

## Introduction: Fifty Years On, Looking Back...

From 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> October 1966, the Johns Hopkins Humanities Center hosted the ‘International Colloquium on Critical Languages and the Sciences of Man’, a major event which brought together for the first time in the United States, and was intended to showcase, some of the most illustrious representatives of ‘Parisian structuralism’: practitioners of a controversial *nouvelle critique*<sup>1</sup> such as Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov and Lucien Goldmann, alongside other influential intellectuals like Jacques Lacan, René Girard and, as a last-minute replacement for the Belgian anthropologist Luc de Heusch, the up-and-coming Jacques Derrida.<sup>2</sup> One year before, the iconoclastic ‘new critics’ had been attacked by staunch Sorbonne *mandarin* Raymond Picard in several articles in *Le Monde* (14, 28 March; 4, 11 April 1964), then in his acerbic *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture*.<sup>3</sup> A Racine scholar, Picard was sparked off by Roland Barthes’s *Sur Racine* (1963) – having (dis)missed two earlier not-so-traditional monographs: Lucien Goldmann’s Marxist sociological reading in *Le Dieu caché* (1956) and Charles Mauron’s ‘psychocritical’ study *L’Inconscient dans l’œuvre et la vie de Racine* (1957) – then his collected *Essais critiques* (1964), which somewhat reductively pitted ‘two criticisms’ against each other: interpretative criticism (Sartre, Bachelard, Goldmann, Poulet, Starobinski, Weber, Girard, Richard) versus outdated, positivist, scholarly criticism.<sup>4</sup> In his pamphlet, Picard inveighed against the ‘subjective’ arbitrariness of all these new-fangled analytic methods, which included Jean-Pierre Richard’s thematic criticism.<sup>5</sup> Barthes responded to Picard’s accusations in *Critique et*

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<sup>1</sup> Unsurprisingly, however, there was nothing ‘newly new’ about this French ‘new criticism’, which dated back in its then current iteration to the decade after WW2, when Georges Poulet, one of the invitees at the Baltimore symposium, put forward the phenomenological view, associated with the Geneva School, of literary texts as representations of deep structures of an author’s consciousness. See especially his four-volume *Études sur le temps humain* (Paris: Plon): vol. 1 (1949), vol. 2: *La Distance intérieure* (1952), vol. 3: *Le Point de départ* (1964), and vol. 4: *Mesure de l’instant* (1968).

<sup>2</sup> At the end of the same year, *Yale French Studies* published a double issue (nos. 36-37) on ‘Structuralism’, featuring extracts from Lacan and Lévi-Strauss as well as essays by Michael Riffaterre (see n. 21 *infra*) and Geoffrey Hartmann (‘Structuralism: The Anglo-American adventure’ [148-68]), which the editor, Jacques Ehrmann, felt the need to introduce thus: ‘Some remarks are probably necessary as an introduction to the subject of this issue. It is not strictly literary, nor is there anything specifically or exclusively French about it.’ (5)

This was followed the year after by a now totally forgotten book, although it must have been the first (self-styled) introduction for an American readership to what it called ‘French New Criticism’, featuring presentations of most of the expected protagonists, with the exception of Lacan and Derrida, and enlisting Bachelard/Poulet and Sartre as a dual phenomenological-existential lineage. See Laurent LeSage, *The French New Criticism: An Introduction and a Sampler* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), especially the remarkably lucid, broadly contextual introduction (3-24).

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Picard, *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture* (Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, 1965); *New Criticism or New Fraud?*, trans. Frank Towne (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine* (Paris: Seuil, 1963); *On Racine*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). *Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), 291-7; *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 249-54. ‘Les deux critiques’ had first appeared in *Modern Language Notes* 78 (December 1963): 447-52.

