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(IN) DIFERÊNCIA: UM ESTUDO DO RACIOCÍNIO PÓS-ESTRUTURALISMO

(IN)DIFFERENCE: A STUDY OF THE POST-STRUCTURALISM REASONING

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Abstract

Structuralism is a theory that needs to be addressed and debated, since its assumptions remain latent even after the rise of Cultural Studies. As a matter of fact, we might even say that the rise of the former was only possible after the rise of the latter. So the primary objective of this study is to survey questions about structuralisms and particularly the post-structuralism, promoting critical discussion, primarily addressing Jacques Derrida's ideas found in *Structure, sign and play in the discourse of human sciences* and in Plato's *Pharmacy*. Thus, this article aims to discuss and reflect on the deconstruction by the political focus. Also aims to observe the extent to which critical to take into account the deconstructionism of Derrida's ideas.

Resumo



O estruturalismo é uma teoria que precisa ser abordada e debatida, uma vez que seus pressupostos permanecem latentes mesmo após o surgimento dos Estudos Culturais. De fato, poderíamos até dizer que a ascensão do primeiro só foi possível após a ascensão do último. Assim, o objetivo principal deste estudo é alimentar questões sobre os estruturalismos e particularmente o pós-estruturalismo, promovendo a discussão crítica, abordando principalmente as ideias de Jacques Derrida encontradas em "A estrutura, no signo e no jogo no discurso das ciências humanas" e em "A farmácia de Platão". Assim, este artigo pretende discutir e refletir sobre a desconstrução pelo foco político. Pretende-se também observar o quanto é crítico levar em conta o desconstrucionismo das idéias de Derrida

Entradas para indexação

KEYWORDS: Structuralism. Derrida. Cultural Studies. Post-structuralism. Pharmacy. Plato.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Estruturalismo. Derrida. Estudos Culturais. Pós-estruturalismo. Farmacia. Platão.

Texto integral

1. INTRODUCTION

"There is more ado to interpret interpretations than to interpret things"

Montaigne²

"The most sublime would be to learn things in a way that facts were already theory"

Goethe³

Structuralism is a theory that needs to be addressed and debated, since its assumptions remain latent even after the rise of Cultural Studies. As a matter of fact, we might even say that the rise of the former was only possible after the rise of the latter. So the primary objective of this study is to survey questions about structuralisms and particularly the post-structuralism, promoting critical discussion, primarily addressing Jacques Derrida's ideas found in *Structure, sign and play in the discourse of human sciences* and in Plato's *Pharmacy*. To enable this dialogue we will adopt a deconstructive perspective. We will try and address the internal wonders of this speech, as stated by Merquior: "However, if the

deconstruction, a necessarily immanent method, becomes the victim of his own work" (Merquior 1991: 258-259), wonders that Derrida himself accept they exist in the quote below:

We have no language - no syntax and no lexicon - that is alien to this history; We cannot describe a single destructive proposition which slither not in form, logic and implicit postulations, belonging precisely to what is sought to contest. (Derrida 1976: 263).

2 - The poststructuralist theory train

I feel like a foreigner
Passenger in a train
That does not come my way
That is nothing more than an
illusion ...
(Engenheiros do Hawaii)

To describe workings of the poststructuralist⁴ literary conception is a task of epic proportions. Given we consider it not as a theory⁵, since to be named a theory it is necessary a method, and we that one neither exists nor was it presented clearly. José Guilherme Merquior (Merquior, 1991) states that deconstruction could not achieve its goal of establishing itself as a theory. In reality what we can see (from demos and examples provided by Merquior itself) is that deconstructionists took the role of *kulturkritik* working from assumptions and positions on issues that ravaged post-war Europe.

