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Overture to *le Cru et le cuit*

(The following text is taken from the opening chapter of Professor Lévi-Strauss' most recent book [Plon, 1964]; it is translated and published with the kind permission of Harper and Row, New York, who are preparing a full English version. Certain devices [e.g. M_1] in the text refer to a list of myths and their variants which is appended to Professor Lévi-Strauss' book [p. 367-71]. The translator wishes to thank Professors F. G. Lounsbury and Harold Scheffler of the Department of Anthropology in Yale for their valuable help.)

The aim of this book is to show how certain categorical opposites drawn from everyday experience with the most basic sorts of things – e.g. "raw" and "cooked," "fresh" and "rotten," "moist" and "parched," and others – can serve a people as conceptual tools for the formation of abstract notions and for combining these into propositions. (The values of such categorical terms can be defined with any necessary degree of precision, and of course always from the point of view of a particular culture, by means of quite simple acts of ethnographic observation.)

The form of this hypothesis requires one's starting point to be at the level of the most concrete; that is to say, one must proceed from some particular social group, or from a cluster of such groups as are reasonably close to one another in habitat, history, and culture. This is a precaution of methodology, necessary to be sure, but one that need neither conceal nor restrict the goals of our project. By means of a small number of myths taken from certain aboriginal societies which will serve as our laboratory we hope to construct an experiment whose significance, if we succeed, will be of a general order; for we anticipate that it will demonstrate the existence of a logic of perceived attributes: one that occurs over and over again, and that reveals its own inherent laws.

We take off from a single myth, one deriving from a single society, and we analyze it by having recourse first to its ethnographic context, and then to other myths from the same society. Our area of interest widens as we move along; once we have placed them in their

appropriate ethnographic context, we will move on to study the primitive myths of neighboring societies. Gradually, we reach even more distant societies. But one basic condition remains: between these societies there must either be genuine historical or geographical connections or else such connections can be reasonably postulated. This work describes only the first steps of a long excursion through the myths native to the New World. The excursion begins in the heart of tropical America and will probably carry us to the northern regions of North America. From start to finish, the guiding line is furnished by the myth of the Bororo Indians of Central Brazil. This choice has been made, not because the myth is more archaic than others we will subsequently study, nor because it is an easier or more complete one. The causes which brought it to our attention are in large measure contingent. Our hope has been to present a systematic account which will reproduce as thoroughly as possible the analytic procedure used. In so doing, it is possible to show the close tie between the empirical and systematic aspects which is found in such materials. If the method chosen to demonstrate this tie embodies that kind of connection the demonstration will be all the more effective.

As we shall try to show, the Bororo myth – which we will henceforth refer to as the *reference myth* – is a more or less extended transformation of other myths which have originated either in the same society or in other near and distant societies. Because of this, it would have been quite possible to take our point of departure from any single representative of the group. What is of interest in the reference myth does not depend on its typical character; rather it depends on its irregular position within the group. And, because of the problems in interpretation which it brings up, the myth is especially thought-provoking.

Despite these cautionary statements, we can reasonably fear that this undertaking will knock up against prejudicial objections from mythographers and specialists of tropical America. And it is unquestionably true that this undertaking does not respect territorial limits or even the contexts of a single classification. From whatever viewpoint

we look at it, it is seen to develop nebulously. Like a nebula it never brings together in a durable or systematic way the sum total of the elements from which it blindly derives its substance. Yet we are firmly convinced that the real serves as its guide and indicates a surer path than any the book might have plotted out synthetically. We begin, then, with a myth which has not been chosen arbitrarily; rather it has been selected because of an intuitive feeling that it is promising and productive. We analyze it according to rules we have set forth in earlier works,[1] and establish for each sequence the group of its transformations either as they are manifested within the myth itself or as they are elucidated in isomorphic elements of sequences taken from a number of myths belonging to the same population. From the consideration of particular myths, we move, therefore, to the consideration of certain major diagrams which are ordered about a common axis. At each point on this axis where a schema is indicated, we subsequently trace out the other axes which are produced by a similar operation. The operation, however, is no longer the result of a single population's myths – myths which had all seemed different. Rather the operation results from a realization that the myths, though they come from neighboring populations, offer certain analogies to the first. Because of this, the leading schemas are simplified, enriched, or transformed. Each becomes a source of new axes which are perpendicular to those on the other planes. There, by a movement which is both prospective and retrospective, we see outlined sequences which have been extracted from myths belonging to more distant populations or myths which have been neglected in the past because they seemed of no use or were impossible to interpret despite the fact that they belonged to a people who had already been studied. As our nebula spreads out, its nucleus condenses and becomes organized. Sparse filaments are soldered; lacunae are filled; connections are established; something resembling order is visible behind the chaos. As though clustering around a germinal molecule, the sequences which have

[1]Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Anthropologie structurale,* Paris, 1958; "Le Geste d'Asdiwal," *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Section des Sciences Religieuses,* Annuaire (1958-1959), Paris, 1958; *Leçon Inaugurale* delivered Tuesday 5 January 1960 on assuming the Chair of Social Anthropology in the Collège de France, Paris, 1960; *La Pensée sauvage,* Paris, 1962.

been ranked in transformation groups are incorporated into the initial group and reproduce its structure and determinations. A multi-dimensional body is born whose central parts reveal a pattern or organization, though uncertainty and confusion continue to rule on the periphery.

