

The Feud of Language

A History of
Structuralist Thought

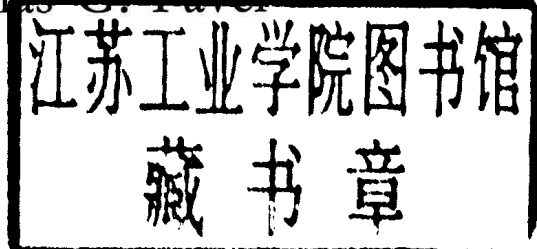
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The Feud of Language

A History of Structuralist Thought

English Version by
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Thomas G. Pavel



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Preface

This book examines French structuralism and poststructuralism from the point of view of their own claims to originality; that is, from the point of view of *language*. In France in the 1960s, linguistics, in particular structural linguistics, brought the promise of a true scientific conversion for the humanities. When this project miscarried, linguistics provided the critics of the scientific approach with the conceptual weapons of their discontent. Cultural, epistemological and metaphysical debates were all expressed in a vocabulary bristling with linguistic jargon.

But the linguistics of French structuralism and poststructuralism was a mirage. Those who used its notions understood neither the technical aspects of linguistics nor the theoretical stakes involved. They mistook the results of a specialized science for a collection of speculative generalities. They believed that breathtaking metaphysical pronouncements could be inferred from simple-minded descriptive statements. They thought that notions elaborated under the influence of behaviourism and logical positivism could be turned against these trends. The story of these misreadings is highly revealing. It proves that the philosophical contribution of structuralism and poststructuralism is flawed in its core: the selection of language as the main concern of human sciences and philosophy. It entails that, to the extent that structuralism and poststructuralism misunderstood the way in which language operates, both their spectacular critique of human intentionality and their resulting hostility to contemporary cultural and political institutions rest on shaky ground. Finally, it demonstrates the need for responsible co-operation between the human sciences and philosophy.

The first chapter surveys some of the French intellectual debates of the 1980s, debates that signal a gradual movement away from poststructuralist thought. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 provide close analyses of texts by Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, discussing their intellectual contexts and the twentieth-century linguistic trends that most influenced them. A detailed critique of structuralist poetics in chapter 5 prepares the way for the final socio-cultural explanation of the

rise and success of structuralism and poststructuralism. A post-scriptum analysing the stormy controversy over Heidegger in Paris in 1987–8 reinforces my initial claim that a new cultural equilibrium has been reached in France.

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1 The Order of Language

My generation witnessed the rise and, one might safely add, the *fall* of one of the most influential yet perplexing intellectual trends in this century – French structuralism and poststructuralism. We saw how, in France during the 1960s, the concepts of structural linguistics were transformed into a lasting set of metaphysical notions, which, in turn, played a crucial role in one of this century's most spectacular attempts to achieve intellectual modernization.

As early as the 1960s, many linguists and anthropologists noticed that the linguistic notions used by the various trends in French structuralism had little to do with the discipline patiently developed, from 1929 on, in Prague and Copenhagen, and at Yale and MIT. A major feature of intellectual modernity, it is sometimes assumed, lies in philosophy's influence over the development of the sciences. The structuralists, however, proposed to achieve modernization in the reverse manner, by subjecting speculative philosophy to the influence of one particular science, linguistics. In the following chapters, I shall argue that this singular strategy was an error and that the intellectual stimulation the structuralists sought in linguistics was beyond the means of that modest discipline. The linguistic project, so vigorously promoted by the human sciences in the 1960s and 1970s, had no genuine impact on the results of these sciences. Moreover, a convincing demonstration of the misuse of linguistic concepts would prove that the modernization undertaken in the name of language and semiology was illusory.