The hegemonic thoughts of Western contemporaneity assumed a position of distrust in regards to previous theoretical principles; the major disruptions were: mistrust of the great historical accounts and the notion of truth, the decentering of the Cartesian subject and the discovery of the Freudian unconscious, the dissolution of the idea copyright and erasing the concept of origin, and an overvaluation of the reader's figure in detriment of that of the author at the Aesthetics of reception, the author's⁶ death, the revision of the structural concept, ownership⁷ of the principles of carnivalization, intertextuality, dialogism, parody, irony, and opposition to the idea of authority and theoretical concepts that have guided the coming of the Western intellectual.

Structuralism was the fruit of a promising encounter between literature and linguistics and it came after a widespread crisis on the notions of subject and consciousness in various fields of knowledge and especially in certain philosophical currents. By having as its main objective a break from previous thinking styles, its target was the immediately preceding current, that is, Sartre's existentialism. The thought of the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre was anchored on two

fundamental bases: the Historicism⁸ and humanism. And it is from these bases that structuralism seeks to overcome the existential philosophy. Although according to Merquior (Merquior 1991: 238) we should not consider "(...) structuralism as the starting point of a new anti-historical layout in Western thought (...). Around 1960, the animosity against history was anything but new". As we can note, a fissure current made possible what Derrida claims to be the "event" or "rupture".

2.2 - The Pharmakos⁹ top hat

In "Plato's pharmacy" Derrida studies Pharmakon (Allegory presented in the "Phaedrus" of Plato), a gift offered by Theuth to the Egyptian king Thamus. Theuth says the Pharmakon (Scripture) would be the knowledge (*tò máthema*) that would make most Egyptians educated, by providing a remedy for memory (*mnéme*) and instruction (*sophía*). However the king realized the ambiguity of this because the Pharmakon (Scripture) would make the souls forgotten, as they would no longer be using the natural memory. In this way, Pharmakon would not aid memory, but the recollection, as it would not create instruction (*sophías dè*) but the appearance of it (*alétheian*).

According to Derrida, the attempt to distill the Pharmakon (deed, medicine and poison), separating the good from bad writing, the true from the false one, would be like finding a chimera.

After closing the pharmacy, Plato withdrew himself to a shelter under the sun. He walked a few steps in the shade towards the back of the private area, bent over the pharmakon, and decided to analyze it. From the bottom of the flask, through its liquid thickness, the pharmacy could be seen reflected in the background, reflect the abyss of its shadow. The analyst then wanted to distinguish between two repetitions. He wanted to isolate good will from bad will, the true from the false. (Derrida 1997: 123)

But Derrida, too, had not found the chimera in his grammatology project, an ambition of a structure without a center "to outline a step outside of philosophy" (Derrida 1997: 237)? Faced with these two chimeras, which would be the most productive? What most strange is that the French philosopher urges us to *kill our Greek father*, yet, he himself cannot escape the influence of his ghost, he tries to overcome it, but in recurring passages of his work it appears again; could this absence be harboring an unwanted presence? According to Merquior: "Derrida insists in always accusing severely, one way or another, of phono centrism the thinkers that he depends the most - Saussure, Lacan, Husserl, Heidegger." (Merquior, 1991: 254).

Based on the two possible meanings of *pharmakon* (remedy and poison), we can see how the controversy was, or as Derrida says: the game, the impasse within the deed.

[...] Until the event which I want to highlight and define, the structure - or rather the structurality of the structure - although always present, has always been neutralized or reduced through a process that was to give it a center or refer it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this point was not only to steer, balance and organize the structure - in reality, a non-organized structure is inconceivable - but above all, its function is to ensure that the organizing principle of the structure was limited to what we might call the structure's interaction freedom. (Derrida 1976: 260).

