JPRS 59458

9 July 1973

TRANSLATIONS ON NORTH VIETNAM

No. 1414

Hoc Tap, No. 12, 1972 (Addendum)

ASIA

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BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET	1. Report No. JPRS 59458	2.	3. Recipient's Accession No.

4. Title and Subtitle	5. Report Date
TRANSLATIONS ON NORTH VIETNAM, No. 1414	9 July 1973
Hoc Tap, No. 12, 1972 (Addendum)	6.

7. Author(s)	8. Performing Organization Rept. No.

9. Performing Organization Name and Address	10. Project/Task/Work Unit No.
Joint Publications Research Service 1000 North Glebe Road Arlington, Virginia 22201	11. Contract/Grant No.

12. Sponsoring Organization Name and Address	13. Type of Report & Period Covered
As above	14.

15. Supplementary Notes

16. Abstracts

The report contains information on military, political, sociological, economic, and technical developments in North Vietnam, selected from North Vietnamese and foreign newspapers and periodicals.

17. Key Words and Document Analysis. 17a. Descriptors

North Vietnam
Military sciences
Political sciences
Sociology
Economics
Culture (Social Sciences)
Ethnology

17b. Identifiers/Open-Ended Terms

17c. COSATI Field/Group 5C, 5D, 5K, 15

18. Availability Statement	19. Security Class (This Report) UNCLASSIFIED	21. No. of Pages 16
Unlimited availability. Sold by NTIS Springfield, Va. 22151	20. Security Class (This Page) UNCLASSIFIED	22. Price

FORM NTIS-35 (10-70)

USCOMM-DC 40329-P71

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Translation from the monthly theoretical and
political journal of the Vietnam Lao Dong
Party published in Hanoi.

Contents

PAGE

[III - ASIA - 110]

STRUCTURALISM, A VARIANT OF MODERN BOURGEOIS PHILOSOPHY

/Article by Hoang Trinh; Hanoi, <u>Hoc Tap</u>, Vietnamese, No 12, December 1972, pp 66-77/

In the past 20 years, structuralism has strongly developed in Western countries. Several bourgeois "humanities" (sociology, psychology, ethnology, arts, literary theory and criticism, etc.) have turned en masse to structuralism with the hope of finding ways to liberate themselves both in viewpoints and in methodology. However, structuralism can only become a fad and a movement, but cannot at all serve as a pole to rescue drowning people. Let us see what structuralism really is.

The Appearance of Structuralism. Modern Linguistics, the "Savior" of Modern Bourgeois Philosophy

For more than half a century, bourgeois philosophy has not been able to cover up its inability to provide the social sciences with a reliable methodology.

This inability, according to many bourgeois philosophers, is apparent where philosophy has never been able to help the social sciences adequately solve the relationship between the subject and the object in methodology. They maintain that before the very rapid development and the great achievements of science today, especially of the exact sciences (mathematics, physics, cybernetics, etc.), the methodology of the social sciences defintely must also have exactitude and real scientificity just like the methodology of the basic sciences and the natural sciences. They consider mathematics the typical model of this exactitude: it has an inherent independent structure, an inner logic, with its own relationships and systems. The mathematician needs only to grasp and act upon the structure and upon those relationships and systems in order to be able to push the development of mathematics, without caring to know who manufactured it under what circumstances and for what motives. And they want to lead the social sciences on the road of mathematics and of all exact sciences by ruthlessly cutting off the subject and considering the objects of research (such as religion, culture, ideological systems, etc.) as "objects" that have been separated from man and now exist as independent entities.

- 1 -

However, the exact sciences, including mathematics, have had only suggestive value, but have not yet directly affected the shaping of structuralism. It was the development of modern linguistics, within which one must first of all mention the work of Ferdinand de Saussure [1] in general linguistics, that people really competed to exploit in order to create structuralism. It was maintained that, among all the "representative systems" and "symbolic systems" produced by man (religion, mythology, thought systems, culture, etc.), language is the most complete system which contains structures, relationships and systems capable of helping philosophy elaborate principles of observation and methods of research regarding things in general, and particularly regarding man's conceptual and social forms. Hence linguistics is considered the "savior" of philosophy, and all the bourgeois social sciences are trying to stretch out and continually fight one another, especially to fight Marxism, the scientific truth of present times.

