

Structuralist practices in art have tended to focus on semiotic and linguistic models of subject construction.⁴ There are also practices that have identified a ‘properly’ architectural model for these semiotic and linguistic structures. Structuralism is an architecture. **Presentation** within a structuralist model therefore requires either a **creation** of an architectural framework, or a **demonstration** of the architecture in which any **presentation** is already embedded.

There are two possibilities of **development** within this structural model – 1) to conform the **presentation** to the semiotic-linguistic and architectural structure, 2) to construct an architecture to allow the **presentation** to occur within the parameters of its structuralist logic. The first of these **development** models involves the **demonstration** of the semiotic-architectural structure itself.⁵ The artwork in this case is based in an actionist logic that through conforming to the

⁴ Conceptual art could be generalized as a form of practice around an investigation of structures and systems. This mode of practice is premised (either proactively or retroactively) on the logics of structuralist theory – linguistic/semiotic structuralism, Marxist, or Lacanian structuralism. The works of Kosuth, Wiener and Bochner for example sit in a grammatical/linguistic semiotic structure; Art & Language’s investigations of institutional frameworks use both linguistic and marxist structures derived from Althusserian structuralism; Klaus Rinke and Monika Baumgartl’s performance demonstrations reference Lacanian theory.

At the same time it should be noted that conceptual art cannot be generalized and that the nomenclature of Conceptualism, and its possible definitions as to both practice and intention, has been much disputed by the various factions of conceptual art. Indeed, the name itself is one contended by most of the artists categorized under the rubric. Conceptual art as understood now is primarily an art-historical categorization that has been applied to the work of those artists and their impresarios who most effectively aligned and publicized themselves as ‘conceptual’ within the defining period of 1966-1972. (See Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (Praeger New York 1973), for her primary cataloguing of ‘dematerialized art’ practice, and Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual art and the politics of publicity* (MIT Press, Cambridge Mass. 2003), for his analysis of the role of publicity in conceptual practice.)

It should also be noted that my discussion of Conceptual art’s alignment with structuralism is necessarily limited to a certain range of practices, which are those now aggregated within Conceptual Art as a proper name. Insofar as this aggregation relates to the point made above regarding art-historical categorization, it is a further demonstration of structuralist methodologies and their frames of construction. In this case these structuralist forms are those of *reception* and alignment. Art-historical and art-theoretical structuralism/s have invested and aligned these particular structural economies into the reception, interpretation and historical transmission of Conceptual Art. (For an example of this see Rosalind Krauss; Denis Hollier; Annette Michelson; Hal Foster; Silvia Kolbowski; Martha Buskirk; Benjamin Buchloh; ‘The Reception of the Sixties’. *October*, Vol 69. (Summer 1994).) And further to both the limits of my discussion and to the deployment of the proper name of Conceptual Art, is to note my non-inclusion of those practices that have come to be termed ‘neo-dada’. This includes those artists known under the proper name of Fluxus; a name deployed by the artists at the time and continued to be used as an effective demarcation point.

⁵ VALIE EXPORT has worked with this methodology. She has described her work as *Feminist Actionism*, a concept hinged on the equation *material = body* developed from Viennese Actionism. (See VALIE EXPORT, ‘Aspects of Feminist Actionism’. *New German Critique*, No 47 1989.)

The structuralist model invoked through the developed of Feminist Actionism from Viennese Actionism is an example of the deployment of the structuralist impulse. The model hinges on its own structural problems. I discuss this further below.

structure reveals the action of the semiotic-architecture as it structures the artwork and the viewer.⁶ Conforming the **presentation** to the structure points to that which is excluded from the semiotic-architecture or that is a structural impossibility.⁷

The other model constructs a **development** of its structural model through a second-level architecture. This second-level at the same time is a **development** within the larger architecture of the gallery, itself embedded in the structural architectures of art-institution, economy etc.⁸ Furthermore; this **development** itself is also a **demonstration** of the structuralist model.⁹ What is programmed in this second-level architecture as **development** and **demonstration** of the

⁶ EXPORT's *Foto-Raum* (Photo-Space) 1971, works with a specific demonstration of spatial extension. This work consists of large-scale photographic prints mounted on the walls, floor and ceiling within the perspectival space of the gallery/room. These photographs - images of sky, street, earth, sea - represent what could or would be seen from the perspective-point occupied by the viewer, if the material architecture of the room was not there. Insofar as the photographs image the absence of the outside from the structure, they also figure the condition of the artwork within the actual and semiotic architecture of the structures of the art economy.

