticism of Metahistory has been oriented toward this point. When the trope is particularly apt, as in the case of the trope of metaphor for Nietzche's poetic defense of history, the work is revelatory. White endeavors to do for the historical imagination what Northrop Frye did for literature in The Anatomy of Criticism, i.e. place his discipline in a broader humanistic and social context.

Clifford Geertz, in The Interpretation of Cultures, tries to examine culture as an assemblage of texts and produces in his essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," a superb example of a cultural ritual read as a literary text in order to translate Balinese experience -- to capture a people telling a story of complex cultural significance about themselves. Geertz is most satisfied, he feels, with the ability of the textual transformation to put emotion to cognitive ends and, thus, extend the anthropological discipline through literary means. He writes: "The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong."[35]

Alton Becker, a comparative linguist, notes in the forward to his collection of essays, The Imagination of Reality: Essays in Southeast Asian Coherence Systems, that communication across diversity which preserves cultural diversity is like the possibility of a good translation.[36] Conceptual systems outside of our culture are ways of making sense of things, if we can learn to read them. For Becker, the meaning of a text is in its context. The rich variety of contributions in the book provide an extraordinary array of examples of the way in which a culture can present itself in various symbol systems. Each is a solution to the problem of communication across diversity.

One final example is James B. White's The Legal Imagination: Studies in the Nature of Legal Thought and Expression. In this unusual text, which both demonstrates the relationship of the humanities to the law and educates the reader to speak and think as a lawyer, White studies the language of the law, the various ways in which the law talks about people and

defines character and judgment, the ways in which rules and relationships organize social

experience, and the relationship of judgment to explanation. This particular work demonstrates the closeness of a significant profession to the disciplines of the humanities themselves as a unit.[37]

These examples constitute evidence of the "quiet revolution" occurring in the humanities, which we can expect to continue, and which will surely hold rich rewards in many particular instances. The more finely integrated world of much contemporary humanistic scholarship provides a praxis for the curriculum -- or a pragmatism if one will. A movement from the model of the natural sciences to a linguistic one has, indeed, opened up a better conversation with other disciplines. A deeper understanding of present achievements should continue the transformation.

Some word should be said in conclusion of what linguistic models can and cannot do. Often the linguistic model, itself, seems to suggest that the analogy matches our own mental structure in some unknown way, and we adapt to it unconsciously. No doubt the nature of the linguistic analogy and linguistic performance will continue to be the subject of examination and discussion, In the future, it is likely, also, that the controversial understanding of the absent subject in structural and post-structural thinkers will be modified, as studies of culture enable us to perceive persons participating in culture without the accompanying narcissism or solipsism, Many of these theoretical directions will have an impact on classroom teaching in the humanities in the form of new kinds, of curricula designed along different lines.[38] On the other hand, Frederick Crews cautioned recently that we are often, today, surrounded by unsubstantiated theories and anti-empirical knowledge and must be constantly on our guard. He speaks of the "humorless acolytes of Lacan and Althussur."[39] Though Crews appears to fail to grasp the revolution in language from which these theories, emerge, his points are well taken. Revolutions bring no easy answers or final rewards. But they may be as Wittgenstein would say -- a way to get on.

FOOTNOTES

1. Raymond Williams, <u>The Long Revolution</u> (Columbia University Press, New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 3-40.

2. Colin Campbell, "Scholarly Disciplines: Breaking Out," <u>New York Times</u>, 25 April 1986, Sec.A, Midwest edition, p.18.

3. Colin Campbell, "Scholarly Disciplines: Breaking Out," p. 18.

4. Susan Suleiman, "Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism" in <u>The Reader in the Text</u>, ed. Susan Suleiman and Inge Grossman (Princeton: University Press, 1980), p. 3.