Some may doubt the need for belabouring the difficulties and errors of a trend the intellectual legitimacy of which has, in the past decade, been increasingly called into question. In 1980, in the first issue of the bi-monthly *Le Débat*, Pierre Nora's 'Que peuvent les intellectuels?' ('What Can Intellectuals Do?'), attacked poststructuralism and made a resounding appeal to reason, clarity and intellectual responsibility. At the same time, a group of philosophers and literary critics, many of them associated with the monthly *Critique*, began to question the structuralist and poststructuralist paradigm in the name of rationalism. In

1983, Vincent Descombes's *Objects of All Sorts: A Philosophical Grammar* used the tools of philosophical logic to scrutinize semiology. In the same year, *La Troisième République des lettres* (*The Third Republic of Letters*) by Antoine Compagnon detailed the links between the rise of French literary history at the beginning of the century and the Dreyfus affair. Compagnon's analysis suggested, intentionally or not, that structuralism had a similar relationship with the events of May 1968; it also reminded that a triumph of dogmatism usually triggers a countermovement. In 1984, in *La Philosophie chez les autophages* (*Philosophy in the Land of the Self-Eaters*) and *Rationalité et cynisme* (*Rationality and Cynicism*), Jacques Bouveresse denounced the nihilistic turn of poststructuralist thought. In *Literature and Its Theorists*, Tzvetan Todorov criticized ahistorical formalism and negative hermeneutics in literary criticism. The exchange between Marc Fumaroli and Gérard Genette in *Le Débat*, March 1984, delineated the alternatives available in literary theory. Fumaroli, supporting the logical flexibility of the humanities, defended epistemological monism and a defence of the scientific project in the humanities. Fumaroli's recommendation of a return to literary history appeared as the natural counterpart to Genette's plea for poetics and literary theory. In 1985, *La Pensée 68* (*The Thought of 68*) by Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut sharply attacked Lacan, Derrida and Foucault, treating them as mere instances of an ideal type: anti-humanism. In 1986, François Roustang denounced the cult of Lacan in *Lacan, de l'équivoque à l'impasse* (*Lacan: From Equivocation to Impasse*). At about the same time, the polemic between J.-F. Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas on the notion of postmodernism signalled an interest in new forms of rationality, and, *a fortiori*, a dismissal of the structuralist paradigm. Still more recently, in 1987, a debate on the legitimacy of cultural judgements has questioned the cultural relativism of the 1960s, and revived the interest in ethics and theory of value. Finally, the representatives of a new generation of political philosophers, Marcel Gauchet, Jean-Pierre Dupuy, Luc Ferry, Pierre Manent, Bernard Manin, Philippe Raynault, Alain Renaut and Pierre Rosanvallon, among others, have contributed to a renewed sense of moral and political responsibility.

All these developments suggest a gradual movement away from the structuralist and poststructuralist debates. They imply that the study of language has ceased to provide the key to philosophy and to the humanities. And while what has been called 'the linguistic turn' has undoubtedly been one of this century's major intellectual events, the time has come to reflect upon the intellectual tasks of the future. True, each time a new generation finds the concerns of its predecessors irrelevant, it is tempted to turn its back on the old topics of dispute and attend calmly to its own affairs. But simply to dismiss the debates of the recent past would be to sidestep an important and urgent task. Knowledge, in order to prosper, needs well-kept and up-to-date records. And although

structuralism and poststructuralism may no longer be at the centre of current intellectual interest in France, surely it is too early to dismiss them altogether, given their persisting influence in England and the United States. Whether one supports or decries structuralist and post-structuralist thought, it is necessary to evaluate the successes and the errors of the waning paradigm. And, as a prerequisite, define it.

THE STRUCTURALIST PARADIGM

From 1945 to 1960, French intellectual life was dominated by a powerful trend which could be called *syncretic humanism* and which generously accommodated Marxism and phenomenology, morality and dialectics, history and modernity. While Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is probably the best-known product of this trend, most political and cultural debates during those years (the Atlantic alliance, Indochina, the European Defence Community, Algeria, existentialism, the rise of postwar Marxism, etc.) were shaped by the growth of syncretic humanism. Among its primary tenets was a strong confidence in revolutionary social progress, to be achieved by human agents freed from the alienating chains of mercantile society and imbued with a sense of moral responsibility and political commitment. But syncretic humanism never imposed its authority without meeting some resistance. The articles and books by Lévi-Strauss, Barthes and Foucault, some of them published as early as the 1950s, immediately triggered a strong response. Sartre and Lévi-Strauss decorously debated in the pages of *Les Temps modernes* the respective merits of humanism and structuralism. For a while humanism appeared to have won, and before 1960 it was difficult to predict whether and how it would ever be rendered obsolete.

