Anthropology and Myth

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Lectures 1951—1982

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'Animé par les objets et par les choses, on parle plus vivement et avec plus de force qu'on ne rapporte après ce qu'on a dit.'

Saint-Simon, *Mémoires* (Conclusion)

(*Enthused by the subject matter, one speaks with more vivacity and energy than can later be recalled.*)

Translator's Note

This book consists of a series of annual reports on his teaching prepared by Professor Lévi-Strauss, in common with other lecturers at the Collège de France. This custom, with its implied promotion of inter-disciplinary understanding, is one that the more compartmentalized British and American universities might profitably consider emulating. Moreover, what Lévi-Strauss deprecatingly refers to in his Preface as the 'arid' style of these reports could well be seen as a merit by anglophone students of his ideas, which have frequently been made to appear more 'difficult' than they really are because of the Master's notorious predeliction, in his definitive volumes, for recondite literary allusion and artful *double entendre*. Here, however, we have Lévi-Strauss plain, together with a unique opportunity to follow the evolution of his thought, in his own words, through a period of three decades.

To augment the possible utility of this book as a source for an intellectual history, it was felt advisable to equip it with more than the bare minimum of bibliographic footnotes provided by Lévi-Strauss (see his comment on p. 7). To avoid any confusion, the author's original footnotes are indicated in the usual way by Arabic numerals, and the translator's additional notes by lower-case Roman letters.

Roy Willis, Edinburgh 1986

Preface

Some months before I took up my duties at the Collège de France, a long-serving uniformed attendant took me on a tour of the lecture rooms so that I might select one in which to present my courses. I indicated my choice, but he warned me off it with a brusque 'Not that one!', then did his best to dispel my astonishment by explaining:

'You see, it's so arranged that to reach the lectern you'll need to cross the auditorium, and the same when you finish!'

'So?'

And his explanation, to him clearly self-evident:

'Someone might speak to you!'

Nonetheless I adhered to my choice, while more conscious than before that Collège tradition regarded the business of the professor as dispensing words rather than receiving or, even, exchanging them.

But this formidable guardian, aware of being, by virtue of his many years of service, more imbued than any mere professor with the essence of the Collège, was also a sensitive soul. Within him dwelt both the starchy dignity and the spontaneous kindness whose varied combination in different individuals lends its distinctive style to our ancient institution. After my inaugural lecture,[1] he confessed to having been as moved by the peroration as by the flute solo of *l'Arlésienne*, a special favourite of his. No compliment has ever touched me more deeply. His artless avowal also unwittingly reminded me that then, as in times past, a Collège professor performed, no less than a concert soloist, in a representative capacity, before a mute and receptive audience.

However, no one who wished to talk with me has ever been prevented from doing so as I leave the lecture room or when jointly

[1] This lecture became the first chapter of *Structural Anthropology* vol. II and consequently has not been included in the present volume.

ascending the staircase that leads to the Social Anthropology Laboratory. Moreover, the somewhat cramped atmosphere of the Collège relaxed considerably when a seminar format was adopted for part of the instruction.

But at the time of my retirement, the core course, at least as far as I was concerned, remained what it had always been and was delivered *ex cathedra*, in accordance with the long-standing Collège rule. Entirely at liberty to select his materials by virtue of his office, the professor must obey a single demanding regulation — that he teach a new subject every year. Certain of my colleagues were wont to read chapters of their books to their audience in advance of publication. For those who, like me, speak extempore with the aid of a few notes (six to a dozen pages, condensing weeks or months of research and cogitation), a great deal of concentration, as well as nervous tension, is involved in this way of doing things. I have always forbidden the direct tape-recording or broadcasting of my courses; for only if I felt unconstrained by the fear of having my presentation retrospectively examined could I feel at liberty to engage in mental struggle, explore odd byways, submit tentative ideas to the test of oral formulation only to discover, through a sensed confusion in my audience, that the ideas were dubious or badly expressed. Comforted by the knowledge that propositions that might be risky or malformed, while also helpful to me in developing my ideas, were not being permanently inscribed on magnetic tape, I felt the more free to follow the often meandering train of my own thoughts, knowing that when I had given them a more solid form, no one would then call me to account for these makeshift approximations. Apart from the odd pirated recording, which I would like to think inaudible, only one of my lectures was recorded on sound and film, and that was the first of the 1970—1 academic year. In addition, a seminar presented in May 1971 was to be included in Yannick Bellon's film *Quelque part quelqu'un*, in which the principal actor played, with my consent, the part of a student of anthropology.

My main excuse for presenting my listeners with material in its raw state was an implicit undertaking to let them enjoy the finished product in due course. They knew that I would not gratuitously take up their time with fruitless labours; that their mute, but still perceptible reactions would help me in the task of developing and honing my ideas; and that they would eventually be repaid, or so I hoped, in works to which they had indirectly contributed.

I believe I have honoured my undertaking, and that my courses were indeed *avant la lettre*. The fact is that all my books, and many articles, written since 1960 were 'roughed out' in oral presentation. Even the reader not familiar in detail with my works should be able to recognize them in this sketchy form. In any case, the chapter headings

will serve as a guide. Without referring to particular volumes or articles, it will be evident that the bulk of the course of 1973—4, 'The Grail in America', is to be found in part in chapter XVII of *le Regard éloigné* [*The View from Afar*]; the course of 1971—2, 'On the Atom of Kinship', in chapter IV of the same book and earlier in *Structural Anthropology* volume II, chapter VII. The series of courses presented from 1976 to 1982 with the general title of 'Clan, Lineage, House' has, again in part, appeared in *La Voie des Masques* [*The Way of the Masks*], chapters V and VI, and in the text of a lecture entitled 'History and Anthropology' (*Annales E.S.C.*, no. 6, 1983).

Bound to the exigencies of a calendar, oral instruction must perforce maintain a brisk pace. More slowly, writing drags along in the rear. And inasmuch as I improvised, unforeseen problems and puzzles were liable to arise, which I was obliged to resolve before I could resume the pursuit of my objective. In any case, the result was the same. My literary projects had to leave out of account certain lecture material, either so that the book under construction did not become impossibly vast and never attain completion, or because it seemed undesirable to impose on the reader detours which had seemed necessary at the time, but which subsequent discovery of a superior route had rendered superfluous. Even so these detours, though irrelevant to the initial project, were still not devoid of interest, since they offered access to domains I had not expected to encounter.

In consequence, at the time that these accounts appear, the contents of several courses either remain unpublished or have made only a fragmentary appearance in print. Left unpublished are the materials presented in the following courses: 'The Future of Anthropology' and 'Three Hopi Gods' (1959—60); 'An Iroquois Myth' (1960—1); 'The Present State of Bororo Studies' (1972—3); 'Cannibalism and Ritual Transvestism' (1974—5); and 'Order and Disorder in Oral Tradition' (1975—6). I shall return to these last two. As for 'An Iroquois Myth', I have a particular reason for postponing its publication in literary form. It seems to me that the analysis of and commentary on this myth would make excellent film material, preferably with Amerindian actors; and that, by making use in properly considered fashion of various technical and stylistic techniques, it would be possible to employ the cinematographic art to make the principles, methods and complexities of structural analysis intuitively comprehensible to the spectator. However, this project would require me to master at least the rudiments of film-making, and as yet it remains but a dream.

As to the courses entitled 'Sketches for an American Bestiary' (1964—5) and 'Fog and Wind' (1968—9), there are some references to the former in *From Honey to Ashes* and *The Origin of Table Manners* (see under 'goat-suckers', 'Guariba monkey' and 'sloth' in the index),

and to the latter in *The Naked Man* (see under 'fog' and 'winds' in the index). I could not go further without the risk of adding a further two volumes to the *Mythologics*. None the less, these courses remain close to my heart. As with other unworked writings, I hope to publish them some day — if not in properly edited form, then just as they exist in my notes, as stacks of raw material ready for processing.

I cannot say the same of the unpublished courses of 1961—2, entitled 'Investigations into Kinship and Marriage', and of 1972—3, entitled 'Asdiwal Revisited'. There I settle a few accounts with various critics: E. R. Leach, R. Needham, M. Douglas, G. S. Kirk and others. Lacking a taste for polemic, I have usually refrained from replying to my critics in print, but occasionally one or two corrections have seemed apposite. This was a way of meeting the expectations of an audience aware of the issues, and also a convenient compromise between remaining silent and engaging in written controversy, something I continue to find equally distasteful both to read and to compose.

Two courses already mentioned chanced to serve the same purpose. That of 1974—5, 'Cannibalism and Ritual Transvestism', gave me an opportunity to demonstrate the use of what in 1955 I had called 'the canonical formula . . . to which every myth may be reduced' (*Structural Anthropology*, vol. I, p. 228).[a] From various quarters I have been reproached for failing to explain, develop or, according to some, even employ the formula I had set out. Did not this 'failure' implicitly confirm the contentions of those who claimed the formula was meaningless? Therein lies a misunderstanding that several scattered references in the *Mythologics* have not succeeded in dispelling. The fact is that, despite its vaguely algebraic appearance, my formula does not constitute an algorithm according to which calculations can be made. I put it forward as an image or picture, a graphic design that, I thought, could facilitate the intuitive grasp of a chain of relations. This purpose achieved, it seemed unnecessary to reproduce the same figure on each and every occasion, any more than, in a book, one would expect to find reproduced the same illustration of a scene or

[a] In 'The structural study of myth', *Journal of American Folklore*, LXXVIII, 270 (1955), an article reproduced as chapter XI of *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1963), Lévi-Strauss says: 'it seems that every myth (considered as the aggregate of its variants) corresponds to a formula of the following type: $F_x(a) : F_y(b) :: F_x(b) : F_a{}^{-1}(y)$ Here, with two terms, *a* and *b*, being given as well as two functions, *x* and *y*, of these terms, it is assumed that a relation of equivalence exists between two situations defined respectively by an inversion of *terms* and *relations*, under two conditions: (1) that one term be replaced by its opposite (in the above formula, *a* and a^{-1}); (2) that an inversion be made between the *function value*, and the *term value* of two elements (above, *y* and *a*).'

object every time the author referred to it. The more so, inasmuch as the unbalanced configuration of elements that I had thought to have shown to be inherent in mythical transformations was more than abundantly illustrated in my analyses of hundreds of different myths. But since a more explicit demonstration seemed required, the course on cannibalism provided it.

As for the 1975—6 course, 'Order and Disorder in Oral Tradition', this is an example of the necessary detour which the later reader can dispense with. As I see it, this course answered a dual purpose. First, it enabled me to summarize my ideas, both former and present, on the nature and quality of the documentary sources available to the ethnographer for the analysis of myth. In so doing I disposed of the objections of those who, like Leach, have unjustly accused me of uncritically drawing on documents of variable quality and provenance. The course included just such an exemplary critique of the kind I have always undertaken, but without inflicting this preliminary work on the reader. Secondly, the course applied the critique to mythical materials from British Columbia. In 1973 and again in 1974 I had visited this Canadian province and I returned to the myths of the coastal peoples when writing *The Way of the Mask* and several articles ('Postscript to the Story of Asdiwal' in *Structural Anthropology*, volume II, and chapters XI and XIII of *The View from Afar*).

An appendix summarizes nine courses presented at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (5th Section: Science of Religion) before I entered the Collège. It was at the École, indeed, that my ideas on mythology and many other topics acquired shape. I recall the period 1950—9, when I was discharging my main teaching duties in this establishment, as being particularly fertile.

There, also, several courses prefigured later publications. That on 'The Visitation of Souls' (1951—2) inspired chapter XXIII of *Tristes Tropiques*; those of 1954—5, 'Relations between Mythology and Ritual', and 1959—60, 'The Ritual Hunting of Eagles', chapters I and II of *The Savage Mind*. Running from 1952 to 1954, the 'Inquiries into American Mythology' inspired a collective enterprise to put to the test, on Pueblo myths, the analytical methods also employed in the course entitled 'Dualism in Social Organization and Religious Representations' (1957—8), and which lie behind the *Mythologics*. The course entitled 'Three Hopi Gods' represents in this collection what dressmakers call 'a fall'.[b]

The most active participants in these seminars were Jean-Claude

[b] *Une chute* (literally, 'a fall'): in the parlance of French *couturiers*, this is an odd piece of cloth left over from the making of a dress.

Gardin, who later returned to pursuits more closely related to his training as an archaeologist, and the late and lamented Lucien Sebag, who had undertaken to edit these notes. Prepared by his friends, the book appeared posthumously under the title *L'Invention du monde chez les Indiens Pueblos* [*Invention of the World among the Pueblo Indians*], published by François Maspéro, Paris, 1971. Other seminar proceedings were not published as such. Thus my contribution to the seminar of 1960—1, on 'The Critique of Dialectical Reason' became chapter IX of *The Savage Mind*. Finally, I have discovered, with some surprise, the beginnings of my recent research into cognatic societies in the lessons of 1957—8.

These courses and lectures thus provide evidence of an interweaving of speech and writing that is not readily apparent in the latter. That is why I wanted to publish the summary accounts of the oral presentations that regularly appeared in the annual directory [*Annuaire*] of the Collège de France, and I hereby thank M. Yves Laporte, the Administrator, and the Professorial Assembly for their kindness in authorizing this. I am indebted for the same reason to M. Claude Tardits, president of the 5th Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes.

Thus brought together, these texts may perhaps be of service to those who wish to subject the books to closer scrutiny. At the time when these books were taking shape in my mind, one can see the points I wished to emphasize in the summaries, in preference to others that may have taken pride of place in the completed works. It is nevertheless of relevance to the proper understanding of the *Mythologics* to know that *The Origin of Table Manners* and *The Naked Man* were elaborated together: after two courses that may be connected in the same order to each work, followed in 1964—5 by one of those apparent digressions to which I have referred, a fourth course returns to problems later examined in *The Origin* (sixth part, I), and subsequent courses take up the thread of *The Naked Man* at the point where I had left it two years earlier. (In 1960—1, I had similarly treated together problems in *Totemism* and *The Savage Mind* as though they were to form part of a single book.) There is an evident disproportion between the preparatory courses to *The Naked Man* and those relating to the three other books. The explanation is the much greater labour involved for me in that work, wherein I was obliged to compress into one volume material which would better have gone into several. This was also the only case where the final course did not antedate the publication of the book, but virtually coincided with it.

I cannot deny that, for many readers, these brief chapters may well seem arid because they are overly condensed and frequently elliptical, deprived of the force and vivacity that, according to Saint-Simon,

peculiarly belongs to oral expression. But this last point also has its defects, which I was unable to avoid: 'Ever carried along by the material', as Saint-Simon also says, 'and neglectful of the manner of its expression, if not of its proper explication'. I shall be justly reproached with the frequent lack of references, but what was I to do? The bibliographic references that appear in my written notes and papers would have taken up as much room as the text, rendering the whole even less attractive.

With all its imperfections, the present book has one advantage, in being less massive than most of the others I have written. Finally, for those who interest themselves in the mechanics of intellectual labour, this book illustrates the efforts, the tentative advances and retreats, and now and again the achievements, of a thought process unfolding during some thirty-two years, which amount to a large proportion of an individual life and the span of a generation.

PART I

The Field of Research

1

The Future of Anthropology (1959–60)

Under the general title of 'The Future of Anthropology' [*l'Avenir de l'ethnologie*], Tuesday's course enabled us to review, from a perspective both theoretical and practical, the fundamental problems facing contemporary anthropology.

1 DISAPPEARING PEOPLES

Is anthropology condemned to become a science without an object? That object has traditionally been provided by the so-called 'primitive' peoples. Since Frazer first dramatically drew attention to the problem, these groups have continued to dwindle. The Australian Aborigines numbered 250,000 when colonization began: today there are no more than 40,000 or 50,000, and the results of recent research show them to be threatened by famine and demoralization, endangered even within their own desert homelands by mining operations and the building of nuclear plants and experimental rocket ranges.[1] Between 1900 and 1950, nearly ninety tribal groups have disappeared in Brazil and, where there were formerly a hundred, barely thirty now remain in relative isolation. Fifteen languages have been lost in less than fifty years. The advance of epidemic disease and malnutrition is reported in numerous cases, symptoms of the terrifying extinction of whole populations, sometimes within the space of a few years, with irreversible modifications of demographic structure and its inevitable

[1] R. M. and C. H. Berndt, *Social Anthropological Survey of the Warburton, Blackstone and Rawlinson Ranges* (University of Western Australia, Perth, Mimeo 1959). At the 1961 Census, 80, 526 persons identified themselves as having either one or two Aboriginal parents. The figure has since doubled.

sociological and psychological consequences.[2] Similar reports are now beginning to emerge from New Guinea.

Study of protective legislation aimed at 'primitive' peoples in different countries reveals a growing difficulty in identifying those peoples by distinctive characteristics. Neither language, culture, nor world view can any longer be meaningfully employed to define them. As research by the International Labour Office has underlined, the blurred concept of *indigène* is giving place to *indigent*.[3]

In other parts of the world, however, such as Central America and the Andes, south-east Asia and, above all, Africa, the populations are to be numbered in tens and hundreds of millions and continue to grow. The problem facing anthropological studies in these countries is not of a quantitative order. But from a qualitative standpoint there are serious difficulties, and of several kinds. Objectively, these peoples are undergoing a process of transformation that is bringing them closer to Western civilization, which has traditionally been regarded as lying outside the province of anthropology. And above all, from a subjective point of view, these peoples manifest an increasing hostility to ethnographic inquiry. It seems as though anthropology is doubly threatened: in the first instance, by the actual disappearance of certain peoples, and in the second, by the fact that other people who are demographically flourishing deny themselves to anthropological study on ideological grounds.

Everyone is agreed on the measures required to combat the first danger. It is necessary to accelerate research, to gather the maximum harvest in information from the years that remain; to compensate for the diminishing size of groups and the disappearance of customs by using increasingly refined methods of observation; finally, to maintain confidence in the future of traditional anthropology, which, even after the extinction of the last 'primitive' tribe (which may well be less imminent than is generally believed), will still need to pursue, and probably for centuries, the extraction of value from the vast mass of accumulated data.

It is rather on the second problem that disagreements arise. Some anthropologists, particularly in the United States, believe that the hostility felt in certain tribal groups against anthropology will vanish if we help them to train their own investigators, and offer ourselves to them as objects of study. But, apart from the fact that such a

[2] D. Ribeiro, 'Convivio e Contaminacao: efeitos dissociativos da depopulação provocada por epidemias em grupos indigenas', *Sociologia*, XVIII (1) (1956), pp. 3—50.

[3] International Labour Office, *Les Populations aborigènes* (Geneva, 1953).

'generalized anthropology' would expose each culture to the danger of losing its unique character, since each would soon consist only of a multiplicity of distorted images of all the others, this concept takes no account of the conflict lying behind the formerly colonized peoples' opposition to anthropology. Their fear is that, beneath the semblance of a global ethnography, we seek to portray as a desirable *diversity* what appears to them as an intolerable *inequality*. With the best will in the world, we are not going to be accepted as their 'savages'. For, from the moment that we made them play this role, they ceased to exist for us; whereas, responsible in their eyes for their fate, we do exist for them.

This manner of posing the problem entails two consequences. If anthropology is to survive its present crisis, it will not succeed in so doing by generalizing itself while retaining its traditional guise: it must needs find for itself an absolute foundation. What this will mean, no doubt, is an inversion of the positions occupied until now by history and classical learning, on the one side, and by anthropology, on the other. In the old tribal societies, anthropology will tend to disappear as it becomes merged with the history and culture of each group, and as native scholars come increasingly to participate in this work. As to anthropology proper, its survival will be achieved outside and beyond these traditional domains.

Outside, in the first place, is used in a geographical sense, since we have to journey ever further to reach the last 'primitives', who become *fewer and fewer*; but it is also used in a logical sense, since we attain the heart of the matter exactly in so far as, already rich in acquired knowledge, we become aware of the fact *more and more*.

Beyond is also used in a double sense: the collapse of the material basis of the last primitive cultures makes our own *inner experience* one of our only means of knowing in the absence of the lost objects of study; and Western-type civilization, becoming constantly more complex and coming to include the whole inhabited globe, is perhaps already beginning to display, *within itself*, those qualitative differences that are the proper study of anthropology, but which can henceforth be found only in the comparison of distinct and distant cultures.

2 PLURALISM AND EVOLUTION

The opposition of diversity and inequality has, in the past, furnished a topic of theoretical debate. We have come to see that this is no longer just our own discussion, for it inspires the revolt of those who were formerly for us an object of study. In affirming themselves as subject,

they accuse the whole body of anthropologists of a collective mystification because, regardless of the different positions taken by individual anthropologists in the debate, all were agreed on its ideological nature; whereas, in the eyes of the formerly colonized peoples, this was not a private problem of Western philosophy, but the objective expression of an unequal power relation between our society and theirs. By a curious paradox, it is doubtless out of regard for these peoples that many anthropologists have embraced the ideal of cultural diversity, which seems to exclude the idea of 'inferior' societies. However, these same anthropologists now find themselves accused of having denied this 'inferiority' with the sole object of concealing, and thus maintaining, it.

A classic problem is thus posed in new terms. Up to now, the theoreticians have reacted to this situation in a very confused fashion. In France, a philosopher like Simone de Beauvoir seems hard put to it to decide whether it is through pluralism or through 'the illusion of universality' that one needs to define the 'Rightist mode of thought'.[4] In the United States, Leslie White calls for a return of anthropological theory to a universalistic basis, in the form of a thoroughly traditional evolutionism.[5]

We have posed the question of whether it might be possible to resolve an opposition, the terms of which seem equally plausible. This opposition would appear to be related to the fact that the social sciences, which were the first to propose evolutionary hypotheses, have retained a simplistic and primitive concept of evolution that is far removed from that to be found in the natural sciences, where the idea has benefited from a century of discussion and research.

Study of recent work in biology, notably that of G. G. Simpson, teaches anthropologists that science now recognizes not just a single form of evolution, but several.[6] In addition, the form to which certain of them remain obstinately attached, and which is very close to Simpson's 'philetic evolution', is hard to discern in human societies, where evolution takes two other forms: 'quantum evolution', over long durations, and 'diversification', where small-scale and detailed studies are concerned. Such studies relate, in the case of anthropology, to 'demes' rather than to species or orders. In general, biologists have

[4] Simone de Beauvoir, 'La pensée de droite aujourd'hui', *Les Temps Modernes*, CXII—CXIII and CXIV—CXV (1955).

[5] L. A. White, 'The concept of evolution in cultural anthropology', in *Evolution and Anthropology: A Centennial Appraisal* ed. B. J. Meggers (Anthropological Society of Washington, Washington, DC, 1959), pp. 106—25.

[6] G. G. Simpson, *The Major Features of Evolution* (New York, 1955).

become increasingly unwilling to posit unilinear hypotheses and they tend to think, in historical terms, of transformations rather than of necessary steps in an oriented evolution.

Anthropologists must understand that since the times of Lamarck and Darwin the theory of evolution has itself evolved, and in its modern forms it has ceased to constitute what to them still appears as an antimony. Otherwise, the anthropologist is in danger of being more naturalistic than the natural sciences themselves.

The way ahead has been blazed by linguistics, for it was in the measure that Troubetzkoy abandoned an all-embracing global theory when studying significant differences between Slavic languages that he was able to discover the local and modal changes that alone were susceptible to truly scientific investigation.[7] But this achievement depended on locating the evolutionary facts within a statistical conception of history — the mean tendencies of particular changes — rather than trying to locate the historical facts within an evolutionary framework doomed to remain as ideological as it was hypothetical.

We now see how these apparently philosophical considerations can throw new light on certain anthropological problems, notably in the study of material culture and of the relation between anthropology and economics. Old topics that one had thought long since disposed of, like that of the potter's wheel, will have to be re-examined. The classical theories of Laufer and Fréchet are, respectively, purely historical and purely evolutionist. Recent research by Foster renders implausible Laufer's theory that the potter's wheel was derived from the wheel of a chariot,[8] and similarly invalidates the sequence proposed by Fréchet from fixed to turning plate, then to the turntable, the simple wheel, and the wheel with flywheel attached. None of these forms has the significance of one factor, which is the speed of rotation with its quantifiable threshold by which one can distinguish pottery made on a wheel or by simple moulding. However, in certain conditions even very primitive instruments, like the turning plate, can exceed this threshold; hence several lines of evolution are possible. The notion of significant differences succeeds that of progressive evolution, and in the order of evolution the question of mechanism is revealed, as in biology, to be more fundamental than that of overt characteristics.

Recent discussions in economic anthropology also illustrate the spurious nature of the opposition between pluralism and evolution.

[7] N. S. Troubetzkoy, *Principes de Phonologie* (Paris, 1949).

[8] G. M. Foster, 'The Copotepec *Molde* and some associated problems of the potter's wheel', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 15 (1) (1959), pp. 53—63.

Evolutionist anthropology has always maintained as one of its basic propositions that the necessary and sufficient condition for the division of labour and social hierarchy was the production of a food surplus. This idea has been largely demolished by those writers who affirm (unknowingly taking up an argument used by Marx against Lassalle) the cultural and non-biological status of the concept of surplus.[9] But, contrary to Marx, they find no correlation between social structure and economic system. Do we not encounter here, once again, the unilateral definition of phenomena which possess several axes, and the analysis of which is therefore far from complete?

