

Machine and Structure¹

The distinction I am proposing between machine and structure is based solely on the way we use the words; we may consider that we are merely dealing with a 'written device' of the kind one has to invent for dealing with a mathematical problem, or with an axiom that may have to be reconsidered at a particular stage of development, or again with the kind of machine we shall be talking about here.

I want therefore to make it clear that I am putting into parentheses the fact that, in reality, a machine is inseparable from its structural articulations and, conversely, that each contingent structure is dominated (and this is what I want to demonstrate) by a system of machines, or at the very least by one logic machine. It seems to me vital to start by establishing the distinction in order to make it easier to identify the peculiar positions of subjectivity in relation to events and to history.²

We may say of structure that it positions its elements by way of a system of references that relates each one to the others, in such a way that it can itself be related as an element to other structures.

The agent of action, whose definition here does not extend beyond this principle of reciprocal determination, is included in the structure. The structural process of de-totalized totalization encloses the subject, and will

1. Initially intended for the Freudian School in Paris in 1969, and published in *Change*, no. 12 (Seuil), 1971.

2. To adopt the categories suggested by Gilles Deleuze, structure, in the sense in which I am using it here, would relate to the generality characterized by a position of exchange or substitution of particularities, whereas the machine would relate to the order of repetition 'as behaviour and viewpoint relative to a singularity that cannot be changed or replaced' (*Différence et répétition*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1969, p. 7). Of Deleuze's three minimum conditions determining structure in general, I shall retain only the first two:

(1) There must be at least two heterogeneous series, one of which is defined as the signifier and the other as the signified.

(2) Each of these series is made up of terms that exist only through their relationship with one another.

His third condition, 'two heterogeneous series converging upon a paradoxical element that acts so as to differentiate them', relates, on the contrary, exclusively to the order of the machine (*Logique du sens*, Minuit, 1969, p. 63).

not let go as long as it is in a position to recuperate it within another structural determination.

The machine, on the other hand, remains essentially remote from the agent of action. The subject is always somewhere else. Temporalization penetrates the machine on all sides and can be related to it only after the fashion of an event. The emergence of the machine marks a date, a change, different from a structural representation.

The history of technology is dated by the existence at each stage of a particular type of machine; the history of the sciences is now reaching a point, in all its branches, where every scientific theory can be taken as a machine rather than a structure, which relates it to the order of ideology. Every machine is the negation, the destroyer by incorporation (almost to the point of excretion), of the machine it replaces. And it is potentially in a similar relationship to the machine that will take its place.

Yesterday's machine, today's and tomorrow's, are not related in their structural determinations: only by a process of historical analysis, by reference to a signifying chain extrinsic to the machine, by what we might call historical structuralism, can we gain any overall grasp of the effects of continuity, retro-action and interlinking that it is capable of representing.

For the machine, the subject of history is elsewhere, in the structure. In fact, the subject of the structure, considered in its relationship of alienation to a system of de-totalized totalization, should rather be seen in relation to a phenomenon of 'being an ego' – the ego here being in contrast with the subject of the unconscious as it corresponds to the principle stated by Lacan: a signifier represents it for another signifier. The unconscious subject as such will be on the same side as the machine, or better perhaps, *alongside* the machine. There is no break in the machine itself: the breach is on either side of it.

The individual's relation to the machine has been described by sociologists following Friedmann as one of fundamental alienation. This is undoubtedly true if one considers the individual as a structure for totalization of the imaginary. But the dialectic of the master craftsman and the apprentice, the old pictures of the different trades flourishing in different parts of the country, all this has become meaningless in the face of modern mechanized industry that requires its skilled workers to start from scratch again with every new technological advance. But does not this starting from scratch mark precisely that essential breakthrough that characterizes the unconscious subject?

Initiation into a trade and becoming accepted as a skilled worker no longer takes place by way of institutions, or at least not those envisaged in such statements as 'the skill has precedence over the machine'. With industrial capitalism, the spasmodic evolution of machinery keeps cutting across the existing hierarchy of skills.

In this sense, the worker's alienation to the machine excludes him from any kind of structural equilibrium, and puts him in a position where he is as close as possible to a radical system of realignment, we might say of castration, where he loses all tranquillity, all 'self-confirming' security, all the justification of a 'sense of belonging' to a skilled trade. Such professional bodies as still exist, like doctors, pharmacists, or lawyers, are simply survivals from the days of pre-capitalist production relations.