We do not anticipate a point where the mythical material, having been dissoved by analysis, will crystallize into a mass and offer in all respects the image of a stable and well-determined structure. We must recognize that the science of myths is still in its infancy and should be satisfied with the sketchiest of results. But beyond that we must also recognize that the final step will never be taken simply because no population or population group now exists or will exist whose myths and ethnography – and without these there can be no study of myths – can be the object of exhaustive knowledge. There would be no point to holding such ambitions anyway. We are dealing with a reality in process, a reality which is perpetually under the attack from a past which ruins it and a future which changes it. Each case in the literature illustrates how distant such a goal is and we must content ourselves with samples and remains. We have shown that the starting point of the analysis must inevitably be chosen haphazardly because the organizing principles of the mythic material are in the material and will only be revealed progressively. It is inevitable that the finishing point will also impose itself in an equally unexpected way. That will come when the undertaking arrives at the point where its ideal object has acquired adequate form and consistency. There will then be no possibility of doubting its existence as an object properly considered as such nor of certain of its latent properties. Here, as with the optical miscroscope which cannot reveal matter's ultimate structure to the observer, our only choice is between certain enlargements; each manifests a level of organization whose truth is relative; each, while in use, excludes the perception of other levels.

To some extent these remarks explain the characteristics of a book which otherwise might seem paradoxical. It is a complete work, which presents conclusions designed to answer the questions raised at the outset; yet it makes frequent references to a second work in whose

shadows a third work is probably beginning to take shape. If they ever come to fruition, these other volumes will not be a continuation of this one; rather they will pick up the same materials and will offer a different attack on the same problems in the hope of accentuating properties which have remained confused or have not been perceived. They will do this by resorting to new ways of seeing or by coloring historical cross-sections in another manner. If the inquiry proceeds according to these hopes, it will not develop along a linear axis but rather as a spiral: it will return regularly to the earlier results; it will embrace new objects only when knowledge of them will make it possible to understand better the fragmentary knowledge previously acquired.

The reader should not be astonished that this book, which by its own statement of purpose is devoted to mythology, reaches into tales, legends, and pseudo-historical traditions, nor that it calls on a wide variety of ceremonies and rites. We reject all hasty judgment about what is properly considered mythic and claim, as appropriate to our interest, every manifestation of social and mental activity which can be discerned among the populations under study. As the movement of our analysis will show, this allows us to round off the myth or clarify it even in those instances where such manifestations do not amount to what musicians call an obligato.[2] Even though the research has been centered on the myths of tropical America from which the greater number of examples has been drawn, the progressive demands of the analysis have made it inevitable that we should use contributions culled from more distant regions. The process is very much like that of those primitive organisms which, although they are already enclosed in a membrane, maintain a capacity to move their protoplasm within this envelope and to distend it extraordinarily in order to emit pseudopodia. Such behavior is a good bit less strange once we have verified that its object is to capture or to assimilate foreign bodies. Finally, we have avoided all preconceived classifications about cosmological, seasonal, divine, technological, and other sorts of myths. Once again it is the myth itself, subjected to analysis, which we are

[2]Cf. Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Anthropologie structurale,* Paris, 1958, ch. XII.

allowing to reveal its own nature and to find its own place within a type. To the extent that he bases his work on external and arbitrarily isolated marks, such a goal remains beyond the mythographer.

The concern of this book, then, is to have no subject. Since it begins by limiting itself to the study of a single myth, it must, if it wishes to be complete, assimilate the material of two hundred myths. While the study does indeed block out a clearly delimited cultural and geographical region, the possibility of its resembling from time to time a general treatise on mythology is not excluded. It has no real beginning; it could as easily have begun in a different fashion. Had it, it would none the less have developed in an analogous way. It has no end either; numerous problems are treated only in summary fashion here and others are given the sparsest space. They await a better fate. In setting up our map, we have been obliged to place complex contours in relief. Using the tools of ethnography and utilizing other myths, we create the semantic field of a myth. The same operation is repeated for each of them with the result that the central zone, chosen arbitrarily, can be crisscrossed by numerous lines; still, the frequency of the overlappings is reduced in proportion as one is further separated from it. In order to obtain at all points an equally dense scanning, the procedure would have to be renewed several times by tracing new circles at points situated on the periphery. In the process, the primitive territory would of course be enlarged. Mythical analysis is very much like Penelope's task. Each step forward offers a new hope which hangs on the solution of a new difficulty. The books are never closed.

Far from alarming us, the odd conception of this book has special significance for us; it indicates that we have perhaps managed to capture certain of the fundamental properties of our object. The discovery is the result of a plan and method which have been imposed on us rather than selected by us. Of the study of myths, Durkheim has written: "It is a difficult subject which must be treated in itself, for itself, and by following a method special to it."[3] He also suggested the reason for this state of things when, further on (p. 190), he mentioned totemic myths "which, beyond any doubt, explain nothing and

[3]Durkheim, E. *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse,* 2nd ed., Paris, 1925, p. 142.

serve only to displace the difficulty; yet, in displacing it, they appear at least to attenuate their logical scandal." This profound definition could, we believe, be extended to the whole field of mythic thinking by giving it fuller meaning than its author would have admitted.