If one is to believe the classic ethnographies, it is by free choice that certain Melanesian and Micronesian communities destroy enormous quantities of yams in competitive festivals, instead of using them for economic purposes. The ethnographers, however, have failed to take into account the peculiar characteristics of yam culture, as described by the geographer P. Gourou: the abnormally high weight ratio between seed yams and harvested crops, their low nutritional value, the high labour input required, and conservation difficulties — in sum, reduced economic elasticity.[10] It therefore becomes necessary to attempt to over-produce, in the hope of sometimes having enough; hence the risk of surpluses that cannot be consumed, and that therefore become available for other uses. Before speculating on the relations between economic system and social structure, anthropology should undertake research of a kind rarely attempted, into the relation between workforce and total population, number of working hours, productivity, soil type, methods of cultivation and agricultural techniques, and climate. It is possible that meaningful correlations and significant differences will then become evident and that these will be found in different societies and at different moments of history. A lesson has been devoted to a project of this kind, in the form of a comparison between two societies in which yam cultivation has a different place, while there are remarkable similarities in socio-economic structure: one society is Ponape, in the Caroline Archipelago, and the other the Tiv of Nigeria. At least, one can formulate the hypothesis that significant differences in the systems of exchange can be correlated with social and economic characteristics peculiar to each group. As Gilles Granger has suggested, and his ideas have been discussed, it is

[9] Cf. K. Polanyi, C. Arensberg and H. Pearson (eds.), *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (Glencoe, Illinois, 1957).

[10] P. Gourou, 'Les plantes alimentaires americaines en Afrique tropicale, remarques géographiques', III Coloquio internacional de Estudos Luso-Brasileiros (Lisbon, 1959).

through a concrete typology that one can hope to overcome the seeming opposition between the ideas of *structure* and *event*.[11]

3 CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The anthropological problem of inequality and diversity presupposes a distinction between cultural order and social order, because it is social facts above all that are invoked by the pluralists, whereas the evolutionists tend to concentrate on cultural phenomena. The opposition between culture and society, however, is far from clear in modern anthropological theory. As A. L. Kroeber has recently pointed out, the sociologist conceives culture as consequent and interior to society, whereas the anthropologist, just as plausibly, treats social phenomena as belonging to, or as modes, of culture.[12] How are we to understand this 'verbal conjuring trick' that can equally well place society in culture, as culture in society?

Durkheim had already asked this question in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, where culture is defined as a set of 'ways of being' that leads to a kind of concretization of these 'ways of doing' that constitutes society. Hence the curious paradox of Durkheimian thought that social facts are to be treated as things, except in the case where they really are such. Because Durkheim did not define the concept of culture independently, he was unable to transcend the opposition of the individual and the collective, or that between historical and functional points of view. Radcliffe-Brown had a better understanding that the notion of culture was indispensable to anthropology, if it was not to sever its link with psychology and history; but he accorded to culture merely an abstract value.

In contemporary anthropological thought, Leslie White is the most eloquent advocate of the primacy of culture over society, and we can only agree when he defines culture as the totality of relations obtaining between symbolic phenomena.[13] However, symbolism does not occupy a position among social facts comparable with the position it enjoys among cultural facts; for although everything in culture has a symbolic function, the same is not true for society, as the case of animal

[11] G. Granger, 'Évènement et structure dans les sciences de l'homme', *Recherches et Dialogues philosophiques et économiques*', 6 (1959).

[12] A. L. Kroeber, 'The history of the personality of anthropology, 61 (3) (1959).

[13] L. A. White, 'The concept of culture', *American Anthropologist*, 61 (2) (1959), pp. 227—51.

societies demonstrates. Culture, which is closer to matter than is society, is nevertheless more completely symbolic than society; and society, which more than culture seems to concern man's individual existence and psychic life, appears as historically anterior, since it is possible to have societies without culture, but not cultures without society. Despite the arguments as to the primacy of one or the other, it is necessary to admit that the distinction between the two is a real one.

Everything suggests that culture and society arose among living beings as two complementary responses to the problem of death: society, to prevent the animal being aware of its mortality; culture, as man's reaction to that knowledge. These formulations are not metaphoric, because numerous facts from animal ethology show that the isolated insect does not survive the severance of social relations, and that among certain insects and birds the perpetuation of the species is psychologically conditioned by the presence of fellow-beings. However, this social life reduced to the bare essentials cannot serve as a model for what, in man, is dialectically articulated with culture; rather, it is its counterpart. That the so-called 'language' of bees should be interpreted along these lines is a logical consequence of the inability of these insects to operate a 'vertical' displacement, from the order of the signifier to that of the signified.[14] With the insect, one could say that Nature produces the organic by means of the social, whereas with men she creates the social by means of the organic, at the cost of fundamental transformations in the structure and function of the central nervous system.

4 HUMAN AND ANIMAL SOCIETIES

Despite this discontinuity, of which we should remind ourselves so as to avoid any misunderstanding, modern anthropology can no longer be content with making a radical separation between the natural and cultural orders. At the boundaries of zoology and anthropology there is a common area of uncertainty that embraces phenomena of equal importance to both disciplines. Their investigation is certainly one of the major tasks facing anthropology today.

The long-debated question of whether social life in the higher mammals is based on sexual dimorphism, generating opposition, or on a bisexuality productive of a contrary identification would seem to have advanced through observation of non-human primates in the

[14] M. Lindauer, 'L'intercompréhension par les danses dans les colonies d'abeilles', *Journal de Psychologie normale et pathologique*, 53 (1956).

natural state. It is striking that among howler monkeys and rhesus macaques, species that do not swing from tree to tree and are therefore more exposed to attacks by predatory beasts, the single males form protective bands, whereas gibbons and spider monkeys, which do not brachiate, do without such protection. Research conducted for some years by the Japan Monkey Centre into *Macaca fuscata* has shown that learned and transmitted behaviour can play a much larger part in animal life than had been suspected; and likewise for customary differences between different social groups. Already the observations recorded make it possible to write a 'history' of certain groups, and the question of a proto-cultural substratum common to both man and animal becomes seriously posed for the first time.[15]

To these studies should be added others on how birds learn to sing and on the local character of certain song 'dialects'; on the role of education in the transmission of behaviour previously considered instinctive; on the proto-cultural character of certain innovations and fixed ways of behaving; and, finally, on the elementary forms of symbolism observed among rodents and primates.

Taking man as the point of departure, the researches of the Soviet scientists Markosyan, Elkin and Volkova suggest that, on the basis of the transfer of conditioned reflexes from a physical or chemical stimulus to a semantic function, the problem of the passage from Nature to Culture would be amenable to experimental investigation.[16]

Continuity between the two orders would thus be established, at least on a certain level. Language, instead of appearing like a perfection, could then be conceived as an equivalent 'distension' of the organic links that assure social cohesion among the insects. Reduced in this case to a circulation of food and chemical substances, this cohesion would consist in the case of birds of an auditory saturation of space, and of an olfactory saturation of this same space among certain mammals. Among men this saturation cedes its physical character and becomes symbolic; at the same time it allows the re-establishment on another level of a social cohesion that, in an opposite form, because purely organic, the insects alone had fully attained.

5 THE COLLECTIVE AND THE INDIVIDUAL

The articulation of Nature and Culture can thus be studied from the

[15] There is a complete bibliography in J. E. Frisch, 'Research on primate behavior in Japan', *American Anthropologist*, 61 (4), (1959), pp. 584—96.

[16] G. Razran, 'Soviet psychology and psychophysiology', *Behavioral Science*, 4 (1) (1959).

outside; it should also be studied from the inside. Several writers have considered that an ethnography of the dream would provide the means, since the dream appears to combine impulsions and emotions of individual and even organic origin, and forms of expression of a social character. However, it is evident that the six hundred dreams so far recorded from the Hopi Indian Don Talayesva reveal less about individual peculiarities than about the disintegration of the subject's society, which much resembles the disintegration of other societies.[17] Other attempts have approached the recurrence of typical dreams in different societies. Their conclusions seem disappointing. The truth is that it is less between the dreams themselves that the significant differences reside in each society considered, but rather between the reigning theories of the dream in each society, in so far as anthropological inquiry has been able to discover these.

We have been concerned to examine the different ways in which various indigenous societies conceptualize dreams: the Plains Indians of North America, the Iroquois, the Saora of Orissa State in India, the Murngin of Arnhemland in Australia. The Iroquois case is particularly interesting, because their theory of the dream shows remarkable parallels with the ideas of psychoanalysis. In both cases, the interpretation of the dream implies, in a number of forms, the obligatory participation of another.

One is then led to ask whether the psychoanalytic theory of the dream tells us less about the objective nature of dreaming as a universal phenomenon than about its particular function in societies, where the crucial problem is that of the individual's relation to the group rather than to the cosmos. The case of the Plains Indians shows that relation to the cosmos may be no more than a transfigured form of relation to the group. What is invariably at issue, in fact, is the individual's relation to the group, whether immediate or mediated by an image of the cosmos, and it is vain to seek in the dream transcendence of the social order. Roheim himself has been obliged to recognize that, despite indigenous theories, the Australian myths do not resemble dreams, and that the dreams cannot be used directly to explain the myths.[18]

In terms of communication theory, the dream thus appears as a message, one which, conversely from speech, is transmitted from the

[17] Don Talayesva, *Sun Chief: the autobiography of the Hopi Indian* (New Haven, 1942); Dorothy Eggan, 'The personal use of myth in dreams', in *Myth: A Symposium*, Bibliographical and Special Series of the American Folklore Society, ed. T. A. Sebeok, vol V (1955), pp. 107—21.

[18] G. Roheim, *The Eternal Ones of the Dream* (New York, 1945).

receiver to the emitter (whence the necessary participation of another). The myth, on the other hand, consists in a message that is continually received without ever being emitted (whence the supernatural origin attributed to it): each myth goes back to previous myths. Behind the problem of the relations between dream and myth one discerns the problem of the relations between a myth and its variants, which may be individual or collective, as has been shown in the Hopi case. Thus one is led to examine more closely the relations between structure and event.

6 STRUCTURE AND EVENT

When they began the systematic examination of former Japanese possessions in Micronesia, American anthropologists discovered to their surprise that traditional concepts employed in the study of social structure were no longer valid. These structures, it appeared, could not be described from a purely synchronic point of view. Among the Nakanai of New Britain, different structures correspond to different periods in the life of the individual, and a temporal 'slice' provides no more than a statistical distribution.[19] British anthropologists simultaneously made similar discoveries in Africa, notably among the Ashanti where, depending on village, status, the age and role of family heads, residence can be patrilocal, matrilocal, avunculocal, or a combination of these.[20]

Must we conclude that an opposition exists between the orders of structure and event? Rather, it would seem that in many cases the concept of structure is two-dimensional, combining synchrony and diachrony. Further, what seems true for the life of an individual is no less true of generations. The Navajo Indians of New Mexico have marriage rules that appeared arbitrary, because of conflicting observations. Taking up the problem from a statistical viewpoint a model has emerged, 'serial' in form, according to which a family tends at first to distribute its alliances among as many groups as possible; then, having run through the whole cycle, it repeats the same operation. In a cycle of marriages, in consequence, the first alone has a contingent character, the rest being structurally linked to it.[21]

[19] W. H. Goodenough, 'Residence rules', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 12 (1) (1956), pp. 22—37.

[20] M. Fortes, *Social Structure* (Oxford, 1949).

[21] M. Zelditch, Jr, 'Statistical preferences of the Ramah Navaho', *American Anthropologist*, 61 (3) (1959).

The problem of values is a major concern of current anthropological thought and provides another means of understanding the articulation of collective and individual, of permanence and change. If, for Durkheim, the idea of value concealed a veritable antinomy that only an appeal to a *conscience collective* at once transcendent and immanent could give him the illusion of resolving, Saussure was the first to demystify the problem by showing that the constraining force of values, so puzzling for Durkheim, arose from their systemic character, of the same kind as that exercised by every grammar. But this systemic character, as postulated by Saussure, still requires verification, for observation has rather suggested that, for any individual, the totality of values to which he is passionately attached often has an incoherent and contradictory nature.

Several recent studies have been analysed, notably those of Brandt, Ladd, and F. and C. Kluckhohn.[22] After proposing a system of axioms (the problems facing humanity as such are limited in number; the solutions offered to them select between various possibilities; all variations of all possible solutions are present in each society), the last two authors list the problems they consider universal, and reduce the values to a series of binary selections. They hope in this way to define the system prevailing in each society, by means of a formula representing its particular choices.

However brilliant this attempt may be, overtly inspired as it is by structural linguistics, we cannot be satisfied with it. The inventory of so-called universal problems conceals unstated presuppositions, and the oppositions are defined at a semantic level, which does not correspond to the phoneme at the linguistic level; finally, the figure of fifteen significant oppositions, as provisionally set out, is utterly inferior to the order of magnitude required. In general, it would seem that these American endeavours fail to attain their objective. Their aim is either too low, if one can put it that way (at the level of the individual, though in different directions, as with Brandt and Ladd) or too high (at the level of universal categories, as proposed by F. and C. Kluckhohn). Our own research in this domain has taught us that it is necessary to begin within each culture, and with what is peculiar to each culture in the form of myth, ritual and language — that is, in domains where the oppositions are both identifiable and unconscious.

We can now see that, contrary to what Durkheim supposed, values

[22] R. Brandt, *Hopi Ethics* (Chicago, 1954); J. Ladd, *The Structure of a Moral Code* (Cambridge, 1957); F. R. Kluckhohn and F. L. Strodtbeck, *Variations in Value Orientations* (New York, 1951); C. Kluckhohn, *The Sceintific Study of Values* (Toronto, 1958).

are not in themselves social facts, but rather that they translate the impact on the consciousness of the individual of intellectual constraints resulting from the system of collective categories, and the way that consciousness reacts to such constraints. Values cannot therefore be reduced to what men believe and say; they arise from the constraints inherent in the instruments through which human beings think. The problem, then, is to define and list these mental compartments, separately for each society. If anthropology can indeed be defined as a search for invariance, it must also learn that such invariance is never perceptible 'on the ground'.

7 THE ORIGINALITY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

In examining in turn the conceptual oppositions where contemporary anthropology perceives — wrongly, we believe — veritable antinomies, we have been led to consider a series of problems connected with the relations between anthropology and neighbouring disciplines: biology, demography, economics, sociology, psychology, philosophy. These problems relate to the study of material culture, economic life, social organization, mythology and ritual, and even psychological and moral life.

This meandering progress at least has the advantage of illustrating the originality of anthropological research. Much has been heard recently, above all in the UK, on the question of whether anthropology (meaning ethnology defined in the broad sense) properly belongs to the sciences or the humanities. The names of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and E. E. Evans-Pritchard are particularly associated with this debate.[23]

To the contrary, anthropology seems to us to be distinctive in that it cannot be reduced to either dimension. It is clear that history, on one side, and natural science, on the other, concern themselves with the same reality, but at different levels. Whether it likes it or not, anthropology will never be able to situate itself exclusively at one of these levels, or at an intermediate level; it works in a perpendicular fashion which, in the absence of a deep perspective that is presently lacking, obliges it to consider all levels simultaneously.

The case of physical anthropology is most significant in this respect, for, distant as its problems may appear from those facing social anthropology, these two branches of a single science have, during the past few years, evolved in convergent fashion. In physical anthropology,

[23] R. Firth, *Social Anthropology as Science and as Art* (Dunedin, University of Otago, 1958).

the search for invariance has taken the form of attempts to discover factors lacking adaptive value and which therefore provide present evidence of certain differential characteristics by which distinct human groups may be defined.

But again, as in social anthropology, it seems we are too easily satisfied. Although the problem of drepanocytosis or 'sickle cell anaemia' is much debated (by reason of the extreme rarity of the spontaneous mutations that cause it), this characteristic seems no longer capable of giving us precise information on the genetic structure of humanity, by reason of the relative immunity it provides against certain forms of malaria. But, and this is the essential point, in the same measure that it ceases to provide long-term historical evidence, its explanatory value grows within a more restricted time-frame which is also a veritable history: that of the peopling of the African continent during the past two or three millennia. Here too, therefore, invariant properties disappear at the level of overt characteristics only to reappear at the level of mechanism, with the same practical result of dispelling the false opposition between history and evolution. The same conclusions have been reached with respect to blood groups and rare haemoglobins, whose adaptive value seems proved in several cases.

These examples should be added to those given earlier in the year and show that although the traditional problems of anthropology have been transformed, none is yet exhausted. The originality of anthropology has always consisted in studying man by placing itself at what, in each epoch, has been considered the boundaries of humanity. When anthropology today concerns itself with the logic of electronic calculators, it is nearer than many suppose to its position a century or two ago when the study of certain bizarre and exotic customs led it to the extreme limits of what was known about mankind. As an 'interstitial' science devoted to the exploration of this mobile frontier separating the possible from the impossible, anthropology will exist as long as humanity and is, in this sense, eternal. Its persistent interest in other societies, which will last for the period — doubtless long — of their existence, is really only a form of anthropology's interest in every society that could have existed in the past or might exist in the future. The real diversity of human societies has served as a kind of stairway in the progress of anthropological thought. It is for anthropology to fix on its objective with sufficient determination so as to maintain its onward course, should it eventually find this support missing.

2

Totemism and the Savage Mind (1960–1)

The Tuesday course was entitled 'Totemism'. The aim was to study the evolution of anthropological thought with respect to a major classical problem, without concerning ourselves with whether new knowledge had altered the form in which the problem was posed and resolved. It was, then, the problem itself which was examined, it being currently impossible to conclude that totemism exists as a concrete institution.

1 EVOLUTION OF THE TOTEMIC PROBLEM

In 1920 van Gennep published *L'Etat actuel du problème totémique* [*The Current State of the Totemic Problem*], a book that marked, he believed, a stage in a debate destined to continue.[a] On this point, however, van Gennep was mistaken, since his work, which remains indispensable as the last general study of the matter, was to prove the 'swan song' of speculative discussion about totemism. Van Gennep's error is understandable, a mere ten years after the publication of Frazer's monumental work. But we are better able to see now that even when the totemic debate was at its height, symptoms of disintegration were already manifest. In the same year that Frazer's book appeared, Goldenweiser was contesting the reality of totemism;[b] indeed, American anthropology has waged an unceasing struggle against this idea, a struggle of which we have outlined the main episodes in the works of Lowie, Kroeber and Boas. But these

[a] A. van Gennep, *L'Etat actuel du problème totémique* (Paris, 1920).

[b] J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy* (London, 1910); A. A. Goldenweiser, 'Totemism, an analytical study', *Journal of American Folklore*, XXXIII (1910), pp. 179–273.

reservations in regard to what was for a time at the centre of social and religious anthropology were also evident in the UK; for there, after Rivers's attempt to define totemism as a combination of three elements (social, psychological and ritual), more recent studies have adopted a definition which is not only prudent and qualified, but which, above all, directs attention less to the content of the institution than to its form.[c]

The transition from the study of content to that of form goes back to Boas, who introduced the distinction in a celebrated article of 1916.[d] Boas showed that discussions of totemism had ranged over two distinct problems: on the one hand, that of the way men represent their relations with Nature, which is not strictly part of totemism itself; and on the other, the problem of the denomination of social groups. Whether these groups are called by animal or vegetable names concerns the first problem. There remains the essential question: in what condition is it structurally necessary for social groups to be named? Boas claimed that this necessity arose out of exogamy, which thus emerged as a precondition of totemism. Further, exogamy could assume two forms, one of which was incompatible with a naming system — for example, when social groups were defined by real genealogies, as among the Eskimo. However, wherever social groups were defined by unilineal descent and where genealogical links were vague or fictititous, the only way to guarantee the identity and continuity of these groups was to make use of differential terms transmitted by heredity and which were often drawn from the animal and vegetable kingdoms. Important as Boas's contribution was, it failed to resolve two problems: first, why do plants and animals offer a nomenclature which particularly favours the denotation of social groups? Second, what is the relation between the system denominated and the system of denomination?

2 TOTEMIC ILLUSIONS

After a summary recapitulation of the evolution of ideas, it was shown through several examples that the phenomena themselves were far more complex than a premature systematization would have led us to believe.

The Ojibwa of the north-eastern region of North America provided

[c] W. H. R. Rivers, *The History of Melanesian Society* (Cambridge, 1941).

[d] Franz Boas, 'The origin of totemism', *American Anthropologist*, 18 (1916), pp. 319–26.

the first observations that resulted in the various theories of totemism. However, research on these groups has suggested that, as far as they are concerned, the so-called totemism conceals a confusion of two separate systems: on the one hand, a system of clan names, devoid of prohibitions and with very little ritual; on the other, a system of individual guardian spirits with little sociological significance.

The islanders of Tikopia, in the Pacific Ocean, have frequently been cited as proof of the existence of totemism in Polynesia. But Firth's research has shown that the situation is far from simple: were one to formulate it in traditional terms, it would be necessary to admit that not one, but two totemic institutions exist in Tikopia; as with the Ojibwa, these constitute two distinct and opposing systems.

3 AUSTRALIAN NOMINALISM

The significance of the Australian material in the totemic debate since the last quarter of the nineteenth century is well known. It was therefore of interest to see how contemporary Australianists had responded to the American critique. In a refinement of both observation and analysis, Elkin subdivides totemism, treating in turn the form, signification and function.[e] Furthermore, and following Radcliffe-Brown, he defines several basic types of totemism: individual, sexual, conceptional and local, and a variety of associations with social groups (moiety, section, subsection). Finally, clan totemism should be subdivided into two kinds, depending on whether descent is matrilineal or patrilineal. A novel category is the totemism of 'the dream'.

While giving all credit to the author of these distinctions, which draw on richer material than was available to his predecessors, one cannot help wondering if Elkin was not the victim of an illusion, namely, that by exploding totemism into numerous variants, it would be possible to restore to it a reality lost when it was raised to a general level. This attempt is the more dangerous in that it prevents systematic understanding of Australian cultures and deprives us of the means of discovering the relations between religious life and the different forms of social organization.

[e] A. P. Elkin, 'Studies in Australian totemism', *Oceania*, 4 (1) and 4 (2) (1933), pp. 65—90 and 113—31.

4 FUNCTIONALIST TOTEMISM

Elkin's propositions really derive from the divergent orientations of his masters Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. Malinowski's interpretation is naturalistic, utilitarian and affective.[f] It claims to provide answers to three questions: why does totemism make so much use of animal and plant names? Why is it accompanied by ritual beliefs and practices? Why does a sociological aspect exist, besides a religious one? The reason, according to Malinowski, is that the first concern of man is food, which arouses intense and varied emotions. This 'natural' interest in the animal world is reinforced by man's empirical experience of his resemblance to animals; from whence comes his belief in his ability to control the growth and proliferation of animal species. As to the sociological aspect, it is a result of the fact that all ritual gives rise to magical practices, and that magic tends to follow lines of social division. Malinowski was thus more concerned with proving that the problem did not exist than in solving it, or at least proving that the answer was self-evident. But to do so he had to transfer totemism from anthropology to biology and psychology, thereby rendering himself unable to take account of the real diversity of practices and customs.

Radcliffe-Brown's first theory of totemism, advanced in 1929, is close to that of Malinowski.[g] In associating himself with the critics of the American school, Radcliffe-Brown tries to approach the Durkheimian formulation. In fact he inverts it, since Durkheim saw in totemism a special case of the tendency of social groups to associate themselves with an emblem. The emblem as such is sacred, a characteristic that is extended to animal and vegetable species, in so far as non-figurative emblems are recognized as representations of animate objects. To the contrary, Radcliffe-Brown maintains that the appearance of ritual attitudes towards animals and plants is a more general phenomenon than totemism, and anterior to it. Totemism thus originates in ritual attitudes to animals such as are found in all hunting cultures. Such a religious attitude, diffuse at first, becomes progressively differentiated according to the 'rule' that ritual and religious segmentation necessarily follows social segmentation. This 'rule' allows the interpretation of

f Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (Boston, 1948).

g A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'The sociological theory of totemism', *Proceedings of the Fourth Pacific Science Congress* (Java, 1929). Reprinted in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London, 1952).

heterogeneous phenomena grouped under the heading of 'totemism', all of which are particular examples of the 'ritualization' of natural interests.

This utilitarian theory encounters the same difficulties as Malinowski's: it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the economic or just the practical significance of the animals and plants selected as totems by different societies. The Tikopia example, already discussed, shows a lack of fit between the rank order of the clans and their respective totems on the one hand, and the relative importance of the vegetable species concerned on the other, whether in terms of food value, the labour required for their production, or even the complexity of the rites associated with their planting and harvesting. Furthermore, one notes in Australia a considerable number of totems with no economic value whatsoever, or which are concerned with such non-economic matters as certain psychic or pathological states. Other totems are frankly recognized as valueless. If one still insists on defining them from a utilitarian viewpoint, it must be at the cost of voiding of all content the notion of economic or practical interest. The original interpretations of Spencer and Gillen are much to be preferred, since they made out these various totems to be signs rather than stimulants. One is thus led to seek the intellectual value of totemic representations.

5 TOWARDS THE INTELLECT

In seeking to understand totemism, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown considered the matter primarily from a viewpoint of subjective utility. A notable advance was achieved by the British anthropologists Firth and Fortes, when they exposed the defects of utilitarian explanations. They argued that the reasons for the choice of certain animal and vegetable species lay in an objective analogy, intellectually perceived.

Thus the predilection for certain animal species as observed in Polynesia and certain parts of Africa is to be explained by the indigenous perception of an analogy between these species and the gods (as in Polynesia) or the ancestors (as in Africa). The Tallensi conceive the relation between the living and the dead as resembling that between human beings and certain animals designated by the name of 'teeth-bearers'.[h] Ancestors and wild beasts are aggressive

[h] Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (Oxford, 1945), p. 145.

and unpredictable beings that endanger the security of men, who seek to placate them with appropriate rituals.

Evans-Pritchard goes still farther, noting that the Nuer conceptualize the animal world on the model of the social world.[i] According to their kind, animals form communities divided into lineages and sublineages. We are now in the field of metaphor, and it is as metaphorical relations that we should interpret the analogies noted between certain animal or vegetable species and human beings. When the Nuer assert that twins are birds, they do not endow twins with some sort of avian nature. For reasons rooted in indigenous theory and which have first to be investigated, twins are opposed to ordinary humans as 'people of the above' to 'people of the below'; even so, within the category of 'the above', twins are placed relatively low and given names derived from the most terrestrial of birds, the guinea-fowl and francolin.[j] It is therefore no longer a question, as with Firth and Fortes, of a global analogy, but of logical relations for which the diversity of animal species provides exemplars.