Derrida, meditating on the history of the structure's concept, realizes that there had been a change, an "event", a breach, "that was the moment in which language invaded the universal problematic field; it was the time when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything becomes speech," the author argues. According to Hirsch " The questions are not new, nor is the radically skeptical mindset that generates them. What is new, I believe, is the insistence with which these questions have come to occupy the center of literary-theoretical concerns." We realized that the issues are not so new (Compagnon states: "... Confusedly groping for a definition in general, not instrumental, linguistics rhetoric: that 'everything is rhetoric', that deconstruction should rediscover in Nietzsche, around 1968 "- Compagnon, 2001: 11), but the fixation on language can indeed be considered a novelty. However when, where and why this revolution happened? Derrida would rather not say, "To designate this production, it would be somewhat naive refer to an event, a doctrine or name of an author." Would be possible, however, to think of *this break* at a certain time? Didn't Plato no longer recognized the ambiguity in ancient times, the impasse of origin? According to Merquior (Merquior 1991: 234) "(...) Derrida apparently used the Hegelian type of arguments concerning the nature of philosophical discourse to reach the same impeccable conclusions reached by Nietzsche: there is no truth, no objectivity, and no knowledge without interest" that is, there is nothing new under the sun, except the intensity, the center in the language.

In "Structure, *sign and play in the discourse of human sciences*", Derrida (1978, p. 278-80) questioned the "structurality of the structure" or the idea of a "center" which, he argued, operated in order to limit the structure's set. For Derrida the idea of the center would be at the core of the Western metaphysics history, limiting the structure's set; and he identifies three basic forms or main centering: (a) logo centrism, or centering the logos; (b) the phono centrism or centering on the phone; (c) ethnocentrism, or centering on a given culture.

The idea of ethno-phono-logo centrism should, according to the French philosopher, be addressed and even if we cannot deny it, we should analyze its texts by deconstructing them, searching for hidden aspects of supposed center guises. That's exactly what he tried to do in his *grammatology*¹¹.

[...]the whole history of the concept of structure, [...]must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix [...]s the determination of being as presence in all the senses of this word. It would be possible to show that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated the constant of a presence—*eidos*, *arché*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, or conscience, God, man, and so forth (Derrida, 1978: 278-80)

Derrida stated that: "the concept of structure is focused indeed on the concept of a founded base game based, formed from a static foundation and a reassuring certainty, at which time the concept itself is removed game. From this certainty, anxiety can be mastered" (Derrida, 2002: 231). However, should we consider the history of philosophy something uneventful? Do we ever stray from anxiety? Since classical ages philosophy has found its source of being in difficulty. As Menon stated: "Socrates, I learned by hearsay, even before I met you that you did nothing besides find difficulties everywhere and make them find others "(Derrida 1997: 66).

Derrida¹² questioned the French structuralism of the previous decade (also questioning all philosophical currents that preceded it) criticizing the idea of center and giving a crisp, clear direction of his intellectual project. The genealogy of the French post-structuralism needs to be understood, in part, by its affiliations with Nietzsche's way of thinking, especially with his critique of truth and his emphasis on the plurality of interpretation. The idea of a center would neutralize the game's structure and limit the power, the potency of the philosophy. As we can see this breach was only made possible by contributions from Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger¹³: (a) " Nietzsche's criticism of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of being and truth, which were replaced by the concepts of interaction, interpretation and sign (sign without truth present) "; (b) "the Freudian critique of self-presence, that is, the criticism of the conscious, the subject, personal identity, proximity or possession of self"; (c) "Heidegger's destruction of metaphysics, of Onto-theology, of the determination of the human being as presence." (Derrida 1976: 263).

The structuralist pinnacle also contributed to abolish the conscious subject, or at least, to convert it into a residual phenomenon. The radicalization of the Saussurean formalism, especially the primacy of language (phonological rules system, social part of language) over speech (speaker's singular act), added to the predominance of the structure of the process and function, engendered an objectivist or operationalist strategy to analyze the human phenomena. As this linguistic model is exported to anthropology, psychoanalysis and other sciences, it came to

extend a conception of knowledge that excluded the subjects of the experiment. (CANCLINI, 2005: 191)