The study of myths poses a methodological problem if only because such study cannot follow the Cartesian principle of breaking the difficulty down into as many parts as are required for its solution. No term proper to mythic analysis exists; nor is there any secret unity which one can seize hold of at the end of the analysis. The themes can be subdivided endlessly. When we think we have unraveled one from the other and can maintain them separately, we soon find that they are blending together as though under the pressure of affinities we had not foreseen. Consequently, the myth's unity is tendentious and projective; it never really reflects a state or a fixed moment of the myth. It is no more than an imaginary phenomenon implicit in the effort of interpretation. As such its role is to give synthetic form to the myth, to keep it from being dissolved in the war of contraries. We can therefore say that the science of myths amounts to an *anaclasis,* taking this term in the broad sense permitted by its etymology; by definition, it permits us to study reflected rays along with refracted rays. But, in contradistinction to philosophic reflection, which claims it goes directly back to the source, the reflections with which we are here concerned can claim only a virtual source. The diversity of sequences and themes is a fundamental attribute of mythic thought. Such thought manifests itself in a burst of rays; it is only by measuring directions and calculating angles that we arrive at the possibility of a common origin, an ideal point where all the rays reflected elsewhere by the myth's structure would be rejoined. But this does not ever really happen; the rays may very well have come from elsewhere and they have not remained parallel throughout the entire length of their history. As the conclusion of this book shows, there is something quite essential in this multiplicity, for it has to do with the double character of mythic thought: it coincides with its object of which it is an homologous image, but it does this without ever being absorbed into the object since the myth, as image, evolves on another level. The recur-

rence of themes translates this mixture of impotency and tenacity. Unconcerned with neat beginnings and clear goals, mythic thought does not effect complete courses; it always has something more to achieve. Like rites, myths are *in-terminable.* Our undertaking – which is at once too long and too short – will try to imitate the spontaneous movement of mythic thought; to do so, we have had to bow to mythic thought's demands and respects its rhythm. As a result this book about myths is, in its own way, a myth. Whatever unity might be claimed for it will appear hidden in the recesses of the text and perhaps even beyond it. In the best of circumstances, that unity will only be worked out in the reader's mind.

We shall most probably hear the greatest number of criticisms from ethnographers. Despite our concern with sources of information, some, which were not inaccesible, have been neglected.[4] Those of which we have made use are not always cited in this final version. In order not to needlessly overburden the account, we have had to sort out myths, choose certain versions, prune the motifs of their variations. Some will accuse us of shaping the material used to fit the needs of our project. But if, from the vast mass of myths, we had retained only those most favorable to our intentions much of the force of this book would have been lost. Yet surely the converse is not true: that in order to touch on a comparison of myths one must work with and mix together the totality of known myths derived from tropical America.

This particular objection is especially pertinent in light of the circumstances which have delayed the appearance of this book. It was almost completed when the publication of the first volume of the *Encyclopédie Bororo* was announced. We waited until the book had arrived in France and inspected it before putting the finishing touches to this text. Yet couldn't this sort of practice be pushed even further,

[4]Because of their recent publication certain works like *Die Tacana* by Hissinck and Hahn (Stuttgart, 1961) have been looked at only superficially; others which arrived in France after this book had been completed have not been consulted at all. This has been the case with: J. Wilbert, *Indios de la región Orinoco-Ventuari* (Caracas, 1963), *Warao Oral Literature (id.,* 1964), and N. Fock, *Waiwai, Religion and Society of an* Amazonian Tribe (Copenhagen, 1963). In the last book we came across a sargus myth which verifies our analyses in the third and fourth parts of this book. We will profit from these new materials in a future volume.

and shouldn't we be obliged to await the publication two or three years hence of the second volume of the *Encyclopédie* which will be devoted to the myths? And, after that, for a third volume which will treat proper names? Oddly, and despite its many riches, the study of the first volume taught quite another lesson. For the Salesians, whose changes of mind are recorded with great placidity when they are not passed over in silence, are quite willfully acerbic when they come across a study prepared by hands other than theirs and which does not coincide with their own most recent work. When one study contradicts another, we have a problem but not a solution. We have a good bit more respect for sources, whether they be ours or those used by the missionaries. Their evidence possesses a special value. The Salesains' merits are so outstanding as to allow one to reproach them, without denying any of the recognition due them, for one slight practice: they have an unforunate tendency to believe that the most recent inquiry cancels out all others.

Study of other documents which have already appeared and of those which will appear in the future will always influence our interpretation. Those put forward with care will perhaps be confirmed; others will have to be abandoned or modified. But these are not really obstacles. In a discipline like ours scientific knowledge advances with hesitant steps, driven along under the whips of contention and doubt. It leaves to metaphysics the impatience for all-or-nothing solutions. In order for our understanding to be valid, it is not necessary to have the guarantee that, over the years, we can be assured of the truth of every detail of our work. It will be quite enough if we can have the more modest assurance of having left difficult problems in a less bad state than they inhabited when we began working with them. Nor should we ever forget that in science established truths do not exist. The scientist does not supply true answers; rather he asks true questions.