The origin of this intellectualist interpretation has been traced to what we have proposed to call the second theory of Radcliffe-Brown, which was expounded by him in 1951 without, it would seem, any precise awareness of its difference from the first theory, already discussed.[k] Even so, in his second theory, Radcliffe-Brown abandoned utilitarian interpretations. Comparing certain Australian and American social structures and myths, he showed that the evident similarities could be explained only by an identical manner of posing abstract ideas. If the eagle and the raven are associated and opposed on the north-west coast of North America, as are the sparrowhawk and the crow in certain parts of Australia, it is because the native mind requires, in order to conceive similar forms of social differentiation, to make use of pairs that are at once correlated and opposed. Thus can be related two carnivorous birds, of which one is a predator and the other a carrion-eater; or two arboreal birds, one diurnal and the other nocturnal; or two birds of the same species, but of different colours; or two marsupials, of which one is earth-dwelling, whereas the other lives out in the open.

We have speculated on the origin of this change in Radcliffe-Brown's thinking, and it has seemed reasonable to explain it as an

[i] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 89—90.

[j] Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, pp. 128—33.

[k] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'The comparative method in social anthropology', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 81 (1951), pp. 15—22. Reprinted as chapter V of *Method in Social Anthropology* (Chicago, 1958).

indirect consequence of the convergence of structural linguistics and anthropology that occurred during the decade preceding exposition of the second theory.[1]

6 TOTEMISM FROM THE INSIDE

It is curious that this formalist and logical interpretation should initially have been proposed by philosophers. The several pages that Bergson devotes to totemism in *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* are specially revealing in this context. For Bergson, totemism does not consist in an affinity between such-and-such a social group and such-and-such a biological species, but in the mutual opposition of social groups in terms of a generic distinction that is immediately perceived on the level of animal and vegetable life. This remarkable insight of a philosopher ignorant of anthropology poses a problem, which we have tried to resolve by comparing certain Bergsonian texts with some fragments of indigenous philosophy, particularly from the Sioux. Like these North American Indians who practise totemism, Bergson sees in discontinuity a negative aspect of the continuity of the living. A predecessor of Radcliffe-Brown, and a hardly less unexpected one, would appear to have been Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Forty years before the English merchant and interpreter Long had 'discovered' totemism, Rousseau had suggested that the first logical categories, whose appearance marks the transition from the state of Nature to that of Culture, were suggested to man by oppositions intuitively sensed within the animal and vegetable kingdoms. This daring proposition is no accident in Rousseau, because reference to the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalite* and the *Essai sur l'origine des langues* shows it to be based on a theory of language that begins as a theory of thought.

From these retrospective and philosophical considerations, a lesson has been drawn: totemism, or what is called such, is not so much an exotic institution seen from the outside and lacking objective reality, as a manifestation of certain universal modes of thought that philosophers are better placed than anthropologists to understand from within.

[1] Evans-Pritchard has since informed me that what I here call the two theories of Radcliffe-Brown were, in fact, mingled in his thought and teaching. It would seem, none the less, that when his publications are arranged in chronological order, they assign a growing importance to the 'second' theory.

7 THE SCIENCE AND LOGIC OF THE CONCRETE

The complex and various problems subsumed under the label of totemism, then, send us back to the modes of seeing and knowing that we need to recognize as essential to all cultures where relations with Nature are of primary importance. Contrary to what has long been believed, there exists in the majority of so-called 'primitive' societies a wealth of detailed zoological and botanical knowledge, the systematic characteristics of which frequently challenge comparison with modern societies. Every investigation into social organization, religious life, ritual activity and mythical thought demands a thorough acquaintance with an ethno-mineralogy, ethno-zoology, ethno-botany such as may shortly cease to exist. The problems of totemism result in great part from our own ignorance of the botanical and zoological species evoked by indigenous discourse, identifications that need to be made with great accuracy.

Furthermore, we are often in doubt if not about the existence of native classification, then at least about the principles behind it, which only research can discover. Finally, in the case of totemism there is a further difficulty, in that a systematic classification resides in a concrete society subject to an unpredictable demographic evolution. An old order may thus be lost beyond recovery, or else transformed into a novel order endowed with original characteristics that forbid access to their own source.

8 THE METHOD OF VARIANTS

In default of a historical evolution that nearly always eludes our grasp, the systematicity of structures may emerge from comparison with contemporary, geographically contiguous forms, which may sometimes be seen to constitute a transformation group. Two cases were analysed.

The first case is that of the Mota, in the Banks Islands of Melanesia, where Frazer thought he had found an elementary form of totemism, and possible the origin of the institution. But if the situation of the Mota is compared with that of the Lifu in the Loyalty Islands, or of Ulawa in the Solomons, it becomes evident that every change on one level is accompanied by correlative changes on other levels. Among the Mota, the relation with an animal is created at birth, and among the Lifu, at death. This opposition is accompanied by others, the

diagnostic being collective in one case and individual in the other, whereas the converse applies to the corresponding food taboo. The systems are both in correlation and opposition.

Even so, the distribution of totemic institutions in Australia presents a remarkably organized picture, the systematic character of which had already impressed Spencer and Gillen. It is thus that structures operative in a given society, among the living and at the level of social organization, are found in an identical form in a neighbouring society, wherein, however, they function among the dead in the world of the supernatural. It is not therefore a matter of two 'messages', but of a single message, spelled out in converse codes. This was developed and applied to some Australian societies exhibiting both diversity and geographical proximity. In none of these cases could we identify totemism with a privileged order of phenomena, whether these were the natural needs of Malinowski, or the social constraints of Durkheim.[1] What is supremely at issue is a code whose function is not to convey certain kinds of facts, but to enable, by means of a conceptual mechanism, the translation of any order of phenomena into any other. The object of totemic representations would thus be to guarantee the inter-convertibility of all aspects of social reality, in the manner of a language, to enable one to use the same 'words' of significant aspects of both natural and social worlds, and to move continually from one to the other. This theoretical point of view was illustrated using Australian and American examples; we thus saw that certain seemingly arbitrary aspects of so-called 'totemic' beliefs were influenced by environmental features.

9 FOOD TABOOS AND EXOGAMY

If totemism appears initially as a conceptual system, the question arises of whether it is any more than representational. But totemism is not only 'thought', it is also 'acted'. It is associated with prescriptions and prohibitions, notably with food taboos and rules of exogamy. In this context, our first observation has been that the connection between totemism and food taboos is much less general than is commonly held. The Bushmen of South Africa have complicated dietary prohibitions, but their system of categories is non-totemic. In contrast, the Fang of Gabon, who are divided into totemic groups, possess several systems of food taboo which cut across their totemic institutions.

1 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Paris, 1912).

Moreover, totemic prohibitions are far from being exclusively alimentary. In America and India, for example, prohibitions relate to a wide diversity of cultural domains.

Again, if attention is focused on a particular cultural region, one encounters wide differences between neighbouring groups. The ten tribes inhabiting Cape York in northern Australia are distinguished by several different forms of totemism, which are not always associated with food taboos. What alone is clear is that in some of these societies the taboos are linked with matrilineal institutions, whereas in the patrilineal societies they are associated with a more inclusive level of social structure.

As far as the relation between food taboos and exogamy is concerned, we have shown that the frequent association between the two types of rule is rooted in semantics. In many languages, the terms signifying 'eat' and 'copulate' are identical. This equivalence explains why, according to the society, the two rules either reinforce each other or are applied conversely, it sufficing that one rule exists to guarantee the existence of its complement.

10 TOTEMIC GROUP AND FUNCTIONAL CASTE

This complementarity between the order of the homogeneous and that of the heterogeneous allows us to see in a new light the problem of the relation between totemic groups and castes. As totemic groups are homogeneous in terms of their function (since this is illusory), they must therefore be heterogeneous in terms of their structure. In this they differ from castes, which are heterogeneous in function and should therefore be homogeneous (i.e. endogamous) with respect to their structure.

This symmetry explains the existence between totemic systems and castes of a vast number of intermediate forms. In several regions of America, totemic groups exhibit an incipient specialization prefiguring caste organization. Thus, among the Chippewa, the clans are differentiated by characteristics or aptitudes evocative of the eponymous animals. But it is above all in the ancient cultures of the south-eastern United States that one observes the transition between exogamy and endogamy, accompanied by a similar transformation from totemic groups to groups with specialized functions. From this point of view it is of great interest that India, the classical terrain of the caste, exhibits forms of totemism where manufactured objects tend to replace animal or vegetable species. In the broadest sense, exogamous groupings could be defined as castes, in so far as each exogamic group specializes in the production of a particular species of woman, destined for the

use of other groups. In such cases we are dealing with a specialization limited to a 'natural product'. The same argument applies to rituals intended to multiply animal or vegetable species for general consumption. Conversely, castes are specialized for cultural activities. The apparent opposition between endogamy and exogamy thus masks a more profound analogy between two types of specialization, one based in Nature, the other in Culture. In the final analysis, the difference between totemic groups and functional castes comes down to the fact that in one case the society conforms to a natural model or one that purports to be so, whereas in the other case it adopts a cultural model.

11 CATEGORIES, ELEMENTS, SPECIES, NAMES

This possibility of establishing a relation of transformation between social forms previously considered incompatible strengthens our thesis that totemic representations should be considered as a 'conceptual model'. This model is distinctive among universal classificatory systems in selecting the notion of species as a privileged logical operator. Other bases of classification are possible, however, and it is also possible for any given society to pass from one classificatory basis to another. The most abstract levels of thought, those corresponding to such categories as high and low, strong and weak, big and little, etc., are also those with the greatest rigour and logical simplicity. But the same relations can be differently coded: thus the categories of high and low can be translated into the form of an opposition between the elements Sky and Earth. And it is the same relation which, in 'totemic language', assumes the form of an opposition between a celestial creature, such as the eagle, and a terrestrial animal, such as the bear.

At a yet more concrete level, it is no longer groups, but individuals, who are assigned positions in the heart of the system. This can be seen in nearly every 'totemic' society, where each clan possesses an inventory of names derived from such-and-such a part of the body, or such-and-such a habit, of the eponymous animal; whence it is possible to situate individuals within the species, as the species is situated in relation to the elements, and the elements in relation to the categories. In the measure that one descends through the degrees of this hierarchy, the structuration becomes less precise. The resulting situation, however, is not unrelated to that described by Saussure when he showed that the world's languages could be ordered according to the place they assigned to motivation and to the arbitrary: thus some were grammatical, others lexicological, with a wide variety of intermediary forms. Preference for structuration at the species level, and by means

of specific concepts (the final basis of totemism), is first to be explained by the intermediate position of the idea of species, within a range running from the most general categories (and eventually reducible to a binary opposition), to the theoretically inexhaustible diversity of proper names. But most importantly, the notion of species contains remarkable logical properties, since the two dimensions of extension and intelligibility reach equilibrium at this level: the species is a collection of individuals who are similar in certain respects, and each individual is an organism consisting of different parts. It is thus possible, through the idea of species, to pass from one type of unity to another type, which is complementary and opposed: either the unity of a multiplicity, or the diversity of a unity.

This power of the 'specific' operator had been emphasized by Comte in the 52nd Lesson of the *Cours de philosophie positive*, when he referred to it in connection with the transition from 'fetishism' to 'polytheism' (within which he would surely, had he known of it, have classed totemism).[m] The founder of modern anthropology, Tylor, did not omit to mention this observation by Comte; nevertheless he found the first indication of it in the writings of a precursor of anthropological studies, de Brosses.[n]

Finally, the convertibility of categories into elements, elements into species, species into proper names, and conversely, helps us to understand how it comes about that the principles of modern taxonomy show curious resemblances to those employed in the fashioning of proper names by certain Australian and American groups. It is, we suggest, because proper names are in reality specific terms denoting classes theoretically occupied by a single unique individual, whereas, in symmetric and converse manner, the 'personality' that distinguishes one individual from another represents — even among us, the equivalent of a totemic group — a class occupied by a single, privileged tenant.

[m] Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, 52nd Lesson (Paris, 1841), pp. 1—114.

[n] Charles de Brosses, popularly known as *Le Président*, is best known for his study of West African religion, which originated the term 'fetishism' and which was published in Paris in 1760 under the title *Du culte des dieux fétiches, ou parallèle de l'ancienne religion de l'Egypte avec la religion actuelle de Nigritie*. A quotation from de Brosses adorns the frontispiece of E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*.

PART II

Mythologics

1

The Raw and the Cooked (1961–2)

Tuesday's course was entitled 'Mythic Representations of the Passage from Nature to Culture'. It is not easy to give a coherent account of it for two reasons: in the first place, this course marks the beginning of a major undertaking, to be pursued next year. In this initial phase, we are concerned with the presentation of terms, ideas and rules of interpretation, of which the meaning and scope will emerge only gradually. In the second place, and most importantly, we made use of a considerable number of myths that all required to be recounted; to do so here, however, would take up a disproportionate amount of space, and so the briefest of outlines must therefore suffice.

The materials drawn upon mostly originated among indigenous groups of central and southern Brazil, as well as the neighbouring regions of Chaco in the south-west and the Amazon Basin in the north. Three principal groups were therefore concerned; the Chaco and adjacent peoples (Chiruguano, Toba, Matako, Caduveo, etc.); peoples of central and eastern Brazil (the Ge and related groups, such as the Bororo, Karaja, Kayapo, Timbira, Apinaye, Sherente); and the Tupi of the coast and various related or 'Tupi-ized' groups of the Amazon Basin (Tupinamba, Mundurucu, Tenetehara, Tukuna).

The myths examined deal — either directly or indirectly — with the discovery of fire, and hence of cooking; the latter is symbolic in indigenous thought of the transition from Nature to Culture. The starting point was a group of Bororo myths collected and published by Albisetti and Colbacchini, which were shown to represent variations on a single theme. These variants have been classified and subdivided along several dimensions, and parallels were sought in the mythical thought of both the Ge and the Tupi.

It appeared that all these myths made use of the same code, constructed from terms which, for all that they are qualitative and intimately associated with concrete experience, are none the less conceptual tools allowing the combination or separation of significant

properties according to logical rules of compatibility and incompatibility, and in relation to cultural differences between the various groups, as discerned by the anthropologist.

In fact, all the myths examined relate to the origin of cookery. Another common feature is their opposition of this mode of nourishment to that found in carnivorous animals, consumers of raw meat, and in scavengers, who eat rotten meat. Certain myths even evoke, directly or indirectly, a fourth alimentary regime in cannibalism, sometimes conceived as terrestrial (the ogres), and sometimes as aquatic (the *piranha* fish).

In every case, consequently, we encounter a double opposition, on the one hand between raw and cooked, on the other between fresh and rotten. The axis that joins the raw and the cooked is characteristic of the transition to Culture; that joining the raw and the rotten, of the return to Nature. Thus cooking brings about the cultural transformation of the raw, just as putrefaction brings about a natural transformation.

It is demonstrated that in the group so formed, the Tupi myths exemplify the most thoroughgoing transformation: the crucial opposition is that between cooking, formerly a secret known only to the carrion-eaters, and the putrefaction that they are nowadays reduced to consuming. The Ge, however, displace the opposition to one between cooked food and its consumption in the raw state, which is the present condition of the original master of fire, the jaguar. Within this system, the Bororo myths appear to hesitate between the two extreme formulations. Furthermore, they situate themselves from the perspective of a conquering mankind, from that of Culture, whereas the Ge and Tupi myths, related in this respect, are told from the viewpoint of animals deprived of fire, from that of Nature.

2

From Honey to Ashes (1962–3)

Last year, under the title 'Mythical Representations of the Passage from Nature to Culture', we approached a set of problems that soon appeared of such complexity that it was necessary, from the beginning of the second year, to devote both Monday's and Tuesday's courses to them. Indeed, they still remain unexhausted, so that this year's teaching has continued that of the previous year, and the theme will probably be continued next year too.

Last year it was shown that in the myths of central Brazil, the problem of the Nature—Culture transition ws most often illustrated by the story of the invention, discovery, or obtaining of cooking fire. This mythical theme, particularly well exemplified among the central and eastern Ge, has been traced in a south-westerly direction to the Bororo, through a double transformation at once sociological and technological. Effectively, the Ge myths of the origin of fire are transformed among the Bororo into myths of the origin of water. At the same time, a sociological pattern found at the basis of the Ge myths, in the form of a conflict between two brothers-in-law, is found in the corresponding Bororo myth as a conflict between father and son. This year we have begun to discover the source of this second transformation in the highly systematized matrilineal and matrilocal institutions of Bororo society. In this context, if brothers-in-law who are respectively sister's husband and wife's brother are always allies whatever the mode of descent, it is only in a society where institutions of mother right are fundamental that the same relationship can be said to prevail between a father and his son.

That established, we moved on to a second group of myths, concerning the origin of game animals and, in particular, of wild pigs. These creatures, reckoned as a superior type of game in indigenous thought, provide with their meat the basic material of cooking. The myths dealing with their origin can therefore be treated, from a logical point of view, as functions of the origin myths of domestic fire: the

latter evoking the means, the former the matter of culinary activity. Since we had found that all these myths of the origin of meat deal also with the problem of relations between affines, it seemed interesting to discover whether, by means of a similar transformation to that already described, it were possible to find this mythology among the Bororo, under some disguise or other. Such myths do in fact exist, but in the same way that the basic myth of the origin of cooking suffers a transformation wherein fire becomes water, among the Bororo the origin myth of meat becomes a myth of the origin of cultural goods. Thus, in one case, a crude and natural material is situated *side by side* with cooking; and in the other, a technical activity belonging to the cultural order is situated *beyond* cooking.

In the Ge myths of the origin of meat, we detected the intervention in various forms of tobacco and tobacco smoke, which played the role of operators in the transformation of men into wild beasts. The fundamental role of this apparently secondary element was demonstrated through a celebrated myth of the Cariri Indians, formerly eastern neighbours of the Ge, collected at the end of the seventeenth century and published by Martin de Nantes. Further, in the corresponding Bororo myth concerned with the origin of cultural goods, the same role, though expressed in a negative form, is played by honey. We are therefore dealing with a global system in which the origin myths of cooking fire, sometimes inverted as the origin of water, provide the pivot. On one side and another of this axis we find two groups of myths, also in a relation of symmetric inversion, dealing respectively with the origin of meat and with the origin of dress and ornaments. In both of these two groups there is an intervention, positive or negative, of either tobacco or honey.

If this is indeed a systematic and objective structure, we should be able, by transformation of the origin myths of meat, to discover the origin myths of honey; and, by transformation of the origin myths of cultural goods, to find the origin myths of tobacco. On this condition, and this condition only, the totality of myths being investigated would constitute a closed system. Our inquiry during the current year has therefore been mainly concentrated on the parallel mythologies of honey and tobacco. We were the more impelled to follow this line because a summary investigation into the significance of honey and tobacco in the economic, social and religious life of the Indians of tropical America yielded a guiding hypothesis which accounted for the solidarity between the myths concerned with these two substances and the origin myths of cooking, which had served as our point of departure. In fact, just as we had already established that the existence of two 'sides' of the origin myth of cooking fire in stories recounting

the origin of meat and of cultural goods was explained in considering that meat was the condition and dress a consequence of the exercise of culture, so tobacco and honey related in the same way as cooking. Honey is an adjunct to cooking, being a natural product that is eaten fresh or after spontaneous fermentation; correlatively, tobacco is external to cooking, since it not only has to be dried by exposure to the sun, but also has to be burned before it can be consumed. It is doubtless true that, to the two ways of consuming honey already referred to, there correspond in South America various ways of consuming tobacco, which can be either smoked, or drunk in a decoction. Whence the novel hypothesis that myths of origin of honey and tobacco will occur at the two extremities of the mythical system; and that these myths can themselves be analysed in two groups, according to whether they correspond to one or other mode of consumption, the relations uniting them taking the form of a chiasmus.

Among the origin myths of honey, those particularly concerned with the Honey Festival, and which occur principally in northern Brazil, have enabled us to confirm the hypothesis by reconstituting the armature of the cooking origin myths through a number of inversions. As far as fermented honey is concerned, a material used so widely in southern Brazil and northern Argentina to make hydromel, a more difficult problem arose from the fact that the relevant myths have yet to be identified. But by drawing on documentary material from Chaco, we were able to constitute a group of myths characterized by the extreme role played in them by a heroine greedy for honey. This group has been progressively enlarged by the addition of certain elements of the Ge myths, and has even been located in Guyana.

The mythological system of honey thus ascertained, we went on to examine the myths of tobacco which, in conformity with the hypothesis, also fell into two groups. The origin myths of smoking tobacco, largely southern in distribution and running from the Bororo of central Brazil to the Chaco, restore the armature of the origin myths of cooking fire as found in their most simple form among the Ge. There also one finds a birdnester and a jaguar; but whereas, in the first case, the human hero obtains from the jaguar the means of cooking in the form of a domestic hearth, in the second case it is the jaguar himself who becomes fuel for the fire of destruction (the converse of cooking fire), so that tobacco may be born from his ashes.

Whereas it was demonstrated that the origin myths of cooking made much of what we then called 'silent behaviour' or 'deaf behaviour', as a mediator of relations between sky and earth, nature and culture, life and death, cooking demands silence. And a comparison with the noisy rites associated with eclipses and, in the narrower domain of popular

European folklore, the reprehensible unions sanctioned by the *charivari* had suggested that these were all members of the same class in mythical thought.

As the inquiry broadened, we integrated into this dualistic scheme more complex oppositions between different modalities of noise. It was thus that a link was established, on the one hand, between honey, the hollow trees where the bees made their hive, the trough serving for the preparation of hydromel, and the drum; on the other hand, between tobacco and the calabash rattles associated with it in myth, for these are the instruments for the summoning of spirits. Further, in so far as the myths of the origin of honey tell of periods of hunger when the only food was provided by the products of the forest — in other words, the dry season — it seemed remarkable that these myths gave such prominence to instruments such as castanets, bullroarers and rattles, which do not figure in the South American repertoire of musical instruments or are found only occasionally and are thus not generally noticed. These instruments are, however, well known in European folklore, which associated them, certainly from a pre-Christian epoch, since they exist also in China, with a period of crisis, when domestic hearths are extinguished and when the diet is subject to severe restrictions (the 'instruments of darkness').

The situation is quite different in Guyana, where the tobacco myths of origin principally refer to the use of tobacco as a stupefying drug and emetic in shamanistic rites of initiation, and where the myths are indirectly influenced by the absence of hydromel in the symmetrically opposed position of fermented drink. As we had postulated initially, there are indeed two types of myths about the origin of honey, and two about the origin of tobacco.

Finally, we sought to discover the invariant elements of the reconstituted totality. These were established at three levels. First, as with cooking, we encounter the transition from Nature to Culture. But the direction of the relation is inverted according to whether we consider honey or tobacco. Honey, and the methods of finding and eating it, represent a kind of emergence of Nature into Culture. Conversely tobacco, which is the means of communication with the supernatural world and which is used to summon the spirits, corresponds to a manifestation of Culture in the very bosom of Nature. This opposition also exists at the culinary level, since — at least in South America, where the honey of the *melipones* is too strong and even toxic — it is necessary to add *water* before it can be eaten, whereas tobacco has to be consumed in *fire* before use. Secondly, it was noted that the myths were specially attentive to the rhythm of the seasons, and that certain differences between, for example, the myths of Chaco and those of Guyana could be resolved by taking account of

differences in climate and corresponding economic activities. But the most striking analogies occurred within a system of acoustic signs. We thus returned to a problem already formulated in the previous year: the symbolic representations of the transition from Nature to Culture, or the temporary regression from the latter to the former that rituals sometimes impose, are thus found to employ, in myths drawn from communities widely separated in time and space, a common type of 'acoustic code'.

3

The Origin of Table Manners, 1 (1963—4)

In pursuit of the investigation begun two years ago, we endeavoured in Monday's and Tuesday's courses to explore three aspects of the matter. First, from a strictly geographical viewpoint, it was necessary to follow up certain mythical schemes, which until then had been illustrated by South American examples, into North America; here they appeared in transmogrified form, and these changes had to be explained. Secondly, with the change in hemisphere other differences became evident, which seemed the more significant, given that the armature of the myths remained unchanged. Thus, whereas the myths already examined gave prominence to spatial oppositions such as high and low, sky and earth, sun and humankind, the South American examples that appeared crucial for comparison between the two hemispheres principally invoked temporal oppositions such as slow and rapid, equal and unequal periods, day and night, etc. Thirdly, the myths examined this year differed from the others in what could be called a 'literary' respect, in style and narrative construction. Instead of being tightly structured, the narrative was divided into 'layers' or episodes that were seemingly modelled on each other, but with no evident logic behind their numbers.

However, close analysis of a myth of this type from the Tukuna Indians, who inhabit the banks of the Solimões river in mid-Amazonia, revealed that a series of episodes was less uniform than had earlier appeared. The series concealed a system with properties surpassing the manifest formal structure. Effectively, the serial narrative appeared as a limiting value on the possible transformations assumed by other myths, but which, with their successive appearances, progressively lost the structural characteristics that linked them to their ethnographic references. All that remained in the end was a weakened form with the power to reproduce itself a certain number of times, and no more.

The form of a form therefore, this repetition thus appeared as the last gasp of a dying structure. If we momentarily leave the American

domain and consider comparable phenomena in our own civilization, particularly the popular novel and serial story (as with thrillers that retain the same hero, protagonists and dramatic form), literary genres of ours that seem closest to mythology, it seems possible that we have in this intermediate form an essential link between the myth and the novel proper, and evidence of a transition from one to the other.

Returning to the myths, it was shown that the example from the Tukuna Indians contained an episode in which a human wife who had been cut into small pieces partially survived by clinging to her husband's back. This episode, impossible to interpret in terms of the syntagmatic chain, and unclarified by the other South American myths, can be elucidated in relation to a paradigmatic system drawn from the myths of North America. The geographical shift was thus inevitable. However, it still required theoretical justification.