<sup>5</sup> The latter is worth singling out since, in ‘Force et signification’, Jacques Derrida will in turn ‘deconstruct’ the latter’s interpretive approach in *L’Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* (Paris: Seuil, 1962). See Jacques

*vérité* (1966), in which he advocated a ‘science of criticism’ rooted *inter alia* in linguistics (as opposed to philology), psychoanalysis, sociology and history, to replace the prevailing, authoritative *critique universitaire*<sup>6</sup> ‘which continues to act as if Marx, Freud, Adler, Saussure and Lévi-Strauss had never written’.<sup>7</sup> It was not until the more dramatic events of ‘May ‘68’ broke out that the war between structuralism and its rear-guard opponents abated (the former gaining the upper hand largely owing to these unforeseen historical circumstances), when intellectuals’ interest shifted to the question whether ‘structures had taken to the streets’ (Lacan) or not (Goldmann)...<sup>8</sup>

Published four years after the Baltimore symposium, the volume of proceedings was first called *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (1970). Two years later, the colloquium’s near-original title was demoted to a mere appendage and the subsequent edition appeared under the more ominous title *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, with a preface that took stock of ‘The Space Between – 1971’. As the radical shift of tone in the new preface makes unambiguously clear from the outset, what had happened in that ‘gap year’ was that the reality of a hastening turn away from structuralism during the years 1966-1970 had effectively sunk in,<sup>9</sup> with a delayed effect comparable to the belated awareness of the dominant years of structuralism in early- to mid-1960s France. In his excellently balanced (and witty) retrospective on the significance of ‘Baltimore 1966’, Jean-Michel Rabaté writes of this watershed as follows:

The new preface written in 1971 spells out what was palpable in 1966, although not clearly perceived by the American public: the lack of a firm agreement between most French theoreticians about the most fundamental issues. But in 1971 it was urgent to recall that structuralism had been questioned or abandoned by some of its alleged practitioners.<sup>10</sup>

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Derrida, *L’Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil 1967), 9-49 (*passim*); ‘Force and Signification’, in *Writing and Difference*, trans., with an introduction and additional notes, by Alan Bass (London and New York: Routledge, 2005 [1978]), 1-35.

<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 1966); *Criticism and Truth*, trans. and ed. Katrine Pilcher Keuneman, foreword by Philip Thody (London: Continuum, 2004 [Athlone, 1987]). For a perceptive analysis of this new ‘querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’ as revealing of institutional power struggles within French academe at large, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988 [orig. 1984]), 115 ff.

<sup>7</sup> J. Bloch-Michel, ‘Barthes-Picard: troisième round’, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 30 March-5 April 1966; quoted in Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, 115. For a more dispassionate account of the controversy – in parallel with Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont’s later, similar denunciation of the vacuity of postmodernism in *Impostures intellectuelles* (1997) – see Colin Davis, *After Poststructuralism: Reading, Stories and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2004), 11-21.

<sup>8</sup> François Dosse, *History of Structuralism, Volume 2: The Sign Sets, 1967-Present*, trans. Deborah Glassman (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 122. ‘*Les structures ne défilent pas dans la rue!*’ (structures do not parade in the streets) was one of the most celebrated graffiti one could read on walls in Paris during the May 1968 events.

<sup>9</sup> There is perhaps no better or greater recantation and wish to dissociate oneself from structuralism than what Foucault – who provided the epigraph to the 1971 Preface – wrote in 1969, staging a mock-dialogue with himself: ‘I did not want to carry the structuralist enterprise beyond its legitimate limits. [...] But let us leave our polemics about ‘structuralism’; they hardly survive in areas now deserted by serious workers; this particular controversy, which might have been so fruitful, is now acted out only by mimes and tumblers.’ See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1989 [1972]), 221.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Future of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 38 (‘Baltimore 1966 and After’, 36-46, for which see also 9-16 in his preface to the reedition of Sturrock’s introduction to structuralism,

Structuralism, then, was not only *déjà vu*; it was becoming also *déjà vieux*...

Fast forward to the present: in an epoch of tele-technological globalization, when the newest ideas can take root, be accessed and spread anytime anywhere, it is hard to imagine a critical ‘jet-lag’<sup>11</sup> equivalent to the one that presided over the import (and institutionalization or domestication) of ‘French Theory’ into the Anglo-American world, with its parallaxic overlaps between structuralism and ‘beyond structuralism’.<sup>12</sup> Yet this was how its history, made up in part of international transactions and receptions at cross-purposes, turned out to be written.<sup>13</sup> Thus, history periodically calls for reassessments (and reeditions), as has been the case over the last few years with Modernism(s), for instance, after the two-decade-long infatuation with postmodernism had run its course.<sup>14</sup> Here is how the same Rabaté begins his preface to the second edition of John Sturrock’s landmark introduction *Structuralism*, titled ‘Are You History?’, at a time when a certain kind of ‘high theory’ – the major ‘postisms’<sup>15</sup> and gender studies insofar as they were applied mostly to literary and cultural objects – was also trying to catch its second breath:

Habermas read the first version of his essay ‘Modernity – an Unfinished Project’ in September 1980. This was his official discourse of thanks upon receiving the Adorno Prize in Frankfurt. Derrida received the same prize twenty-one years later, to be precise in September 2001, when he was granted a distinction that clashes with Habermas’s sense of priorities but marks perhaps a closure, if not a reconciliation. Whatever one thinks of the closure of this loop or time-warp [...], it signals unambiguously that it is high time to reassess Structuralism. This simple task laid out at the beginning of the new millennium is not just timely, it is historical<sup>16</sup>

referenced n. 15 *infra*).