It is easy to note that the theory of arbitrariness of meaning proposed by Derrida produces a false sense of freedom. The freedom of a false Prometheus would take us to the logic of multiple interpretations and the meaning of mantic nature, unattainable. However this concept will not get us to live a less tyrant life. The tyranny of the sign and the meaning is simply replaced by the tyranny of multiple interpretations (or rather the dictatorial interpretation of the strongest, the most powerful economically or politically). The Saussurean abstraction was limited to the field of language, the semantic field of language. The linguistic abstraction¹⁴ was only possible (and Saussure acknowledges and assumes this limitation) as a system. The "langue" can never be separated from the "parole" in a translinguistic plan. What makes the Derridean's discourse dangerous is the transfer of this abstractionist technique (used by Saussure in an attempt to understand the linguistic system, or rather intralinguistic) to the epistemological field.

It is important to reflect on the consequences of abstractionist thought in practical life. Can the superficial relationship between language and the world affect social relationships? "It is worth asking, then, if we shouldn't affirm, with at least a minimum of clarity and sharpness, what it means to be the subject after the structuralism, Marxist and psychoanalytical deconstructions." (CANCLINI, 2005: 186). The subject is thought of as the creation, a virtual being, and, "when something does not work, it is because 'the system is down' or the 'server is not responsive'" (CANCLINI, 2005: 185). And the danger of "removing responsibility of individuals and groups" ends up creating a 'greater vulnerability of individuals and a growing sense of powerlessness' (CANCLINI, 2005: 185). How should criticism be reacted?

3 - The position of the critic

We must recognize that for us, critics and literary theorists, the situation caused by the deconstruction was comfortable. After all the theory achieved a prestigious place, given that if everything is speech and language, who better to analyze these concepts? However it can be noted on the path taken by Merquior to Prague in the 30s and to Paris in the 60s, some luggage was left behind. After the turn that took place in Paris in the 60s, some issues have been abandoned or sent to the background, as stated by Hirsch. But the question that remains is – were these expendable luggage?

In a tribute made by Leyla Perrone-Moisés the critic Antonio Candido, the author pointed out qualities of the one being honored that made her criticism worthy of praise. Among others, we can find: "The love of literature that makes him value the text more than the context, the object more than the method"; "the delicate numbering of his evaluations, which never present themselves as truth judges, definitive and indisputable"; "The recognition of aesthetic values regardless of ethical and political values"; the critic as a sensitive reader to the "aesthetic

transfiguration of the real" and "clarity of its presentation, never hermetic or pedantic." As we can see, based on the description of these qualities, and by following these requirements, few would be the critics who deserve to be honored nowadays.

Besides the hermetic language of relegating the literary work into the background, another risk that the criticism is subject to is the careless and excessive use of theoretical concepts through magic formulas that could solve all the literary problems. Terms such as "writing" or "arch-writing": as "game" [jeu], "trail" [trace], "text" [text], "differance" [differance], "gram" [gramme], among others, are used in a variety of texts and with different connotations, the official jargon of post-Derrida criticism. It is necessary to reflect, oppose, and discuss problems and possible solutions. The terms of any given theory should not work negligently.

It is necessary to accept that the criticism made by deconstructing the whole history of Western philosophy was productive for literary criticism, although Derrida may not have directly addressed it, as stated Culler, "Derrida writes frequently on literary works, however he did not deal directly with topics such as the task of literary criticism, the methods of analysis of literary language or the nature of meaning in literature," says Culler (1997: 206-207). "The implications of deconstruction for literary study must be inferred, but it is unclear how such inferences must be made," he concludes. Yet the French thinker's notes caused several discussions in and outside of the academic realms. The meta-criticism, criticism of criticism, theory objective (suggested by Compagnon), was recommended by deconstructionism in the beginning and in this sense it helped us realize the strength that certain interpretations possess. Criticism should never be used (as in the past) to suppress or assume a dictatorial position. You must redeem or create a critical laughter¹⁵, yes, a laughter that would allow the seriousness or severity of a dictatorial thought to breakdown, as stated by Compagnon (COMPAGNON, 2001) " All you need is to let one theoretical speak, be content on stopping them once in a while with a slightly mocking 'Ah!', to see them fall apart before our eyes."