"Synchronic" Versus "Diachronics," Relationships and Systems, "Signified" and "Signifier"

In his Course in General Linguistics, Saussure was determined to oppose the conservative and biased traditional viewpoints of linguistics at that time and before. Before Saussure, linguistics tended to start with the language of one country to study the language of another country according to the comparative method, it tended toward historical linguistics or "external linguistics," that is to say, the effects of extra-linguistic factors (society, thought system, etc.) upon the development of language itself, etc. As for "internal language" -- language considered in its own order -- it was not given adequate emphasis, which explains why linguistics made such slow progress.

Saussure recognized the historical method and the social character of language, but his main thought was a real desire to return to language itself, with its inner part considered as an entity that exists objectively in a stable state, something outside man and unrelated to its historical process. He called it "synchrony," and he maintained that only "synchronic linguistics" can really help man discover the internal rules of language.

Saussure found relationships and systems unconsciously made by man within the structure of language. In language, such elements as phonemes, morphemes, semantics, grammar, words, etc. are all interrelated, and all of them make up systems, that is to say, complete groups that include elements whose relationships follow specific rules.

According to Saussure, language exists thanks to those relationships, and not thanks to the elements and their units. And the word relationships means form, and not content or substance. Hence, "language is a form and not a substance."

Also according to Saussure, the elements in language do not exist in a disorderly and chaotic fashion. Whatever area we consider, phonemes,

morphemes, words, etc. are interrelated and make up systems, just like chess-men on a chessboard. The system is important, the elements are not. The elements can exist and have value only through and within their systems.

Saussure was the scholar who used the term "semiology" more than half a century ago. He conceived language as a system of especially complete signs collectively produced by man and human society. That is why in Part One of his Course, he devoted two sections to a discussion of linguistic signs, and the "basic principles" (according to Saussure) posited in these two sections were going to be exploited by several philosophers in their own way to construct the theoretical basis of structuralism.

According to Saussure, the linguistic sign has two sides that are intimately united: a concept reflecting an object and a sound-image con-taining that concept. The sound-image, according to Saussure, is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the "psychological imprint" of the sound, witness the fact that people can recite a poem mentally or talk to themselves without having to articulate.[2]

In the word "horse" there are the concept of a horse (equos) and the sound-image, that is, the word "horse" either spoken or written. To avoid ambiguity, Saussure later changed "concepts" into "signified" (or content) and "sound-image" into "signifier" (or form).

A very important discovery by Saussure here is that the "signifier" (or the shell containing the concept) is a sign which, at the beginning, is arbitrary and conventional and has no organic relation to the concept, such as the relation of the husk to the grain of rice or of the sound to the string of a musical instrument. Because the shell, or phonemic material, is not derived from the concept, but is rather created from another world, the phonetic world, which follows rules that have nothing to do with the concept. The outer shell of a word and the relation between it and the concept are non-essential, because for the same concept of "river," for instance, the Vietnamese say song, the Russians say reka, and the French say riviere or fleuve. Moreover, some words change their meaning in time: the "signifier" (or outer shell of the word) still remains, but the con-cept inside it has completely changed. It is this "arbitrary" nature that makes the value and meaning of a word only relative, since the same word may have several different meanings, some of which brought from outside.

Where Saussure Was Right and Where He Was Wrong and Structuralist Philosophy

People call structuralist philosophy "a philosophy of relationships" or "a philosophy of objects." Actually there have long been idealist philoso-phies that worship "relationships" or "objects" under this or that form, and at times they had been submerged. For instance, the view that rela-tionships create existence, that relationships are essential while elements are auxiliary or meaningless has existed since Plato and also during the Middle Ages. Some of Saussure's views have met those views about "relation-ships" and "objects," but Saussure had new developments, some inaccurate, others accurate, more concrete and more systematic.