<sup>11</sup> I am using this metaphor deliberately, bearing in mind that, just before the advent of a diffusely ‘global’ structuralism, one of Barthes’s mythologies was already dedicated to the ‘jet-man’; see Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972 [orig. 1957]), 71-3.

<sup>12</sup> Thus, one can read at the beginning of Culler’s preface to the Routledge Classics reedition of his pioneer *Structuralist Poetics* that the work ‘began as a doctoral dissertation at Oxford in 1968-9, when the structuralist revolution in France was underway.’ See Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002 [1975]), 1; emphasis mine.

<sup>13</sup> In this respect, see my ‘French Thinking / Thinking French – in Translation’, in *Discipline and Practice: The (Ir)resistibility of Theory*, ed. Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), 107-22, which examines three such ‘test cases’: the vicissitudes of ‘theory’ versus ‘*théorie*’ in their respective academic-cultural environments, the origins of ‘post-structuralism’, and national-institutional differences in reading Barthes’s ‘The Death of the Author’.

<sup>14</sup> On the eve of the advent of postmodernism, sensing the ‘sense of an ending’, Harry Levin’s well-known precursor ‘What Was Modernism?’ (*The Massachusetts Review* 1.4 [Summer 1960]: 609-30) was to set an inflationary trend for its superseding movement, with similar interrogations of ‘What Was Postmodernism?’ – in William V. Spanos’s review of Silvio Gaggi’s 1989 *Modern/Postmodern: A Study in Twentieth-Century Arts and Ideas* (*Contemporary Literature* XXXI.1 [1990]: 109-15), by John Frow (in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-colonialism and Post-modernism*, ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin [Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991], 139-52), and by Brian McHale (*electronic book review*, 20 December 2007; available at <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/fictionspresent/tense> [accessed 10 November 2017]).

<sup>15</sup> This is Jacques Derrida’s famous coinage in ‘Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms’, trans. Anne Tomiche, in *The States of Theory: History, Art, and Critical Discourse*, ed. and intr. David Carroll (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). 63-94.

<sup>16</sup> John Sturrock, *Structuralism*, 2nd ed., intr. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003 [1986]), 1.

Rabaté then recalls how, in his influential *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (orig. 1985), Jürgen Habermas had subsequently offered a critique of what he termed French ‘neostructuralism’, aimed at Derrida, Bataille and Foucault in particular,<sup>17</sup> to designate part of what had become canonized as *post*structuralism in Britain and America.<sup>18</sup> In this age of so-called ‘post theory’ – whether this is understood to refer to the post-millennial empiricist backlash in the Humanities or, more positively, to a counter-offensive highlighting new developments of ‘theory after theory’<sup>19</sup> – it may therefore not be inappropriate to bring out a journal issue specially devoted to the ‘New French Theory’ of yore in the hope that some of the essays included here will fulfil a similar duty of historical reinscription.

As the previous roll-call of names reveals, some of the protagonists of bygone feuds have now been well-nigh forgotten and become unilateral casualties of historical sedimentation.<sup>20</sup> Although it may occasionally be resisted, if not downright reversed, this is one effect of the inexorable passing of time and history, which occurs even more forcefully in the ‘memorialization’, amounting at times to a mythologization, of past events and ideas. Thus, it is perhaps no accident that Claude Lévi-Strauss, perhaps with Foucault the main absentee from Baltimore, whose name became synonymous with the resistance of classical structuralism to the openings of this *nouvelle critique*, is mainly represented here in one single contribution, which offers a post-mortem reflection, with the benefit of a more dispassionate hindsight across two ages (1966, 2017), on (anniversary) events. As Macksey and Donato stated in the 1971 preface to *The Structuralist Controversy*: ‘With the exception of Lévi-Strauss, all those whose names have come to be associated with structural theory – Foucault, Lacan, Derrida – have felt obliged programmatically to take their distance with relation to the term.’<sup>21</sup> In his essay,

<sup>17</sup> The same trinity had been lumbered together in the category of the ‘young conservatives’ in his ‘Modernity – An Incomplete Project’, trans. Seyla Ben-Habib, in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 14; first published in English as ‘Modernity Versus Postmodernity’, *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981), 3-14 (13).