We can be even more firm about this. Critics who may reproach us for not having made an exhaustive inventory of South American myths before proceeding to our analysis of them will be seriously misconstruing the nature and role of the document in question. The en-

semble of a population's myths belongs to the realm of discourse. Unless the population is morally or physically extinct the ensemble is never fully rounded off. We do not think of criticising a linguist when he writes the grammar of a language without having included the totality of all the words used since the language's beginning and without knowing the verbal exchanges which will take place so long as the language remains in existence. We know from experience that even a ridiculously small number of phrases, only a sampling of those he might theoretically have had at his disposal, permit the linguist to work out a grammar of the language he is studying. (And we need not tarry over the problem of words he cannot know either because they were not at his disposal or because they have not yet entered the language.) Even a partial grammar, or the sketch of a grammar, represents a valuable acquisition where an unfamiliar language is concerned. We do not have to wait for a tally of a theoretically limitless series of events in order to see syntactical processes at work, especially since syntax consists of the body of rules which governs the engendering of those events. The sketch we have tried to make is of the same ilk; it is a syntax of South American mythology. When and if new texts come to enrich mythic discourse, there will be occasion to check or to modify the manner in which certain grammatical laws have been formulated. Some will be given up; others will be discovered. But in no case can the argument of the need to possess a total mythic discourse have any relevance to this undertaking. As we have just seen, such a demand makes no sense.

Another possible objection is more serious. Our right to choose our myths here and there and to illuminate a Chaco myth by a Guyanian variant, or a Ge myth by its Colombian analogue might be contested. Yet, though it is respectful of history and anxious to profit from its lessons, structural analysis refuses to be enclosed in the already circumscribed perimeters of historical investigation. On the contrary, by demonstrating that myths of very diverse origins objectively form a group, structural analysis raises a problem for history; it invites history to go looking for a solution. We have constructed a group, and we hope to have supplied proof that such a group is indeed real.

It is incumbent on ethnographers, historians, and acheologists to show how and why this is the case.

They can be reassured. In order to explain the group character of the myths drawn together in our enquiry – and drawn together for this reason alone – we are not counting on historical criticism to restore one day a system of logical affinities to the enumeration of a multitude of successive or simultaneous borrowings that contemporary or ancient populations have made from one another across distances and lapses of time which are sometimes so considerable as to make all such interpretation highly implausible. In any case, such interpretation could not be verified. We begin simply by inviting the historian to look on Indian America as a phenomenon whose Middle Ages had no Rome: it is a confused mass, issuing from an older syncretism of unquestionally loose texture; at its center and over a period of centuries there subsist centers both of high civilization and barbarous people, both centralizing tendencies and disruptive forces. Although the latter finally carried the day because of the play of internal causes and because of the arrival of the European conquerors, it is none the less certain that a group – much like the one we are investigating – owes its character to the fact that it was crystallized in an already organized semantic milieu whose elements had served for all kinds of combinations. Without doubt this was less the result of any concern with imitation that it was of a desire to allow smaller, less populous societies to affirm their respective originality by exploiting the resources of a dialectic of oppositions and correlations within the framework of a common conception of the world.

Such an interpretation, which we present in sketchy fashion, clearly rests on some historical conjectures: the great antiquity of tropical American settlements, repeated displacements of numerous tribes in many directions, demographic fluidity, and phenomena of fusion. The last created the conditions of a very ancient syncretism from which the differences observable among the groups were created. These reflect nothing, or practically nothing of the archaic conditions which most often are secondary or derived. Despite the formal perspective it adopts, structural analysis validates the ethnographical

and historical interpretations we advanced twenty years ago. Though they were considered adventurous then, they have continued to gain ground.[5] If an ethnographic conclusion emerges clearly from this book, that is because the Ge, far from being those "marginal people" they were imagined to be in 1942 when the first volume of the *Handbook of the South American Indians* — we objected to the suggestion at that time — actually represented a pivotal element in South America. Their role is comparable to that played in North America by the very old cultures whose survivors were established at the basins of the Fraser and Columbia rivers. When our inquiry gets to the southern regions of North America the bases of this rapprochement will be more evident.

It has been necessary to cite these concrete results of structural analysis — others, limited to the cultures of tropical America, will be pointed out in the course of the book — in order to put the reader on his guard against the reproach of formalism, indeed of idealism, which we sometimes hear. Does not this present work, even more than its predecessors, push ethnographical research into the realms of psychology, logic, and philosophy — paths which should be forbidden to it? Are we not then distracting ethnography, in part at least, from its genuine tasks: the study of concrete societies and of the problems raised in those societies by the social, political, and economic conditions which governed the relations between individuals and groups. These oft-expressed worries strike us as resulting from a complete misunderstanding of the task we have taken on. But — and this is much more serious — they cast doubt on the continuity of the program followed methodically since *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté*. Certainly no such criticisms can be reasonably directed against that work.

While *La Pensée sauvage* does represent a pause in our attempt, the pause was needed in order to catch breath between two efforts. There was no doubt about the profit derived from looking closely at the panorama spread before us or of seizing that occasion to measure

[5]Cf. Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Anthropologie structurale Paris,* 1958, p. 118 sq. and all of ch. VI.

the distance which had been covered, to take bearings on the reminder of the itinerary, and to get some idea of the unfamiliar countries still to be traversed. We were determined none the less never to stray long from our route and, except for some minor poaching, never to go adventuring into the securely guarded grounds of philosophy. *La Pensée sauvage,* though some thought it was a terminus, was only a stop. It was meant to be no more than a temporary halt between the first step ventured in *Les Structures* and the second which this book is undertaking.

