Roland Barthes--The Structuralist Activity

Structuralism is an activity—it is "the controlled succession of a certain number of mental operations.

The goal of all structuralist activity is to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the "functions") of this object."

This reconstruction is called the simulacrum. "The simulacrum is intellect added to object." The simulacrum is essentially the representation the critic makes of the sensuous manifold which is the object.

Structuralism involves two operations:

1) dissection--"find[ing] in it [the simulacrum] certain mobile fragments whose differential situation engenders a certain meaning"; and

2) articulation--discovering or establishing for the units posited by the above activity "certain rules of association."

The object of structuralism is not man endowed with meanings, but man fabricating meanings."

For Barthes, structuralism is "not a school, nor even a movement." Barthes defines structuralism as an activity—it is "the controlled succession of a certain number of mental operations. . . . The goal of all structuralist activity, whether reflexive or poetic, is to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the "functions") of this object." In the structuralist activity, "creation or reflection are . . . a veritable fabrication of a world which resembles the first [original] one, not in order to copy it but to render it intelligible." This copy of the original world or object is what Barthes refers to as the simulacrum. "The simulacrum is intellect added to object." The simulacrum is essentially the representation the critic makes of the sensuous manifold which is the object; the critic selects out of an infinity of perceptual possibilities inherent in the object a certain number of characteristics on which to focus, thus building a critical response to the object on the basis of the reconstruction or re-presentation of the object.
Structuralism involves **two operations:**

1) **dissection**--"find[ing] in it [the simulacrum] certain mobile fragments whose differential situation engenders a certain meaning"; and

2) **articulation**--discovering or establishing for the units posited by the above activity "certain rules of association."

The simulacrum, analyzed in this manner, "does not render the world" as it is found by the critic--in its sensuous entirety. This is impossible; no one of us can process with equal attention all of the sense data we receive each second--if we were unable to filter out the vast majority of such data we would be functionaly insane. The simulacrum, therefore is a kind of representation of the world as seen through such a selective filtering process; "it manifests a new category of the object, which is neither the real nor the rational, but the **functional** . . . . it highlights the strictly human process by which men give meaning to things. . . . Ultimately, one might say that **the object of structuralism is not man endowed with meanings, but man fabricating meanings.**"It is this meaning-making activity which is the structuralist--and **human** activity.