

Some point in the late 1960s, structuralism gave birth to „poststructuralism". Some commentators believe that the later developments were already inherent in the earlier phase. One might say that poststructuralism is simply a fuller working-out of the implications of structuralism. But this formulation is not quite satisfactory, because it is evident that poststructuralism tries to deflate the scientific pretensions of structuralism. If structuralism was heroic in its desire to master the world of artificial signs, poststructuralism is comic and anti-heroic in its refusal to take such claims seriously. However, the poststructuralist mockery of structuralism is almost a self-mockery: poststructuralists are structuralists who suddenly see the error of their ways. It is possible to see the beginnings of a poststructuralist countermovement even in Saussure's linguistic theory. Having established language as a total system independent of physical reality, he tried to retain a sense of the sign's coherence, even though his splitting of the sign into two parts threatened to undo it. Poststructuralists have in various ways prised apart the two halves of the sign. Much of the energy of poststructuralism has gone into tracing the insistent activity of the signifier as it forms chains and cross-currents of meaning with other signifiers and defies the orderly requirements of the signified. Structuralists attack the idea that language is an instrument for reflecting a pre-existent reality or for expressing a human intention. They believe that „subjects" are produced by linguistic structures which are „always already" in place. Saussure's assertion of a certain stability in signification is to be expected in a „pre-Freudian" thinker: while the signifier/signified relationship is arbitrary, speakers in practice require particular signifiers to be securely attached to particular concepts, and therefore they assume that signifier and signified form a unified whole and preserve a certain identity of meaning. Poststructuralist thought has discovered the essentially unstable nature of signification. The sign is not so much a unit with two sides as a momentary „fix" between two moving layers. A subject's utterances belong to the realm of parole, which is governed by langue, the true object of structuralist analysis. This systematic view of communication excludes all subjective processes by which individuals interact with others and with society. The poststructuralist critics of structuralism introduce the concept of the „speaking subject" or the „subject in process". The signifier „hot" is able to work as part of a sign because it differs from „hat", „hit", „hop", „hog", „lot", and so on. These „differences" can be aligned with different signifieds. He concludes with his celebrated remark „In language there are only differences without positive terms". Instead of viewing language as an impersonal system, they regard it as always articulated with other systems and especially with subjective processes.