Most important of all, the destination has not changed. From the very beginning of the ethnographic experience, it has always been a question of setting up an inventory of mental enclosures, of reducing apparently arbitrary data to order, of reaching a level where necessity reveals itself as immanent in the illusions of freedom. In *Les Structures* we had disentangled a small number of simple principles from the apparently superficial contingency and incoherent diversity of the rules of marriage. Because of those principles a very complex ensemble of usages and customs was drawn together into a meaningful system, though at first they seemed absurd and had generally been so judged. There was nothing meanwhile to guarantee that these constraints were of internal origin. It was quite possible that they only reflected, within the minds of men, certain demands of social life which had been objectivized in institutions. Their reverberations on the psychic level would then have been the effect of mechanisms whose mode of operation alone remained to be discovered.

The experiment in mythology which we are now undertaking will be even more decisive. Mythology has no evident practical function; unlike the phenomena previously examined, mythology is not in direct contact with a different reality, endowed with an objectivity higher than its own whose orders it transmits to a mind which seems perfectly free to abandon itself to creative spontaneity. If, as a result, we were able to demonstrate that, here too, the arbitrary appearance, the apparently free outsurge, and a seemingly unbridled inventiveness presuppose laws which operate at a deeper level, we could posit as ineluctable the conclusion that the mind, freed for conversation with

itself and rescued from the obligation of dealing with objects, finds itself reduced in some way to imitating itself as an object. Since the laws of its operations are no longer fundamentally different from those it manifests in its other functions, it avers its nature as a thing among things. Without pushing this line of reasoning too far, we need only to have acquired the conviction that the human mind appears as determined even in its myths; if that is so, then a fortiori it must be determined in all its manifestations.[6]

Since what we are positing is a process which would allow itself to be guided by a search for mental constraints, we see that it is not unlike Kantianism, though we are indeed making our way along other roads which do not lead to the same kind of conclusions. Unlike the philosopher, the ethnologist does not feel obliged to accept as the basis for his reflections the working conditions of his own thought or of a science which belongs to his society or his times in order to extend his particular statements to a judgment whose universality would be only hypothetical and virtual. Preoccupied with the same problems, he adopts a doubly inverted procedure. Rather than the hypothesis of universal judgement, he prefers the empirical observations of collective judgments. Their properties, solidified in some way, are manifested to him by innumerable concrete systems of representation. Since he is a man of one social milieu, of one culture, one region, and one period of history, these systems represent the whole gamut of possible variations within a genus; he chooses those whose divergencies strike him as most noticeable. His hope is that the methodological rules which will be imposed on him will translate these systems in terms of his own and, reciprocally, will bare a network of fundamental and common constraints. This is a very high form of gymnastics indeed since it pushes the exercise of reflection to its objective limits – and the limits have initially been marked and inventoried by the ethnographic inquiry itself – flexes each muscle, and reveals all the skeleton's joints, thereby exposing the lineaments of the general anatomical structure.

[6]" . . . if there are laws in some areas, there must be laws everywhere." This was the conclusion of one of Tylor's passages which, seventeen years ago, we used as the epigraph for *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté.*

What we are attempting to do is well described in Paul Ricoeur's qualification of our effort as "Kantianism without a transcendental subject."[7] We see no indication of a lacuna in this restriction; instead we see the inevitable consequence, on the philosophical level, of the ethnographic perspective we have chosen. By pursuing conditions where systems of truth become mutually convertible and can therefore be simultaneously admissible for several subjects, the ensemble of these conditions acquires the character of an object endowed by a reality proper to itself and independent of any subject.

More than any other phenomenon, mythology allows us to illustrate this objectified thought and to demonstrate its reality empirically. We do not exclude the possibility that the speaking subjects, who produce and transmit the myths, may be conscious of their structure and their mode of operation; such an occurrence, however, is more partial and intermittent that it is routine. The situation with myths is very much the situation we find with language. Any speaker who consciously applies phonological and grammatical laws in his speech – and we are presupposing, of course, that he has the requisite knowledge and virtuosity – would not be able to pursue the line of his argument very long. In the same way, the exercise and practice of mythic thought demands that its properties remain hidden; if they are not, one would find himself in the position of the mythologist who cannot believe in myths because he spends his time expounding about them. Mythic analysis does not and cannot have as its object to show how men think. In the special case with which we are concerned here, it is at least doubtful that the natives of Brazil go beyond the delight with which they listen to narratives and conceive openly the systems of relations to which we are reducing these myths. When, using these myths, we validate certain archaic or highly imaged turns of phrase found in our own popular language, the same observation imposes it-

[7]Ricoeur, Paul. "Symbole et temporalité," in *Archivio di Filosofia,* no. 1-2, Rome, 1963, p. 24, See also p. 9: "More a Kantian unconscious than a Freudian one; a categorical, unifying unconscious . . ." and on p. 10: ". . . a categorical system without reference to a thinking subject . . . homologous to nature; it might even be nature . . ."

