

*Support Structures*  
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A co-production with  
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# Function: *Requirements*

“Corporality of speech, the voice is located at the articulation of body and discourse, and it is in this interspace that listening’s back and forth movement might be made: ‘To listen to someone, to hear his voice, requires on the listener’s part an attention open to the interspace of body and discourse, and which contracts neither at the impression of the voice nor at the expression of the discourse. And what such listening offers is precisely what the speaking subject doesn’t say’.” — Denis Vasse, quoted by Roland Barthes<sup>5</sup>

Everything starts from this intuition: that what I define as support structures can release potential, and that support is not to be reduced to a reactive, symptomatic, and redeeming gesture, but that through its uttering we may be able to hear the unspoken, the unsatisfied, the late and the latent, the in-process, the pre-thought, the not-yet manifest, the undeveloped, the unrecognised, the delayed, the unanswered, the unavailable, the not-deliverable, the discarded, the over-looked, the neglected, the hidden, the forgotten, the un-named, the un-paid, the missing, the longing, the invisible, the unseen, the behind-the-scene, the disappeared, the concealed, the unwanted, the dormant.

In order to follow this fragile lead in almost complete darkness, the unequivocal alternative is to not think about support, but — tautologically perhaps — be supportive to it, and think ‘in support’. There can be no discourse on support, only discourse in support. This choice, taken without reservations, entails a rejection of survey, investigation, and analytical study (the study of a subject from a hypothetical outside which positions work on and about its subject but can never speak with it) for the performance of its primary proposition (‘I support’), and can only talk in action through the voice of support.

Hence the impossibility of describing or even explaining support, but the need to expose its operation and propose a structure, a support structure for the formation of its discourse. Here, this is articulated as a manual for support, which offers parallel modes of entry into a field; these entrances are by no means exhaustive and do not attempt to trace boundaries, but are to use for access and orientation. This is the proposal for a discursive site for the exercise of support to take place, and a register where its manifestations can be accounted for, forming the beginning of a bibliography of support structures.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘Listening’, in *The Responsibility of Forms*, translated by Richard Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 1985.

## Features: *Proximity*

*close, next-to, familiar, detailed, thorough*

Support's first operational feature is its proximity. No support can take place outside a close encounter, getting entangled in a situation and becoming implicated in it. A desire emerges, an offer opens; they are expressed in different ways, emitted or projected without or before being fully formed. It is not a word but a call, a longing; it cannot rely on intellectual awareness or abstract information, but requires a proximity and intimacy (one needs to recognise that it is a call and not just noise). This unarticulated moment is one of an intimate, un-named knowledge; someone is listening, someone hears something. This sound that can be made out is already an address (it is heard), but an open one, a discernment; not a judgment nor yet an emotion, but a sudden, initial erasure of distance demanding a decision which cannot in any way be impartial.

But this intimacy entails some violence as well, the violence of support: providing support and being supportive implies not only being in contact, but being right up against the subject of concern, and taking it on-board, making common cause with it. To work in support also means working towards the hypothetical disappearance of a lack, of the need for support, which are the basis for this intimacy in the first place: once more, against it. How does one become intimate with the problem? What is the distance of proximity that support proposes?

This is so close, it is almost too close to see, making it difficult to make out any contours or edges, which appear blurry and soft. Very different from the distant glance, this filling of vision almost prevents it: it obliterates the field (I am consumed by it), and through it, the feeling of an intimacy is expressed. To be this close is never objective, nor impartial; it develops implication, too close to be innocent and too messy to be clear. The work of support is not melancholic, which would be another way to measure distance; it cannot be unengaged, nor without a politics.

"The specific political distinction, to which political actions and notions can be reduced, is the distinction between friend and enemy."<sup>7</sup> The implication of support is that of the politics of friendship, for to give or receive support is an allegiance, and establishes who and what one can count on, and "if the political is to exist, one must know who everyone is, who is a friend and who is an enemy,"<sup>8</sup> and this knowing is not in the mode of theoretical knowledge, but in one of a practical identification."<sup>9</sup> With this possibility being acknowledged comes a responsibility, a commitment: this is what is here called proximity.

7 *The Politics of Friendship*, Jacques Derrida, London: Verso, 2005, p. 85. Translated by Georges Collins from *Politiques de l'Amitié*, Éditions Galilée, Paris, 1994.

8 "The figure of the enemy would then be helpful—precisely as a figure—because of the features which allow it to be identified as such, still identical to what has been determined under this name. An identifiable enemy—that is, one who

is reliable to the point of treachery, and thereby familiar. One's fellow man, in sum, who could almost be loved as oneself: he is acknowledged and recognised against the backdrop of a common history. This adversary would remain a neighbour, even if he were an evil neighbour against whom war would have to be waged." *The Politics of Friendship*, *ibid.*, p. 69.