This change is of course intolerable; institutional production therefore sets out to conceal what is happening by setting up systems of equivalents, of imitations. Their ideological basis is to be found not solely in fascist-type, paternalistic slogans about work, the family and patriotism, but also within the various versions of socialism (even including the most apparently liberal ones, like the Cuban), with their oppressive myth of the model worker, and their exaltation of the machine whose cult has much the same function as that of the hero in antiquity.

As compared with the work done by machines, the work of human beings is nothing. This working at 'nothing', in the special sense in which people do it today, which tends more and more to be merely a response to a machine – pressing a red or black button to produce an effect programmed somewhere else – human work, in other words, is only the residue that has not yet been integrated into the work of the machine.

Operations performed by workers, technicians and scientists will be absorbed, incorporated into the workings of tomorrow's machine; to do something over and over no longer offers the security of ritual. It is no longer possible to identify the *repetition* of human actions ('the noble task of the sower') with the repetition of the natural cycle as the foundation of the moral order. Repetition no longer establishes a man as someone who can do that particular job. Human work today is merely a residual sub-whole of the work of the machine. This residual human activity is no more than a partial procedure that accompanies the central procedure produced by the order of the machine. The machine has now come to the heart of desire, and this residual human work represents no more than the point of the machine's imprint on the imaginary world of the individual (cf. Lacan's function of the 'a'³).

Every new discovery – in the sphere of scientific research, for example – moves across the structural field of theory like a war machine, upsetting and rearranging everything so as to change it radically. Even the researcher is at the mercy of this process. His discoveries extend far beyond himself, bringing in their train whole new branches of researchers, and totally redesigning the tree of scientific and technological implications. Even when a discovery is called by its author's name, the result, far from 'personalizing' him, tends to

3. See Glossary, *Objet petit 'a'*.

be to turn his proper name into a common noun! The question is whether this effacing of the individual is something that will spread to other forms of production as well.

Though it is true that this unconscious subjectivity, as a split which is overcome in a signifying chain, is being transferred away from individuals and human groups towards the world of machines, it still remains just as un-representable at the specifically machinic level. It is a signifier detached from the unconscious structural chain that will act as *representative* to represent the machine.

The essence of the machine is precisely this function of detaching a signifier as a representative, as a 'differentiator', as a causal break, different in kind from the structurally established order of things. It is this operation that binds the machine both to the desiring subject and to its status as the basis of the various structural orders corresponding to it. The machine, as a repetition of the particular, is a mode – perhaps indeed the only possible mode – of univocal representation of the various forms of subjectivity in the order of generality on the individual or the collective plane.

In trying to see things the other way round, *starting* from the general, one would be deluding oneself with the idea that it is possible to base oneself on some structural space that existed before the breakthrough by the machine. This 'pure', 'basic' signifying chain, a kind of lost Eden of desire, the 'good old days' before mechanization, might then be seen as a meta-language, an absolute reference point that one could always produce in place of any chance event or specific indication.

This would lead to wrongly locating the truth of the break, the truth of the subject, on the level of representation, information, communication, social codes and every other form of structural determination.

The voice, as speech machine, is the basis and determinant of the structural order of language, and not the other way round. The individual, in his bodiliness, accepts the consequences of the interaction of signifying chains of all kinds which cut across and tear him apart. The human being is caught where the machine and the structure meet.

Human groups have no such projection screen available to them. The modes of interpretation and indication open to them are successive and contradictory, approximative and metaphorical, and are based upon different structural orders, for instance on myths or exchanges. Every change produced by the intrusion of a machine phenomenon will thus be accompanied in them with the establishment of what one may call a system of anti-production, the representative mode specific to structure.

I need hardly say that anti-production belongs to the order of the machine: the keynote here is its characteristic of being a subjective change, which is the distinctive trait of every order of production. What we need

therefore is a means of finding our way without moving as though by magic from one plane to another. We must, for instance, relate to the *same* system of production both what goes on in the world of industry, on the shop floor or in the manager's office, and what is happening in scientific research, and indeed in the world of literature and even of dreams.

Anti-production will be, among other things, what has been described under the term 'production relations'. Anti-production will tend to effect a kind of re-tilting of the balance of phantasy, not necessarily in the direction of inertia and conservatism, since it can also lead to generalizing within a given social area a new dominant mode of production, accumulation, circulation and distribution relations, or of any other superstructural manifestation of a new type of economic machine. Its mode of imaginary expression is then that of the transitional phantasy.