5. M.H. Abrams, <u>The Mirror and the Lamp</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 14-21. Abrams notes   the simultaneity of both mimetic and pragmatic theories of criticism and the simultaneity of objective and romantic or expressive theories. Many critics linked romantic and objectivist theories through Kant's formula that a work of   art exhibit <u>Zweckmassigket ohne Zweck</u> (purposiveness without purpose), while simultaneously expanding on Kant's own reference of every aesthetic work to the mental faculties of its creator and receptor. One focal point, however, may reign supreme at a particular time as objectivist theories have certainly done in the United States until very recent times. Abrams enters his discussion of pragmatic theories through Sir Phillip Sidney's "Defense of Poetry" which Raymond Willaims was, in fact, returning to in his concept of the creative mind. This has a leveling, democratic effect on art and returns it to a social function.

6. Ferdinand de Saussure, <u>Course in General Linguistics</u>, ed. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye. trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1966.

7. Saussure, <u>Linguistics</u>, p. 113.

8. Saussure, <u>Linguistics</u>, p. 16.

9. Catherine Belsey, <u>Critical Practice</u> (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 136.

10. John Searle, "The World Turned Upside Down," <u>New York Review of Books</u>, October 27, 1983, p, 79.

11. Jean-Francois Lyotard, <u>The Postmodern Condition: A Report on</u>

, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis:
90/ ISSUES
University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 15.

12. Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in Style in Language, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 353-59.

13. Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: University Press, 1979), p. 294.

14. The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy, ed. E. Donato and R. Macksey (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970).

15. The Languages of Criticism, p. x.

16. Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge: Essays in Interpretive Anthropology (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 32.

17. Richard H. Brown, A Poetic for Sociology, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

18. Rorty, Philosophy, p. 11.

19. Rorty, Philosophy, p. 223.

20. Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 216.

21. The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences, ed. Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: University Press, 1985), p. 3.

22. Claude Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, trans. C. Jacobson and B.G. Schoepf (New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 78-9.

23. Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, pp. 202-227.

24. Roland Barthes, Critical Essays, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 218.

25. Barthes, Critical Essays, p. 219.

26. Barthes, <u>Critical Essays</u>, p. 228.

27. The most useful bibliographies of deconstructive criticism are contained in Josue V. Harari ed. <u>Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism</u>, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 421-63 and "Deconstructive Criticism: A Selected Bibliography," <u>Society of Critical Exchange Reports</u> (Fall 1980), No. 8 (supplement), pp. 1-54. Other studies of excellence are: <u>Deconstructive Criticism</u>, Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); <u>Deconstruction: Theory and Practice</u>, Christopher Norris (London: Methuen, 1982); <u>The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America</u>, Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich, Wallace Martin, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

28. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" in <u>Language of Criticism</u>, p. 250.

29. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," p. 250.

30. Hayden White, "Michel Foucault," in <u>Structuralism and Since</u>, ed. John Sturrock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 82.

31. Michel Foucault, <u>The Archaeology of Knowledge</u>, trans, A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon,1972), p. 225.

32. Clifford Geertz, <u>Local Knowledge</u>, p. 32.

33. Edward Said, <u>The World, the Text, and the Critic</u> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 255.

34. Hayden White, <u>Metahistory</u> (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. xi.

35. Clifford Geertz, <u>The Interpretation of Cultures</u> (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 452.

36. <u>Imagination of Reality: Essays in Southeast Asian Coherence Systems</u>, ed. Alton Becker and Aram Yengoyan (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1979).

37. James B. White, <u>The Legal Imagination: Studies in the Nature of Legal Thought and Expression</u> (Boston: Little Brown, 1973).

38. Jeffrey Peck, "Advanced Literary Study as Cultural Study: A Redefinition

of the Discipline," <u>Profession 85</u>, ed. P. Franklin, and R. Brod, (MLA 1985).

39. Frederick Crews, "In the Big House of Theory," <u>New York Review of Books</u>, May 29, 1986, p. 41.

BETH A. CASEY is Director of the Center for Academic Options at Bowling Green State University, which currently provides curricular initiatives to enhance the liberal education of undergraduates. She holds the Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia University and has taught at the University of Rochester, Bard College, and the City College of New York. She is presently completing a study of the poetics of Wallace Stevens.