But disaffection for humanist rhetoric gradually did develop. From 1955 to 1960, the idea of a modernizing discourse inspired by linguistics steadily gained prestige. Under the name of *structuralism*, the new discourse influenced the human sciences, particularly those which were then called 'the sciences of the sign': anthropology, poetics, psychoanalysis and philosophy. In 1968, the term *structuralism* figured in the title of an introductory book, *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* (*What is Structuralism?*) which explained the principles of the trend. Yet after having been for a while closely united around the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, the structuralist disciplines, namely the anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, narrative poetics and the theories of Lacan, Foucault and Derrida, began to differentiate themselves from one another at the end of the 1960s. Soon after substantially contributing to the invention of literary semiology and narrative grammars, Barthes concluded that these disciplines were too subservient to the scientific, hence reductive, practices of linguistics. At the same time, Lacan, Foucault and Derrida, all previously considered as exponents of structuralism, began to criticize it

strongly. Replaced in the early 1970s by an approach that focused on notions such as 'desire' and 'power' (Nora and Gauchet, 'Mots-moments' ('Terms-moments') in *Le Débat*, 50, 1988), linguistics has nevertheless passed on a common legacy to the former structuralists. Derrida and Barthes, like the other French poststructuralists, and later like their Anglo-American disciples, continued to organize their thoughts around the theoretical metaphors originating in structural linguistics. For a long time after 1972, signs, texts, discourse, discursive formations, signifiers, signifieds, differences and traces could be found everywhere. The one notion that continued to pervade all aspects of this large family of doctrines was that of language.

But this family was far from homogeneous. There were three major varieties of structuralism. *Moderate structuralism* included those rationalist theorists who were attracted to the results of recent linguistics, but refrained from borrowing its concepts and methods *stricto sensu*. In stylistics and poetics, moderate structuralism was dominant throughout the 1960s and 1970s, defining itself against philology and history on the one hand and the impressionism of literary criticism on the other. This branch of structuralism shared many of the concerns of morphology of culture, German stylistics, Russian and Czech formalist criticism and American New Criticism. Taxonomic attempts to systematize the theory of genre, such as Todorov's *Introduction to Fantastic Literature*, Jean Rousset's and Paul Zumthor's sophisticated literary analyses, J. P. Richard's phenomenological thematics and the poetics and narratology of Claude Bremond, Genette and Todorov are examples of moderate structuralism. These writers were only moderately interested in the methodological problems raised by structural linguistics; in addition to linguistic notions, they made use of various other conceptual tools, such as traditional grammar, the theory of action or, simply, intuition.

Scientistic structuralism borrowed more vigorously from linguistics. This trend was the main representative of the structuralist orthodoxy in France in the 1960s, claiming that linguistics was the most advanced among the social or human sciences. Its most typical thinkers were Lévi-Strauss, Barthes (during the 1960s) and A. J. Greimas. Since they and their disciples strongly believed that the linguistics of Saussure, Hjelmslev and Jakobson offered the most advanced methodology conceivable in the human sciences, they spent a considerable amount of energy developing various applications of linguistics in anthropology, semiology and formal narratology, each deciding in his own way to compensate for the inadequacies of the model through *ad hoc* means without ever questioning its fundamental validity.

Speculative structuralism, uniting the philosophical and ideological branches of the movement, flourished at the end of the 1960s and attracted both intense admiration and violent criticism. From Louis Althusser's efforts to transfer the scientistic message of structuralism to

Marxism, to the stands of *Tel quel* and *Change, theory* (used without a complement) became a source of radical political ideologies. At about the same time, less directly related to politics, yet equally remote from empirical concerns, great speculative systems proclaimed the end not only of Western metaphysics but of humanity itself as an object of knowledge. Most of the texts of the founding fathers of speculative structuralism (Foucault, Derrida, and, since the beginning of the 1970s, Barthes) were bursting with an elegant despair. To this branch belonged the school of existential psychoanalysis founded and subsequently abolished by Jacques Lacan.