⁷ Another of EXPORT's projects *Body Configurations in Architecture* 1972, consists of photographs of a female body as it con-forms to structural geometrics and to actual architectural forms. These works explore the body's accommodation to its environment - *Insertion, Adaption, Addition, Elevation* are used as principles for the series of accommodations. (See Roswitha Mueller, *VALIE EXPORT: Fragments of the imagination*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1994. pp.97-103.) This project demonstrates the material body as a form of impossibility within structuralism - a major point of departure for post-structuralist thinking.

Dan Graham is an artist who has deployed second-level architecture in his performance works. As he states, "An architectural code both reflects and directs the social order. In the not too distant future one can envisage that this code will be modified and in part supplanted by a new code, that of television...Video in architecture will function semiotically speaking as window and as mirror simultaneously, but will subvert the effects and functions of both. Windows in architecture mediate separated spatial units and frame a conventional perspective on one unit's relation to the other; mirrors in architecture define, self-reflectively, spatial enclosure and ego enclosure." (Dan Graham, 'Essay on Video/Television/Architecture' (1979) in *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art* (ed. Alexander Alberro) MIT Press, Cambridge Mass. 1999. p.53.)

⁹ In *Performer/Audience/Mirror* 1977, the studio/room in which the performance takes place is fitted with a mirror filling the entire width and height of one wall. This is the wall that Graham performs in front of, and that the seated audience face. This mirror provides a structural link to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage (see Graham p.55). Moreover, the structure of the performance (in which Graham stands before the audience describing his observations of their appearances and actions while being gazed at by the audience in turn, then inverting this by turning to face the mirror and maintaining his monologue description while viewing their reflection as well as his own), is a demonstration of the diagrammatic logic of Lacan's theory of the gaze. The triangulation of *Performer/Audience/Mirror* and its structural inversions locates and activates the binary gazes through the technology of the mirror. Graham's role as performer/artist fills the space and function of the screen.

Both the diagrammatic conceptual structure and the linguistic/semiotic performative structure point to the proper(ly) architectural construction of the practice. In Graham's project this is a mobilized architecture constructing all structural positions in the work. In *Performer/Audience/Mirror* the mobilization occurs through the technology of the mirror, functioning as both form and virtuality.

structuralist model is a mobilized architecture or a technology¹⁰ that opens the structuralist model to view.

The Structuralist Impulse

Stage 1. The structuralist impulse¹¹ is not utopian. It resists reinsertion into historical trajectories by a recognition of the inherent paranoia/s of the utopian desire. It rejects a return to meaning that positions a utopian ambition as the alternative non-place to the capitalist *tabula rasa*.¹²

Stage 2. The structuralist impulse is not relational. It does not seek a shared status. Neither does it identify incomplete projects or unfulfilled beginnings to cathect or re-cathect. Indeed it does not recognize beginnings or completions. That attribution belongs to a categorical historical understanding – one that simultaneously schematizes the artwork as autonomous or discrete.¹³

The structuralist impulse does not locate itself within an order of origin, and therefore does not situate itself as secondary or as a purveyor of second-order knowledge or information. Rather, it situates itself within a structuralist logic, one operating or mobilized by its own technologies, that derives, demonstrates or develops structuralist architectures already presented, demonstrated and derived.

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Graham equally identifies video as a mobilized architecture. “Architecture defines certain cultural and psychological boundaries; video may intercede to replace or rearrange some of these boundaries.” (Graham, *op.cit.* p.53.)