Further, the very fact that the myths of the Plains Indians posit an equivalence between the 'clinging woman' and a frog enriches with a new dimension our discussions of last year on the myths of tropical America that feature a frog heroine. In this new context, the analyses can be taken up again and made to yield anew with the assurance that a more general interpretation is justified. For it becomes evident that all the myths in this group can be assimilated to so many reciprocal variants, notwithstanding geographical distance and regardless of whether they originate in North or South America, on condition only that we respect the rules of a transformation that could be called rhetorical: namely, the 'clinging woman' being none other, in her literal expression, than a female personage who is also metaphorically described in this manner in popular parlance among ourselves. This validation at a distance, in myths from widely separated and differing groups, of figures of speech in our own language (but which have their local analogues in every tongue) appears to us like a mode of ethnographic proof similar to what philosophy asks of other forms of reduction.

Simultaneously there is clarification of the logical function and semantic position of another mythological personage, symmetrical with the preceding one and which frequently accompanies it. This time it is a man, rather than a woman; and distant, as opposed to close. But his assiduity is no less real and insidious, since he is equipped with an abnormally long penis that enables him to overcome the problem of distance.

After thus resolving the problem presented by the final episode of the Tukuna myth, we considered another episode, no less obscure. This consisted of a journey by canoe, the significance of which is revealed in the Guyanese myths. For here the passengers are said to be really the sun and the moon, in the respective roles of steersman

and rower. They are both close (because in the same boat), and distanced (the one behind, the other in front): *at the right distance*, therefore, as the two celestial bodies should properly be so as to guarantee the regular alternation of day and night; and as day and night should themselves be at the time of equinox.

This demonstration coincided with a report in an American magazine of a discovery from Tikal, Guatemala, of bone engravings by a Mayan artist of a mythological motif that we were in course of investigating and of determining the fundamental significance. We were thus able to put forward an initial interpretation of these archaeological findings, their importance confirmed by their presence in the tomb of a high priest, at the same time that we were tracing the geographical extension of the same motif.

We were thus able to make a further advance. In effect, we had successively established that an Amazonian myth related, on the one hand, to a Frog Wife and, on the other, to two masculine protagonists who represented celestial bodies; and then, that the Clinging Woman motif could be interpreted by reference to a frog, due to the consolidation into a single group of myths originating in both South and North America.

Further, it became evident that in the same regions of North America to which our attention had been led — the northern plains and the upper Missouri basin — all these motifs were explicitly juxtaposed in the celebrated 'Star Husband' cycle, wherein the two brothers Sun and Moon, who are in search of ideal partners, quarrel about the respective merits of human beings and frogs.

After summarizing and discussing the interpretation of this episode by the eminent American mythographer Stith Thompson, we gave our reasons for seeing in it not a local and belated variant, but an integral transformation of other known versions of this myth, which is diffused over a vast area stretching from eastern Canada to Alaska, and from regions south of Hudson Bay to the rim of the Gulf of Mexico.

Through analysis of all the variants, totalling a dozen, of the Quarrel of the Sun and Moon, we elicited an axiom of an 'equinoxial' kind, sometimes explicit in the myths, which brought us back to hypotheses concerning a transition from a spatial to a temporal axis, initially proposed in connection with the South American myths only. But we then found that there was more to this transition than a simple change of axis. For the poles of the temporal axis did not appear as *terms*, but rather as *interval*-types, opposable according to their duration, whether long or short, in such a way that they already constituted a system of relations between differentially distanced terms. In comparison with those studied in the preceding years, these new myths exhibited the greatest complexity, since they depended on

relations between relations, rather than simply on relations between terms.

To develop the structural analysis of mythical thought, we now saw it as necessary to employ models of several types between which there was always the possibility of movement, and with the manifest difference from one to another understandable as a function of particular mythical content. From this perspective, the decisive transition appeared to occur at the level of the astronomical code wherein the constellations, characterized by a slow periodicity (because seasonal), and strongly structured in virtue of the contrast between ways of life and techno-economic activities, gave place in the newly introduced myths to singular celestial bodies such as the sun and moon, whose diurnal and nocturnal alternation defined another type of periodicity, one both shorter and also constant, in spite of seasonal variations. This periodicity within a periodicity contrasts, by reason of its serial character, with the other, englobing periodicity, while being exempt from the same monotony.

At the same time, therefore, that we prepared to enlarge our field of study and that we already began to consider the mythology of North America, the work carried out this year also produced a positive result: the establishment of both foundation and form for a whole group of myths, and the demonstration of a novel-like style at the very heart of mythology. Despite its formal character, this new style is bound to mythical transformations affecting the content.

4

The Naked Man, 1 (1965–6)

Monday's and Tuesday's courses saw us begin the last stage of an inquiry that was to continue for several years. After eliciting a certain number of mythical structures common to all the peoples of South America, we sought to discover them in North America — not, of course, in strictly identical form, but modified by the history and environment of each ethnic group. Preliminary soundings, notably in 1963–4, had been enough to assure us that this was no vain endeavour, but it still remained to tackle the problem head-on.

The matter was complicated by the fact that we were pursuing the inquiry in a region which, at first sight, appeared to have little in common with tropical America. For it is the tribes belonging to the Salish and Sahaptin linguistic families whose myths afford the most striking resemblances to those from South America in which we have discerned a topographical value. However, the Salish and Sahaptin peoples live to the west of the Rocky Mountains, between 40° and 55° N. These are hunters, fishers and gatherers who, lacking agriculture, are further distinct from the tropical peoples. It is therefore appropriate to consider their geographical and historical characteristics. Should the region comprising the plateau of the Colombia River and the Great Basin be seen as a dead-end or as a place of refuge?

Since the use of radio-carbon dating in archaeology, the accepted dates for the beginning of human habitation in the Americas have been put back considerably. There is general agreement that it goes back at least to the tenth millennium. Much earlier dates, which were initially welcomed with enthusiasm, have since been contested.[1] From the north to the south of the region we are concerned with, there are several indications of continued occupation of certain sites since the

[1] Since these lines were written earlier datings, of the order of several dozen millennia, have gained increasing acceptance.

eighth millennium. So far unexplained is the scattered incidence of large stone tools shaped by striking. Palaeolithic in appearance, they have been found only on the surface, which precludes dating.

For the moment, let us simply register the co-existence and development from ancient times of three cultures in western North America: a riverine culture on the Plateau; a so-called desert culture in the Great Basin, which turned to agriculture in the south-west about three millennia before our era; and the discovery of an 'ancient culture of the Cordillera' in the northern Rockies, which also suggests archaic habitation. There is therefore no reason to rule out the possibility that the Salish, who are now commonly termed an isolated people, and the Sahaptin, who belong to the great Penutian group distributed all along the Pacific coast, have occupied their present territories for several thousand years. Glottochronological studies, which should be used with care, suggest the same conclusion. One is therefore tempted to see in the Salish and Penutian peoples evidence of ancient waves of migration which left some representatives confined between the mountains and the ocean, while the remainder, passing to the east of the Rockies, went on into South America long before the advent of the Athapaskans, the Sioux and the Algonkin. According to this hypothesis, the close relationship observed between the myths of a northern region of North America and those of tropical America would appear less strange.

Coming then to the myths, we have decided to restrict ourselves this year to those of the Sahaptin, and particularly of the Klamath of southern Oregon and of the Modoc of northern California, these being two neighbouring and linguistically related tribes that are generally treated as separate from the Sahaptin proper. The work of Gatschet and of Spier on the Klamath, of Ray on the Modoc, and finally of Murdock on the Tenino has enabled us to outline the major features of economic and social life. These authors have also provided the materials for mythological inquiry, together with the collections of Curtin and of Boas and those, more recently, of Jacobs and of Barker. Several versions of the South American 'birdnester' myth have been selected and discussed. We have been specially concerned to reveal the transformations undergone by the astronomical code common to all these myths in the passage from the southern to the northern hemisphere; and we have been able to show that their regularity proves that, despite expected differences — and even, perhaps, because of them — we are dealing with very much the same myth.

5

The Origin of Table Manners, 2 (1966–7)

The lectures on Monday and Tuesday have this year taken a turn that was not anticipated when they were announced as being on 'Representations and Beliefs about the Origin of Culture in the Northwest of North America'. In fact, the inquiries of which we were going to reveal the results have confronted us with a problem impossible to ignore, and which it was necessary to attempt to resolve before continuing with the task of the past few years.

The truth is that the difficulty was not entirely unexpected. We had already encountered it two years ago, but had chosen to avoid it. But it reappeared before us in the same terms, in connection with myths originating in other regions of North America. This very recurrence made it obvious that the problem was not contingent, but reflected certain obscure, though none the less essential properties of the mythical universe of which we were seeking to discover the nature and significance. In consequence, its correct solution assumed a methodological value: once again, it was necessary to establish whether or not the myths contained gratuitous information. In the negative case, the test to which we were about to submit the myths would be the more important, given that we had tried in vain to adopt a contrary hypothesis.

What, then, is the problem? Myths that undeniably belong to the same group when considered from a systematic viewpoint, but that come from three distinct regions of North America — the west coast, the Great Lakes and the central Plains — assign major importance to groups of human or supernatural personages that are always ten or twelve in number, larger figures than peoples without writing usually deploy in their narratives. Moreover, these figures frequently result from the multiplication by two of a five- or six-base. Finally, the multiplication procedure tends to repeat itself during the course of the same myth, either by reiterated application of the same multiplier to the product of the preceding operation, or by raising the decade to the

second power, or by the substitution for the first product of its arithmetic sum, so as to carry out other operations from there.

Thus formulated, the problem could not be simply approached by placing oneself at the level of the myths. It was first necessary to consider the numerical systems in use among the North American tribes, to investigate their logical and empirical basis, and to study their modes of utilization. But then one encountered a double difficulty, partly practical and partly theoretical. In the first place, these systems are complex and curiously distributed: they are nearly all decimal to the east of the Rockies, whereas on the other side a great diversity of formulae flourishes — quinary, quinary—decimal, decimal—vigesimal, vigesimal, quaternary, etc. Although all the myths in question come from groups characterized by a decimal system, they are absent from other groups that, in this respect, are no different. But can we be certain in this area? Our categories and classifications are as ill suited to the numerical systems as they are to the languages of which those systems form a part or aspect. And as soon as one deepens the analysis, it is found that two systems, unmistakably decimal, are based on different internal principles or organization, which may also be opposed among themselves.

Without doing more than sketch the general lines of an inquiry that anthropologists have too often neglected when studying societies with a low level of technology, or which are so considered, we concentrated our attention on calendars of ten months divided into two series of five that corresponded to winter and summer. Sometimes named after the fingers of the hand, these months also carry serial numbers. In consequence, specific appellations are lacking, or else they exist only for a series, the other consisting of months that are numbered, or modelled on a ceremonial system, or even, as the Zuni say, 'not named'. It seemed to us that a connection existed between this type of calendar and certain indigenous ideas about the maleficient character of multiplication by two. For if it was necessary, to obtain the year, to multiply by two a five-base corresponding to the number of months in each season, reiterating the same operation would engender a winter of ten months, rendered so severe by its length that men would not survive. One finds the same reasoning applied to the fingers of the hand which, to the number of ten, make an over-complicated and therefore useless organ.

This negative value of the decade pervades the myths. They certainly begin by positing groups of ten (sometimes increased to twelve through mechanisms we have described or interpreted), but they immediately set about reducing them. Furthermore, the character of these groups is always cosmological or political; they illustrate situations where either the number of months in the year, or that of the enemies of the

tribal group, is twice (meaning many, because of the iterative nature of the operation) too numerous. The myths evoke these catastrophic eventualities, only to overcome them through the institutions of seasonal periodicity or of martial rites, especially the taking of scalps. The mediatory function of these trophies in North America, a matter that has long exercised specialists because of its triple field of application to inter-tribal relations, family life and the control of the seasons, is thereby clarified.

At the same time we solved the problem that had earlier detained us, bearing on the fact that the same Plains myths, depending on whether or not they featured groups of ten soldiers, also referred either to the introduction of seasonal periodicity and biological rhythms, or to the institution of martial rites.

At the time of the appearance of Georges Dumézil's masterwork,[1] it was tempting to conclude with a brief comparison between North American beliefs and those of early Rome, where there is evidence of a primitive calendar of much the same type as those referred to at the beginning of our discussion. Like the American Indians, ancient Romans played with multiplication by two. Their calendar of twice five months attests to this, and it has another trait in common with America in that only the first months are named; those following are denoted by a serial number. Then, the Romans were familiar with collections of groups of the same power, but with unequal degrees of complexity. However, the arithmetic philosophies that in some ways resemble each other point to opposite conclusions. The Indians were afraid of the evil power of multiplication, and if it was evoked in their myths, this was to conjure away its effects. To the contrary, the Romans sought by analogical procedures to extend their vision of the future; if Remus had observed six vultures and Romulus twelve, it was possible to predict from this portentous sign that the life of the city would exceed twelve days, twelve months, twelve years, and since Rome had already passed the twelve-decade mark, the duration promised by the augury could not be less than twelve decades of decades, or twelve centuries . . . In this sense, the positive or negative connotation assigned by a society to large numbers would seem to be linked to that society's more or less explicit attitude towards its own future. For all of them, the mythology of large numbers provides a kind of index serving to evaluate what could be called their coefficient of historicity.

[1] Georges Dumézil, *La Religion romaine archaïque* (Paris, 1966).

6

The Naked Man, 2 (1967–8)

Monday's and Tuesday's lessons have been concerned with the evolution and self-modification of mythical representations common to human groups with diverse ways of life, technologies and social institutions.

In the course of the preceding years, we had been able to identify certain recurrent mythical schemes in widely separated parts of the two Americas. Not that the old mythography had been unaware of resemblances of this kind: it had been long recognized that some myths were of pan-American distribution, and that others inexplicably appeared in virtually identical form in the four corners of the New World. But, generally, these resemblances have been simply noted, then explained in terms of diffusion and borrowing. Such explanations must remain conjectural, given our present ignorance about pre-Columbian population movements.

Abandoning a *Why*? that eludes us and will perhaps always do so, we have concentrated on the *How*? of these recurrences. Nevertheless, they do not make an appearance independently of all the other myths possessed by a given cluster of peoples, who, for the purposes of the inquiry, can be treated as a separate entity. In the midst of such a group of peoples, all the myths are solidary in the sense that they are mutually transformational through changes of code, lexicology, or message, or on more than one of these levels simultaneously. Thus the myths of a group of peoples brought together by geography and history never appear as isolated objects. The only concrete object available to the investigator assumes the form of a *mythical field* of which the extent, limits and internal structure have to be determined. Then it is a matter of discovering how this field takes multiple forms like images of the same scene reflected in parallel mirrors, with each mirror possessing specific properties such that, for each image, a new law of symmetry emerges.

Our principal objective was not to establish that a myth first

analysed in its South American forms, all found in central Brazil, also exists in the extreme west of North America between the basins of the Fraser and Klamath rivers, and that outside these two areas of the myth's continuous diffusion, it also makes isolated appearances elsewhere. No, we were looking for something quite different, and what we have tried to show comprises two aspects. First, we tried to demonstrate that the transformation rules that had enabled us to reduce the South American myths to diverse expressions of a single system could be transposed to North America, where the method developed in central Brazil also led to the same result; thus the two mythical fields, despite their wide geographical separation, became integrally interchangeable. Secondly, and most important, we attempted to discover in what way this fundamental identity was masked in the content of the myths by alterations and displacements that could be interpreted as functions of the extremely different ways of life and social institutions in the two cases.

In fact, the indigenous societies of central Brazil that served as the starting point for our inquiry are characterized by a relatively low techno-economical level: some are even ignorant of pottery, but all practise slash-and-burn agriculture, certain of them with remarkable skill. In the same context, the North American tribes living between the Klamath and Fraser rivers, to the west of the Rockies, present a picture that hardly lends itself to comparison. Fishing and hunting are differentially important as between groups, but all devote much energy to gathering the wild produce of the bush. Pottery was absent, whereas weaving and plaiting were highly developed, and agriculture non-existent. If one were obliged to place the two groups in an evolutionary series, those in North America would doubtless receive an inferior ranking. The same result would follow if one considered the degree of internal complexity attained here and there by each society.

However, this conclusion would run counter to intuition. In North and South America alike, the cultures concerned have a hybrid character and their pseudo-archaicism, which appears in various degrees here and there, contrasts with an extreme refinement in certain domains. In what are now the states of Oregon and Washington, several tribes possessed a hierarchical social structure, differentiated according to rank and wealth. These collectors of roots and other wild produce stored up shell money, which was used in various kinds of commercial and matrimonial speculation, to the extent that the prohibition of close unions was founded, in indigenous thought, on the assimilation of matrimonial alliances to inter-tribal commercial exchanges.

The lower reaches of the Columbia river were not only renowned for

the fishing sites used by a great diversity of tribes at the time of the return of the salmon. The Chinook peoples inhabiting both banks organized fairs and markets, of which the most important was in the Dalles region, where the river began its course through the mountain chain of the Cascades; this was a convenient meeting place for the people of the coast and the interior.

There were exchanged skins, furs, fish-oil and fish-meal, dried meat, basketwork, clothing, shells, slaves and horses. All these products, sometimes transported over considerable distances, changed hands and were distributed in new directions, often to secondary markets where they became the objects of other transactions. How could such a complex organization, in which the needs of inter-tribal commerce imposed peaceful relations between groups (except those more distant, where military expeditions went to capture slaves, brought to market by their captors or by intermediary agents), not have profoundly affected mythical representations? A detailed analysis of myths, entirely comparable to those studies in central Brazil, has revealed a complete change of problematic. Admittedly, there are occasional narratives about the transition from the state of Nature to the state of Culture, the outcome of a series of catastrophic conjunctions of equal severity, finally overcome by an act of mediation. But whereas in South America the conquest of cooking fire definitively resolves the conflict between high and low, sky and earth, sun (or rain) and humanity, in the North American regions considered, this fire, whose origin is also explained in the myths, is situated among a series of goods defined by a sole criterion: what are those that are exchanged, shared or kept to oneself? Narratives that at first sight appear burlesque and arbitrary can be made to yield, through painstaking analysis, a whole economic philosophy. Therein relations between heterogeneous animal species, or, contrariwise, close companions within a family or variety — thus, among the felines, the predatory puma and the voluntarily carrion-eating lynx — serve to illustrate all possible attitudes towards goods and persons, from the 'each for himself' to the 'each for all', by way of the ever-giving and the twosome. At one end of the scale, cooking fire and drinking water are included in the category of things that are shared between neighbours; at the other end, women form part of the goods exchanged between strangers.

But there is more. According to whether the peoples considered live more or less far from the places where commercial transactions occur, and according to whether they participate in these more through business dealings or through military activities that provide slaves for the market, the myths take on different inflections. Their aetiological function is then less concerned with fishing, which is reduced to a

subordinate function, and more with hunting, which in the domain of food production exhibits a more combative and adventurous character; and there is less of fairs and markets, and more of competitive games. In effect, these also take place between strangers and can readily change into warfare — not at all, as with exchange, a transformation into a contrary, but more as a kind of substitute. In conclusion, we hope to have demonstrated that mythical discourse can evolve according to its own laws, while adapting itself, through logical mechanisms the complexity of which has been illustrated by an example, to the techno-economic infrastructure of each society.

7

Interlude: Fog and Wind (1968—9)

Monday's and Tuesday's courses were entirely devoted to the study of the relations between, on the one hand, the environment, way of life and social institutions of the Salish-speaking peoples, and, on the other, their mythology.

This inquiry has encountered certain difficulties, for the history and ethnography of the Salish, who occupy an area between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean that practically includes the basins of the Columbia and Fraser rivers, conspire to complicate the analyst's task. Christianized since the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the Salish of the Plateau owed to their pacific temperament and friendly attitude to the Whites their relatively tranquil existence until about 1870, apart from the ravages of epidemics. When, at this time, they were progressively confined to reservations, their culture was to undergo a change comparable with what had already occurred since influences from the Plains preceded by at least a century the advent of adventurers, colonizers and missionaries.

It is generally agreed, none the less, that, despite the diversity of tongues within the linguistic family, along with differences in dress, ways of life and social institutions between the coastal and interior peoples, there are many traits that attest to the originality of a culture in which internal differences appear only, and progressively, as one approaches the tribes of the Plains, on the one side, and those of the north-west Pacific coast, on the other. Archaeological research has confirmed that this is a part of America where human habitation is most ancient, going back to at least the tenth millennium. Sequences of occupation on the lower Fraser extend over 12,000 years. In Washington State, the so-called Marmes man goes back more than 11,000 years. In the same state, the opal and calcydon tools from Lind Coulée may be of the same age.

It seems evident that the Salish originally inhabited only a small part of their present area of diffusion, which apparently occurred

towards the east and south. This area, however, appears to be richly circumscribed with archaeological sites of great antiquity where there was continuous human occupation for long periods. And properly wary as one may be of the reconstructions of the school of glotto-chronology, their estimate of 6,000 or 7,000 years for the internal differentiation of the Salish language family appears significant. Though the existing tribes have been able to enlarge their territory, they still remain, like the heirs of the first occupants of this region, more or less in place.

By the beginning of the historical period, however, ways of life, technology, social institutions and religious beliefs differed considerably between Vancouver Island and the coast, between the northern coast and the coast of Puget Sound, between the coast, the Gulf of Georgia and the interior, between the river valleys and the Plateau. The western populations possessed a strictly hierarchical social organization in which birth, primogeniture and wealth created distinctions between aristocrats, commoners and slaves. The peoples of the interior, on the other hand, were amorphous in all these respects, several of them even lacking concepts of heredity and rank; or else, like the peoples of the east and south, they founded their social hierarchy, following the example of the adjacent Plains peoples, on civic or martial merit.

At the level of material culture, the people of Vancouver Island, and to a lesser extent those of the coast, built what must be the largest houses ever recorded among so-called 'primitives': their irregular hangars, with plank walls and roofing, could be several hundred metres long. The habitations of the interior were quite different: in summer, they consisted of rudimentary shelters covered with mats or bark; in winter, pyramidal cabins half buried in the ground and with earth-covered roofs that were demolished in the spring. According to whether or not people lived near the open sea, straits, rivers or lakes, fishing and hunting (if not the gathering of roots, bulbs, wild fruits and berries, practised everywhere with enthusiasm), occupied different positions in the economy.

Notwithstanding these considerable differences, there is an underlying commonality that distinguishes the mythology of the region. With the exception of the eastern groups — the Lake Indians, the Coeur d'Alène, the Flathead — among whom may be observed, in varying degrees, something resembling tribal organization that is obviously borrowed from the Plains, the Salish recognize neither tribe nor state. No doubt they feel a vague solidarity with peoples speaking the same language or dialect. That apart, the extended family among the western peoples, the semi-nomadic band or semi-permanent village among the northern or central peoples, the local group in the south

provide the only basis of social order. Whether hereditary or elective, chiefship rarely confers any real authority. Even the aristocratic societies of Vancouver Island (where rank order and family prestige have to be constantly reaffirmed through sumptuary feasts and the distribution of wealth), it has been said that in the absence of administrative control or state, government reposes on the strict observance of rules instilled from childhood.

Whether one is dealing with lineages, families, bands or villages, it is everywhere a matter of small autonomous social units. This particularism could hardly fail to make its impression on the myths of which, for each dialect group (and despite the enormous gaps in the documentation), we possess multiple versions which differ from each other more profoundly, and in a greater variety of ways, than is generally the case. It seems as if the raw material of the myths, being broken into tiny pieces, has come together again in a capricious mosaic in which the same elements appear in diverse combinations. As a result, the boundaries between different types of myth become difficult, if not impossible, to determine. One is constantly at a loss to decide whether one is going from one variant to another of the same myth, or from one type of myth to another which one had at first assumed to be distinct.

This instability of the mythical material can also be explained by other factors. As much on the coast as in the interior, the Salish readily entered into marriages with neighbouring or distant groups, either to extend the network of political alliances or because the *pax selica* that reigned in the interior rendered this kind of marriage as easy, if not more easy than others, because of a kinship system founded on bilineal descent and entailing a prohibition on marriage between close cousins. As commercial transactions were pursued with an equal enthusiasm to matrimonial ones, and both necessitated frequent visiting, it is reasonable to suppose that, throughout Salish territory, each myth, regardless of its origin, quickly became common property. But each of these numberless social units would receive the myth in its own fashion. Thus the study of Salish mythology offers a particular methodological interest. Is it or is it not possible to elicit transformation rules and structure from a totality that can be identified and recognized, but which, in this case, seems to be unceasingly decomposed and recomposed by minuscule societies whose politically amorphous character and mutual permeability lead one to suppose that here the grand mythical themes possessed in common with South American cultures no longer exist, save in a fragmented state?

None the less, we were able to discover among the Salish a cognate mythology to that found among other groups in the preceding years, but based on an original pair of terms linked by correlation and

opposition: Fog and Wind. However, traces of this pair also exist in South America, in Guarani cosmology. Furthermore, the Fog—Wind couple exhibits an undeniable homology with that which other American groups (and the Salish themselves, in a series of parallel myths to be studied shortly) constitute through Fire and Water. Like cooking fire, fog is interposed between sky and earth, sun and humankind: partly separating, partly assuring communication between these pairs. For its part, wind disperses fog, as rain soaks the hearth and extinguishes fire. The armature is therefore the same in both places, and we were able to interpret apparent anomalies in Salish and Sahaptin mythology, when compared with other groups, by a reformulation that made it appear as a negative image of a more widely distributed positive model.

This transformation is partly explained by the need felt by the coastal peoples, or by the opportunity they have made use of, to find a place in their myths for objective conditions, inherent in their geographical environment: in this maritime region, with its numerous gulfs, straits and inlets, blessed with a mild climate and plentiful rain, fog is a fact of life. But an interpretation in terms of physical environment would remain at the surface of things. The most important point, which we have endeavoured to bring out, relates to the fact that the 'positive' and 'negative' mythical series develop in parallel, tied respectively to two animal personages which, we can show on other grounds, from the Athabaskans of the north to the eastern Pueblos of the south, also form a pair of terms in correlation and opposition. In one series, the artful Coyote and his son, who plays the role of mediator, preside over fire and water. In the other series, the culture hero Lynx and his son preside over fog and wind.