With his usual finesse and perspicuity, Roger Bastide ("La Nature humaine: le point de vue du sociologue et de l'ethnologue," in *La Nature humaine,* Acts of the XIth Congress of the *Sociétés de Philosophie de langue française,* Montpellier, 4-6 September 1961, Paris, 1961) anticipates the preceding argument. This coincidence is all the more indicative of his clear-thinking since I had no knowledge of his text until he kindly sent it to me while I was correcting the proofs of this book.

self: we make these discoveries under the influence of a foreign mythology; our discovery is the result of an awareness which works retroactively. We are not, therefore, claiming to show how men think the myths, but rather how the myths think themselves out in men and without men's knowledge.

We have already suggested that it may be appropriate to go even further and, setting aside consideration of the subject's role, weigh the possibility that, in a certain way, the myths think themselves out among themselves.[8]. This is not so much a question of extricating what is within the myths without necessarily being held in the consciousness of men; rather it is a question of extricating the system of axioms and postulates which define the best possible code, a code capable of giving a common sense to the unconscious elaborations which are the actuality of minds, societies, and cultures which, set off one against the other, offer the greatest separation. Since the myths themselves depend on codes of the second order -- codes of the first order are those of language -- this book is offering the sketch of a code which would belong to a third order, an order designed to assure the reciprocal translatability of several myths. For this reason, a reader would not be wrong if he took the book itself as a myth: the myth of mythology.

But, in common with the other two, this third code has neither been invented nor hunted for elsewhere. It is immanent in the mythology itself; we only discover it. An ethnographer working in South America was astonished by the way in which the myths came to him: "Practically every narrator told the stories in his way. Even in important details, the margin of variations is enormous . . ." Still, the natives seem not to be bothered by this state of things: "A Caraja who accompanied me from village to village heard a great number of these kinds of variations and greeted them all with an almost identical trust. It wasn't that he didn't perceive the contradictions. But they had no interest whatever for him."[9] A naive commentator, one who came

[8]The Ojibwa Indians consider myths as "being endowed with consciousness, capable of thought and action." W. Jones, "Ojibwa Texts," in *Publications of the American Ethnological Society*, vol. III, pt. ii, New York, 1919, p. 574, n. 1.
[9]Lipkind, W. "Caraja Cosmography," in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 53, 1940, p. 251.

from another planet, might have a better right to be astonished – since he would be dealing with history and not with myth – by the mass of works devoted to the French Revolution. In them, authors do not always make use of the same incidents; when they do, the incidents are revealed under quite different lights. And yet these are variations which have to do with the same country, the same period, and the same events – events whose reality is scattered across every level of a multi-layered structure. The criterion of validity clearly does not depend on the elements of history. Pursued in isolation, each element would show itself to be beyond grasp. But certain of them derive consistency from the fact that they can be integrated into a system whose terms are more or less credible when set off against the overall coherence of the series.

In spite of worthy and indispensable efforts to bring another moment in history alive and to possess it, a clairvoyant history should admit that it never completely escapes from the nature of myth. Mythic schemes offer in the highest degree the character of absolute objects; if they were not subject to external influences they would neither lose nor acquire other elements. The result is that when a schema undergoes a transformation the transformation affects the myth in every aspect. Whenever some aspect of a myth appears unintelligible, we are justified in treating it, in a hypothetical and preliminary way, as a transformation of the homologous aspect of another myth which has been attached to the same group because it lends itself better to interpretation. We have done this several times. For example, in resolving the episode of the covered jaw of the jaguar in M_7 by using the universe episode of the open jaw in M_{55}, or that of the real obligingness of the carrion vultures in M_1 by looking at the manifestations of their deceptive obligingness in M_{65}. Contrary to what one might believe, the method does not fall into a vicious circle. It implies only that each myth, considered by itself, exists as a restrained application of a scheme which can be progressively extricated with the aid of those relations of reciprocal intelligibility which are perceived among several myths.

We shall probably be accused of over-interpreting and over-

simplifying in the use we make of the method. By way of reply, we can only point out once again that we have never claimed that all the solutions suggested have an equal value; to this we can add that we have at times pointed out the precarious value of some of them. Still, such a reply would be a hypocritical evasion of a declaration of the full weight of our thinking. To such eventual critics, we offer an immediate answer: what difference does it make? If the final goal of anthropology is to contribute to a better knowledge of objectivized thought and its mechanisms, then in the end it does not make much difference whether the thought of Latin American natives finds its form in the operation of my thought or if mine finds its in the operation of theirs. What does matter is that the human mind, unconcerned with the identity of its occasional bearers, manifests in that operation a structure which becomes more and more intelligible to the degree that the doubly reflexive movement of two thoughts, working on one another, makes progress. It is a process in which now one, now the other can be the wick to a glimmer of rapprochement from which their common illumination will spring forth. If a treasure is uncovered in the process, we will have no need of an arbiter in order to move on to the division of the riches; from the very start we have recognized that the inheritance is inalienable and that it must remain undivided.[10]

At the outset we said that we were seeking to transcend the opposition of the perceptible and the intelligible by straightaway placing ourselves on the level of signs. Through signs the one is conveyed by means of the other. Yet, even when restricted in number, they lend themselves to rigorously grouped combinations which can translate, in their most discrete nuances, the whole diversity of perceptible experience. Our hope is to attain a level where logical properties will be manifested as attributes of things quite as directly as savors and perfumes. Their special nature, excluding all error, can still evoke a combination of elements which, were they selected or disposed in other ways, would evoke awareness of another perfume. Because we have the notion of the sign, our task is that of bringing secondary

[10]Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *La Pensée sauvage,* Paris, 1962.

qualities to the business of truth at the level of the intelligible; we are no longer exclusively limited to the perceptible.