These three categories are necessarily idealized, and the work of the most important authors, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault and Derrida cannot be flatly reduced to them: each followed his own winding path. Lévi-Strauss's research does far more than momentarily apply linguistic models. Having in the early 1960s abandoned Marxist concerns in favour of structuralism, Barthes later dramatically converted from scientism to anti-scientism. Foucault, who always rejected the label 'structuralist', changed his theoretical stands more than once during his long and baffling career. Although it is useless to predict the future development of Derrida's thought, it seems clear that from *Speech and Phenomena* to *Glas*, his ideas underwent a dramatic change. These authors not only called into question their own past convictions, they also often criticized each other, either explicitly (as Derrida did with Lévi-Strauss and Foucault), or implicitly (as Foucault frequently did with other structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers).

All these branches of structuralism had several features in common. All used *linguistic concepts*. Though developed by moderate structuralists mostly as heuristic devices, they played a major role in the modernization project of the scientific group. The speculative thinkers used these concepts to articulate their epistemological misgivings more clearly. The scientific determinism of the early structuralists gradually gave way to scepticism, and linguistic algebra became the model of a new transcendence.

Another striking feature, bitterly resented by the adversaries of structuralism, was the *critique of humanism*. It can be found in Lévi-Strauss's vast research programme, in Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966), in Derrida's call for the replacement of humanism, as well as in the writings of the Marxist group at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure. Some analysts take this to be the most important feature of French poststructuralism.

Equally striking and equally omnipresent, was the *critique of subjectivity and truth*. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss defined his conception of myths as Kantianism devoid of a transcendental subject. Barthes asserted that the death of the author is the only provider of meaning. Both Foucault and Derrida, so seldom in agreement, believed that the notion of subject

should be dispensed with. Truth was discarded by Barthes as a useless prejudice, denounced by Derrida as a logocentric illusion, destroyed in Foucault's theories by the impact of changing epistemes. Only Althusser still believed in it; and, paradoxically, his notion of truth took such rudimentary and dogmatic forms that rather than supporting truth, it undermined it. Notice that the critique of humanism, subjectivity and truth is by no means restricted to French structuralists and poststructuralists. It characterizes all philosophical trends which, after recognizing that subjectivity cannot serve as a foundation for knowledge, looked for new solutions in the realm of language.

Moreover, structuralist philosophers questioned philosophical language to an unprecedented degree. The targets of philosophical meditation changed. Instead of addressing questions of nature, knowledge, or freedom, philosophical discourse withdrew into itself and carefully problematized its own impossibility: self-consuming philosophy, as Bouveresse (1984a) calls it. Indeed, although speculative structuralists declared war on what they decided to call metaphysics, they never attempted to define an alternative conceptual space in which new referents could be constructed and new strategies of understanding could be tested. Deconstruction (Derrida's notion), archaeology (in Foucault's early work) and Althusser's structuralist rewriting of *Capital*, all manifest the replacement of metaphysics by metacriticism. The repetition of the prefix *meta* emphasizes that these philosophers perpetuated a speculative pattern of thought even as they explicitly condemned it.

Speculative structuralists, perhaps embarrassed by the conjectural nature of their approach, tried to reconcile themselves with the empirical sciences. Unlike the German philosophers at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the French philosophers of the 1960s avoided, or at least purported to avoid, being absorbed in the examination of subjective consciousness. Instead, they turned to disciplines more closely related to the outside world: hence Derrida's close reading of Rousseau; Lévi-Strauss's theorizing on the origin of language and writing; Foucault's research on the history of medicine, political economy, biology and linguistics; and Althusser's acrobatics through the cogs and wheels of *Capital*. However, their attitude towards empirical work is fundamentally ambiguous. In *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida appears to speak both as a linguist and as a theoretician of anthropology. Some of his long commentaries on passages by Saussure and Hjelmslev (ibid., pp. 27–73) would not be out of place in a treatise on general linguistics; several of his remarks on the relationship between writing and violence (ibid., pp. 101–40) seem to be aimed at anthropologists, be they theoreticians or experienced field researchers. But suddenly, as the argumentation seems finally to have taken root in the empirical realm, the discourse flies off without warning into the heavens of transcendental speculation. A lucid analysis of Lévi-Strauss's anthropological biases during his visit to the Nambikwara (ibid., pp. 173–200)

abruptly leads to the establishment of one of those ironical and evanescent concepts with which Derrida wants to replace the hard concepts of classical philosophy. In this case, the concept is *the lure*:

