Black Holes, Watches, and Keystones

Derrida’s entire analysis of structure revolves around the idea of a center. Located (metaphorically) at the “center” of two binary opposite, this unique element is what supposedly holds the entire structure together. Like a keystone that is fixed to bear the entire weight of an arch, the center is the final, imperative piece of the puzzle that Strauss’ Structuralism was lacking. It simultaneously exists within the system, providing it with order, and beyond the system, unbound by the limits that apply to everything else. In a category of its own, the center supersedes the rules that would normally identify it with a specific side of the system. For example, the midpoint of a traditional wristwatch represents no particular time, yet all changes of time revolve around it - a specific case where the “center” is both literal and metaphoric. The hour, minute, and second hand depend upon the center axis to protrude from in order to adequately display what time it is. Without it, their skinny forms would have no point of reference, and the entire structure of a watch would no longer make sense.

Another key element of the “center” is the concept of “play”. Play refers to the amount of wiggle room that each piece of the puzzle has in accordance to how intensely the center has “balanced” the system. A supermassive black hole sitting at the center of the universe, while slowly dragging everything to its doom, does allow for smaller galaxies, stars, and planets to orbit in patterns that confront the ultimate gravitational pull of the black hole. These orbital patterns do not *entirely* conform to the demands of the center, but offer a minute amount of spirited resistance. Some play exists within this system. Similarly, a little child who is holds his finger an inch from his brother’s eyeball “isn’t” technically breaking his parent’s rules and touching his brother. He is, however, being a nuisance.

Derrida claims that this all began at a specific moment time, when an “event” occurred. The structuralists began to investigate the structure *within* structure, sowing seeds of frustration for future English enthusiasts, and inspiring the plot structure of Inception. I would imagine that this event was accompanied with the same mixture of ironic terror and wonder that we will feel when our machines become self-aware. The entire paradigm of structuralism had been changed forever. At first the great and almighty God occupied this center, with religion being the dominant force upon the Earth for thousands of years. God was cordially pardoned from this responsibility by science and rational thinking during the Enlightenment, in which orderly pursuit of knowledge fueled the world’s fire. Freud crowned “the unconscious” part of the human mind as the latest center, reminding us that deep down on the inside, we are all mere slaves to our desires. In a pessimistic or realistic sense, I would postulate that the unconscious, while at least subtly and sly, has now been replaced by the egotistical, greedy self. Today the world values success, money, and fame, with success and fame being intangible and useless when stripped away from the system that surrounds them. In a similar way, money itself has no actual value, yet the global system of economics depends upon it. It’s value has been attributed due to its central place within the system, as a universal tool for acquiring far more useful things. A center is needed to allow a structure to have structure, even if it has no purpose when on its own.