- 3 -

Saussure's great contribution was to have posited and promptly emphasized "synchrony" and "internal linguistics" at the time, when it was necessary to break the inertia of conservative thought that stood in the way. His discovery of relationships and internal systems of language, syntagmatic relations and associative relations, etc. opened up new capabilities for linguistics and several related sciences. The two-sided character of the linguistic sign and the "arbitrary" character of "the signifier" and of the relation between "the signifier" and "the signified" were important discoveries. They rejected the naive views of Greek philosophy, including that of Plato, who maintained that "names belong to substantive things," that is to say, a name accurately reflects and imitates the basic nature of things (for instance, the word rice carries the substance "rice" in it). They helped people further understand many interesting and "mysterious" phenomena in language, such as the phenomenon of one word carrying several meanings, that of implicit meaning, and those of change such as metaphors, metonymy, imagery in literature, etc.

However, Saussure's viewpoint was not consistent and often it was extremist, and consequently became idealist and metaphysical.

He recognized the "diachronic method" and "external linguistics," but absolutely opposed "diachrony" to "synchrony." According to him, in order to study a language, one must sever all connections with its historical process and with everything (man, society) that has produced it. One needs only to examine a language in itself and for itself. If it is so, then in the present language of Vietnam, for instance, how can we understand why, on the age-old and stable tradition of Vietnamese, there evolves right now a rich and multi-faceted development of language in every field of revolutionary life? And if we do not understand this, how can we discover "the internal laws" of present-day Vietnamese?

It is correct and dialectic to speak of relationships and of systems, but Saussure denied the elements, which are the material bases and concrete parts of the system. That is why he thought of language as nothing but form, although he did mention the concept within the linguistic sign and speak of the social character of language. This idealist viewpoint had many effects upon modern bourgeois philosophy, which, in its attempt to save itself, is searching for a new kind of idealism that looks scientific. In language, if there is only distinctiveness (through which different units exist side by side) and no real elements, no real units, then one may ask, "First of all, what is distinct from what?" If a exists only because it is not b, if a exists only thanks to its relation (of distinctiveness) to b, but cannot exist independently, then how can a differ from b if it is not through "its own substance, its own existence?" The meaning of a word, truly, is determined by the meanings of other words through given grammatical relations among them, within one semantic field. But this is not absolute. If a word does not have its own existence and does not have an independent semantic content, then how can it help human communication?

To recognize distinctiveness and not to recognize elements consti-
tutes a kind of idealist relativism.

Saussure's discovery about linguistic signs was a new contribution.
But one must add that between the arbitrariness of the shell, i.e., the
signifier, on one hand, and the close relationship between the signifier
and the signified, on the other hand, the main thing is the close relation-
ship, the unity. In reality, the concept, which belongs to the idealist
world, depends on the shell to have form and shape, to have life. The shell,
on the other hand, depends on the concept to become, from the world of
inanimate things (speech sounds), alive, "organized" and linked closely to
man's thought. The arbitrariness of the shell cannot negate the law of
human thought, which is to constantly make appellations generalize about
certain characteristics of things. Therefore, the combining of the shell
and the concept belongs to two opposite worlds, which have miraculously
created living entities, meaningful units, names that can reflect the ob-
jective truth and suggest ideas, images and feelings. This is the active
participation of man and of life in language, especially in the realm of
vocabularly and grammar. Saussure's analysis of the arbitrariness here is
purely technical, therefore biased, although he recognized the intimate
relationship between the two sides of the linguistic sign. He only paid
attention to the body of language with the look of an anatomist, and under-
estimated the inner life of language itself in the intimate link between
it and man.

But Saussure's rightness was partly related to dialectical material-
ism and contributed to the development of linguistics. In exploiting
Saussure, however, Western philosophers and theoreticians later developed
further the idealist and metaphysical aspects of his and subsequently of
structural linguistics. Therefore, if we want to understand structuralism,
we must mention Saussure, and in pointing out Saussure's mistakes, we have
provided an initial judgement of structuralism itself.