Perhaps one of the noblest functions of literature, specifically, and of art, in general, is to promote freedom. From this perspective, the dilution of boundaries between humanities, the epistemological openness, pluralism, and multiple interpretations may seem chaotic, however they have helped us rethink and review the entire history of Western thinking. This reflection has placed us in between a place and a non-place¹⁶, the threshold. But we should not remain this threshold, we must seek new ways to recognize our breaches, collect our pieces and design new perspectives.

We have arrived at the mock universe of Jean Baudrillard, where there is no difference between copy and model, between spectacle and reality. But, as noted by Boltanski and Chiapello, this blurring leaves us without a starting point from which to build a critical point of view. The very postmodern critical position itself becomes invalidated (...) (CANCLINI, 2005: 203).

A great leap triggered by Derrida's thinking would be the abandonment of the vertical criticism and the appreciation of horizontal criticism. But even so it is important to understand that it is still impossible to abandon or abolish judgments as "to choose is to judge" (PERRONE-Moisés, 1998), or in the words of Compagnon "The theory of literature, like every epistemology, is a school of relativism, not pluralism, because you cannot elect not to choose "(Compagnon, 2001: 262). So we are faced with a dilemma - what would be the appropriate criteria value used by "post-structuralism"? Perhaps the politically correct criteria is not the most appropriate, because this criteria limits, diminishes and cuts the artist's freedom. We should not use the same criteria used in the past, or we would continue electing "Western white men" as canonical authors. It is crucial to think about this question, because neither pluralism nor eclecticism¹⁷

Would solve our problem.

Notas

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² We started this text with this quotation from Montaigne repeating the act of Jacques Derrida when he began his lecture given at the International Colloquium at Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore) on "critical languages and the science of man" on October 21, 1966. And that is exactly the incessant and tiring work that we will attempt in this essay, to interpret the interpretations. We believe that the so-called "science of man" and specific of philosophy (Derrida's formation) provide this work, at a first level, an interpretation of things and then at a second level, an interpretation of the interpretations. We believe that Derrida's work focused on the second level.

³ Goethe's quote was extracted from Merquior's book (Merquior 1991: 7).

⁴ Varied are the terms used: prefixes such as "post" or "neo", "super" or as the "propter-" used by Merquior (Merquior 1991: 231). Merquior states that for Derrida (...) "deconstructionism is the real structuralism, that is, structuralism that has come true - the effectiveness of Saussure's central intuition" assuming even the anti-structuralism function " therefore it's fair to mention that, in a very significant perspective, post-structuralism, through the thoughts of Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard and Deleuze, came to be, in fact, a way of anti-structuralism "(Merquior 1991: 230).

⁵ According to Milton José Pinto "We should call theory (and only in this sense the word seems adequately used) a conceptual language that abstractly specifies the shape of the models (logical, mathematical, linguistic or other) used as methodological tools of transformation of a factual language ("object") in another language ("interpretation"), which may be coined knowledge. (Milton José Pinto, *For an interpretative semantic theory of speeches in Structuralism and discourse theory* (Vozes, Petrópolis) , in press.

⁶ According to Roland Barthes "Once separated from the Author, the claim to "decipher" a text becomes moot. Give the text an Author is to impose a stopper, to provide him with an ultimate meaning, to close the deed. This concept is good for criticism, who assign importance to finding the author (or its hypothesis: society, history, psyche, freedom) beneath the work: once the author is found, the text is "explained", and the critic won (...)". (Barthes, *the language of rumor*, 1988 p. 69) We believe that Barthes position here is simplistic, the critic should not analyze the work from a naive biographism, however, denying the existence of an author is to fail to extract important interpretations of his or her work.