<sup>18</sup> It is worth recording here that, historically speaking, and despite acquiring critical tender earlier in Anglo-American academia, the word ‘post-structuralism’ seems to have been used in French first, albeit between quotation marks, in Jean-Joseph Goux’s *Freud, Marx: Économie et symbolique* (1973). See Geoffrey Bennington, ‘Postal Politics and the Institution of the Nation’, in *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London: Verso, 1994), 241-2, 253-4 n. 4, and Robert J. C. Young, ‘Poststructuralism – the improper name’, in *Torn Halves: Political Conflict in Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 67-83. See also my ‘French Thinking’, 114-6 and 120-1, n. 18, for the complex chronology of the account of this genesis.

<sup>19</sup> See *Theory after ‘Theory’*, ed. Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011). To my knowledge, the term ‘post theory’ was first used as the title of a conference (at the University of Glasgow in 1996), then the subsequent publication of its proceedings, to denote this more generous understanding. See *Post Theory: New Directions in Criticism*, ed. Martin McQuillan *et al.*, preface by Ernesto Laclau (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), which appeared in a ‘Postmodern Theory’ series.

<sup>20</sup> This is especially the case with Jean-Paul Weber, who had also chipped in with his *Néo-critique et paléo-critique ou Contre Picard* (Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, 1966).

<sup>21</sup> Macksey and Donato, ix. In that respect, and for what it is worth, 1962 could be adduced as the ‘official’ crystallization of structuralism as a many-faceted interpretive method, when Roman Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss, respectively the pioneer of structuralist linguistics and the inventor of structuralist anthropology as early as *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1949; reed. 1967), jointly authored a detailed semiotic analysis of one of Baudelaire’s poems. See Roman Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss, ‘Charles Baudelaire’s “Les chats”’, in Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 180-97. In the *Yale French Studies* double issue mentioned previously (n. 2), Michael Riffaterre returned to their exhaustive

M. C. McGrady attempts to counter the demonization of the anthropologist's work based on later quasi-fictionalized renderings of Derrida's critique, in his Baltimore address on 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', then in *Of Grammatology* (orig. 1967), of a certain naïve complicity between ethnography and colonization.<sup>22</sup> This short reappraisal therefore provides a fitting coda to this anniversary issue.

Against this process of historical selection, Hywel Dix's article focuses on a long-neglected offshoot of (post-)structuralism now belatedly receiving its due: Serge Doubrovsky's work and its crucial contribution to the emergence of the new literary genre and problematization of the autobiographical subject in *autofiction*.<sup>23</sup> Arguing that the development of an audience-oriented participatory culture and the proliferation of various forms of historical and/or cultural memorials and commemorative events have provided contexts for theories of autofiction to be finally acclimatized, Dix's article also tackles sideways one of the running themes in most contributions gathered here: what comes after the structuralist subject?<sup>24</sup>

One way of schematically defining the gradual disaffection with structuralism is to emphasize a shift from the (centeredness of the) subject not only to its entanglement in intersubjectivity (Lacan), just as the structured text became perceived as criss-crossed with intertexts (Kristeva, Barthes), but also, in those politico-ideologically fraught times, to the necessity of thinking in modes of subjectification/subjectivation (Foucault, Deleuze) instead. This motif is picked up by Zhu Wang, whose essay examines the appropriation of the Foucauldian 'subject', embedded in a complex network of power and knowledge, for the politico-historical turn in Renaissance studies known as New Historicism, especially in Stephen Greenblatt's project of 'historization of the subject'. Similarly, Miguel Rivera details how, prolonged by several Lacanian gender and race theorists, Lacan's conception of sexuation, related to *jouissance* and the Symbolic Order rather than to social construction or rooted in biology, is still relevant today for an apprehension of racial identity and signification, as well as of the difference between sex and race in terms of psychic structures – against various philosophical views based on a 'crude parity' between race and gender.