The Principles of Structuralism

It can be said that structuralism is a mixture of some basic views
taken from Saussure and some other views taken from the idealist philosophy
of relationships, from symbology, Freudianism and structural anthropology.
It is only an alliance of many old, decrepit idealist and metaphysical view-
points. Taking advantage of the opportunity, when the exact sciences were
developing, it tried to maintain the status of bourgeois philosophy, which
was endangered and divided. Its principles sounded scientific, but they
are full of self-contradictions, they are self-righteous, and really arbi-
trary and forced, and they reflect a new kind of "determinism" in contem-
porary Western philosophy. If one digs into some principles of structuralism
itself, one will see this more clearly, although in our analysis of Saussure
above we have touched on it:

1. In science, in order to understand such man-made things as forms
of conscience and society, one needs only to use the view-point of

- 5 -

synchronic method, that is to say, to go directly into existing things in their fixed and stable position and disregard its past and its previous development, since everything that belongs to it in the final analysis resides right in it in the existing state. Only then can one discover objectively and accurately the internal laws and the internal structures of those very things.

2. A thing is an entity whose structure consists of many elements which are interrelated into a whole with internal systems. Considered separately the elements are meaningless, valueless. The elements exist only in a whole, in different systems, through relationships among themselves. Thus the relationships create existence, and to speak of relationships is to speak of form, and therefore content resides inside form and is created by form. Language is the typical example of this. The relations among phonemes make up words, that have meaning, or content. Grammatical relations make up meaningful sentences.

If we take examples from literature, a work of literature, since it is made through language, is merely a group of linguistic relations which make up systems of sentences, words and images. A literary work takes shape through relations, that is to say, through form. Therefore literature is language, form and technique. What counts is the uniqueness in linguistic technique. "Literature basically and substantively is irrealist." "To the writer, the real responsibility is to see literature as a failure to commit oneself, as a look by Moses at the promised land of reality," (that is to say, the land that can be seen but not reached) "It is not the basic nature of a copied object which will define art, but it is precisely what man has added in the course of recreating it; technique is the reality of every creation."3 If we want to talk about content, it is also created by form, because only through relationships can we have a meaningful work of literature. That is why the higher the form the more easily created the content.

3. Things have internal laws that are independent, spontaneous and self-generating. Examples are language, and the primitive social institutions.

If we study the social institutions of the remaining primitive tribes, we see that inside there are very tight systems, such as the kinship system, the system of names, the system of attitudes, which are interrelated according to some laws, and which do not exist in an incoherent or haphazard manner. These are spontaneous, self-generating and self-sufficient laws within "unconscious structures."4

A literary work also has its own internal laws. Literary language develops by itself through the internal logic of the work, through the special laws of language, which the writer cannot control or be conscious of. Therefore the work does not depend on the writer's consciousness, thought or motivation. "A literary act has no cause and no end." Reality

is not related to the work, either, since the act of creativity already kneads
the reality in accordance with the special specifications of art and language.
The characteristics of a literary work is that "it cannot be traced back to
anything." The characteristic of a literary work is also its "autonomy."[5]

On the other hand, once they become systems, things will exist as
"objects" that speak for themselves, and it is not necessary to link them
with what is outside them.

For the above reasons, in studying forms of consciousness and
society, one needs only to investigate their internal laws in order to grasp
everything. One does not need to know the person who made them, why he made
them and under what circumstances he made them. Likewise, when we examine a
given product, we need only to know how it is, whether it is good or bad,
but we do not have to worry about who manufactured it, where those people
are, for what purpose they made them, or whether those persons are good or
bad, etc.

4. Forms of consciousness of human society in the final analysis
must all be expressed by means of language (either spoken or written) for
the sake of communication, intercourse and transmission. That is why
language is the container for everything, the place where everything is
entrusted, the lead to communication from man to man in every area of life.
And that is also why in order to study the above products of man, it is
necessary to go through the language that expresses it, and through the
specific laws of language in general.

One structuralist philosopher, Lucien Sebag,[6] asserts that every
ideological system, every doctrine is a system of discourse constructed in
two steps:

(a) The first step is the creation of language itself. Language
has its own laws, which man does not know and is not conscious of. The
phonemes, which belong to the natural world (sounds, sound elements), which
are arbirtary and conventional, and which have their own laws, cause a con-
tradiction within language, i.e., the contradiction between the outer shell
and the inner concept, that belongs to another world -- the spiritual and
cultural world. This contradiction creates a discrepancy between the outer
shell, i.e., the signifier, and the concept, i.e., the signified, thus
making language not clear and accurate, and often full of ambiguity and
vagueness. The same word, the same sentence, with the same outer shell,
can be understood one way or another since it can bear several concepts and
several meanings.