From this double series constantly emerge images and symbols evocative of twinship and connoted in the myths by means of plants — conifer branches, *Peucedanum*, *Balsamorhizza*, etc. — which form a veritable system, wherein they are assigned a ritual function in connection with cooking in earthern ovens or in the presentation of animals which, according to region, the Salish and their northern neighbours associate with twins: bears, wolves, salmon.

These findings have thrown a new light on the place and role of twins in mythical representations in the two Americas. Twinship is far from being a self-evident symbol, as has often been claimed: its meaning resides in the fact that the divine twins are incompletely godlike, being conceived of different fathers. Out of the unbridgeable gulf between them there ensues a series of consequences which, at the cosmological level, assert the impossibility of reconciling extremes. Near and far, water and fire, high and low, sky and earth, sun and humankind — despite the nostalgic dream, these can never be true

twins. The same divide gives rise in the sociological and economic domains to the emergence of pairs of antimonies: Indians and non-Indians, comrades and enemies, abundance and scarcity, etc.

Confronted with these antinomies, each twin reacts in a different way. One seeks to resolve them through his own mediation, whereas another institutes or perpetuates them through his separatist zeal. At all levels of the real, this latter therefore bears the special responsibility for the maintenance of a dualism which, no less than mediation, is a constitutive aspect of the universal order.

With this feature in mind, one can understand why Salish mythology has shown itself to be so receptive to certain European folkloristic themes, French in particular, disseminated since the eighteenth century by the Canadian lumberjacks. In this folklore, the function of the hero—separator eclipses that of the mediator. And since the production of antinomies by the indigenous myths has reserved, as it were, a vacant slot for non-Indians even before encountering them, the tales that these strangers told to the Indians found, by their very nature and origin, a way into a system that already took account as a metaphysical presupposition of the existence, albeit irreconcilable with its own, of the Other.

8

The Naked Man, 3 (1969–70)

Leading up to this year, last year's courses had two principal objects: on the one hand, to outline the ethnography of the Salish-speaking peoples; on the other, to resolve certain preliminary problems that seemed to set their mythology apart from the mythical systems of North America. These difficulties disposed of, we were able to devote Monday's and Tuesday's courses this year to a complex configuration of myths with numerous recorded variants. Their interest for us lay in the fact that, despite geographical distance and differences of language, culture and environment, these narratives reproduced in almost literal fashion the South American myths we began to study eight years ago. This inquiry should be completed next year.

Progressively, we extracted the cosmological implications from a myth of the Bororo of central Brazil that deals with a family quarrel. It would seem that the Salish were also fully aware of these implications, for they were not satisfied with having a lonely hero, whose jealous father wanted him dead, suffering at the top of a tree or clinging to a precipitous rockface: they dispatched their hero to heaven where, in his wanderings, he met with complicated adventures which this year's lessons are concerned with interpreting. What is more, these adventures duplicate other, terrestrial ones, undergone previously by the hero and then by his father. Finally, intermediary myths allow us to invest the motif of the visit to heaven with a still greater value, for they introduce us to other narratives that concern a primordial war waged by the earth people against the sky people to obtain fire. From a myth about the temporary loss of cooking fire in a village, following torrential rain which swamped the domestic hearths, we go on to a myth about the origin of culture, and perhaps the exemplary origin myth of all civilized life.

Between the Sahaptin, examined in the same perspective two years ago, and the Salish, the Nez-Percé are intermediate by virtue both of their belonging to the proto-Sahaptin linguistic family and their

geographical situation adjoining the Plateau Salish. Already, one finds among them an inflection of the reference myths, differences we were able to correlate with contrasting ways of life. Fishers and hunters like their neighbours the Salish, the Nez-Percé were also the last easterly exponents of the textile crafts that on the other side of the Rockies, are almost non-existent in the Plains. One can therefore understand that for the Nez-Percé more than for others, the practice of these crafts would appear like a touchstone distinguishing civilization from barbarism. Whence the conversion, in myths otherwise identical with those of the Salish, from a code inspired by the hunt to one based on various aspects of basket-making and plaiting.

Approaching the Salish myths through those of their neighbours the Nez-Percé, it was necessary to show how an initial sequence not found elsewhere is integrated into a transformation group occurring among the Klamath-Modoc on one side, and among the Sahaptin and the coastal Salish on the other. This sequence, in the course of which the trickster god tries by various means to fabricate an artificial son, relates to other sequences examined earlier in which a male personage of the same type incorporates into himself a child he has acquired, or becomes really pregnant. This sequence must also be related to the coastal myths, where it is given contrary expressions: fabrication of two artificial daughters instead of a son, who voluntarily leave their father, in contrast to the father's exiling of his son, always in connection with attempted incest.

This son reaches heaven, where he visits a succession of diverse and mysterious personages, some of them hostile, others helpful to the extent that he is able to return to earth; there some no less strange companions await him. It is impossible to go into details here, since these vary considerably in different versions. However, we were able to reconstruct a coherent schema on the basis of these data, which highlighted the fundamental importance attached in indigenous thought to the concept of contiguity. Whether it is a question of high and low, near and far, land and sea, the mythical problematic continually seeks to resolve the same problem resulting from an antinomy between an excessive contiguity, productive of confusion and disorder, or an equally excessive distance that denies all possibility of mediation. In this context, we subjected to close analysis a celebrated mythological motif of great importance among the Salish and to which the mythologists have given the Old World name of *symplegades.*[a] We

[a] The original Simplegades were so-called 'moving rocks' off the coast of Turkey, mentioned by the classical authors Strabo and Euripides as a notorious hazard to sailors. The term has been used figuratively in mythological studies to refer to a perilous transition between worlds.

think we have found a satisfactory interpretation of it under the dual aspects of spatial and temporal periodicity.

Continuing to follow the thread of mythical narrative, we next examined the adventures of the hero's father, after his son's revenge on him. These adventures take him into the country of the salmon, at that time unknown to human beings. He liberates the fish, conducting them into rivers and streams; he orders their distribution according to the welcome given by these strange people, or their daughters, to his offers of marriage or, sometimes, less honourable propositions. But it also happens, in myths originating in the same group, that the same personage leans towards endogamy rather than exogamy, and invents a trick to marry his own daughter. All these possibilities have been itemized, classified and ordered so that a general picture emerges: a vast sociological, economic and cosmological system in which multiple correspondences are established between the distribution of fish in the hydrographic network, the fairs and markets where commodities are exchanged, their temporal periodicity and that of the fishing seasons, and finally a picture of exogamy, for women are exchanged between groups like foodstuffs, and the myths make of the enjoyment of abundant and varied food a function, one might almost say, of the openness of each micro-society to the outside, according to whether they are more or less disposed to practise matrimonial exchange. Thus the mythology is illuminated by the forms of practical existence, and illuminates them in its turn.

The geographical order is confused with historical evolution in the myths. Thus the same schema explains at one and the same time that certain riverine peoples fish often and successfully because of the configurations of the river banks where they live or because of the depth of the river, whereas the mountain peoples, like those of the Similkameen Basin who speak a different language and may be Athabaskan intruders from the north such as are known to have lived in the region, live off wild sheep or mountain goats rather than fish.

Through the empirical fact of resemblance between the myths of North and South America, we therefore attain to the deep reasons for this similarity. An identical problematic engenders them, for the South American myths had independently, and allowing for contingent differences, elicited the same type of interpretations as the North American narratives. An important conclusion of this year's courses was to establish the existence among the Salish of a major mythological motif in a completely explicit form: that of the canoe voyage of the moon and sun, which we have recently reconstituted on hypothetico-deductive grounds in South American mythology, where it does not openly appear. Again, the Salish express it in both myth and ritual, such as, in the central region of Puget Sound, the canoe voyage of the

shamans to the land of the dead to recover the souls of the departed; or, among the Salish-speaking Bella Coola, isolated far to the north of the mass of Salish speakers, in the form of an annual toing and froing of the mystic canoe that leads the salmon to the springtime rivers and streams, and later, another canoe that carries the masked protagonists in the great ceremonies of winter.

In conclusion, we set out and analysed the zoological code through which the myths embody important oppositions, for example, between various forms of periodicity — astronomical, telluric, meteorological and biological — and whether these are expressed along a spatial or temporal axis. Rodents like the beaver, the porcupine or Big Bear, and the aplodontie, which is found only in this area, or birds like the woodpecker, the American merlin, the junco, the singing finch, the winter wren and the titmouse function in the myth like so many 'zoemes', comparable to the linguistic phonemes in their differentiation of meanings. The semantic values connoted by them are sometimes so precise and subtle that we were able to recognize and identify by their differential functions varieties or species that the vernacular tends to conflate under the same name.

9

The Naked Man, 4 (1970–1)

The courses on Monday and Tuesday have carried to its conclusion a lengthy enterprise which has lasted for a total of nine years. In the beginning we had little idea of the magnitude of the task, and in the 1962–3 account of our teaching, though recognizing that complex problems remained unresolved, we still hoped to complete the inquiry the following year. But even this postponement we had allowed ourselves was inadequate to the dimensions of a long journey round the mythology of the New World; beginning in central Brazil in 1961–2, it was to come to an end at the point of involution of the major themes of American mythology, situated on the Pacific coast between 40° and 50° N. In appearance, therefore, it is very far from the starting point from a geographical point of view, but in fact, because the same myths with which the analysis began are also found here, and because their deep significance becomes manifest only in this place, it is an ideological site, which endows the notion of Return with its full significance.

In this year's course, three phases or stages may none the less usefully be distinguished. An initial series of lessons was devoted to rapid surveys of several parts of the North American continent, beginning with the territories west of the Rockies that make up the basins of the Columbia and Fraser rivers and to which the last two years' investigations have led. In this region, which is occupied by groups belonging to the Salish linguistic family, we have gradually been able to reconstitute a complex mythological system, identical to that discovered in equatorial and tropical South America. Before pushing the analysis of this system to a conclusion, it therefore seemed appropriate to verify whether its centre of gravity indeed lay where we had proposed, and that it did not also extend to the east and south.

The system does not disappear in these two directions, but it does become weaker and change. Proceeding in stages, we established the

continuity of the system from the Salish as far as the western and southern Algonkin, such as the Cree, Blackfoot and Arapaho; then from the Salish until the central Algonkin, such as the Ojibwa, and to the Dakota and Omaha, who are members of the Sioux linguistic family; finally, to the Iroquois in the east, and the Ute and Navajo in the south. These are not uni-directional, for the terminal myths throw light in their turn on those that had served as a point of departure. Cross-cutting links were also discovered between the principal itineraries we had proposed to follow, without expecting to see them join up.

So the missing elements in the 'myths of entry' can be restored with the aid of the 'myths of exit', which contain them in a different form. We therefore find that all the myths that initially appeared as distinct entities belong to a semantic field that one could imagine to be made up of possible pre-existing fields, and within which it seems that each version chooses certain themes among others, and has the responsibility of finding the right way to articulate them in narrative.

All the same, this interpretation would hardly be plausible if the mythical mathematics did not rest on very simple operations of a fundamental nature, which recurred in diverse parts of the continent. The second part of the course was therefore devoted to showing how, from one end of the New World to the other, peoples with ways of life, manners and customs that have nothing in common have tenaciously sought and succeeded in finding in the most varied climates certain forms of animal and vegetable life, assimilating some of them to the function of an algorithm in the service of mythical thought, so as to effect the same operations.

We carried on this demonstration by examining the role assigned to various animals in the two hemispheres: birds of the Galliform order, whose flesh has the supposed characteristic, paradoxical in indigenous eyes, of lacking fat; flatfish and certain insects, such as butterflies, that seem large when viewed in outline and slender in profile; other insects such as ants, flies and wasps, whose bodies seem divided into halves that naturally symbolize the two terms of an oppositional pair; and also tree-living quadrupeds that appear to describe a half-circle according to whether they are ascending or descending a tree-trunk; all animals, then, whose anatomy or behaviour renders them specially apt to translate into the empirical mode logical relations of a binary type and indeed serve this purpose, according to the rudimentary algebra which, it would seem, underlies all mythology.

Having illustrated with examples the simple principles of mythical operations, we were able to return to the general picture of American mythology as it could now, near the end of the course of teaching, be displayed. The picture appeared to be coherent, but problems remained

in respect of its origin, history and meaning. For it represented something, for all that numberless painters, separated by thousands of miles and belonging to different languages and cultures, had each contributed no more than a tiny fragment. And yet, none the less, all these fragments were inter-related, complementing or counterbalancing each other.

One could begin to answer these questions if the synthetic image we had created, as if in a laboratory, from 1,000 or 1,500 myths, reproduced an object existing somewhere in the natural state. But in such a case, two hypotheses were possible. Either this real object could be reduced to an unconscious schema that generated the same phenomena in different places, and whose existence would therefore be unverifiable, except through its indirect effects; and thus there would be the possibility of taking account of apparent confusions, to resolve contradictions, to elucidate ethnographic problems and to achieve an economy of solutions in all these domains. Or, on the contrary, that in the heart of the relatively confined territory to which our inquiry had led us, certain localized myths with a number of variant forms conferred a concrete existence on the ideological edifice that, in order to interpret and inter-relate some hundreds of myths, we had laboriously pieced together.

In the event, this latter possibility was seen to be confirmed in a part of the geographical area that we had been gradually approaching. Small coastal groups living between roughly 43° and 50° N synthesize in their myths motifs which appear elsewhere in totally distinct narratives, but which, in order to understand them, we had been obliged to consider as so many states of the same transformation group. These contiguous peoples, who most often belonged to different linguistic families — Coos, Siuslaw, Alsea, Tillamook, Quinault, Quileute, etc. — therefore achieve a real unification of mythical themes originally encountered by us in dispersed form. At the same time they elaborate, by investing it with cosmic proportions, a conflict which had been everywhere evident, but which the myths of tropical America reduced to a minor quarrel occurring at the level of the village, or even of the household. Beginning with a version from which the motif indeed appeared totally absent, we had nevertheless discovered behind this myth the problem of the origin of cooking fire, and hence of the transition from Nature to Culture; a problem that these coastal peoples expound by presenting it in the form of a war of the earth against the sky, which followed the carrying off of women and eventuated precisely in the conquest of fire. Their myths furnished a kind of experimental proof of propositions to which we have been led by hypothetico-deductive means: namely, that the sociological relation between wife-takers and wife-givers was conceived in

indigenous thought as homologous with the opposition of sky and earth, high and low; and that between these extreme terms, fire in the cultural order and women in the social order equally play the role of mediator.

It remained to understand why a multitude of cultural leads converged on a confined region of North America to which ethnography, at least in this respect, had paid no particular attention. None the less, it is there that one finds juxtaposed the weakest and strongest forms of the myths based on the theme of the war of the Earth people against the Sky people.

This state of affairs can be explained in two ways. One theory would have the peoples occupying the geographical region in question maintaining through conservatism the richest and most vigorous forms of a mythological system that became fragmented in diffusing towards the east and south; proceeding in the contrary direction from far distant places, the analysis had gradually reconstituted the myths before rediscovering the intact system in a privileged region. An alternative theory would propose, on the contrary, that totally distinct narratives came to join up with each other like so many elements of a possible system actualized by a synthetic function. From an analytical point of view, the two hypotheses are equivalent because, starting from either and inverting all the signs, the operations implied would unfold in the same way. Given the fact that the global system one is trying to restore is closed, it amounts to the same thing whether it is explored from the centre outwards to the periphery, or from the surface towards the interior: in any case, its intrinsic curvature makes sure that it will be eventually covered in its totality.

Certainly, local-level analyses enable one to establish relations of priority between certain mythical transformations. But when one attains to a sufficiently elevated perspective that the system can be viewed from outside rather than from inside, the relevance of historical considerations is annihilated at the same time as criteria permitting one to distinguish between prior and antecedent states of the system.

However, even after adopting this radical point of view, certain historical points of anchorage remain. In conclusion, we were able to set out a number of cultural traits held in common by the main groups — the Ge in South America, the Salish in North America — whose myths have, as it were, formed the spinal column of the system we have studied and discussed during the past nine years. In these groups, then, the earthen oven is of central importance in culinary techniques, and has given rise to similar ideological constructs among both peoples. Owing to what is often a considerable complexity of construction, its frequently collective character, the knowledge and care required for its proper functioning, the slowness of the cooking

process, which may last for several days, accompanied until the last moment by uncertainty as to the results; furthermore, this anxiety is compounded by the irreversible committal to the oven of vast quantities of food, the provisions of several families and their only hope of subsistence until the end of the winter. This earthen oven is the terrestrial, if not chthonic counterpart of the celestial entrance evoked in the myths of two hemispheres, and through which, its location marked by the Pleïades, children denied food escape from their families.

Analysis and discussion of the ideology of the earthen oven, together with associated prohibitions and prescriptions, in two widely separated regions of the Americas have thus underscored the fact that the formal study of myths, far from turning its back on matters related to the techno-economic infrastructure of the relevant societies, necessarily brings us back to these considerations, in so far as structural studies throw light on the modalities of practical existence, which then illuminate our studies in their turn.

PART III

Inquiries into Mythology and Ritual

1

Three Hopi Gods (1959–60)

Wednesday's course touched on certain aspects of the rites and religious representations of the Hopi Indians of Arizona. In particular, we were concerned with examining the relations between three divinities that are often associated in ritual, and that are held to be kin or affines: Muyingwu, the god of germination, his sister Tuwapongtumsi, 'the late lady with the altar of sand', and her husband Masau'u, god of the bush, of fire and of death. These kin relationships are found especially among the Hopi of the third mesa; elsewhere they may assume a different form, because the sex of Muyingwu varies in different village traditions.

The three divinities were initially studied as they appear in cultic practice. That entailed examining the entire Hopi ceremonial calendar. Several festivals that occur in sequence were reinterpreted according to symbolic exchanges, the key to which was found in a minor celebration, the *Nevenwehe*.

During this event, which occurs in May, a procession of young people goes out into the country. There the youths gather wild spinach (*Stanley* sp.), which they present to the girls in return for maize cakes prepared by the latter. These exchanges, which are also the occasion for the plighting of troths, take place in the presence of the god Masau'u, personified by a masked actor. The Nevenwehe ritual thus operates, through the means of exchange, a triple mediation between male and female, between wild and cultivated plants, and between the raw and the cooked.

Applying the same formula to other ceremonies, we hope to have shown that these consist of mediations of the same type, between terms that become increasingly close together as one proceeds through the calendar. The *Wuwutcim* or tribal initiation ritual, which opens the ceremonial year at the end of November, through its terrifying rites of symbolic murder of the novices, followed by rebirth, would also seem, in parts that still remain secret and involve the exhumation

of corpses, to consist of a double exchange: of natural death for social life, and also of social death for natural life. If this is correct, the following ritual of *Soyal*, which occurs in December, should not consist merely of a solar rite linked to the winter solstice, as is generally believed, but must also contain an exchange between less distant terms.

Moreover, if one makes a close examination of the complex Soyal ritual, it becomes evident that its diverse aspects, set out in chronological order, deal successively with the winter solstice, with war, with human and animal fecundity, with germination (evidenced by the presentation of a painted screen representing the god Muyingwu), and finally a hunt followed by a distribution of rabbits. In addition, the most important rite of Soyal is a series of dances in which a masculine personage, the Sparrowhawk God, confronts the (female) 'Virgin of Soyal'.

In all these respects, it becomes apparent that the rabbit hunt, and the rites and religious representations related to it, plays a more important role in the Soyal ritual than has previously been supposed. The hunting of rabbits is prohibited during the month of the winter solstice, which is also called 'the dangerous moon', partly to enable the animals to multiply, and partly because of the 'thinness' of the Earth during this period. The hunt, which concludes Soyal, therefore corresponds to the end of this prohibition. After that, rabbit hunts bring together youths and unmarried girls, and each hunt is concluded with an exchange, as in Nevenwehe, but this time of rabbits for maize cakes. Further, the rabbit is a chthonic game animal because it lives in subterranean burrows, and is associated in indigenous thought with female menstruation, whereas the sparrowhawk, held to be the rabbit's main enemy, is associated with the sun. Finally, the curved stick, which was formerly used to kill rabbits, was copied, according to the myths, from the wing of the sparrowhawk god.

We thus see the appearance of an arbitration between high and low, sky and earth, male and female, and above all between hunting and agriculture, if one takes account of the hybrid and equivocal nature of the rabbit in indigenous thought: formerly the principal source of animal food at the same time as the principal threat to vegetable food, by reason of the destruction wrought by rabbits in the gardens. In Hopi symbolism, the rabbit therefore acts as point of articulation between war (forerunner of the hunt), and abundance, which is to say life. It is at once food and a parasite on food: in this sense, and like female menstruation, it is an inevitable pollution associated with fecundity. It is understandable that the rabbit plays a traditional role between the Soyal ritual and *Powamu*, which is also the first ritual with a purely agricultural character.

Powamu, or 'the setting into order', exhibits two main aspects. It is a festival of germination in which the men undertake the forced cultivation of maize and beans in underground temples specially heated for the purpose. It is also a ritual of initiation of youths and girls into the Katchina society — an association of masked dancers who personify the gods. Further, the 'settlement of accounts' alluded to in the very name 'Powamu' would appear to unfold simultaneously on two levels: on one side, between cultivators and predators on crops; on the other, between men and gods, who exchange beans for maize.

Data collected by agronomists and botanists on indigenous agriculture in the south-west of the United States suggest that, as far as crops are concerned, the opposition between maize and beans is of the same type as that between crops and pests. One crop enjoys good natural protection against pests, the other is particularly exposed to their attacks; one is ancient, the other recent; maize is associated with the arts of civilization, whereas beans would appear, according to some accounts, to have replaced in ritual a wild vegetable long used as a foodstuff.

We then raise the question whether the opposition between life and death, which assumes its strongest form in the Wuwutcim ritual, then in an already weakened form in Soyal, as an opposition between war and fecundity (and mediated by the rabbit hunt), does not also furnish the schema of Powamu, albeit in a still more restricted format: that of an arbitration between agriculture and natural forces — storms and pests — which represent death at the level of agriculture.

For this to be so, it is necessary to equate the initiation rites which make up the second aspect of Powamu with a symbolic surrender of youth — a human product — to divinities which themselves personify agricultural pests. Without claiming to have resolved this difficult problem, we were at least able to indicate the direction where the solution might be found. The flagellation of the novices performed during Powamu might be considered a weak form of the symbolic stripping away of flesh with the help of venomous insects, as encountered elsewhere in America. Furthermore, could the masked divinities who whip the novices in Powamu represent agricultural pests? The idea is seductive, given that the horned mask of the two *Hu'*, who carry out flagellation, resembles images described as insects, which are found in ancient petroglyphs of the south-west; and that the divinity in charge of these menacing figures bears the name of Augwunasomtaqa, meaning 'lady with the wings of a crow' (which she actually wears attached to her mask), the crow being regarded as a pillager of the gardens.

After *Niman*, which in mid-July concludes the Katchina season, we

went on to a more rapid examination of the alternating ceremonies of the Flutes, on one side, and of the Snakes and Antelopes, on the other. This was done for two reasons. In the first place, these ceremonies pose particularly complex problems, the examination of which demands comparisons not only with the other Pueblo groups, but also with far distant American peoples. In the second place, the configuration of Flutes, Snakes and Antelopes, which exhibits great internal homogeneity, appears to be structurally distinct from the Wuwutcim—Soyal—Powamu—Nevenwehe—Niman cycle. We therefore restricted ourselves to recording, in this group of rituals and in the group of feminine ceremonies called *Marau, Lakon* and *Ooqol*, which occur in September and October, the circumstances and modalities attending the intervention of the three divinities forming the object of this inquiry. This was done to illuminate certain obscurities in the account presented by the myths as they appear in the collections of Cushing, Stephen, Voth, Wallis and others. The final lessons were devoted to this topic.

Physically, Muyingwu is shown as a god who is slow in his movements, subject to periodic obesity (when his body swells with grain), and hampered in walking by his soft feet. Temperamentally, this is a timid and impressionable god, easily upset if reprimanded, and subject to the influence of sorcerers.

More generally, Muyingwu and Masau'u are opposed in terms of their antithetical characters. The one moves along a vertical axis (underground world, surface of the earth), the other along a horizontal axis (bush—gardens—village); one is little, the other a giant; one is androgynous, or lacks well-marked sexual characteristics, the other is an active male, a seducer; one is without a mask, whereas the other has several. To obtain food, it is necessary to get on the right side of Muyingwu, but Masau'u has to be attacked, or at least confronted. Muyingwu is the master of instant food, Masau'u that of continuing food; Muyingwu would have liked to keep men inside the earth in accordance with the wishes of the Council of Gods, whereas Masau'u seeks, despite the gods, to attract men to the surface.

Muyingwu's relations with his sister Tuwapongtumsi are of another kind again. We had discovered that neither one of these divinities could be defined in relation to certain positions in a semantic field. This field is, in fact, the same for them both, but they traverse it in opposite directions. Consequently they define themselves not as *states*, but as *processes*.

This semantic field could be described in terms of the system of equivalences shown in table 1. This is a double cycle, which it is the function of Muyingwu to traverse in the direction of reading (that is, from left to right), whereas Tuwapongtumsi always proceeds in the

TABLE 1 System of equivalences

$$\left(\text{bush} : \begin{cases} \text{fallow land} \\ \text{hunting ground} \end{cases}\right) :: \left(\begin{matrix} \text{fallow land} \\ \text{living animals} \end{matrix} : \begin{matrix} \text{garden} \\ \text{animal remains} \end{matrix}\right) :: \left(\begin{matrix} \text{garden} \\ \text{animal remains} \end{matrix} : \begin{matrix} \text{house} \\ \text{clothing} \end{matrix}\right) :: (\text{Nature} : \text{Culture})$$

opposite direction (that is, reading from right to left). Consequently the former has, from the point of view of the passage from Nature to Culture, a *progressive* function, which he fulfils with *ill grace*, whereas Tuwapongtumsi fulfills a *regressive* function, but with *enthusiasm*.