Another significantly timed catalyst in the evolution beyond structuralism was the 1971 publication by Jean Starobinski, after five essay instalments from 1964 to 1970, of the 'other Saussure' of the *Anagrams Notebooks*, more consonant with the shift from the belief in subjacent, stable structures to the fetishization of the fluid text.<sup>25</sup> Generally

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analysis and offered his more reader-oriented 'response' emphasizing a poetic rather than linguistic (grammatical) 'activation': 'Describing poetic structures: Two approaches to Baudelaire's *les Chats*' (200-42).

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 247-65; *Of Grammatology*, Corrected ed., trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), especially 101-40.

<sup>23</sup> Doubrovsky should also be reminded for his taking sides in the 'Picard affair'; see his *Pourquoi la nouvelle critique: Critique et objectivité* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1966).

<sup>24</sup> I am referring here to the landmark – and timely – collection *Who Comes after the Subject?*, ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Jean Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots: Les anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); *Words upon Words: The Anagrams of Ferdinand de Saussure*, trans. Olivia Emmet (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979). An invaluable study of the convergence between Saussure's belatedly

regarded as the original impetus for the development of a ‘scientific’, structuralist method in linguistics, the posthumously published *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916) was reissued in a *variorum* edition in 1968,<sup>26</sup> showing the enduring interest in Saussure the proto-structuralist (as well as the difficulty of establishing a definitive canonical text), while a more imaginative, ‘textual’ Saussure was being uncovered. This provides the background to Ivan Callus’s landmark contribution to this special issue, a mixture of erudite historical contextualization and subtle theorizing which charts Derrida’s surprisingly discreet engagement with the Saussurean precedent of an ‘ana-grammatology’ *avant la lettre* yet consonant with the ‘style’ he was himself trying to develop to do philosophy otherwise. Whereas the Geneva linguist was reticent both to admit *and* let go of his penchant for unearthing secret language patterns in literature, Derrida’s writing during the time of the serialization of the Anagram Notebooks and later, especially in *Glas*, took on a distinct anagrammatological quality and, for Callus, can be seen as the belated avatar of another Saussure, rather than of the one whose more official *Cours* Derrida had targeted in *Of Grammatology*.

The heyday of this ‘New French Theory’ was also marked by a flurry of conceptual activity, at the centre of which stood *écriture*. This informs John Phillips’s examination of what he calls ‘The Age of Thinking Writing’, in an essay which reflects on the historicity of what that ‘age’ was, when emerging techno-sciences contributed to changing one’s awareness of writing-as-inscription as well as helped blaze new trails for a philosophy still largely moored in existentialism. A companion to Phillips’s wide-ranging meditation, yet with deconstruction more explicitly in its line of sight, is Sorelle Henricus’s interrogation of how *Of Grammatology* remains pertinent to areas of knowledge today. By foregrounding textual operations and the notion of arche-writing, while mimicking the form of various twentieth-century fields of knowledge production, such as information-communication theory and molecular biology, Derrida’s ‘programmatic’ work, chiming with *Zeitgeist* debates on ethnography and (de)colonization, is seen to elicit a tension with the moment in which it is being thought.

The motif of performative mimicking, as ‘ventriloquy’, also animates Maxime Philippe’s study, also focused on the practice of deconstruction, of what Derrida owes to Antonin Artaud as a ‘conceptual character’ embodying *écriture* – the maddening or ‘unsensing’ of the subject of/through writing, or ‘subjectile’<sup>27</sup> – and a problematic precursor to Derrida’s performative writing style and thought. This ventriloquy is then more specifically connected to the figure of the puppet in both Artaud’s theory of theatre and Derrida’s last seminar *The Beast and the Sovereign*, in an arc spanning the quasi-entirety of Derrida’s *oeuvre*.

One of the most positive outcomes of the May 1968 events’ socio-cultural upheaval was the creation of an alternative experimental university at Vincennes, which aspired to meet the demand for profound changes in academic curriculum and pedagogical

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discovered, more private research into anagrammatic patterns in poetry and changing trends in contemporaneous critical conceptions of writing is Ivan Callus’s (sadly unpublished) PhD thesis *Anagrammatologies: Saussure’s Anagram Notebooks in Theory and Practice* (University of Wales, Cardiff, 1998). For a recent historical and epistemic study, see Pierre-Yves Testenoire, *Ferdinand de Saussure à la recherche des anagrammes* (Limoges: Lambert-Lucas, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, critical ed. Rudolf Engler (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1968).