Language itself does not, therefore, fully agree with thought and
reality. Through its implicitness, through its own laws, language cannot
reflect reality in a perfectly accurate way. Language forces reality by
means of its own laws, that is to say, it forces meaning, attributing to
reality meanings that do not quite belong to reality.

(b) The second step takes place as follows: forms of consciousness are basically systems of signs, and existing potential units, for example, this or that deity in religion, concepts and images of things, of the universe and of social phenomena in man's world view. These systems of symbols have their own internal laws. They either rely upon one another or oppose one another in their growth, and human consciousness cannot control or guide them (just like in language). Through language those potential symbols will interlock into a system, and only then will they have meaning and become a discourse, a real thought system. Therefore those units or symbols have become here the signified, i.e., content, whereas language is the means to signify, the signifier, i.e., form. Here we will see the same contradiction between the signifier and the signified which has evolved inside language, as seen above, evolve once more: the signified (that is to say, the symbols in religion or thought system), which belongs to another system and posseses its own laws, must obey the laws of language, i.e., of the signifier, which belongs to a different kind of system, before it can become a discourse (spoken words or written texts) and a thought system. This contradiction prevents words and meaning, discourse and thought from ever coinciding completely. Put together, the two successive contradictions render doctrines originally constructed by means of language (either spoken words or written texts) incapable of reflecting reality according to the accurate meaning of reality. Those contradictions also cause doctrines to carry vague and ambiguous meanings, which each person can understand and carry out in his own way.

According to this theoretician's reasoning, because Marxism is also a doctrine, a discourse, it cannot avoid the above contradictions. Symbols (or social phenomena) have been wrongly evaluated by Karl Marx and given forced meanings. Marxist theory cannot accurately reflect reality. It also forces reality. People can understand Marxism in several ways. That is why the practice of Marxists never agrees with the theory and the language of the books(?!).

In the field of literature, structuralism maintains that, because language is usually ambiguous, what has been written down actually covers something unwritten or "absent." This is a characteristic of language. That is why a work of literature may be understood in several ways, outside the author's intention. So in literary criticism one must leave the author out, one must set reality aside, and one needs only to know the effectiveness of the work among the public. That is precisely the function of criticism(?!)

5. Structuralism requires a kind of "structuralist thinking" over technical diagrams. This is formalized thinking. It also requires a structuralist method which is accurate, mathematical-experimental, that is to say, which must manifest the object of the study through processes of mathematics and experimental sciences (by setting models, diagrams, statistics, formulas, equations, function, etc.) and actions over these forms just as a mathematician acts over mathematical structures. For example, one would draw models that correspond to social institutions, or look for a methamatic formula to manifest a psychological, social or cultural phenomenon.

- 8 -

Just Like Every Other Idealist and Metaphysical Doctrine, Structuralism
Will Surely Be Eliminated by Science and Life

Pythagoras used to be a master mathematician, but also an idealist
philosopher of first-ranking. Many philosophers-scientists have been,
throughout their lives, caught in a dramatic dichotomy: science is materialist
whereas philosophy is idealist. This happens within the same human being!
So, one cannot make philosophy scientific or exact, one cannot immediately
make philosophy agree with nature and man's life just by imitating and
copying science and bringing science into philosophy. Edmond Husserl, a
mathematician, declared that he was "bringing philosophy back to the basic
nature of things," but from beginning to end he remained a phenomenologist,
that is to say, exactly an idealist.

As long as philosophy still lings to its idealist core, all efforts
at making it become scientific, or mathematic, or experimental, will be use-
less, and it will be rendered only more mysterious and more cumbersome.

In the past 20 years, many structuralists have strongly attacked
Marxism-Leninism in several respects. They think that the problems which
they have loudly dug up and resolved are very "new," very "modern," and will
likely upset all the traditions of Western philosophy.

Some Marxists who have fallen into modern opportunism and revisionism
because they worship the bourgeois doctrine, are trying at present to "con-
tribute" to the theory of structuralism through their sensational research
work.