Let us then look at the other end of the chain, the level of dream production. We may identify anti-production with working out the manifest content of a dream, in contrast to the latent productions linked with the impulse machine that constitute part objects. The *objet petit 'a'*, described by Lacan as the root of desire, the umbilicus of the dream, also breaks into the structural equilibrium of the individual like some infernal machine. The subject finds it is being rejected by itself. In proportion with the change wrought by *objet-machine petit 'a'* in the structural field of representation, successive forms of otherness take their places for it, each fashioned to fit a particular stage of the process. Individual phantasizing corresponds to this mode of structural signposting by means of a specific language linked with the ever-repeated urgings of the 'machinations' of desire.

The existence of this *objet-machine petit 'a'*, irreducible, unable to be absorbed into the references of the structure, this 'self for itself' that relates to the elements of the structure only by means of splitting and metonymy, means that the representation of oneself by means of the 'stencils' of language leads to a dead end, to a breaking point, and the need for a renewed 'otherness'. The object of desire de-centres the individual outside himself, on the boundaries of the other; it represents the impossibility of any complete refuge of the self inside oneself, but equally the impossibility of a radical passage to the other. Individual phantasy *represents* this impossible merging of different levels; it is this that makes it different from group phantasizing, for a group has no such 'hitching posts' of desire on its surface, no such reminders of the order of specific truths as the body's erogenous zones, and their capacity for touching and being touched by other people.

Group phantasy superimposes the different levels, changes them round, substitutes one for another. It can only turn round and round upon itself. This circular movement leads it to mark out certain areas as dead ends, as banned, as impassable vacuoles, a whole no-man's land of meaning. Caught up within

the group, one phantasy reflects another like interchangeable currency, but a currency with no recognizable standard, no ground of consistency whereby it can be related, even partially, to anything other than a topology of the most purely general kind. The group – as a structure – phantasizes events by means of a perpetual and non-responsible coming and going between the general and the particular. A leader, a scapegoat, a schism, a threatening phantasy from another group – any of these is equated with the group subjectivity. Each event or crisis can be replaced by another event or crisis, inaugurating a further sequence that bears, in turn, the imprint of equivalence and identity. Today's truth can be related to yesterday's, for it is always possible to re-write history. The experience of psychoanalysis, the starting up of the psychoanalytic machine, makes it clear that it is impossible for the desiring subject to preserve such a system of homology and re-writing: the only function of the transference in this case is to reveal the repetition that is taking place, to operate like a machine – that is in a way that is the precise opposite of a group effect.

The group's instinctual system, because it is unable to be linked up to the desiring machine – *objets petit 'a'* returning to the surface of the phantasy body – is doomed to multiply its phantasy identifications. Each of these is structured in itself, but is still equivocal in its relationship to the others. The fact that they lack the differentiating factor Gilles Deleuze talks of dooms them to a perpetual process of merging into one another. Any change is precluded, and can be seen only *between* structural levels. Essentially, no break is any longer accepted. That the structures have no specific identifying marks means that they become 'translatable' into one another, thus developing a kind of indefinite logical continuum that is peculiarly satisfying to obsessionals. The identification of the similar and the discovery of difference at group level function according to a second-degree phantasy logic. It is, for example, the phantasy representation of the other group that will act as the locating machine. In a sense, it is an excess of logic that leads it to an impasse.

This relationship of the structures sets going a mad machine, madder than the maddest of lunatics, the tangential representation of a sado-masochistic logic in which everything is equivalent to everything else, in which truth is always something apart. Political responsibility is king, and the order of the general is radically cut off from the order of the ethical. The ultimate end of group phantasy is death – ultimate death, destruction in its own right, the radical abolition of any real identifying marks, a state of things in which not merely has the problem of truth disappeared forever but has never existed even as a problem.

This group structure represents the subject for another structure as the basis of a subjectivity that is clogged up, opaque, turned into the ego. Whereas, for the individual, it was the object of unconscious desire that

functioned as a system of change or machine, in a group it is either the sub-wholes that happen to come into being temporarily within the group or another group that will assume that function. This area of structural equivalence will thus have the fundamental function of concealing or abolishing the entry of any particular object represented *either* on the screen of the human subject by unconscious desire, *or* on the more general screen of unconscious signifying chains by the change effected by the closed system of machines. The structural order of the group, of consciousness, of communication, is thus surrounded on all sides by these systems of machines which it will never be able to control, either by grasping the *objets petit 'a'* as the unconscious desire machine, or the phenomena of breaking apart related to other types of machines. The essence of the machine, as a factor for breaking apart, as the a-topical foundation of that order of the general, is that one cannot ultimately distinguish the unconscious subject of desire from the order of the machine itself. On one side or other of all structural determinations, the subject of economics, of history and of science all encounter that same *objet petit 'a'* as the foundation of desire.