We find, then, that the collection of apparently contradictory functions attributed to Masau'u as god of domestic fire, master of agriculture, god of the hunt, of death, of travellers and of depopulated lands, corresponds to a regrouping under his jurisdiction of all the initial terms of each relation. In respect to Muyingwu and Tuwapongtumsi, he therefore represents the stable and invariant element.

Contrariwise, if Muyingwu and Tuwapongtumsi are 'processual' divinities, from a functional point of view, and Masau'u a 'static' divinity, the converse is the case from a conditional perspective: Muyingwu and Tuwapongtumsi are by vocation sedentary gods, whereas Masau'u is an errant god. This American trinity therefore exhibits all the characteristics of a system whose properties have been analysed, on the one hand, as a function of the richness of temporal concepts in the Hopi language and, on the other, in respect to the social structure (matrilineal and matrilocal) of these Indians, to the extent that the familial relations between these three divinities correspond to what we have called the 'atom of kinship'.

2

An Iroquois Myth (1960—1)

Wednesday's course, devoted to 'Investigations into American Mythology', was concerned with a myth of the Iroquois Indians, of which the analysis had been sketched last year during our inaugural lesson. This is Myth No. 129 in the collection of J. N. B. Hewitt.[1]

Two children who were brother and sister lived alone in the forest. When the girl reached the age of puberty, she was visited by an unknown suitor, whom she believed to be her brother. She accordingly repulsed him, and reproached her brother for his incestuous designs. Her brother then revealed that he had a double, not only like him in physical appearance and dress, but also through sharing a common destiny: everything that happened to one inevitably happened to the other. To overcome his sister's disbelief, the young man took his double by surprise and killed him. Was he not condemned to the same fate? However, he would be cunning and pretend to his adversary's mother, a powerful sorceress and master of the owls, to be her son and the husband of his own sister. Betrayed by the light of a domestic fire and by the owls, who revealed the trick to the sorceress, the incestuously united brother and sister escaped with the help of a magical dog. After various adventures, the last being a fight between the brother and an unknown opponent, they managed to rejoin their mother, who lived in a cave in the east. A double of the brother, distinct from the first one, finally succeeded in marrying the heroine.

We first considered whether this myth might be a variant of the tale of two brothers (Type 303 in the Aarne—Thompson classification), the subject of a monograph by Kurt Ranke.[2] In fact, North American versions of this tale have been recorded, though they are undoubtedly

[1] J. N. B. Hewitt, *Seneca Fiction, Legends and Myths*, part I, 32nd Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1910—1911 (Washington, DC, 1918).

[2] K. Ranke, *Die Zwei Brüder* (Helsinki, 1934).

of European origin. Moreover, it is evident that the Iroquois myth evokes a doubly inverse situation, since it concerns, in one case, two brothers and a sister-in-law, and, in the other case, a brother, a sister and a brother-in-law. Furthermore, the tale of the two brothers draws its dramatic force from the ostensible chastity of one of these men in relation to his sister-in-law, whereas the American myth turns on concealed incest between a brother and sister.

It is far more tempting to consider the Iroquois myth as an original American variation on an Oedipal theme, the particular interest of which derives from the myth's provenance from one of the most thoroughly matrilineal societies known to anthropology.

1 ANALYSIS OF THE MYTH

The initial situation presents us with an opposition between brother and sister, which is to say between male and female — principles the Iroquois associate respectively with Earth and Sky. Men correspond equally with hunting and with raw food, women with agriculture and cooking, that is, with cooked food. In this sense, one could say that the male/female opposition is also an opposition between Nature and Culture.[3] However, a ternary structure soon makes its appearance in the narrative, and we have shown that this represents an invariant element in the myth: the murder of the double and the incest are denounced, on the one side, by cooking fire and, on the other, by two owls. Each informer fulfils a function that is proper to it, for the fire particularly condemns 'fractricide', and the owls incest. Moreover, one of the owls attaches itself more particularly to the false identity assumed by the hero, the other owl to the union with the sister. And the incestuous relation has itself a double aspect: disjunctive in that it depends on a change of identity, and conjunctive as a marriage between close kin. The problem, then, becomes that of discovering the relation between the initial duality and the series of triads that make up the body of the myth. Note that one of the terms of the binary opposition, namely the feminine pole, is immediately presented under

[3] For the benefit of those, of both sexes, who accuse me of dogmatically positing an equivalence between man and Culture one one side, and woman and Nature on the other: let them recall that I have always maintained that, just as with phonemes in language, mythemes have no significance in themselves, but only by reason of their structural position; and moreover that, as I showed in *The Naked Man* (pp. 248—9), even within a particular culture, the relations between man/woman and Nature/Culture are commutable.

a dual aspect: on the one hand, a female adolescent who has attained puberty and is ready to abandon her role of sister; on the other, a wife-to-be promised to a 'non-brother' in a society in which marriage is obligatorily exogamous. The drama is precipitated by the fatal hesitation of the young woman between these two roles, which she finds hard to distinguish, and between which she is unable to decide.

Subsequently, episodes of the myth reproduce the triad, sometimes right side up, sometimes inverted, but in each case integrating intermediate terms into it. If the first triad is constructed by means of an opposition between a monovalent masculine term and an ambivalent feminine term, a second triad appears with the flight of the two heroes, bringing into play an east—west opposition, also meaning life—death, and substituting for the ambivalence of the feminine term a new ambivalence based on the double role of the dog as a domestic animal, participating simultaneously in Nature and Culture.

The hero's struggle with an unknown enemy raises particular problems, for it seems at first sight so alien to the story that Hewitt does not hesitate to describe it as an interpolation. We showed that there was a structural and semantic continuity between this last part and those that had preceded it. In fact, it is always a matter of a difficult or impossible conjunction, because the hero is paralysed by a mysterious adversary and has the greatest difficulty in ridding himself of him. Moreover, the very methods of his liberation, the details of which it is not possible to enter into here, enable one to reconstitute a triad analogous to the preceding ones, but of much greater complexity, the terms of which are, respectively, earth, water and fire. Once again, the triad is constructed by reference to a binary opposition — Nature/Culture — the same that appeared at the beginning of the story.

2 COMPARATIVE STUDY

After examining the variants, few in number and differing mainly in details, in Iroquois mythology, the inquiry was expanded to take in neighbouring groups, namely the Ojibwa, Blackfoot, Menomini and northern Sioux, particularly the Assiniboin. The Iroquois story was identified there, but more or less linked to another theme, which was not immediately apparent among the Iroquois because it was displaced on to cosmogonic myths, that of the 'excremental husband'. It is significant that this 'excremental husband' is the punishment reserved, among the Menomini and Assiniboin, for young women who rebel against marriage, who do not know how to choose between their present condition of sister or maiden and their future as a wife. Furthermore, these variants bring out, more clearly than the Iroquois

myth, the connection between the narratives dealing with untamed or indecisive girls, and the ceremonies marking feminine puberty. That is particularly true of the northern Sioux, who treat these narratives as the origin myths of puberty rituals. We were then led to examine the ideas that the societies in question entertained about puberty, and we were able to correlate discernible variations in this domain with those to be found in the mythical texts. A general picture was presented, in which each myth examined was placed in relation to two co-ordinate axes: one corresponding to the passage from myth to ritual, the other to the transition from the notion of increment to that of excrement, the essential role of which in mythical symbolism had been established. There thus appeared a kind of mythological 'spectre', the aspects of which were examined. It seemed that the three major groups whose myths had been studied occupied characteristic positions in this figure. The Iroquois location was confined and precise, whereas the space reserved to the Algonkin-speaking groups is very fluid. Finally, the myths of the northern Sioux are, as it were, diffracted through various parts of the 'spectre'.

3 INTERPRETATION

It did not seem possible to take account of these particularities at the level of formal analysis. The groups in question all live in a region of North America that is of considerable importance from an economic point of view, being traversed by the northern limit of maize cultivation. The three ethnicities are clearly differentiated according to way of life, the Iroquois being cultivators, the Menomini collectors of wild grain, whereas the northern Sioux mainly live from hunting bison. To these various ecologies correspond metaphysical systems differing from each other in the place they accord to the Earth, the feminine principle. The Menomini, who are sufficiently near the Iroquois to learn agricultural techniques from them, have always refused to cultivate the wild rice that provides their staple diet, because they could not 'wound their mother, the Earth'. In this situation, it is hardly surprising that the Iroquois, matrilineal cultivators, give evidence in their mythology of a certain indulgence towards incest, as if the pollution resulting from promiscuity between the sexes, and between close kin, more or less resembled that entailed by the agricultural life, founded on an aggressively intimate relation with the feminine earth. Symmetrically, Ojibwa reserve in respect to agriculture, in any case virtually ruled out by the natural conditions obtaining north of the Great Lakes, corresponds at the level of social life to a particularly negative and puritanical view of sexual relations. But among the northern

Sioux, who are almost exclusively hunters, the equivalence Woman = Earth is in some sense liberated, and the antagonism between the sexes, instead of being played out in the philosophical domain between categories and principles, unfolds concretely in society between living people. We are, of course, acquainted with the complex character of relations between the sexes among the Plains Indians: excessively jealous of their spouses, but tireless seducers of those of others, and obliged, by religious fervour or martial fury, to do violence to their own feelings.

Lastly, we reviewed certain neglected aspects of puberty rites. In the thought of the Indians of North America, and doubtless also elsewhere, familial equilibrium is seen as perpetually subject to a double threat, either from incest, which is a misused conjunction, or by a distant exogamy, which is a disjunction fraught with risks. Furthermore, familial and social links should be neither too close nor stretched to excess. Two perils beset the familial and social order: that of the hated union with the brother, and that of the inevitable union with a 'non-brother' who may be, because of this fact, a foreigner or even an enemy. In this perspective, it is possible to reconstitute the group formed, from America to south-east Asia, by myths of marriage between a human being and an animal. Sometimes the animal is a dog, a 'domestic' being like the brother, sometimes a wild beast, generally a bear, an animal with the 'cannibal' characteristics often attributed to strangers. Further, the onset of first menstruation puts the young girl in a situation where these two dangers are, as it were, conjoined in a superlative form. As with incest, she is in danger of polluting those about her and, by her physiological condition, she is exposed to malign influences from outside. The extreme importance attached by numerous indigenous peoples, and particularly the Algonkin-speaking groups, to puberty rites is thus explained by the symbolic meaning attributed to them. The ceremonies performed on this occasion by the northern Sioux illustrate this meaning almost literally.

3

Sketches for an American Bestiary (1964–5)

Made easier by a government decision, this year's course was concerned with a problem that, at first sight, might appear unduly simple. Under the title 'Sketches for an American Bestiary', we endeavoured, in Monday's and Tuesday's lessons, to define the place assigned in South American mythology to one animal of the tropical New World: the sloth.

This toothless creature, represented by the genuses *Choloepus* and *Bradypus*, relies for food on a small number of vegetable substances. Moreover, it suffers from poor thermal control so that its habitat is restricted to forest zones, where temperature changes are minimal: in broad terms, from eastern Bolivia to Guyana by way of the Amazon Basin. It was therefore of interest to discover whether the myths of these regions made mention of the Bradypoides.

It was soon found that the animal was indeed featured and in very different forms, which nevertheless occurred at both extremities of the large area considered. The Tacana of eastern Bolivia and the Kalina of Dutch Guyana both make a cosmological symbol of the sloth. Curiously, they explain this role by certain behavioural peculiarities of the animal related to its excretory functions.

The first question was to decide whether these peculiarities were imaginary or real. This delicate matter could not have been resolved without the assistance of the eminent mammalogist François Bourlière, professor at the Paris Faculty of Medicine, who brought to our notice a valuable list of references for which we are duly grateful. Observations on the sloth in captivity are few, but they fully confirm the habit attributed in the myths to these animals of excreting at intervals of several days, at ground level and always at the same place.

It remained to determine how the myths went about integrating this empirically confirmed behaviour in a system of meanings. The problem was approached from two different perspectives.

In the first place, we examined the association, quite explicit in

Tacana mythology, of the sloth as a cosmic power with an earth-dwelling race of dwarfs lacking an anus, and dependent on smoke for nourishment. The same belief is found in Guyana and in the most northern regions of North America, where we discovered an association of the same type between chthonic dwarfs and squirrels. We were thus led to the hypothesis that the dwarfs of the world underground, which is also a world upside down, nevertheless exist in a relation of homology with the small tree-dwelling animals such as the sloth, lesser ant-eaters, squirrels, monkeys, kinkajous, etc., all of these being animals whose mythical connotations were surveyed. More precisely, beliefs relating to chthonic dwarfs appeared to result from the logically-felt necessity for a term, the position of which in respect of humans was the same as that of humans in relation to the tree-dwelling creatures. From that stage, the research programme was clear.

In particular, it was necessary to ascertain whether this arboreal fauna was itself articulated by the myths so as to form a system of meanings, and whether, in this system, the figure of the sloth retained all its relevant characteristics. By means of myths originating in groups situated between those that had provided our initial examples — the Mundurucu, Waiwai, Bare, Ipurina, etc. — we managed to elicit a pair of oppositions formed by the sloth and the howler monkey (genus *Alouatta*), connoting, respectively, anal retention and incontinence. Thanks to the mythology of the Jivaro of eastern Peru, where the sloth enjoys a position unequalled elsewhere, we were able to integrate this pair into a triangular system of which the 'goat-sucker' (*Caprimulgus* family) occupies the apex. That is to say, it is a bird, no longer a mammal, to which the myths attribute as a pertinent characteristic an oral avidity not only in South America, but also in North America and even worldwide, as this creature's various European names demonstrate in their fashion.

Two conclusions were drawn from the inquiry, one concerning South American ethnography, the other of more general interest. From the ethnographic point of view, it is notable and doubtless significant that a moral philosophy preoccupied with certain immoderate uses of the digestive tract — positive or negative, above or below — coincides in its area of distribution with that of the blowpipe, which is also a hollow conduit, technologically linked with the other, since the arrow expelled by oral means is the source of meat, which will be taken in by the mouth before being expelled in the form of excrement.

As far as mythology in general is concerned, our findings underscored the topical value of the *sloth/goat-sucker* pair. Not only because the areas of distribution of these two animals are massively unequal — the one being very restricted, the other vast — but, more importantly,

for another reason. By illustrating with the zoological symbols the opposition between the 'anal character' and the 'oral character', and by drawing out, as we have tried to show, all their psychological implications, mythical thought gives evidence of its richness and perspicacity. It deals astutely with ideas that, in our society, psychoanalysis has only just begun to rediscover.

4

The Way of the Mask (1971–2)

Tuesday's course approached a problem new to our teaching, if not to our published works: that of the plastic arts, in the context of Indian masks of the north-west Pacific coast. We asked ourselves whether it was possible to apply to the imaginary beings these masks represented, to the stylistic treatment and semantic function accorded them, the same methods that, in preceding years, had proved their worth in the study of myths.

We began by considering a type of mask called *swaihwe*, found among several Salish-speaking peoples on Vancouver Island and along the coast. These masks have a peculiar form: the upper part is rounded, then it curves inwards to a horizontal plane lower down. They represent in very stylized fashion a face with a wide-open mouth that is equipped with a prominent, pendant tongue; the eyes, in the form of cylinders, are protuberant; a bird's head takes the place of a nose; and two or three heads of birds crown the head like horns. The mask was worn over a collar, formerly made of white swan's feathers; and white swan's feathers or down — sometimes straw, but also white — covered the body and legs of the dancer, who held in his hand a sistrum made of scallop shells sewn on to a circlet of wood.

Swaihwe masks were the exclusive property of certain high-ranking lineages, and were transmitted only through inheritance or marriage. Their owners exhibited them only on the occasion of a *potlach* or a public festival. The masks were never taken out during the great winter rituals. They were held to bring their possessors wealth and worldly success, and similarly to help those who made appropriate payments to those possessors.

The origin myths of the *swaihwe* masks are of two kinds, according to whether they come from the island or the coast. In the former case, the masks or their prototypes fell to earth from heaven; in the latter, they were fished out of a lake. Two lessons on the comparative analysis of these two kinds of myths have confirmed their symmetry,

right down to details: they are therefore in a relation of transformation. We were able to show that this transformation makes sense only when read in one direction, the insular myths transforming the coastal ones, but not in the converse. The argument has seemed more convincing than others of a historic and linguistic kind, which are usually invoked for the origin of *swaihwe* in the middle and lower reaches of the Fraser River, but they arrive at the same conclusion. Finally, some excursions into the mythology of the neighbouring Salish peoples, who possess similar masks, have led us to postulate a double affinity of *swaihwe* masks, on one side with fish (because the masks are caught in the lake, and because of a metaphorical equivalence, independently attested, between the tongue and fish), and on the other with copper, a mineral known and utilized by the peoples of this region. As recounted by the Liloet, the origin myth of copper can be effectively reduced to those on the origin of masks among the coastal peoples.

The immediate neighbours of the Salish to the west and north, the Nootka and the Kwakiutl, have borrowed from them *swaihwe* masks, all the characteristics of which remain recognizable, despite stylistic differences. The Kwakiutl call them *xoa'exoe* or *xwexwe*, wear them with the same kind of collar as the Salish and, even more strongly than the latter, associate them with earthquakes. Conversely to the Salish, they find a place for them in the winter ritual. In all other respects, we have only sparse information on the sociological and ritual significance of the masks. However, the origin myths are more elaborate.

These narratives are of two kinds. First, there are legendary traditions explaining how certain lineages of northern Vancouver Island, or their opposite numbers on the coast, obtained the masks of the Comox, a Salish-speaking people established on Vancouver Island to the south of Kwakiutl. Secondly, more truly mythical narratives tell how an Indian received the masks at Cape Scott (in the extreme north of the island, therefore in the opposite direction) from supernatural entities that first appeared to him in the form of fish, probably *Sebatodes ruberrimus*, a reddish-coloured species of the Scorpenides family. Giving of the masks was not accompanied by any present in the form of food or objects of value. That is why, the myth concludes, it is said today that the fish of this species are avaricious. This moral would seem inexplicable unless one knew that the Salish attribute diametrically opposed behaviour to *swaihwe* masks.

After reviewing what is known about *swaihwe* masks, we were forced to conclude that our information is inadequate to solve the problems raised. Whence the necessity of applying to the masks the same procedures that, in a comparable situation, had enabled us to

establish the significance of what had at first seemed incomprehensive myths. Could one, as with the myths, restore a particular kind of mask to a semantic field formed by other elements of the same type? More specifically, the question was whether one could find a second mask which, in terms of the personage it represented, the artistic features of the representation, its sociological and ritual role in indigenous culture, existed in a relation of transformation with the first mask. In this case, the 'message' of one would complement the 'message' of the other to form a global meaning of which each mask expressed only one half.

Such a 'second' mask exists among the Kwakiutl as well as among the Salish who, according to certain texts, obtained it by 'swapping' with the former. It represents a gigantic ogre, more often female than male, that the Kwakiutl call *Dzonoqwa*. Whereas the *swaihwe* mask goes with white dress, the *dzonoqwa* mask is black, and its wearer is also clad in black. The first is decorated with feathers, the second with fur. The *swaihwe* mask has protuberant eyes, whereas the eyes of the *dzonoqwa* mask are deeply sunken in hollow sockets, or else half-closed. The *swaihwe* masks are clairvoyant: during the dances, a personage armed with a spear attempts to blind them. Conversely, the personages represented by the *dzonoqwa* masks are blind, or nearly blind: but in the myths they blind the children they catch by gluing their eyelids with resin. One type of mask has a pendant tongue; *Dzonoqwa*, whether male or female, has pendant breasts, and it is in one of these breasts, the mammary 'eye', as it were, that their human enemies seek to plant their missiles.

According to the myths of origin, the *swaihwe* masks come from the sky or the waters, which is to say from *high* or *low*. In contrast, the *dzonoqwa* masks come from the deep forest and mountains where their prototypes live, that is, from *afar*. The *swaihwe* masks represent the founding ancestors of the most important lineages; they are therefore associated with the social world, in opposition to the asocial and child-stealing spirits of the *dzonoqwa* masks, who belong to wild nature. The former are excluded from the winter ritual, the latter play a part in it in virtue of a minor, but official men's association. Among the Salish, this last contrast is accentuated further by the fact that, unlike the *swaihwe* masks, which are transmissible only through inheritance or marriage, any family whatsoever can purchase the right to wear the mask of the ogress, provided it has the means, even if its motives are those of 'nouveaux riches' impelled by a desire to show off.

Compared with the origin myths of the *xwexwe* masks, those of *dzonoqwa* exhibit some remarkable characteristics among the Kwakiutl. First, they are not distributed along the same spatial axis. The axis of the *xwexwe* masks has its pole in Comox country in the south and in

Cape Scott in the north, respectively. On one side, therefore, there is the world of strangers, if not of enemies; on the other, wide ocean — that is, an unknown defined in natural instead of sociological terms. The axis distribution of the myths about the *dzonoqwa* masks, oriented east—west, is perpendicular to the preceding one and serves to join the western coast of the island to the deep fjords of the mainland coast, particularly Knight Inlet, which penetrates the most mountainous region of Kwakiutl country: this is therefore a land—sea axis. Complementarity is found also in this domain.

And there is more. For if the *xwexwe* masks, in the most mythical tales, were brought to humans by the fish, the Dzonoqwa people inhabit a land located so far from fish as to lack them altogether; according to the myths, they take advantage of fine weather in order to steal fish from human beings. Finally, and more importantly, the *xwexwe* masks do not dispense generous presents; they are said to be mean. Contrariwise, the Dzonoqwa folk possess fabulous riches in terms of dried meat, furs, hides and copper sheets, which they give lavishly to their human protégés, or allow themselves to be robbed of after being killed or put to flight. These goods, the myths make clear, are the origin of the *potlach* institution and of the famous decorated coppers that are for the Kwakiutl the most precious of their possessions. Further, it is with his face hidden behind a *dzonoqwa* mask that, among the southern Kwakiutl, the chief goes about distributing coppers; and it is with a knife with the handle representing the ogress that he, if needs be, cuts them into pieces. Gigantic plates in the shape of Dzonoqwa, and smaller ones representing her face, breasts, umbilical cord and knee-caps serve to present ceremonial foodstuffs to visiting strangers.

In connection with myths of the coastal Salish on the origin of *swaihwe* masks, we emphasized the recurrence in them of a brother and sister in a state of dangerous intimacy; this state is removed by the fishing expedition for masks, which they undertake together, since possession of the masks (given to her as dowry by her brother) enables the young woman to find a husband. Moreover, among the Kwakiutl the coppers originally obtained from the Dzonoqwa folk fulfil the same function of enabling exogamous marriage: the young wife received them from her father and offers them to her husband. In so doing she behaves like a *Dzonoqwa* (who also makes the puberty dress, indicating that the girl is ripe for marriage), even though all her actions have a contrary sense: the *Dzonoqwa* steals a child from its family, which voluntarily or involuntarily surrenders its coppers to her. Symmetrically, the young wife takes the coppers to her husband's family, but she takes from him the children she will later bear, for in this society, where patrilineal and matrilineal principles compete, the

wife's family has a superior right to her children. *Dzonoqwa* carries away the kidnapped children in a basket, and it is also in a basket that the newly married wife carries the coppers to her husband.

All these considerations lead to a single conclusion. The Kwakiutl have borrowed the *swaihwe* masks from the Salish where, under the slightly different name of *zwezwe*, they retain the same artistic characteristics. In return, the Kwakiutl have created, and yielded to the Salish, the *dzonoqwa* masks which, in the artistic and ritual domains, are diametrically opposed to the *swaihwe* masks; and this is so, even though on sociological and mythical levels they retain their essential characteristics as being associated with copper and as dispensers of wealth. It follows that, at least in this case, *when the artistic form is retained, the content of the message is inverted* (the *xwexwe* masks are avaricious) and, reciprocally, *when the message is retained, the artistic form is inverted*. This remarkable transformation invites investigation as to its extent. Is it restricted to two types of mask that exist side-by-side in a small corner of the globe, or does its field of application extent to other aesthetic forms, other times, other regions?

The framework of these lessons precluded us tackling a problem of this magnitude. But another and more limited problem remained to be resolved. How did one explain the association of the *xwexwe* masks with earthquakes, an association already evident, though to a lesser degree, in the *swaihwe* masks of the Salish? We had already, and on several occasions, demonstrated the link between the Salish *swaihwe* complex, the Kwakiutl *xwexwe—dzonoqwa*, and the origin of copper. And it was by extending the mythical paradigm to include the Athabaskan myths on the origin of copper that we were to put ourselves in a position to answer this last question.

Such a procedure seemed the more justified in that the native copper used by the peoples of the Pacific coast came from the north; that the Athabaskans are their immediate neighbours to the north and north-west; and that this latter group had achieved greater skill in the working of copper than either the coastal peoples or the Eskimos to their north. Furthermore, the Athabaskan myths on the origin of copper present striking parallels, in symmetry and complementarity, with the Salish myths from the Fraser River on the origin of *swaihwe* masks. As will be remembered, these latter myths deal with the dangers of excessively close matrimonial union — between brother and sister — from which the 'fishing' of the masks offers an escape by affording the young woman the means to contract an exogamous marriage.

Dealing with its origin, but taking account of the scarcity of copper, the Athabaskan follow a precisely opposite track. Here we have a

woman forced against her will into an exogamous union, and raped by her kinsmen after her flight home, and after she had told them of the fine copper she had seen on top of a shining mountain during her return journey. To avenge herself, she buries herself in the earth together with the copper, which thenceforth is difficult to obtain.