To recognize writing in speech, that is to say difference and the absence of speech, is to begin to think the lure. There is no ethics without the presence of *the other* but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, difference, writing. The arche-writing is the origin of mortality as of immorality. (ibid., pp. 139–40)

In just one paragraph, the reader is projected a thousand metaphysical miles from the Nambikwara and their writing anxieties as described by Lévi-Strauss. Noting that Saussure expresses a certain distrust of the written forms of language – a distrust in fact shared by all nineteenth-century comparative philologists, who wanted to avoid the prejudicial confusion between written forms and pronunciation – Derrida develops, without any transition, a theory of how linguistics *expelled* writing, as it were:

Saussure here points at the inversion of the natural relationship between speech and writing. This is not a simple analogy: writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech and to the Logos. (ibid., pp. 34–5)

A few lines later he points an accusatory finger at the great sacred images of metaphysical thought: 'And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems – conversely – to borrow its metaphors' (ibid., p. 35). The linguist, seized with admiration, is thus reminded how irremediably provincial is his discipline. At the same time, the critical reference to the true specialists of language is calculated to dazzle philosophers and persuade them that the body/soul distinction derives from the existence of writing.

Similarly, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault oscillates between superficial research into the history of science and glamorous philosophical generalizations. The text is thus made invulnerable, since to the sceptical historian one can answer that, after all, isolated facts count less than the theoretical gains in this kind of project (one of the book's main theses is that in science facts count for little); while to the unconvinced epistemologist, one can modestly argue that the book is just a contribution to the history of science. True, such *empirico-transcendental sidestepping* (to designate this last feature of structuralist thought using an adjective created by Foucault himself) is commonplace in the history of philosophy: it is easily found (proceeding in reverse chronological order) in Friedrich Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, in Hegel's philosophy of nature, and in the physics of the late scholastics and neo-Platonists; consequently, its

use by a metaphysician of language or by a philosopher of knowledge, though disconcerting, is by no means exceptional. Yet one cannot help feeling disturbed by the resilience of the old sophisms, ready to spring to life again at any moment, and in places where one would least expect them.

The last two features, namely the transformation of metaphysics into metacriticism and the empirico-transcendental sidestepping, are more stylistic than substantive. By style, I mean the style of thought and not the numerous discursive procedures and special rhetorical effects which, carefully cultivated, gave speculative structuralism its particular physiognomy. In the midst of a relatively civilized and peaceful period, a group of distinguished representatives of the liberal universities spontaneously adopted an apocalyptic idiom, quite similar to that of Puritan preachers and revolutionary tyrants. They talked less of knowledge than of salvation, relied less on logical arguments than impassioned pleas, were interested less in results than revelations. To a certain extent, Tocqueville predicted this development when he wrote that in the twentieth century the style of literary production will often be 'fantastic, incorrect, overburdened and loose, almost always vehement and bold' (1840, p. 62).

Others have criticized the style of poststructuralist authors in more detail. Few, however, have noticed the *narrative technique* embedded in their writings. Jean-François Lyotard is probably correct when he claims that the great Promethean metastories of the nineteenth century have by now lost most of their appeal. But we have not yet attained a perfect indifference to narratives. Lashed to the mast of postindustrial society, we still let ourselves be charmed by the legend of the 1960s and their intellectual heroes. Whether this new myth will supplant the lost stories of Progress and Revolution or whether it will turn out to be only a passing fad is difficult to foresee. In any case, the heroic point of view in the history of science has been around for a long time – and refuted for almost as long. Narrative is, however, inescapable, and I will later use a narrative device myself: the notion of modernization. Before this, it is useful to examine briefly a narrative pattern that is common in structuralist and poststructuralist writings: the rhetoric of the end.