However, such problems as "synchrony," "relationships," "internal
laws" of things, etc. are precisely problems that have always been present
here and there in Western philosophy. These are also problems which Marxism-
Leninism completely, seriously and creatively solved long ago.

(1) Synchrony and Diachrony

Regarding synchrony and diachrony, Marxism-Leninism have the logical
method and the historical method. These two methods, although independent,
have always been dialectically and thoroughly employed and are not opposed
to each other as synchrony and diachrony oppose each other in structuralist
philosophy. In the study of sciences and of man, if one follows only the
synchronic method, one will definitely reach biased, subjective and crooked
conclusions and be unable to discover the internal laws of the object, as
the structuralists themselves often say. If, in studying an existing thought
system or culture, we follow only the synchronic method -- that is to say,
if we wipe out what belongs to its past and lift it as an object out of
time in order to better study it -- then how can we explain the unity among
all the on-going contradictions (for instance, between the traditional and
the modern), how can we distinguish what is typically national and what has
been under foreign influence, between what is being lost and what will be
lost, between what is now and what will be the main thing. Man and his

different states of consciousness and his different patterns of living are
not simply figures and statistics, or physical and chemical formulas, or
arbitrary symbols which can be pulled out as states of synchronic nature
as viewed in structuralism!

Understood in such a metaphysical way, the synchronic method will
lead to a coercion of reality, a separation of reality from its own nature,
a forcing of various laws, and a pure invention of laws at the pleasure
of subjective research workers.

(2) <u>Relations</u>

As for the problem of relations, dialectic materialism has also
solved it through principles that are absolutely predominant scientifically
speaking. Things make up a whole entity. But this whole is constituted by
interconnected elements according to given mutual relationships. The re-
lations create existence, but they are not the same as existence. The mutual
relations and interconnections are due to the basic nature of concrete ele-
ments with their own contributions, their own existence: whether they are
absolutely or relatively independent depends on circumstances or on the en-
vironment. If, as structuralism claims, relations are the principal matter
then things constitute only a whole built upon zeroes, or a collectivity
without individualities.

The elements must exist first before they can, by virtue of their
interconnections, constitute things, that is to say, whole entities. To
give relations absoluteness is to fall into formalism, to move away from
the basic nature of things and to stand opposed to real life from the point
of view of methodology. For instance, let us ask: What is the real nature
of those structuralist arguments that are making a lot of noise? ("Litera-
ture is by language and for language," "Criticism is an exact science which
has to consider linguistic techniques and linguistic structures," etc.).
Actually, some people are merely banded together to fight realism, especially
socialist realism, to fight revolutionary literature, to fight the litera-
ture which serves politics and which is for life and for man. Those people
through the loss of faith in man and in truth are trying to deny everything,
to dehumanize, to de-image, to push a-literature, to turn away from the
function of literature and the responsibility of the writer, and thus to
go back to formalism in the name of science and language.

(3) Concerning the <u>independence of forms of consciousness and
society</u> created by man, some people have overemphasized this problem through
the worship of Freudian subconscious philosophy, which is being restored
more vigorously than ever.

It is true that at the beginning man made language and various forms
of consciousness in a spontaneous way, without any principles, guidelines or
theory. Those forms of course had then a specific internal development of
their own. Each element required the appearance of the other elements.

They were interconnected and they acted upon one another, not entirely
through man's consciousness and intelligence. Even when consciousness and
intelligence had already fully developed, the above-mentioned things to a
certain extent still retained their internal laws. In language and litera-
ture, for instance, we can see this clearly. Some words or sentences auto-
matically require one another and come together in accordance with internal
logic, cadence, rhythm and tonality and beyond the writer's control.

But is this a phenomenon which can be raised into a principle about
world view and consciousness? Religion, to take an example, is surely not a
product resembling a dream. Why has one religion been split into denominations
and sects that even are pitted against one another and why did people change
its internal laws? Could Luther and Calvin have carried out their religious
reforms during their periods of unconsciousness? Or could new thought sys-
tems have suddenly penetrated the minds of those two men and reacted together,
as one extremist and pessimistic view of C. L. Strauss' asserts. Here there
is definitely some consciousness of the thinking and the interests of one
class, of one collectivity, and religion itself is manipulated by the thrust
of those outside factors.