In these myths, the copper thus proceeds from strangers to kinsfolk through a female intermediary, a contrary path to that followed by the *swaihwe* masks among the Salish, and by copper among the Kwakiutl: from the kin of the woman, and by her agency, to the stranger—husband. But this is not all, for the Athabaskan myths also describe the converse of an earthquake. By a kind of involution, the earth folds itself over its mineral riches and denies them to humans, whereas, on the occasion of earthquakes, it opens wide to reveal them. Predisposed in varying degrees to earthquakes, the *swaihwe* and *xwexwe* masks are bedecked with sistrums, the function of which could thus correspond with that of these musical instruments in ancient Egypt, as described by Plutarch.[1]

We thus find confirmed, in a vast complex that is at once mythical, sociological, ritual and technological, the triple affinity between certain kinds of masks and earthquakes, fish and, finally, copper. This association is the more suggestive in that, on the other side of the Pacific, the same affinity between fish, earthquakes and mineral riches has been recorded in Japanese folk beliefs.[2] Moreover, wood sculptures from the Chou Dynasty in China feature beings with pendant tongues and protuberant eyes, which strikingly resemble *swaihwe* masks. Drawing such parallels would be too risky without the discovery in the American north-west of a prehistoric production of obsidian microliths, which are very like others known from eastern Siberia and Hokkaido. Assimilation of metal to excrement, recorded from Japan, also exists among the Athabaskans, who call it 'bearshit' or 'beavershit': and further south in Salish country, among the Thomson and Shuswap, the first copper appeared in the form of a ball of metal filled with excrement — a union of opposites which the *swaihwe* masks embody in their fashion by bringing together, in the same artistic figure, the bird and the fish.

Finally, in Japanese beliefs the earthquake, in interrupting the social order, appears as a mediating phenomenon between rich and poor, just as, in the Salish myths already cited, the first copper, a precious ball in the possession of the privileged, is transformed into

[1] *From Honey to Ashes*, pp. 346—7.

[2] C. Ouwehand, *Namazu-e and their Themes: An Interpretative Approach to some Aspects of Japanese Folk Religion* (Leiden, 1964).

the rainbow or the sun which, the myths tell us, will shine thenceforth on everyone. With the copper raised to heaven in what could be called a democratized form, a heaven from which it had first descended in the metaphoric and noble form of the *swaihwe* masks, the cycle we have been following runs its full course. And the more so in that, throughout the region, we have envisaged that copper, as such, born from the earth or the watery depths, and so brilliant that only the *swaihwe* and *xwexwe* masks, owing to their firm base and protuberant eyes, can bear to behold it, achieves a marriage of contraries; and such indeed is every marriage in societies characterized by inter-lineage conflict and in which, consequently, the essential problem consists in the mediation of two contrary principles — endogamy and exogamy.

It is therefore not only, as has already been observed, through their proportions and form that the *swaihwe* masks resemble the enigmatic copper sheets that occupy so proud a place in the thought and economy of the peoples of the north-west Pacific coast.[3] Everything invites us to see in these masks and objects the results of a parallel evolution beginning with the same complex of motifs. Among the Salish, the *swaihwe* masks serve as an equivalent to the copper sheets, just as, further north, the copper sheets replace the *swaihwe* masks of which, in a different material and style, they transpose the artistic aspect, while preserving the social role and philosophical significance.

[3] P. S. Wingert, *American Indian Sculpture: A Study of the Northwest Coast* (New York, 1949), p. 60, n. 72.

5

Asdiwal Revisited (1972—3)

In Monday's course we examined the discussion and critiques that have ensued from the publication fifteen years ago of our study *The Story of Asdiwal*. Of particular note have been the critiques of Mary Douglas and G. S. Kirk.[1]

To the claim that marriage with the matrilateral cross-cousin would not have had a normative character among the Tsimshian, we have set, in addition to our already collected and published data, the recent analyses by A. Rosman and P. Rubel, confirming that this preferential choice corresponded to a structural distinction between wife-givers and wife-takers.[2] However, it is not evident, as these authors assume, that the status of wife-taker was always superior to that of wife-giver. This hypothesis is a result, as we see it, of a confusion between the preparation of the *potlach* by the lineage of wife-givers with the assistance of their wife-takers, and the *potlach* itself, which is not offered to the wife-takers, but to third parties playing the role of witnesses. In such a system, economic relations between the host clan and the clan of the father essentially consist of borrowings followed by obligatory repayments; and the fact that this assistance from the paternal clan is not only asked for, but required, does not place this social segment in a position of superiority. For the Tsimshian, matrimonial transactions normally involve four lineages, namely those of the father and the father's sister, and those of the mother and her brother: thus, of the husband-to-be as well as of the bride-to-be. If

[1] Mary Douglas, 'The meaning of myth with special reference to *La Geste d'Asdiwal*', in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, ed. E. R. Leach (London, 1967); M. G. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Cambridge, 1970).

[2] A. Rosman and P. Rubel, *Feasting with Mine Enemy: Rank and Exchange Among Northwest Coast Societies* (New York, 1971).

these four lineages were hierarchically ordered in a system of generalized exchange in which wife-takers were always superior to wife-givers, it would be incomprehensible that indigenous accounts describe the exchanges between the two central lineages (mother and uncle of the husband-to-be or of the wife-to-be) and those between the two peripheral lineages (father and aunt of the husband-to-be or bride-to-be), as strictly parallel; for, according to this hypothesis, the respective statuses of the peripheral lineages should be that much more unequal than those of the adjacent lineages.

Within the framework of a social hierarchy sufficiently rigid to divide the society into castes or classes, it would seem, on the contrary, that the lineages could compete with each other and seek to improve through matrimonial alliances their relative position within a common category. We therefore do not believe that the rank order of social statuses was duplicated by another rank order of matrimonial statuses, establishing a fixed relation between wife-takers and wife-givers. Moreover, there is at least one myth concerning a prince who, contrary to the norm, finds his family trying to compel him to marry into the paternal lineage.[3]

This myth, which makes a point of transposing every aspect of social reality in a paradoxical perspective, evokes not one but several types of union, which are successively eliminated. The hero begins by playing with the idea of a homosexual marriage and declines one, genealogically too close, with his patrilateral female cousin. By the end of the myth, he rightly avoids an incestuous union with his own sister and breaks up a too-distant marriage which he had secretly contracted with an aquatic divinity. On the contrary, the result appears to be that marriage with the matrilateral cousin, unmentioned in the myth, is the only viable one, since all the others considered turn out to be failures.

Analysis of this myth also enriches our understanding of the myth of Asdiwal, where the hero performs similar exploits, with the difference that Asdiwal marries a celestial instead of a chthonic being and that the solution of matrilateral marriage, with which the myth concludes, also fails like the other unions. But before reaching this point, it is necessary to dispose of a few misunderstandings. The character strongly imbued with matrilocal feeling, attributed by us to the marriage of Asdiwal's mother with a supernatural bird, arises not from the circumstances of the marriage itself, but from the fact that although, as a supernatural being, the husband is superior to his

[3] Franz Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology* (Washington, DC, 1916), pp. 154—8.

affines, he is obliged, as a wife-taker, to provide his wife-givers with presentations and to humble himself before them when he claims their sister and nephew. Moreover, the young mother chooses the name of her son and announces it publicly, prerogatives that in the real society belong to the father and his lineage. That established, one can proceed to draw a parallel between the myth of Asdiwal and that which we have just analysed. If, as we have demonstrated, this myth constitutes a critique in the Kantian sense of all forms of marriage apart from that accorded a preferential value by the Tsimshian, what can this tell us about similar episodes in the Asdiwal myth? The hero's marriage with the daughter of the maleficent Sun, who submits him to seemingly mortal ordeals, places him also, as wife-taker, in a position of inferiority in relation to this supernatural wife-giver. But it is vain to seek in this situation, as some have tried to do, an image of actual social conditions as reflected in the service due by the son-in-law to his parents-in-law; for while it is true that this son-in-law's service existed among the Tsimshian, the fathers-in-law by no means took advantage of it to attempt the destruction of the husbands and their daughters. By whatever way one approaches it, this episode clearly represents an inversion of the real model.

It is not to particular empirical conditions that this episode should be related, but rather to its treatment by American mythology in a number of different societies.[4] The murderous father-in-law is either a maternal uncle who fears his nephew will succeed him or will seduce his (the uncle's) wife, or, as here, a stranger who is jealous of the hero after presenting him with his own daughter in marriage, or because he is opposed to their union. Furthermore, the son-in-law's service among the Tsimshian was entirely comparable, where it was not expressly identified, with the service due by the young nephew to his maternal uncle, whose daughter he could later marry. In these conditions, it is understandable that the *cosmic* marriage of Asdiwal with a strange woman, who is moreover of supernatural origin, is opposed to the *sociological* marriage of his son Waux with his cross-cousin. It represents the converse, a marriage between unreasonably distanced partners compared with one between partners of a proper distance; but at the same time, it offers a sinister and exaggerated image of this second type of marriage, one wherein the often real antagonism between maternal uncle and nephew evolves, in the absence of any kinship link between the two men, towards a frankly murderous

[4] R. H. Lowie, 'The test theme in North American mythology', *Journal of American Folklore*, XXI (1908), pp. 97—148.

intent of one towards the other, as though the hostility between wife's father and son-in-law contaminated the solidarity between uncle and nephew. We are therefore dealing with two marriages based on the matrilateral model, one evoking it negatively through its converse, the other positively, though with no greater success. Between the *cosmic* and *domestic* marriages are inserted the two marriages of Asdiwal that could be called *political*, because they are contracted in foreign groups; these also fail, one because of a dominant solidarity between a group of brothers and their sister, the husband being abandoned by his wife's maternal lineage; the other because of a dominant solidarity between father and son, the wife being abandoned by the husband's paternal lineage. The four marriages thus form a closed system, even more strongly organized than our earlier study had been able to show.

But the empiricism of our critics prevents them interpreting the mythical motifs as functions of each other: taking them up one by one, they claim to see in them mere reflections of actual social conditions. Thus the incomprehension and gluttony attributed to the wife of Asdiwal's son Waux, whose matrilateral cousin she is, have been explained as a devious way of showing that women are inferior beings and men superior, which is supposedly a positive commentary that directly relates to social reality. Apart from making an abstraction from the three wives of Asdiwal, who are, in the myth, credited with all moral and domestic virtues, hardly proof of any kind of feminine inferiority, such an argument ignores the fact that the Tsimshian are distinguished above all the other societies of the north-west Pacific coast in the respect and consideration enjoyed among them by women: initiated, like men, into the secret societies, able to inherit supernatural powers, actively presented at the *potlach* and, in certain circumstances, called upon to serve as tribal chief. The moral judgement invoked is not merely arbitrary. Nothing in the rest of the myth corroborates it, and actual social conditions contradict it. Imaginary social conditions are thus postulated in the belief that the myth is being grounded in reality.

No better founded are assertions that the rivalry of Asdiwal and his brothers-in-law illustrate the kind of conduct observed in connection with the *potlach*. There is now general agreement that the *potlach* is a public and juridical act, in the course of which specially invited guests are showered with expensive gifts and by their presence endorse their host's right to a title, social rank or new status. Three such feasts occur during the Asdiwal myth, and the text explicitly describes them. In one the hero's name and civil status are proclaimed, at another an honorific title is conferred on him, and at the third he himself decides to assume another such title. To assimilate private disputes to these legal procedures is as though an ethnographer ignorant of our customs

were to equate a dispute between cardsharpers with an inheritance ruling verified by a public notary.

It is even said that the misfortunes of Asdiwal are explained by the jealousy aroused by excessively successful shamans, and that Asdiwal is himself a great shaman. Nothing could be less true. Asdiwal, as the texts inform us on several occasions, is a great chief; and among the Tsimshian, the position of chief was antithetical to that of shaman. Admittedly, in one version Asdiwal makes himself out to be a shaman when among the seals, pretending to cure them of an epidemic of which they believe themselves to be victims, while in fact extracting, unknown to these animals, the arrows launched by him which were the real cause of their ills. We thus see that, even in this particular incident, when he acted as an impostor, shamanic gifts were explicitly denied him. Moreover, only dubious shamans envy a more gifted colleague and sometimes try to eliminate him; no manipulation of the texts permits us to discover shamans in the brothers-in-law of Asdiwal who conducted themselves towards him in this fashion.

Kirk adopts Douglas's criticisms as his own, so the preceding arguments also apply to him. There are also some further points addressed to him alone. Waux's gluttonous wife is not to be assimilated to the 'honey-mad girl', the motif of which we have in any case identified. Contrary to what Kirk believes, this personage does not neglect her duties to her husband's parents. The opposite is the case: by intercepting the gifts due from the son-in-law, she prevents her husband from fulfilling his obligations to *her* parents. Further, it is suggested that the positions of the two women in the Nass and Skeena versions are opposed: the Nass people go up this river to catch candlefish, whereas the Skeena people have to make an earlier descent of their river. This proposal ignores the fact that candlefish were and are caught on the lower Nass near Greenville, barely 20 kilometres from the river's mouth. Apart from those who are established there, the Nisqa therefore have to reach this place by going, not down the river — which is still frozen at this time — but along the valley. No one goes up the valley again. Then, if one is going in for this kind of interpretation, to what empirical happenings would the journeys of the hero to the celestial and underground worlds correspond? His movements from east to west and west to east, which might have their experiential equivalents, form a system together with his journeys from down to up and up to down, which relates to the imagination. The symmetry evident between them all belongs to the field of myth, not of lived experience.

Moreover, it is from another and singular misreading of the empirical data that the same critic advances another interpretation as superior to ours. The Skeena version, which concerns the frozen river where the women in search of food find only a half-rotten berry, would

suggest by these two details that the fish are not yet there; whereas the Nass version, in which the two women bring, one a scrap of fish-fry, the other a handful of berries, would mean that the fry is 'already available, although in short supply'.[a] It follows from this interpretation that, strange to relate, the fry would begin to move upstream before the fish. Social as much as biological conditions are misrepresented in the suggestion that in the Nass version the daughter of the maternal aunt of Asdiwal, who receives a passing mention, replaces the female cousin married by Asdiwal's son in the Skeena version, and that, consequently, the danger of marrying a cousin would be everywhere evident. Apart from the fact that the idea of such a notion would mark a surprising departure from that real situation to which our critic asserts fealty, cousin marriage being the norm among the Tsimshian, as we have shown, he entirely forgets that although the cousin category (including cross and parallel) exists for us, the Tsimshian had a kinship terminology of the Iroquois type in which parallel cousins, identified as brothers and sisters, are diametrically opposed to cross-cousins. In any such system, a daughter of the mother's sister is a 'sister' — from a marital point of view the exact opposite of a 'cousin' — and the indigenous categories make it impossible to identify them.

Professor Kirk also claims to demolish our interpretation of two Bororo myths and to replace it with his own. This is indeed quite different. For, no doubt less familiar with French than with the classical languages on which he is an eminent authority, Kirk translates 'termite mound' (*termitière*) as 'ant-eater' (*fourmilier*)! It would be uncharitable to dwell on the highly picturesque interpretation that results from this confusion.

In another part of the course, we have again taken up the analysis of the Asdiwal myth in terms of the version published in Boas in 1895 and to which, for reasons which were explained, we have devoted insufficient attention.[5] Comparative study has not only confirmed our earlier interpretations. It has also enabled us to formulate them in a manner at once more economical and more convincing, and to pose in general terms the problem of the role and semantic function in myth, not only American, but those from other parts of the world, of the motif of forgetfulness. As this discussion will have appeared in a separate publication at the moment of this report's appearance, we simply refer the reader to it.[6]

[a] Kirk, *Myth*, p. 55.

[5] Franz Boas, 'Indianische Sagen von der Nord-Pacifischen Küste Amerikas', *Sonder-Abdruck aus den Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte, 1891—1895* (Berlin, 1895), pp. 23—7.

[6] *Structural Anthropology*, vol. II, chapter IX, postscript.

6

The Grail in America and Addendum (1973—4)

The reduced teaching load we enjoyed this year lent itself to a project which could have seemed risky, had it been pressed further. Not, to be sure, that in comparing the Grail romances, works of pure literature, with certain myths of the North American Indians, we would have claimed to reveal historical connections between materials that are doubly heterogeneous. Our intention was quite other. If mythical elements remain in the Grail romances, these must be faint and vestigial. That is why the adversaries of the thesis that sees a Celtic origin in these elements advance two contrary arguments. On the one hand, they say, the thesis depends on fragments haphazardly put together to form an arbitrary mosaic out of scattered items in the Gallic and Irish traditions. On the other hand, these elements taken out of their context are to be found in many mythical traditions; they therefore relate to no particular mythology, but to the underlying substratum of universal mythology.

All of which is doubtless true. But one can turn the argument round the other way by asking the question whether, in a mythology quite unconnected with European antiquity and the Celtic world, these same elements are not found again in the same combination. In that case, they would cease to appear like inert materials that every narrator fashions and refashions according to his whim, but rather as diagnostic signs of constraints which, both here and there, impel them towards the same kind of articulation. Were this phenomenon observable in historical and geographical contexts that are totally distinct, it would be necessary to ask what these constraints are and if, postulated as the origin of the Grail narratives, they can illuminate them. In pursuing this course, one might succeed in discovering a more solid link between these narratives and what is known of the Celtic myths from which they are believed to derive. In sum, we set ourselves the task, using an indirect approach, of establishing the mythological nature of the Grail narratives; and we do this by showing

that, in another part of the world, their constituent elements crystallize according to the same laws.

The Algonkin of the Great Lakes region have myths that are curiously similar to the Grail stories. The 'wasteland' results there from the misconduct of young people who treat maize with disrespect. In consequence there is a famine, until the time when a hero undertakes a quest at the end of which he encounters the spirit of maize in the form of an old man — the master of an inexhaustible cauldron — whose spine is broken. In learning the cause of the misfortune of his host and of his own people, the hero becomes able to remedy both one and the other. Among a non-agricultural people such as the Modoc of northern California, the myth is found to have two important differences: the broken spine becomes a broken weapon which a hero, brought up in solitude by his grandmother, restores to use; this weapon enables him to revenge the earlier massacre of all his kinsfolk. We then see how, in the Grail narratives, a broken sword could take its place beside a magical vessel, and why a family vendetta can play there the role of combinatory variant in relation to lost and recovered fertility.

The Algonkin themselves illustrate another transformation present in the Grail narratives, that of the inexhaustible cauldron in the form of a bleeding head: in America, this head is itself a grail from which flow inexhaustible riches. This example is the more interesting in that it also shows us a swan, avatar of the daughter (or sister) of the king of the underworld, the object of the hero's quest: and we know that the Grail narratives make a close association between the offspring of the Grail king and these birds. Finally, if the triumphant hero receives the young girl as wife, it is because he has not asked for her. The motif of the answer without a question is therefore also found there.

Study of American narratives that have retained their mythical nature enables us to ascertain that in them a quest to achieved a vendetta transforms one to break an enchantment, and that the motif of the bleeding head transforms that of the inexhaustible cauldron. This latter change is explained in large measure by the practice of head-hunting: the proof is the presence in ancient Mexico of ritual vases with pedestals in the form of a vertebral column. Furthermore, there is no lack of evidence of head-hunting and the taking of scalps among the Celts.

Iroquois mythology allows us to interpret a third and a fourth parallel. Authorities on the Grail literature often seem hard put to it to explain an opposition found there between two kinds of magical nourishment: terrestrial food, when the Grail dispenses every desired form of cooked dish and a variety of liquid refreshment: and the miraculous host, the only subsistence of a personage in whom the

commentators have wanted to see a superfluous double of the wounded king. However, this personage exists in a clearly distinct form in the Iroquois myths: a skeletal man, whom a tiny fragment of chestnut or a pipe of tobacco suffices to nourish, the uncle or brother of a young and somewhat simple-minded hero who discovers him one day hiding in the granary where he lives. Naively, the youth attempts to feed him, so bringing about the loss of the magical food; thereupon he undertakes a search in the other world to recover the supernatural substance. Recital of the hero's childhood adventures, the evidence of his innocence, the presence at his side of a single female relative after the slaughter of their family — all this strikingly recalls the texts of Chrétien and Wolfram. One notes also the special role of a personage with extended eyelids that fall to his knees and prevent him from seeing, a motif not to be found elsewhere in world mythology except in Russia and in the Wales of the Mabinogion.[1] Finally, some Iroqouis versions have the hero accompanied in his quest by a double, identical to him except that his hair is of two colours. This double reminds us of Feirefis, Percival's piebald brother who accompanies him on his successful quest, and Branwen's half-brother in the Mabinogion. And if, in certain Iroqouis versions, this double is a cannibal who must be cured of his addiction, it should not be forgotten that Branwen's half-brother is partly destructive and partly helpful: for Feirefis is a pagan who must be converted. Further, the links with the Iroquois and Algonkin myths are triply confirmed: by the nature of aquatic birds assumed by beings from the other world; by the transformation, in many Iroquois narratives, of the inexhaustible cauldron of food into a martyred head whose tears change into precious stones; and finally, by the return of other versions which make an incarnation of the Grail out of an exogamous son-in-law, to the personage of the man with the broken spine.

The Indians of the northern Pacific coast do not practise agriculture, but the same mythological system exists among them, transposed into fishing terms. They tell the story of a prince who, during a time of famine, found and gave to his starving slave a piece of dried fish that

[1] I would now add Japan, where, according to legend, a tenth-century hero encounters a 'woman of the mountains', *yamauba*, whose breasts hang below her knees and who has to employ a stick to keep her eyelids open; one is also reminded, in other contexts, of a certain Tanuki, whose scrotum is so enormous that it serves him as a cloak; and of the holy man Inkada Sonja, whose eyelashes reach to his feet. These are a few examples, among others, of the replication of the same mythological motif among Celts, Slavs, Japanese and Amerindians, a fact that poses baffling problems for comparative mythology.

his mother kept folded inside a little box. In consequence, the salmon carried off the young man and took him to their king, who had been cured of paralysis by the prince's act. Owing to human non-observance of fishing rituals, this paralysis was the cause of the salmon ceasing to go upstream at springtime. A double, comparable to that in the Iroquois myths, plays a role in this story. Other narratives coming from the same region feature, as among the Algonkin, the intervention of a swan woman, the daughter of a sea god, who is the master of inexhaustible riches and whom the hero visits. This god is also sick and exists lying on his back; sometimes he is said to have been wounded by an inconsiderate act of the hero, who is consequently the only one able to heal him. The king of the salmon and the divine master of riches live beyond the seas in a palace protected by a swinging door that cuts in half those bold enough to attempt to enter. We know that the castle of the Grail is similarly protected.

A vast family of American myths thus concerns a supernatural personage who is wounded because the hero or his fellows have done that which they ought not to have done. In appearance, the formula inverts that of the Grail narratives, where the hero fails to do what he ought, which is to pose one or several questions. But, although in America to pose questions is contrary to good manners, the motif is often found there in another form: either, as in certain cases we have discussed, the hero does not do as expected of him and fails in one of his quests, or he succeeds, during his brief stay with the master of riches, in learning what he needs to know in order to obtain wealth. Evidently it is with the myths of the north-west coast that we approach most nearly to the Grail narratives, since the king of the other world appears there as a salmon or as a sea god, in both cases sick because of human fault, whereas the wounded king of the Grail is a fisherman, surpassingly rich. We find, in the same myths, a weapon (a splinter of hardened bark), the cause of the wounding of the wronged god, and a round stone, comparable to the Grail according to Wolfram, which protects from death and obviates the need for food. A ceremony takes place in another world difficult of access, situated beyond the waters. The healing is the work of a youth at first judged irresolute or simple-minded, but endowed with the qualities necessary for success. This hero finally decides to share the mysterious life and secrets of his host (in America, the rituals of maize or salmon, in which he instructs human beings); finally, the ceremony in which he participates begins with lamentations and ends with rejoicing. What could be called the syncretic model of the Grail narratives is thus revealed as a perfect homologue of the syncretic model that it is possible to construct out of the American myths; all sorts of details common to the two series confirm this impression.

How can we explain these similarities? From the start, we have dismissed the hypothesis of an ancient Palaeolithic substratum appearing in both Old and New Worlds: not because it is impossible or even improbable, but because it is incapable of proof. Another hypothesis then suggests itself: that of borrowings, much more recent, from European folklore of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, through the intermediary of Canadian lumberjacks. Such a hypothesis is plausible, since even in the nineteenth century echoes of the Grail were to be found in Breton folktales. All the same, the diversity of indigenous instances and the specific characteristics they assume in each culture militate against this solution, which lacks a single concrete piece of evidence to support it. At the most we can point to a detail of certain myths about the visit to the country of the salmon: recognition of the hero, who is changed into a salmon, thanks to a copper chain he wears round his neck, may reproduce an incident in the Irish story of the swan children, as it has been preserved in a French tale. For the rest, the evidence seems negative. Only the general plan of the European and American narratives is the same, but this common form is expressed in too many different contents, both from one to another and as between the two mythical totalities, for us to be able to consider the possibility of borrowing.

Let us add that the myths of the Pacific coast constitute, in their fashion, a courtly literature: their different versions serve, at least in part, to trace the origins of aristocratic lineages and to substantiate their pretensions. Iroquois society may have had a more democratic character, but its myths, as far as we know them, seem to have been formulated already by local wisemen. However that may be, we are closer in America to a mythical substratum than we are in Europe; for here the Grail romances have undergone all kinds of elaborations from the archaic narratives about which we know almost nothing, and which we can but faintly discern through a much altered and fragmentary Celtic literature. Building on the relatively advantageous American situation, we can at least attempt, in this particular case, to reach this substratum.

A splendid myth of the Mandan, a tribe of the upper Missouri, would seem to have preserved it best. It features a goddess, mistress of both an inexhaustible cauldron and of aquatic birds whose seasonal migrations mark the beginning and end of the agricultural year. Two brothers, who are identical in all respects except that one is wise, and the other is foolish, visit the divinity and stay with her for a year, then they ascend to heaven, where they marry daughters of the thunderbirds. But the birds are unable to travel to bring humankind the fertilizing rainstorms, because one of them is lame. The two brothers heal the bird, and the following year the seasonal rhythm is restored. As

among the Algonkin, the Iroquois and the people of the north-west coast, we are here dealing with a myth on the theme of interrupted communication.