THE RHETORIC OF THE END

The recent challenge to the structuralist paradigm has been accompanied by a reappraisal of many topics that were marginalized during the 1960s. Accordingly, the critics of structuralism and poststructuralism speak of the *return* of the subject, of the referent, of history. Yet the metaphor of the *return* in recent anti-deconstructionist writings is just a belated answer to the concept of the *end*, which was in great favour in the 1960s and 1970s and, more generally, in all anarchist and millenarian approaches, which love to stress how inevitable their arrival is and how

fortunate the world is to have them as a last resort after all other intellectual choices have been exhausted. If Foucault is ultimately right in insisting that all discourse involves power, the metaphor of the end (notably the end of all rival concepts and groups) that has recently been so much used and abused implies that the speaker is in a position – or at least a posture – of power. If, forgetting historical fact for a moment, we examine the narrative effect of the notion of end, it becomes apparent that he who announces the end of an era, the end of the onto-theology or of logocentrism, for instance, presents us with a *finished story*, thus implying that the debate is concluded and the file has been closed. The debate over, the speaker plays the role of narrator, hence of judge, thus assuming the right to pronounce verdicts. To conceptualize the end – be it the end of a historical period or a way of thought, not to mention the end of History itself or the entire metaphysical tradition – amounts to inflicting an ontological degradation on the sequence supposedly ended, relegating it, through rhetorical artifice, to the level of passive narrative material lacking the right and the ability to react.

In an insightful analysis of historical discourse, Arthur Danto (1985) noted that any presentation of the past remains essentially incomplete. A historian who, in 1825, narrated a series of past events, say those of the 1789 French Revolution, could hardly claim to have exhausted its meaning, since at any subsequent time, in 1830 or 1848 for instance, new events could retroactively change the perception of the first revolution. But if this is true of all propositions about events, it is equally true of higher-order assertions that add a caesura indicating the end of a sequence of narrative sentences. As Danto put it, 'a complete story of the past presupposes a complete story of the future' (*ibid.*, pp. 17). During the 1950s, social scientists predicted the end of ideologies. Ten years later, their revival took everyone by surprise. In North America today, whether we like it or not, ideologies are as lively as ever. Similarly, are we indeed experiencing, as Derrida claimed, the end of onto-theology? If onto-theology happens to make a comeback in a few years, its so-called end will prove to have been an illusion. Used from within history and about history, the notion of end points less to a *fact* than to a *desire*; far from achieving a real closure, it instead opens a polemic. If, in addition, using the weapons of philosophy, the announcement of the 'end' fails to provide any empirical proof, the period being proclaimed as closed will be as impossible to defend as those political figures in totalitarian systems who are retroactively erased from all records. History's distinctive feature is co-ordination, Jacob Burkhardt said; that of philosophy, subordination. Presumably this is why in philosophy, behind the concept of the end, lurks a project of violence.

The philosophical ambitions of a theory often become evident through the rhetoric of the end, even though the discipline in which this theory takes shape belongs to the empirical sciences. In 1954, when Lévi-Strauss argued in favour of the structural revolution in anthropology, he

reasoned in the following manner: by attributing a stable meaning to myths, theoreticians (such as C. G. Jung, with his archetypes) committed an error comparable to that of Socrates in *Cratylus*. During his conversation with Hermogenes, Socrates attributes an affinity with definite meaning to each sound, *r* to express movement, *l* for elision, *o* for roundness. After Saussure elaborated the principle of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, however, linguistics achieved the stature of a real science. The arbitrariness of the linguistic sign emphasized the absence of justified links between sounds and meanings and contributed to the successes of structural phonology proving that the sounds of a language, though devoid of all meaning, nevertheless form a system. *As a result*, Lévi-Strauss continued, since the anthropology of myths must also transform itself into a science, it has no other choice than to adopt the principle of arbitrariness and follow phonology's example. Just as the sounds brought together in a word have no meaning on their own, since *t* followed by *r* and *i* signifies 'tree' only by pure convention, so the elements which make up a myth emerge in the same arbitrary fashion and without any direct relationship to the myth's overall meaning. Like phonemes, which, beyond spoken sequences, organize themselves into harmonious abstract systems, the simple narration of myths does not exhaust their meaning, because narration rests on an algebraic foundation that the anthropologist deduces by using conceptual tools borrowed from linguistics. Those who had proposed other methods before this discovery, as well as those who were not converted as soon as it came to light, found themselves relegated to pre-scientific limbo.