In studying a literary work, some people speak of its autonomy, its
internal logic, its self-generativeness and brush aside the writer's own
thought, consciousness and motivation. However, the same people who say so
have contradicted themselves, since they themselves praise those works that
are purely literary and purely verbal and on the other hand, attack works
that are realist and closely linked to politics and life. They have some
concepts and viewpoints, so they look for concepts and viewpoints that re-
semble theirs. If literary works are also self-developing and by themselves
move away from their authors centrifugally, then how could we have realist
works for them to criticize and non-realist ones for them to praise to the
skies?

When we study any object, we naturally have to start from that
object and examine itself as the principal focus, we cannot introduce pre-
conceived notions about man and about the circumstances that have produced
that object. The same is true of a literary work. Preconceived notions,
prejudices and biases are wrong. But, in order to avoid them, can we pro-
duce a principle of "polarization" that would cut off the product from any-
thing related to it, especially from the man who created it and from the
social milieu? Although introduced into society and estranged from its
author, a literary work simply cannot by itself explain its entire internal
life. Many complex problems that are posed demand that we permanently re-
late it to all what is outside it, and that we have to look back at the
author, at life, at the period in our effort to scrutinize, test and evaluate
the work itself. Whether a work of literature is successful or not depends
on the writer, and is determined above all by his world view. That is why
we cannot have a total conclusion about the work if we have not attempted to
thoroughly understand the author in every basic respect (his position, his
thinking, his life experience, his education, his talent, etc.).

Generally speaking, in every case, a writer's thinking, his political, social and esthetic views are all combined in his literary work, but to different degrees and from different angles depending upon the circumstances of its creation. If we do not associate the work with the whole person of the author and with the environment of creation, then we cannot evaluate any work of literature.

The view that considers objectives of social sciences just so many "mathematical objectives" in our study is only a kind of modern "scientism" which wishes to bring the methodology of natural sciences into social sciences in a mechanical way. Lenin used to criticize people who wanted to put the label "instinctivist" or "bio-sociological" on such phenomena as crises, revolutions, class struggle, etc.[7]

(4) Supremacy and implicitness of language

Today, in the bourgeois human sciences, people everywhere talk about language, people say that everything is language, that only through language and the laws of language can one understand and study anything at all. They betray Marxism, they follow rightist and leftist opportunism, they distort Marxism-Leninism, then in the end they blame Marx and language, they blame the contradiction between the signifier and the signified, they blame the implicitness and ambiguousness of language! If this is not the "linguistic disease," maybe it is the disease of "crazy logic" or the "ruses of the mind" (to quote Hegels) in defense of oneself.

Language has a special characteristic of being often implicit, symbolic and of having hidden, implied meaning. If it is so in daily language, this is even clearer in literary language, especially in poetry. But if, between the exactitude of language, which agrees with thought and reality, and the implicitness of language, this implicitness is primary (according to the structuralists' extreme position), then mankind would have been long in danger, and the structuralists themselves would not have the ambition of positing this or that hypothesis!

The specific laws of language in phonemics, morphemics, semantics, grammar, the contradiction between the signifier and the signified, and the implicitness of language are real things. But, in reality, the intimate relation between form and content in language, which Saussure compared to "the two sides of a sheet of paper," has made the exactness and the unity of language become fundamental. The arbitrary and conventional character of linguistic symbols basically does not prevent the essential nature of the inner concept or the agreement between concept and thought, or between concept and reality. Consequently language generally speaking agrees with thought, with consciousness, with reality, and this agreement has been tested by mankind's practicalities and demonstrated by life and science. Even the implicitness of language will be clarified by the rational activities, living experiences and ties of man, of the collectivity with reality.

The view that holds that language is everything and that through language one can understand the real nature of what language contains (thought system, doctrine) is a new type of experimental view, idealist and mechanist. There is still reality, there are still man's practical activities and other historical arguments and bases within reality. In other words, there are still things "outside language," such as the positions, viewpoints, practical activities and other factors affecting those men who have made up things contained in language. To dig deeply and make absolute the laws of language, in particular the contradiction between the signifier and the signified in order to emphasize the discrepancy between language and thought, between language and reality, between the language of different doctrines and reality, etc., is to adopt an extremist position against reality and against life as far as consciousness and methodology are concerned. That is also a bold and rash attitude in the name of science.