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of this word, borrowed by Derrida from Artaud, see Maxime Philippe’s essay in this issue.

relationships from the student movement. The then Minister of Education, Edgar Faure, entrusted the project of a free-thinking, anti-authoritarian establishment to a dynamic young woman, Hélène Cixous, who was responsible for recruiting the likes of Foucault, Deleuze, Canguilhem, Barthes, Todorov and Genette, among others, taking planning advice from Jacques Derrida.<sup>28</sup> While Cixous's long-life friendship and numerous intertextual connections with the latter are well-known,<sup>29</sup> Marie-Dominique Garnier's Deleuzian 'performance essay' on the 'Neuterre' (Nanterre and the neuter) uncovers some of the striking textual links between Cixous and Deleuze at the time. Together with Yue Zhuo's own articulation of the sexual undertones of Barthes's *neutre* with his own understated sexuality, prefigured in his reading of Balzac's *Sarrasine* in *S/Z* (1970), it forms a critical diptych probing into the growing importance of a figure first highlighted by Maurice Blanchot in a range of essays gathered in *L'Entretien infini* (1969), but here redeployed, from Cixous's 1972 novel *Neutre* to Barthes's lecture notes on *le neutre* at the Collège de France (1977-78), for its fruitful potential in future issues of sexual difference, LGBTQ / gender studies and identity politics.

Although poetics was reinvented as a critical discipline during those years, the intersecting influence of narratology (Genette, Todorov) has resulted in fiction being the privileged object of critical re-readings. It is therefore fitting that this anniversary issue should explore the relevance for poetry and a 'poetics of poetry' of the work of two prominent thinkers, Roland Barthes and Gilles Deleuze, with Calum Gardner's study of the impact of 'The Death of the Author' (the function of 'scriptor') on English-language avant-garde poetics (Ron Silliman and Language poetry, prose poet Dodie Bellamy and the 'New Narrative' writers, Harryette Mullen) and Jason Skeet's attempt to work out a Deleuzian poetics or schizoanalytic reading, adducing as an example Deleuze and Guattari's engagement with Allen Ginsberg's 'Kaddish'. A similar schizoanalytic perspective, combined with a narratological approach, informs Kwasi David Tembo's unpacking of the 'tridentity' of DC Comics' Superman. Applied to a contemporary aesthetic form traditionally held to be non-academic and which would not have been deemed worthy of critical attention even in those days of intellectual rebelliousness, Tembo's dual reading implicitly underscores the longevity and versatile applicability not only of those ideas and methods, from what Foucault once called 'founders of discursivity',<sup>30</sup> that are (still) the 'flavour of the month' (Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis) but also, in the case of narratology and, more generally, structuralism, too often confined to the dusty shelves of history.

Stepping back from this collection of essays, presented here deliberately in a different articulation than the thematic arrangement chosen for the issue, one can see another intersubjective as much as intertextual 'round robin' of protagonists and themes emerging: Cixous, Deleuze and Derrida on performance, Deleuze and Barthes on poetry

<sup>28</sup> Other luminaries who taught in this hub of intellectual ferment until its fateful relocation to Saint-Denis in 1979 include Lyotard, Badiou, Rancière, Balibar, Serres, Richard, linguist Nicolas Ruwet, philosophers François Châtelet and René Schérer, sociologists Robert Castel and Jean-Claude Passeron, and psychoanalyst Serge Leclaire – the latter instead of Lacan, who after a disrupted one-off lecture in December 1969 never returned.

<sup>29</sup> I list a chronology of those in my 'Portrait of H. C. as J. D. and Back', *New Literary History* 37.1: 'Hélène Cixous: When the Word is a Stage', ed. Eric Prenowitz (2006): 53-5.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', trans. Josue V. Harari, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 114.

and poetics, Barthes and Cixous on the neuter. Indeed, it is hoped that the reader will not feel bound by the ‘subjective’ sub-headings under which the various contributions to this anniversary issue have been grouped, but rather use them as a suggestive point of departure from which to invent new ‘assemblages’ and critical constructions giving this ‘New French Theory’ half a century old a ‘second life’.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> I am borrowing the phrase from Vincent B. Leitch’s chapter ‘French theory’s second life’ in *Literary Criticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Theory Renaissance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 91-104, although it is used more restrictively to refer to the proliferation of posthumous volumes and collective projects of manuscript and seminar editions.



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