Lévi-Strauss's argument divides the history of linguistics into a 'before' and an 'after' separated by the revelation of the principle of conversion (the arbitrariness of the sign) attributed to Saussure. Let us call this narrative model 'the scientific salvation'. It proves so effective that it sweeps away the pre-Saussurian history of linguistics and, at a stroke, assures the converted access to a privileged epistemological domain, that of structural linguistics. In the same way, with anthropology allegedly being in a state of crisis, the principle of conversion already tested elsewhere will bring about the much-needed progress. Setting aside for a moment this highly unlikely account of the development of linguistics, let us examine briefly the fallacy in Lévi-Strauss's reasoning. Linguistics and anthropology have always enjoyed a 'good neighbour' relationship and the free exchange of methodologies and results between the two disciplines has proved profitable from as far back as the missions and grammars of the Jesuits. The methodological borrowings were for a long time limited to the less problematic aspects of research, notably to field techniques. When Edward Sapir and then Benjamin Lee Whorf, updated Humboldt's well-known theses on the mutual dependence between language and worldview within each culture, they reformulated them as substantial hypotheses and not as methodological improvements.

Consequently, Whorf's reflections on the Hopi, far from taking the interdependence between language and worldview for granted, strove instead to establish its existence. Yet when Lévi-Strauss suggested converting the methodologies of the anthropology of myths, the validity of the models adopted was never subject to doubt or to systematic research. Working in this way saves several steps: not only did Lévi-Strauss avoid considering other recent trends in linguistics and phonology, as though the linguistic community had, by 1954, unanimously accepted the results of the Prague school formulated in Roman Jakobson's writings as the best solution for phonology; he also avoided examining how appropriate those models that had supposedly succeeded in structural phonology were to the analysis of myths.

Given these conditions and the lack of any debate, for Lévi-Strauss to label his adversaries 'pre-scientific' was tantamount to pronouncing a symbolic death sentence, to marking out their narrative end, an end which had to bear witness to the inevitable advent of a new regime in anthropology. Such is the force of excommunicative utterances. To proclaim the end of other groups and systems exorcizes the fear of having to confront them. It pours the contingency of new projects into the concrete of necessity and conceals their precarious nature, thus eliminating all the features that would make such projects risky and, perhaps, seductive.

Elsewhere the end appears as *division*. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault avoids the model of scientific salvation, which, as we saw, divides the universe of discourse into a before and an after separated by the advent of a scientific saviour who brings about a revelation. The rudimentary character of such a model, however satisfactory it may be for the anthropologist searching for certainty, would hardly have escaped the historian of sciences who, because of his training, is familiar with the evanescent promises of scientific salvation. Since the history of every discipline is but a series of theoretical upheavals, it is tempting to enhance the notion of epistemological end by attributing to it the virtues of periodicity. Somewhat similar to Cuvier's conception of the successive creation of animal kingdoms, which successfully emphasized but avoided explaining the morphological discontinuities of fossils, the Western world, according to Foucault, experienced a series of epistemological mutations, the reasons for which remain shrouded in obscurity. For example, at the end of the eighteenth century

European culture is inventing for itself a depth in which what matters is no longer identities, distinctive characters, permanent tables with all their possible paths and routes, but great hidden forces developed on the basis of their primitive and inaccessible nucleus, origin, causality and history ... What changed at the turn of the century, and underwent an irremediable modification, was knowledge itself as an anterior and indivisible mode of being