An example of a structure functioning as subject for another structure is the fact that the black community in the United States represents an identification imposed by the white order. To the modernist consciousness this is a confused, absurd, meaningless state of things. An unconscious problematic challenges the rejection of a more radical 'otherness' that would be combined with, say, a rejection of economic 'otherness'. The assassination of Kennedy was an event that 'represented' the impossibility of registering the economic and social otherness of the Third World, as witnessed by the failure of the Alliance for Progress, the endeavour to destroy Vietnam and so on. One can only note here the points of intersection and continuity between the economy of desire and that of politics.

At a particular point in history desire becomes focalized in the totality of structures; I suggest that for this we use the general term 'machine': it could be a new weapon, a new production technique, a new set of religious dogmas, or such major new discoveries as the Indies, relativity, or the moon. To cope with this, a structural anti-production develops until it reaches its own saturation point, while the revolutionary breakthrough also develops, in counterpoint to this, another discontinuous area of anti-production that tends to re-absorb the intolerable subjective breach, all of which means that it persists in eluding the antecedent order. We may say of revolution, of the revolutionary period, that this is when the machine represents social subjectivity for the structure – as opposed to the phase of oppression and stagnation, when the superstructures are imposed as impossible representations of machine effects. The common denominator of writings of this kind in history would be the opening up of a pure signifying space where the machine would

represent the subject for another machine. But one can no longer then continue to say of history, as the site of the unconscious, that it is 'structured like a language' except in that there is no possible written form of such a language.

It is, in fact, impossible to systematize the real discourse of history, the circumstance that causes a particular phase or a particular signifier to be represented by a particular event or social group, by the emergence of an individual or a discovery, or whatever. In this sense, we must consider, *a priori*, that the primitive stages of history are where truth is primarily to be sought; history does not advance in a continuous movement: its structural phenomena develop according to their own peculiar sequences, expressing and indicating signifying tensions that remain unconscious up to the point where they break through. That point marks a recognizable break in the three dimensions of exclusion, perseverance and threat. Historical archaisms express a reinforcing rather than a weakening of the structural effect.

That André Malraux could say that the twentieth century is the century of nationalism, in contrast to the nineteenth, which was that of internationalism, was because internationalism, lacking a structural expression that matched the economic and social machineries at work within it, withdrew into nationalism, and then further, into regionalism and the various sorts of particularism that are developing today, even within the supposedly international communist movement.

The problem of revolutionary organization is the problem of setting up an institutional machine whose distinctive features would be a theory and practice that ensured its not having to depend on the various social structures – above all the State structure, which appears to be the keystone of the dominant production relations, even though it no longer corresponds to the means of production. What entraps and deceives us is that it looks today as though nothing can be articulated outside that structure. The revolutionary socialist intention to seize control of political power in the State, which it sees as the instrumental basis of class domination, and the institutional guarantee of private ownership of the means of production, has been caught in just that trap. It has itself become a trap in its turn, for that intention, though meaning so much in terms of social consciousness, no longer corresponds to the reality of economic or social forces. The institutionalization of 'world markets' and the prospect of creating super-States increases the allure of the trap; so does the modern reformist programme of achieving an ever-greater 'popular' control of the economic and social sub-wholes. The subjective consistency of society, as it operates at every level of the economy, society, culture and so on, is invisible today, and the institutions that express it are equivocal in the extreme. This was evident during the revolution of May 1968 in France, when the nearest approximation to a proper organization of the struggle was the

hesitant, late and violently opposed experiment of forming action committees.

The revolutionary programme, as the machine for institutional subversion, should demonstrate proper subjective potential and, at every stage of the struggle, should make sure that it is fortified against any attempt to 'structuralize' that potential.

But no such permanent grasp of machine effects upon the structures could really be achieved on the basis of only one 'theoretical practice'. It presupposes the development of a specific analytical praxis at every level of organization of the struggle.

Such a prospect would in turn make it possible to locate the responsibility of those who are in any way in a position genuinely to utter theoretical discourse at the point at which it imprints the class struggle at the very centre of unconscious desire.