⁷ Appropriation, yes, but without considering the notions of history and present process in Bakhtin's ideas. Besides, all appropriate concepts were presented in exaggerated form, used to corroborate the idea of questioning employed by Derrida.

⁸ As stated by Hirsch: " All methodologies carry their own ideological baggage, and the baggage of genealogical historicism is an implacable hatred for liberal democracy in general, and for American culture in particular, as both the paradigm and disseminator of liberal democracy." (Hirsch, 1991: 53)

⁹ *Pharmakeús*: Sorcerer, sorcerer, one that misleads. One who uses language to deceive, mislead. Plato condemned the misuse of language, though ironically he is convicted of this practice.

¹⁰ According to Compagnon, "Permanence of questions, contradictions, and fragility of answers: from this it follows that it is always relevant to start from the popular notions that the theory was attempting to void, the same that return when the theory has weakened, in order to not only review the oppositional responses it proposed, but also to try and understand why these answers did not solve all the old questions at once. Perhaps because the theory at the expense of its fight against Hydra de Lerna, has taken its arguments too far and they have now turned against her?" (Compagnon, 2001: 18)

¹¹ According to the Merquior, Grammatology would be "(...) the first title given by Derrida to his own theory - the theory of different traces, the invisible marks of its ever postponed meanings,(...) is the theoretical weapon directed against all logocentrism" (Merquior 1991: 251).

¹² Merquior argues that Derrida's ideas can be summarized in four points: "(a) as with most post-structuralists, he follows Nietzsche; (b) he seems to have inherited from, or at least share this commonality, Lacan of the mystique of the primacy of the significance of meaning; (c) he developed a sign theory as a radical differentiator, a position even 'more Saussurian than of Saussure's own'; and finally (d) combined - somehow - this theory of radicalized sign with Heidegger's philosophy" (Merquior 1991: 250).

¹³ Even though, according to Canclini, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud "(...) they attacked the illusions of consciousness and developed deciphering methods not to dilute it, rather, to substantiate and enlarge it." (CANCLINI, 2005: 199).

¹⁴ Abstraction is an important process used in science as a procedure to understand a certain object. Math uses this technique. However the technique is limited to a single field system and should not be transferred to an empirical existence. Only by understanding the meanings of each word we are able to think. There is a short story by Borges in which he

tells the story of Funes the Memorious: Funes was a person did not know how to abstract, his world was full of details, that is, everything was distinct. " They let us glimpse into the dizzying world of Funes. He, lest we forget, was almost incapable of general, platonic ideas. Not only it was hard for him to understand that the generic meaning but he also covered many disparate individuals of different sizes and different shapes; it bothered him that the dog at three-fourteen (seen in profile) had the same name as the dog at three-fifteen (seen from the front)"we see in this passage that would be impossible for an ordinary person to think the world only through differences .

¹⁵ The earlier Derridean's criticism reached this form of laughter. However this critical laughter needs to be productive and not an instrument to ridicule old currents of thought. Merquior says that: "just as Figaro, Derrida serves more than one master and ridicules all. Such rituals of appropriation / repudiation brought him many laurels in literature departments. These departments, frequently laic in philosophy, are increasingly being colonized by the theoretical literary criticism in search of the *weltanhauliche* pedigree" (Merquior 1991: 254).

¹⁶ Even Derrida recognizes this intermediate place to deal with the choice of two possible ways forward "As far as I am concerned, I do not think that there is something to choose at this moment, although these two interpretations must acknowledge their differences and sharpen their irreducibility. Firstly because we find ourselves in a moment - even if temporarily, of historicity - where any choice still seems quite fragile. "

¹⁷ According to Compagnon, "to study literature it is indispensable to take sides, chose a path, because the methods do not add on, and eclecticism will take us nowhere. A critical double, the knowledge of the problematic hypotheses that rule our procedures are, therefore, vital." (Compagnon, 2001: 262)

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