This search for a middle way between the exercise of logical thought and esthetic perception should naturally be inspired by the example of music which has always followed the middle way. Something more than a general point of view suggests the rapprochement. Almost as soon as work on this book had started, it was evident that it would be impossible to arrange its materials according to any plan which respected traditional norms. Chapter divisions would not only have done violence to the movement of its thought but would have brought impoverishment and mutilitation; all the bite would have been gone. If the presentation was to appear decisive, then, paradoxically, more freedom and suppleness would have to be conceded to it. We noticed, too, that the order chosen for the presentation of documents, could not be linear; the sentences in the commentary could not be connected by a simple before and after relationship. If the reader were to have from time to time a sense of simultaneity, then artifices in composition would be essential. His sense of simultaneity would, of course, be illusory, for he would still be tied down by the order of the narrative. Yet a close equivalent could be hinted at through alternation of a lengthy discourse with a diffuse one, by speeding up rhythms which had been slowed down, by heaping up examples at some points and, at others, by keeping them separated. We noticed thus that our analyses were situated on several axes. One was the axis of succession; but there was also the axis of relative density which demanded that we have recourse to those evocative musical forms, the *solo* and the *tutti*. Furthermore, there were the axes of expressive tensions and replacement codes which produced, as the book was being written, oppositions comparable to those between song and recitative, between the instrumental ensemble and the aria.

In choosing this free recourse to a multi-dimensional approach which would best display our themes, we had to give up something. The usual division of a book into isometric chapters had to give way to a division into less numerous parts. These, as a result, are more voluminous and complex; they are also unequal in length. But each

forms a whole by virtue of its internal organization which is the outflow of a certain unity in inspiration. For the same reason these parts could not be poured into a single mold; rather each has had to obey the rules of tone, genre, and style required by the nature of the materials being used and by the nature of the technical means employed for each case. The result was that musical forms once again offered the resources and diversity already gauged by experience. Comparisons with the sonata, the symphony, the prelude, the fugue, and other forms permitted easy verification of the fact that problems of construction analogous to those posed in the analysis of myth had already cropped up in music where solutions had already been invented for them.

At the same time there was no way of eluding another problem: what deep causes were behind this at first surprising affinity between music and myths? (Structural analysis limits itself to pointing out their value, simply taking them into account and transporting them to another level.) Certainly a major step towards an answer had already been taken once we could evoke a constant element in our personal history which no sudden event could shake. We speak of the service we had rendered since childhood at the altars of the "god Richard Wagner," a devotion in no way shaken either by hearing *Pelléas* as an adolescent or, later, *Les Noces*. If one must see in Wagner the unimpeachable father of the structural analysis of myths (and, in the case of *Meistersinger,* of tales), then it is highly revealing to note that such analysis was first made *in music*.[11] In suggesting that the analysis of myth was comparable to the perusal of a great score, we were only drawing the logical consequence of the Wagnerian discovery: the structure of myths is revealed through means of a score.

This prefatory homage does more to confirm the existence of the problem than to resolve it. The true answer is found, we believe, in the character common to the myth and the mysical work: each after its fashion is a language which transcends the level of articulated

[11]While acknowledging this paternity we would be guilty of ingratitude if we did not admit other debts: first of all to the work of Marcel Granet which glitters with brilliant intuitions; then — and if last not least — to the work of Georges Dumézil and to the *Asklèplos, Apollon Smintheus et Rudra* of Henri Grégoire (*Mémories de l'Académie Royale de Belgique, classe des Lettres*, t. XLV., fasc. 1, 1949).

language; each requires at every instance a temporal dimension in order to become manifest; the same is true with language but is not true with painting. This relationship to time is of a very special nature: everything takes place as though music and mythology needed time only in order to deny its place. Both, in effect, are mechanisms designed to do away with time. Underneath the sounds and rhythms, music operates on a rough terrain which is the physiological time of the listener; that time is irremediably diachronic because it is irreversible; music none the less transmutes the segment of that time which is devoted to listening into a totality which is synchronic and enclosed in itself. The act of listening to the musical work has immobilized the passage of time because of the work's internal organization; like a cloth billowing in the wind, it has caught up and infolded it. In listening to music – and while we are listening – we have achieved a kind of immortality.

It is clear now in what way music resembles myth; myth, too, overcomes the antinomy of historical and elapsed time; it has also overcome the limitations of a permanent structure. In order to justify the comparison fully, it must be pushed further than in one of our earlier works.[12] Like the musical work, the myth operates with a double continuum as its starting point: One is external; in one case its matter is made up of occurrences which are either historical or believed to be historical; these form a theoretically unlimited series from which each society extracts a restricted number of pertinent events in order to elaborate its myths. In the other case, it is made up of an equally unlimited series of physically possible sounds from which each musical system appropriates its scale. The second continuum is of an internal order. It has its seat in the psycho-physiological time of the listener whose factors are very complex: the periodicity of the cerebral waves and the organic ryhthms, the capacity of memory, and the power of attention. These are neuro-psychical aspects which mythology especially challenges by the length of the narration, by the recurrence of the themes, and by the other forms of recurrence and parallelism. In order to be properly taken in, my-

[12]Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Anthropologie structurale*, Paris, 1958, p. 234.

thology demands that the mind of this listener sweep thoroughly back and forth across the field of the narrative as it spreads out before him. This applies equally to music. But, aside from psychological time, music addresses itself to physiological and even visceral time. Mythology does this, too; we do not hesitate to say that a told story has been "breathtaking." But in mythology it does not play the same essential role as in music: all counterpoint contains a mute part to be filled in by the cardiac and respiratory systems.