The socialist revolution has been successful in many countries, and the working people in many countries are trying to follow the path of Marxism-Leninism. What is the role of the inner laws of language in that? What is the role of the contradiction between the signifier and the signified? What is the role of that arbitrariness which has been doubled, in the language of the Marxist doctrine as analyzed by Lucien Sebag? If some individuals who had previously called themselves followers of Marxism-Leninism now turned their backs to Marxism-Leninism and shook hands with imperialism, then this, as Lucien Sebag argues, was not due to the implicitness of language, nor to the "shortcomings" or "lapses" of the Marxist doctrine, which results in each person understanding Marx in a different way, "coercing" reality, "forcing" life!

The language of art, just like the language in literature, has of course subtler and more complex facets than the language of awareness. Yet in the final analysis people can always understand it correctly, understand its author correctly, through their actual experience, world view, degree of awareness and method. If criticism considers only effectiveness and the public, then we can first ask, what effectiveness and what public. Effectiveness by itself and separated from everything else is not sufficient to the total evaluation of a work of literature. Literary cricism reflects a policy, a system of viewpoints. It treats the public with respect, but it is not passive and does not just follow the crowd. It must uphold good effects and prevent bad things from producing any effects.

(5) Structuralist method

Although methodology guides the method, the latter has its own existence. The structuralist method, in terms of isolated measures and techniques of research, is of course also made up of concrete steps, which may have a certain effect in a given concrete case. If, however, it is not rigorously guided by the world view and methodology of Marxism-Leninism, and if it abuses and reveres diagrams and formulas, then it may also fall into a type of formalism which makes it easy for science to be detached from man and

from the basic nature of the objective and thus to reach a point where the laws of life are bent and distorted according to the researcher's subjectivity

To sum up, from the point of view of philosophy and methodology, structuralism is clearly idealist and metaphysical. It wants to rescue and salvage bourgeois philosophy, but being itself still within bourgeois ideology it is not able to save itself, let alone save something else. Science and life have proved and will prove that every world view which is idealist and metaphysical will ultimately bury itself, and not even mathematics or any exact science can intervene and come to its rescue.

To us, only Marxism-Leninism and the Party's science policy constitute a solely creative and solely serious compass. It is very necessary to follow and pay attention to all useful methods and techniques of research. However, our world view, our consciousness and our thinking must of course turn to a single objective, on behalf of the very future of science and of the struggle to defend the ideals and guidelines of the revolution.

Once more, our people's victorious resistance against the United States to save our country has proved that our Party has with creativity applied Marxism-Leninism to the particular situation of our country, pursued an independent, autonomous policy, and maintained the highest sense of responsibility before our people and before our brotherly friends. Springing from the general policy, our Party's science policy has become the guiding light and the source of dynamism for all sectors of scientific research. To struggle against the influence of bourgeois and revisionist viewpoints as well as that of conservative and dogmatic viewpoints is a task of the social sciences that aims at safeguarding the Party's policy. An effort to understand, criticize and evaluate structuralism, a fashionable movement which has appeared in Western bourgeois ideology and deeply infiltrated the temporarily occupied areas of South Vietnam, lies within that political task.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist (1857-1913), author of the Cours de Linguistique Generale, edited by his students. We use the Payot (Paris, 1961) edition.

2. Here Saussure does not recognize the real speech sounds, and this is his idealist viewpoint.

3. Roland Barthes, Essais Critiques (Editions du Seuil, 1964).

4. Claude Levy Strauss, Anthropologie Structurale (Plon, 1958).

5. Pierre Macherey, Pour une Theorie de la Production Litteraire (Maspero, 1966).

6. Lucien Sebag, _Marxisme et Structuralisme_ (Payot, 1964).

7. Lenin, _Le-nin Toan tap_ (Vietnamese translation) Volume 14 (Hanoi: Su that Publishing House, 1971), p 460.

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