9 Jacques Derrida on Carl Schmitt, *ibid.*, p. 116.

“Responsible for myself before the other, I am first of all and also responsible for the other before the other. [...] The aporetic question what can ‘to give in the name, to give to the name of the other’ mean could translate into the question of the decision, the event, the exception, sovereignty, and so on. To give in the name of, to give to the name of, the other is what frees responsibility from knowledge [...] For yet again, one must certainly know, one must know it, knowledge is necessary if one is to assume responsibility, but the decisive or deciding moment of responsibility supposes a leap by which an act takes off, ceasing in that instant to follow the consequences of what is—that is, of that which can be determined by science or consciousness—and thereby frees itself (this is what is called freedom), by the act of its act, of what is therefore heterogeneous to it, that is, knowledge. In sum, decision is unconscious—insane as it may seem it involves the unconscious and nevertheless remains responsible.”<sup>10</sup>

The deciding moment of responsibility is crucial because it throws the relationship into the public realm, the space of ‘words and deeds’. Supporting is a political relationship, of approval and encouragement, not dissimilar to that of being a friend: embracing or at least being actively interested in, and concerned for, the success of a particular project, undertaking, or venture, which has, inevitably, precedence (even in opposition). This encompasses Montaigne’s perfect friend, but also the friend of the museum, party supporters, football supporters, and the implied positionings that any activity in culture entails. Richter understood this and propounded that the artist’s duty was to be actively political, opposing war and supporting the revolution. If friendship is the principle of the political, support is part of its actualisation.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida explaining Carl Schmitt, *ibid.*, p. 69.

# Operation: *Structures*

Instances of support here are considered as structures, measures taken, complex plots and schemes. Structures take shape insofar as they are imagined, planned, drawn up and committed to, and most importantly, made, built, constructed, erected, and put together. This is the entry of support into a work, beyond any reactive, symptomatic gesture it may suggest (no forgiveness is possible here). There is no redemption in a structure as it is a complex arrangement, which is put up—this explicit intent is essential here, as there is no structure without volition, and no volition without desire.

“I want, I desire, quite simply, a structure (this word, lately, produced a gritting of teeth: it was regarded as the acme of abstraction). Of course there is not a happiness of a structure; but every structure is habitable, indeed it may be its best definition.”<sup>20</sup>

Volition and desire are important to us here, as while support structures are invested with a longing for emancipation, emancipation itself is not a question of knowledge, but a question of will. The faculties of will allow us to understand that emancipation, in fact, starts from the principle of equality, rather than from an ambition to address and overturn inequality. “Emancipation”, says Jacques Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator*, “begins when we dismiss the opposition between those who look and those who act, and recognise that the distribution of the visible is not a manifestation of existing configurations of domination and subjection, but is an intrinsic part of it.” Supporting structures are added onto existing dynamics, in order to supplement them, and in this way re-distribute complex sets of forces that also go through them; while doing so they are not attempts to acquire knowledge of a condition, but function, through their persisting, active presence as reconfigurations in time and space, that overturn and transform the old distribution of the sensible.

Structures<sup>21</sup> are not the shape of things, but the underlying principles behind how things appear, as if they resided behind a curtain. A structure displays; but properties that are manifest in its appearance can only be understood formally, and do not necessarily disclose the inner structure, and are in fact able to hide and obscure it exactly by offering a front, a skin, a first degree depth of comprehension. The superficial appearance of things, by the same token, often has the strategic function to hide their hidden deep structure.

<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘Dark Glasses’ in *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, Vintage Books, 2002, p. 47. First published in French as *Fragments d’un Discours Amoureux*, Editions du Seuil, 1977.

<sup>21</sup> According to Barthes’ 1957 essay ‘Histoire et Sociologie du Vêtement: Quelques Observations Methodologiques’, Braudel opposes structures to

events, and was influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s polarity between process and system, and Saussure’s between language and grammar. Structures therefore do not reside in spoken language and cannot be apprehended directly, but they are the grammar of language, which refers to deeper, more abstract levels of reality ordering and conditioning how we speak.

“Scientific analysis would be superfluous is the phenomenal appearance and the essence of things directly coincided.”<sup>22</sup>

Structures are solely produced by the principles underlying observed phenomena, and as such delve beyond their representation (how something is shown), within structural determinants: structure is the syntax of transformation, the relational system latent in any object, which can therefore be present in not obviously related ones. To specifically address support structures therefore, is to privilege a particular type of relations in systems—those that are supporting—and to do so by working in them on a deeper level: constructing and adjusting frameworks through which the exercise of support takes place. This work is a process of engagement in the operative dynamics and forcefields of power systems, and therefore also, inevitably, a strategic apparatus. As such, support structures are set-up not to modify a given phenomena or an individual occurrence, but to intervene at the level of their determinants—they may produce multiple, diverse, individual events, but they are affecting the conditions of possibility for those to occur in the first place.

A structure of support is a reflexive, performative system—while the structural exists on the level of syntax and grammar, support works on the mode and the operational, both together beyond redemption or a charitable endeavour in a process which, by preceding representation, and working behind appearance, opens-up complex possibilities for multiple, simultaneous authorships.

To take Lévi-Strauss’ description:

“First, the structure exhibits all the characteristics of a system. It is made-up of several elements, none of which can undergo a change without effecting changes in all the other elements. Second, for any given model there should be the possibility of ordering a series of transformations resulting in a group of models of the same type. Third, the above properties make it possible to predict how the model will react if one or more of the elements are submitted to certain modifications. Finally, the model should be constituted so as to make immediately intelligible all the observed facts.”

The potential quality of a structure’s organisation can be considered as a framework, an outline that could be filled in, added to by each of us. The property of a structure is a systematic reason and purpose, but like any pattern, also by definition the capability to be extended, repeated, or rearranged: it is a tool. Support taking place through structures allows it to be explicitly functional, and implies a certain organised arrangement: we know in what way to rely on a structure, as its internal logic is an operative order, and not imposed randomly through an independent, or worse, seemingly neutral, logic.

“As support, the structure is separated from desire.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital III*, p. 797.

<sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘Dark Glasses’ in *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, Vintage Books, 2002, p. 47. First published in French as *Fragments d’un Discours Amoureux*, Editions du Seuil, 1977.





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