¹¹ My title is derived from Hal Foster ‘The Archival Impulse’ October 110, (Fall 2004), (whose own title “echoes Craig Owens, ‘The Allegorical Impulse: Notes toward a Theory of Postmodernism’ October 12 and 13 (Spring and Summer 1980), as well as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, ‘Gerhard Richter’s *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive’ October 88 (Spring 1999)”). Yet the structuralist impulse here is not archival à la Foster, The collections and recollections that Foster locates as the project of the archival impulse revolve around a core of mnemonic desire and manifest as memorial and memoir. These projects may assume critical forms as well as salutational ones but they are all involved with a project of retrieval. The structuralist impulse mobilizes a structuralist logic of its own that necessarily integrates structuralist thinking into its fold and forms its projects by derivation and interpellation.

¹² Foster identifies an “aesthetics of resistance” as one of the aims of the archival impulse. He proposes that “...a shift in address is necessary if an “aesthetics of resistance” is to be made relevant to an amnesiac society dominated by culture industries and sports spectacles.” (Ibid. p.10.) Foster’s thinking here itself owes much to an ideology derived from the cultural criticism of the Frankfurt School.

Foster also identifies the archival impulse as the result of “a sense of failure in cultural memory, of a default in productive traditions”, which he compares to Freud’s theory of the anal stage where “creative definitions and entropic indifferences struggle with one another”. (Ibid pp.21-22.)

¹³ According to Althusser, “...those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is the practical denegation of the ideological character of ideology by ideology: ideology never says, “I am ideological”.” (Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press 2001 p.118.)

Even though the goal may be a representation that operates on as many levels as possible, and one that opens communication with the audience as to their own subjectivity, this structuralist position is a performative position, even if this performance occurs at the level of process.¹⁴

Stage 3. The structuralist impulse may be marked by the trace, but is not a romanticizing of traces – its own or others. The structures, even as trace, are still clearly discursive, albeit hinged to their own contestation – not in the sense of the revolutionary power of the *démodé*¹⁵, but in the invocation of a structure already ambiguous with its contestations for the present, to be deployed again as problem.

The structuralist impulse does not identify with a desire for systematic transformation or reification. Rather it demonstrates the interpellation of its own logics within a system that it simultaneously exposes.

Stage 4. The structuralist impulse speaks from an undifferentiated but not entropic materiality. It does not problematize the material basis for the work through entropy.¹⁶ The nostalgias and libidinal flows of entropic materiality are replaced by virtuality and technology that act on the material base as illustration. The architecture is virtual.

The structuralist impulse is not Structuralist. It interiorizes structuralism as episodes that can be apprehended and manifested in any particular order. Its structure is non-linear and ahistorical, derivative and areferential, actionist and amoral.

Actionism as Structuralist Impulse

The project of Alex Martinis Roe has contrived a re-presentational

¹⁴ Again according to Althusser, ideology has a material existence because "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices". Ideology manifests itself through actions, which are "inserted into practices". (Ibid. pp. 112-114.)

¹⁵ Althusser suggests that "...the survival of the past as the '*superseded*' (*aufgehoben*) is simply reduced to the modality of a *memory*, which, furthermore, is merely the inverse of (that is, the same thing as) an *anticipation*." (Louis Althusser, 'Notes for an Investigation, part III', in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, Penguin London 1962. p.118.) Although the superseded here refers to the action of Hegel's dialect and the *démodé* refers to Benjamin's abandoned object-histories, they both suggest and aim at a transformative potential.

¹⁶ Foster identifies an entropic impulse that is a "false dialectic". He speculates that "that the dialectic at large – not only in advanced art but in cultural history – has faltered since [the] moment of high postmodernism, and that today we are mired in a stalled relativism." (op.cit. p.20.) Foster also cites this negation through entropic collapse as a homage to the work of Robert Smithson, which by this logic would be understood as pre-postmodern although still post-structuralist - work that transcends the "structuralist map".