In order to simplify this line of reasoning, we shall limit our discussion to visceral time. We will say that music operates through two grids. One is physiological and therefore natural; its existence is connected to the fact that music exploits organic rhythms and thereby gives pertinence to discontinuities which would otherwise remain in a latent state as though drowned in duration. The other grid is cultural; it consists of the scale of musical sounds whose number and deviations vary according to cultures. This system of intervals supplies a first level of articulation to music, not by function of relative pitches – which result from the perceptible properties of each sound –, but by function of the hierarchical rapports which appear between the notes of the scale: whence their distinction into fundamental, tonic, dominant seventh, and dominant to express the rapports which polytonal and atonal systems enmesh without destroying.

The composer's mission is to adulterate this discontinuity without revoking its principle; at times, melodic invention hollows out momentary lacunae in the grid; at other times, but again only momentarily, it plugs up the holes or reduces their circumference. At times it perforates; at other times, it stops up a gap. What is true of melody is also true of rhythms since, by this second means, the times of the physiological grid which are theoretically constant are overlooked or accelerated, anticipated or overtaken by retardation.

Musical emotion stems precisely from the fact that the composer at each instant removes or adds more or less than the listener anticipated on the basis of his faith in a project which he believes he is incapable of penetrating genuinely because he is subject to a double

periodicity: that of his thoracic cage, which stems from his individual nature, and that of his musical scale which is a function of his education. If the composer holds back even more, we experience a delightful impression of having fallen; we feel we have been torn away from the stable point of the sol-fa and thrown into the void, but only because the support which will be offered, did not come at the expected place. When the composer holds back less, the opposite happens: he forces us to more able gymnastics that we have been accustomed to. At times we are stirred; at times we are constrained to stir ourselves; but we always move beyond what on our own we would have thought ourselves capable of achieving. Esthetic pleasure is made up from this multiplicity of excitements and respites, expectations which are deceived only to be rewarded beyond expectation; these result from the challenge which the work delivers. They result, too, from the contradictory feeling music provides: the tests to which it submits us are insurmountable even at the moment when the work is preparing to offer us marvelously unforeseen means which will allow us to triumph over it. Though it is equivocal in the score which delivers it to us,

> . . . irradiant un sacre
> Mal tu par l'encre même en sanglots sibyllins,

the composer's design assumes reality, as does myth, through the listener and by him. In both cases, we are effectively observing the same inversion of the relationship between the sender and the receiver since, in the end, the receiver reveals himself as signified by the message of the sender. The music lives out its life in me; I listen to myself through the music. The myth and the musical work thus appear to be like orchestral conductors whose listeners are silent members of the orchestra.

If we ask where the real home of the work is, we find that no precise answer can be given. Music and mythology confront man with virtual objects whose shadow alone is real; they offer conscious approximations – a musical score and a myth can be nothing else –

of ineluctably unconscious truths which are consecutive to them. In the case of myth, we conjecture as to the why of this paradoxical situation. It has to do with the irrational relationship which prevails between the circumstances of the creation, which are collective, and the individual nature of consumption. Myths have no author; from the moment when they are perceived as myths, and despite their real origin, they exist only as they are incarnated in a tradition. When a myth is recounted, individual listeners receive a message which in a very true sense comes from nowhere. It is for this reason that a supernatural origin has been assigned to it. It is therefore understandable that the unity of the myth should be projected on to a virtual home: beyond the conscious perception of the listener which it only traverses to a point where the energy it radiates will be consumed by the unconscious reorganization it has previously released. Music raises a much more difficult problem because we are thoroughly ignorant of the mental conditions behind musical creation. In other words, we do not know what the difference is between the small number of minds which secrete music and those, vastly more numerous, where no such phenomenon occurs even though such minds show musical sensitivity. The difference is so clear and manifests itself with such precocity that we suspect it implies properties of a special nature which are doubtless to be found at the deepest levels. But that music is a language by whose means messages are elaborated, that such messages can be understood by the many but sent out only by the few, and that it alone among all the languages unites the contradictory character of being at once intelligible and untranslatable — these facts make the creator of music a being like the gods and make music itself the supreme mystery of human knowledge. All other branches of knowledge stumble into it, it holds the key to their progress.

It would be wrong to invoke poetry in order to pretend that it causes a problem of the same order. Not everyone is a poet, but poetry utilizes a vehicle which is a common good: articulated language. It is satisfied with decreeing certain special constraints on the

use of language. Music by contrast uses a vehicle which belongs properly to it and which otherwise does not lend itself to any general usage. By right if not by fact, any reasonably educated man could write poems, be they good or bad. Musical creation presupposes special aptitudes which can not be brought to flower unless the seeds are already there.

Translated by Joseph H. McMahon