And are not the Grail romances built around the same theme? In this case, the beauty of Chrétien de Troyes' narrative, its remarkable success, and the attraction it has exercised over a multitude of imitators and on those who took up the Grail theme are not to be explained as faithfulness to a myth we have lost, but, at a purely formal level, through intuition of an armature. It is a fact that Chrétien de Troyes' version of the Grail story is devoted to resolving a problem of communication. This problem is initially physical, because the mobility of Perceval's father, being wounded in the legs, is compromised. Then the problem is transposed to the intellectual level when, having warned him against liberality with words, the hero's mother takes him for a mute, and at the Grail castle he fails to pose the expected questions.

Perceval learns that he should have posed these questions, and that he has consequently failed to establish communication, at the moment when he guesses his own name, which is to say, when he succeeds for the first time in establishing communication with himself. Furthermore, the person who is the cause or occasion of this double revelation is an unknown female cousin, whose lover has just been beheaded, and who gives Perceval a sword that is fated to break as soon as it is used in battle. These symbols connote a double loss of physical communication, concerning the relation to one's self (decapitated body) or to another (broken sword). The sign beneath which Perceval lives during all these adventures is that of the Maid-Who-Never-Laughs who, breaking her silence, addresses his problem.

The same holds for the court of Arthur, which is always moving and which the sovereign, the king of this world, refuses to hold until some new happening is announced. This mobile, terrestrial court, which poses a permanent question (both according to Chrétien and in the first Continuation), appears symmetrical with that of the Grail king, a mobile court of the other world which offers a continual answer. Between the two lies a gulf of communication that requires to be filled. This symmetry also arises from the fact that Perceval fails to join the Grail court because of an unposed question, whereas Arthur's court tries in vain to include Perceval, and for the same reason: no one has asked him who he is. When the conjunction at last occurs, it is Perceval who makes the separation because at the sight of the three drops of blood he suddenly remembers, re-establishing one communication only to break another. All this has hardly been noticed: however it may be described, this armature occurs again in the Mabinegi of Pwyll. There, Rianon is a separated, though pursued woman who will

not be recovered until Pwyll addresses to her a request to which she agrees to respond: and she finds herself again separated by reason of an imprudent response to another request; this disjunction is resolved with the help of an inverted Grail, a vessel that is no longer inexhaustible, but is impossible to fill.

Supposing that there existed in the Celtic world, as in America, a myth relative to a wounded fish king or bird (fisher) king, whose infirmity interrupts the seasonal cycle and produces the wasteland, it would belong to a past too distant for its traces to be found in a much later literature of which few documents remain. It seems more worth while to consider that as opposed to myths of the Oedipal kind, which are widely distributed throughout the world and deal with an excessive communication that must be interrupted to avoid abuse, the comparisons we have been dealing with this year allow us to constitute a symmetrical model, perhaps also universal, of Percevalesque myths that pose the converse of the same problem: that of interrupted, or, more exactly, inverted communication, that needs to be properly re-established.

If this suggestion, advanced in our inaugural lesson, deserves acceptance, we should then go on to enlarge the scope.[2] For it could be that all mythology leads, in the final analysis, to the posing and resolution of a problem of communication; and that the mechanisms of mythical thought, confronted with logical circuits that are too complex to function all at once, consist in the making and unmaking of relays.

[2] *Structural Anthropology*, vol. II, chapter 1.

ADDENDUM

With the kind permission of Mr Jonathan Benthall, Director of the Royal Anthropological Institute, which published this text in its bimonthly newsletter *RAIN*, I complete the summary above with that of a lecture I gave in 1975 on a closely related theme at the French Institute in London.

I learned later that this anonymous report, remarkable for its elegance and clarity (and for which reasons I would have been hesitant to translate it), was due to M. André Zavriew, then director of the French Institute. I thank him for writing it and for allowing me to reproduce it here.

The Wasteland and the Hot-House? Notes on a Lecture by Lévi-Strauss

A correspondent writes:

In his lecture at the French Institute in London on 23 October, entitled 'Perceval, Parsifal: the life of a myth', Professor Claude Lévi-Strauss set out to show how a myth can transform itself. Taking the myth of Perceval that appears in Chrétien de Troyes' *Conte del Graal* (*c.*1175), he followed it up to the *Parsifal* of Wagner, who presents us with a modern (1882) variant of this myth. The analysis was very rich and only a simplified and schematized account can be given here.

In Chrétien de Troyes, the myth seems to appear in its simple or early form. Two worlds are stated: the court of King Arthur, here below; and the castle of the Grail, beyond. The essential feature of the myth of Perceval is that — whereas in Celtic mythology the passage was always open between these two worlds and allowed the coming and going of the dead and the living — communication here ceases to exist. Lévi-Strauss shows this when he characterizes the Arthurian Court by mobility, nervousness and impatience, and by its unceasing quest for an answer to questions that it is always asking. He characterizes the Castle of the Grail by its immobility and its waiting for a question that is never asked. There is a central scene in the romance of Percival where the hero does not dare ask 'Whom does one serve?', with the gold cup, encrusted with precious stones, which he has seen pass before him. Thus one of the two worlds calls for a question that does not come, the other offers a question that is not taken up. Between the two, conversation is interrupted.

The version of Wolfram von Eschenback (*c.*1205) keeps the essential character of the myth of Percival, a myth that includes two worlds without communication; but the simplicity of the early dualism has begun here to get confused. The Grail is no longer a chiselled cup, but a magic stone that serves cooked dishes to the person who asks for them; there is a question, but the hero cannot ask 'Who is served by the cup?' This confusion of the early myth is due to the adding of new elements of Oriental or Christian origin (notably by Robert de Borron), so that when Wagner takes up again the myth of Parsifal, he is faced by elements that have lost their meaning.

To understand what follows, we must open a parenthesis. If the Percival myth is that of interrupted communication, there exists a type of myth that is opposed to it: this is the Oedipus myth, or rather myths. These myths (Lévi-Strauss argues) are to do with an excessive communication characterized by resolution of a riddle, rankness and the explosion of natural cycles. By contrast, in the Percival myth are found questions without answers or questions that are not asked, the virginity of the hero, an earth without fertility, the 'wasteland' of the Grail. There is thus a systematic opposition between the two types of myth.

We can now take up the main thread of the analysis. Lévi-Strauss went on to argue that Wagner's transformation of the myth consisted in his seizing the dualism of the Percival story, but — since Wolfram von Eschenback's 'confusion' of the myth prevented him from conceiving a myth in which there would be two worlds — he conceived one world in which there are two myths. Instead of the opposition between here below and beyond, Wagner substitutes an opposition between the Percival myth and the Oedipus myth. The Percival myth or world is the Grail: the Oedipus myth or world is the magician Klingsor's castle. And indeed we find in the first act of *Parsifal* this world of non-communication, in the full sense that Lévi-Strauss means; for the king Amfortas is stricken by incapacity, the earth is stricken by sterility, and a question is not asked by the hero. By contrast, at Klingsor's castle in the second act we have an Oedipus world, a world of instantaneous communication, recognized in the climate of incest between the enigmatic Kundry and Parsifal, but even more in the ability to see from a distance what Klingsor manifests, while the flower-maidens illustrate the confusion of kingdoms and (in another register) recall the rankness of Thebes.

Wagner's transformation of the Percival myth has a paradoxical, yet at the same time rigorously logical character. The myth generates its inverse as myth. How can these two myths co-exist? Or rather, what solution will be found to the contradiction between the two worlds characteristic of the two myths — a contradiction which comes to replace the dualism between the world here-below and the world beyond of the Percival myth? Since, on the one side there is instantaneous communication and on the other side total absence of communication, Wagner's solution is something which is *both at the same time*; that is to say, pity, where we find both instantaneousness and non-communication. Between two incompatible logics, the solution is effective. So Lévi-Strauss leads us to the threshold of Wagner's music and its powerful emotional effects, and here aligns the work of Wagner with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, where 'pity' is that which explains the passage from total absence of social life to the birth of social life.

Lévi-Strauss has thus taken up, with characteristic originality, a body of material much studied by anthropologists about the turn of this century. He arrived in 1961, by way of his studies of analogous North American myths, at the suggestion that Percival is a kind of inverted Oedipus. And in his recent teaching at the College de France, he has speculated 'that all mythology comes back finally to posing and resolving a problem of communication; and that the mechanisms of mythic thought, confronted by logical circuits so complex that it cannot make them all function together, consist of the connecting and disconnecting of relays'.

7

Cannibalism and Ritual Transvestism (1974—5)

Monday's course took as its theme the relations between cannibalism and ritual transvestism. But before approaching the subject in depth, it is appropriate to consider the very notion of cannibalism, interest in which has progressively declined among anthropologists to the point where some now dispute the former existence of cannibalism in parts of the world where there is abundant and concordant evidence.

Granted, these testimonies are often unreliable. In the first part of the course the evidence was critically examined. We concluded that a considerable mass of documents remained, testifying to the reality and diversity of cannibalistic practices not only in South America, where the first explorers described them with a wealth of detail, and in New Guinea, where they died out no more than a few years ago, but also in Indonesia, Oceania and Africa.

The real difficulties begin when one seeks to analyse and classify the various forms taken by cannibalism. The now-traditional distinction between exo- and endo-cannibalism is misleading. All kinds of intermediate forms exist between these two extremes, and the initial contrast becomes meaningless. The exo-cannibal reincorporates the virtue of his kinsfolk by ingesting the enemy who has himself eaten them. The endo-cannibal may be propelled by the opposite motive: the Yanomami of southern Venezuela, who consume the piled bones of their dead, believe that they thereby acquire a strength sufficient to counterbalance the deleterious consequences of killing an enemy, a murder conceived as an act of metaphorical cannibalism. For them, therefore, endo-cannibalism in the strict sense is the means to a figurative exo-cannibalism.

Moreover, evidence from both Americas illustrates the states of transition between exo-cannibalism, torture, and a form of sacrifice to the gods that is at first a sacrifice *of* the god. Through examples taken from the ancient Tupinamba, the Aztecs, the Iroquois and the Plains Indians, we demonstrated the generality of this model in America; it

is also found elsewhere. Cannibalism, then, appears as a limiting case of the torture of the other; but this is not infrequently in overt or disguised form, a self-torture administered with the help of another. We can thus construct a typology with two poles: at one the mystical identity of the prisoner with his captors, the precondition of his torture and cannibal victimization; at the other extreme we find torture inflicted by the sufferer on himself, or with the aid of a parent, fellow-tribesman or stranger. In this perspective, the 'stake of torture' is no more than a means accepted, if not sought, by the victim, in order to rise above himself, and the torturer is less an enemy than an officiant. We then see, let it be noted in passing, that this 'primitive' torture has nothing in common with that practised in so-called 'civilized' societies, the effect of which is to degrade the victim in violation of all moral rules, and not to sanction, according to norms accepted by the culture, his effort towards self-transcendence.

Even the criterion of mastication does not allow us to define cannibalism with equivocation. What we find is that the problematic of cannibalism and head-hunting is one and the same, and it is doubtful if we need to separate two customs that, moreover, often appear together. Whether in Indonesia among the Atoni, the Tempasuk Dusun and the Iban, in New Guinea among the Asmat and Marind-Anim, or in America among the Jivaro, the head-hunting ritual corresponds in all its details to the cannibalistic sacrifice of the ancient Tupinamba.

Finally, the practice of cannibalism, where it exists, never seems to be the rule. In Africa, Polynesia and several parts of Melanesia, far from being co-extensive with the whole social group, cannibalism appears as a privilege exercised by local groups, lineages, a caste or class, or even certain individuals. Where the practice appears to be the norm, one notes exceptions in the form of reticence or repulsion. One is also struck by the labile character of cannibalistic customs. In all the evidence available from the sixteenth century until the present, these customs emerge, spread and disappear in what is often a very short period of time. Doubtless this explains their frequent abandonment at the first contacts with Whites, and even before coercive measures could be deployed against the practitioners.

It would be hard to understand how cannibalism could so frequently assume an unstable and subtly changeable form without recognizing an underlying schema wherein identification with the other plays a part. At this point we re-encounter a central thesis of Rousseau on the origin of sociability, a hypothesis more firmly based and more productive than that of contemporary ethologists who, in order to explain cannibalism and other behaviour, appeal to an aggressive instinct. In this connection we have proposed that certain human

ways of behaving can be better explained on the model of cellular phenomena occurring at the basis of the organism, rather than by arbitrary comparison with complex and diverse animal behaviours produced by a long evolution. Research by biologists into cyclic AMP, a chemical vector common to both unicellular creatures and higher animals and which, among the latter, plays an essential role in cerebral activity, does not justify us in describing 'aggression' as an instinct or drive definable by its own characteristics.[a] On a continuum where communication becomes sociality, which in turn becomes predation and incorporation, aggression has no fixed place. It cannot be defined in an absolute fashion, for it is cultural factors that order this continuum and, in each particular case, establish the thresholds differently.[1]

If it were necessary to seek in this sense for the objective basis of identification as conceived by Rousseau, the problem of cannibalism would no longer present itself in the same terms. It would not be a matter of searching for the 'why?' of the custom, but, on the contrary, for the 'how?' of the emergence of this lower limit of predation from which, perhaps, we are brought back to social life. The frontiers of cannibalism appear so fluid to us as to be undefinable as constituted practice; it would be equally vain (and of little interest) to approach it, in the manner of the psychoanalysts, from the bias of our own subjectivity. The only valid question for the anthropologist is to know what cannibalism is (in so far as it is anything at all), not in itself or for us, but only for those who practise it. We shall not succeed in this by artificially isolating the practice, but, contrariwise, by reintegrating it in a larger semantic field containing other configurations which it transforms and through which it is itself transformed: some external, like political relations and kinship systems; others internal, cultural traits definable by derived notions such as anti-, para- and infra-cannibalism, which are incarnated in ritual by personages called ceremonial clowns, fools or gluttons.

Further, a striking feature of societies that practise cannibalism would seem to be that, in relation to this custom, women invariably occupy a strongly marked position. This mark, as the linguists say, can be negative: for example, in those societies of Africa, New Guinea and Indonesia where women have no place in cannibalistic festivities, either as guests or as food. Indeed, women in these societies were

[a] J. T. Bonner, 'Hormones in social amoebae and mammals', *Scientific American*, 220 (6) (1969), pp. 78–91.

[1] Cf. *The Naked Man*, p. 685.

forbidden to consume human flesh; or again (and sometimes simultaneously), the flesh of women was banned from these meals.

To the contrary, many American societies and certain Polynesian ones gave women a major role, either at cannibal banquets or at ceremonies such as the mutilation of a dead enemy and the torture of living prisoners (sometimes followed by acts of cannibalism) that resembled 'pure' cannibalism. In relation to cannibalism, consequently, the position assigned to women was rarely neutral. If the society did not exclude them, one could say that it expected of women, if the expression be permitted, that they go 'over the top'. The mythology itself often traces the origin of cannibalistic customs to a woman.

These comments also apply to head-hunting, which, as we have already demonstrated, can be assimilated to cannibalism as one of its modalities. On the return of the victorious warriors, the women appropriate the heads and exhibit them. And if, among the Asmat and the Marind-Anim, the captured head enables the naming (after the victim) of the already procreated child, among the Iban of Borneo it permits the procreation itself: a well-born woman would not marry a man who had not taken at least one head, and a newly severed head was indispensable at the celebration of a chiefly marriage.

This connection between cannibalism, or head-hunting, and women emerges particularly clearly in the rituals of which Bateson has provided a classic description in a work devoted to the Iatmul, a New Guinea tribe. In the course of the *naven*, a ceremony intended to honour a uterine nephew, the maternal uncle disguises himself as an old female gossip and plays the clown, while the women of the paternal side put on warrior's dress and make themselves out to be head-hunters, which the Iatmul indeed were. We have extended this paradigm to other societies — mainly in North America, but also in Melanesia, South America and Africa — where, on certain occasions, the women dress as men or behave in a masculine fashion, and conversely for the other sex. Applying a law of transformation proposed twenty years ago, this very general model can be given the form: the function 'woman' among fellow females is to the function 'man' among fellow males, as the function 'woman' among male fellow tribesmen is to the function 'non-fellow-tribesmen (= enemy)' among men.[2] But does this equivalence, expressed in abstract terms, also have a concrete content? That is what remains to be investigated.

The Kwakiutl of British Columbia explain the origin of their cannibal rites by the forced marriage of one of their daughters to a supernatural

[2] Cf. *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1, p. 228.

ogre. The surrendered woman thus played the role of pivot between human beings and the ogres. According to certain versions of the myth, she returns to her parents and this return coincides with the acquisition or conquest of cannibal rites; in other versions, she is for ever lost to her own people, 'rooted' in her new home, but she guides her brothers and helps them with her advice. On the other side of the Pacific, the Iban of Borneo have a curiously symmetrical myth: a husband (instead of brothers) whom a cannibal monster deprives of his dearest companion (a wife killed instead of a sister ravished) goes to see him and triumphs over him with the help of the ogre's sister, who thus likewise plays the role of pivot or hinge between cannibals and humans. In both cases, therefore, the sociological relationship between wife-giver and wife-taker underlies the mythological relationship between cannibals, as supernatural beings, and their victims. It is easy to understand why: in exogamous marriage the wife-taker, ravisher of a sister or daughter, appears as a stranger, and therefore as an enemy, and the wife-taker has always grounds for fearing that the wife who has come from elsewhere may exert mysterious and criminal powers against him. It is therefore not surprising that in New Guinea and in Indonesia the warriors proudly call themselves the 'husbands' of foreign villages that they attack in order to take heads: by her fate or by her origin, the woman given in marriage or acquired as a wife finds herself in some way contaminated by the cannibalism, moral if not always real, of the strangers with whom she associates or of the group from whence she comes.

In the last part of the course, we sought to discover whether this model could be generalized, and we investigated its possible modification by either matrilineal or patrilineal rules of descent. The Pueblo Indians of the south-western United States afford a good example of the first type, and it is noteworthy that the *Koyemshi* ceremonial clowns of the Hopi, hermaphroditic and impotent, are the 'husbands' of the Katchina, divinities that are nowadays considered benign, but, according to the myths of Acoma and elsewhere, were formerly ferocious. Moreover, the Koyemshi had particularly close ties with the women of the father's clan. The Iatmul model thus holds, although it is inverted: instead of the cannibals, as masculinized women, belonging to the paternal line and the clowns, as feminized men, to the maternal line (locus of the divinized and, on occasions, symbolically eaten ancestors), we here find the clowns, desexed beings, belonging to the paternal lines, whereas the maternal line is represented at the mythical level by head-hunting gods that, albeit repentant, remain formidable. There is thus a commutation of *cannibals//clowns* + *gods* into *clowns//gods* + *cannibals*.

A brief analysis of the great Shalako ritual of the Zuni, which in

certain respects constitutes an Aztec-type sacrifice and in other respects a Kwakiutl-type *potlach*, provided additional support for this interpretation.

Among patrilineal peoples such as the Algonkin and the Sioux we noted the simultaneous progressive fusion of the clown and the cannibal and the emergence of a newcomer: the fool. All these personages are in some way demasculinized and play the roles of woman, invalid, cripple, old man. They disguise themselves as hunchback, transvestite, pregnant woman or, like the Sioux fool, take a vow of celibacy. This general weakening of the contrast between the sexes appears as the consequence of a complex evolution that it is necessary to consider as a whole.

We began with the opposition between wife-takers and wife-givers, which, among the Pueblo Indians, mainly assumes the form of an opposition between paternal and maternal kin. In fact Pueblo societies seek each in its own way, a doubly guaranteed equilibrium: internally by the divine origin attributed to the social order, and externally by the concomitant refusal to admit neighbours and strangers. It is therefore only through the latent antagonism between paternal and maternal kin that the social order can generate its dynamism. The Koyemshi mediate between these two poles and their character of 'upside-down' personages, incestuously conceived while their mothers were menstruating, and who are hermaphroditic and impotent, makes them apt to realize this equilibrium in ritual in the form of a symbolic inversion of the real order.

The same antagonism between paternal and maternal kin also existed among the Kwakiutl, who invested their marriage rites with the flavour of warlike expeditions. But Kwakiutl society was also hierarchically organized and entertained complex relations — sometimes pacific, sometimes hostile — with neighbouring peoples. Consequently, from one side and another of the antagonism between paternal and maternal kin, two kinds of conflict emerged: one was internal, between exploiters and exploited, the other external, between hosts and guests. We saw that the *Shalako* ritual of the Zuni already sketched the outlines of this complex configuration.

Contrary to the Kwakiutl, the Plains Indians presented the image of societies in equilibrium, like those of the Pueblo Indians. But this equilibrium was more apparent than real, for the warrior Indians of the Plains suppressed internal conflicts between paternal and maternal kin and between rich and poor, the better to express external conflicts. To the repression of internal antagonisms there doubtless corresponded the fusion, illustrated in the rituals, of the clown and cannibal personages; and, to the exacerbation of external conflicts, the appearance of the fool, an irresponsible risk-taker in whom masculine

and feminine characteristics were confounded, an asocial being whose solitude and fatal destiny were perhaps the inevitable counterpart of a false harmony conceived in group terms. It was a false harmony indeed, for, thinking to eliminate all internal frictions to assure the solidarity of the group and direct its violence towards the outside, the Plains Indians condemned themselves to having no model of hostility other than that exercised against their enemies and, so to say, to reimporting this model. Among them, the antagonism between affines and that resulting from economic inequality had virtually disappeared, only to reappear in the form of a mini-war between the sexes, a small-scale model of the real war between enemy peoples. The kidnapping of women, the pastime of young men when not engaged in military operations, shows us that the interior life of the group, deprived of structural factors that could nourish its dynamism, was thereby reduced to copying the serious conflicts occurring on a larger stage.

All the facts under consideration could therefore be treated as so many symbolic expressions of a series of relations, beginning with reversible forms (wife-takers and wife-givers) and ending with irreversible forms (compatriots and enemies), by the way of intermediate forms (paternal and maternal kin, hosts and guests, exploiters and exploited). For each form we can distinguish symmetric modalities dependent on whether the descent rule is patrilineal or matrilineal, and these modalities also vary as a function of other aspects of the social organization peculiar to each group.

Finally, we felt obliged to refute the error of those anthropologists who explain ritual transvestism as a feminine reaction: as if women, on the occasion of festivals, sought to rebel against their inferior status, without being able to express this revolt in other than symbolic fashion. It appeared to us, on the contrary, that the relation underlying ritual transvestism is always established between men. Clowning and figurative cannibalism are the signifiers by means of which men symbolize women in the first case, and in the second case women are the means of symbolizing men. For, in the latter case, men cannot symbolize themselves, they can only be as they are. Women are therefore required as an indispensable mediating term to express the meaning, which is quite other than reproducing the real. As represented in ritual, cannibalism translates the way men think of women, or rather in which men think of masculinity across and over (*à travers*) women. Conversely, ritual clowning translates the way men think of themselves as women, or try to assimilate femininity to their own humanity.

8

Order and Disorder in Oral Tradition (1975–6)

As they were collected in very diverse times and conditions, the mythological traditions of non-literate peoples appear under two contrasting aspects: some are heaps of disparate pieces, each retaining its own individuality; others are coherent wholes consisting of interlinked narratives, but in which we often find myths or elements of myths that a neighbouring people recounts as separate stories. Do these two types constitute distinct genres of oral literature, or should we see in them the stages of an evolution? And, in the latter case, should one take the epic as anterior to the fragmentary forms into which it would have decomposed; or, in a converse movement, did philosophical poets fuse together originally heterogeneous materials, in order to give them the form of a unitary work? Tuesday's course, of which the title was 'Order and Disorder in Oral Tradition', has proposed the beginnings of an answer to these questions.

We made particular use of Canadian examples. After retracing the history of juridical and political relations between the Crown and the provinces on one side, and the Indians on the other, we reconstructed the complex picture of the conflicts that still divide these parties; typical, among others, are the James Bay affair, in which the parties concerned are the province of Quebec, the Cree and the Inuit, or again, the long legal struggle waged by the Nishga Indians against the British Columbia authorities. At the same time as these problems emerged, one saw the birth of a new mythological literature of which the Indians themselves are the authors and initiators, and which, in a more or less direct manner, validates economic, political or territorial claims. For convenience, we labelled this corpus in formation 'baroque' without any pejorative intent, following the custom of historians who thus denote an art whose principal objectives are movement and expression. It proved interesting to compare this corpus with that called, also for convenience, 'classic'; the latter covers the myths that

were published by Boas between 1895 and 1916 and by Barbeau a little later, collected directly by these authors or with the assistance of local collaborators. In the 'baroque' category we included works due to this same Barbeau who, momentarily escaping from professional constraints to discover the sources of indigenous inspiration, produced out of authentic versions a variant of his own making that should none the less not be disdained;[1] oral traditions dictated by an Indian chief to an amateur aware of the importance of his mission;[2] and a work of the Gitksan chief Kenneth B. Harris, a translation of family traditions tape-recorded by his maternal uncle, whom, according to the rule of matrilineal inheritance in force among the Tsimshian, Harris succeeded.[3]

The difference between the two bodies of work does not therefore depend on the greater or lesser role played in them by indigenes. In fact, Boas's monumental *Tsimshian Mythology*[4] and Barbeau's slimmer volume, *Tsimsyan Myths*,[5] are, as far as the tests are concerned, the respective works of Henry Tate and William Benyon, both literate Tsimshian Indians. But in cases like these the collaborator carries out the instructions of the anthropologist; he becomes himself an anthropologist when he seeks to construct as complete a collection as possible and treats on the same level the traditions of his own familial or social group and those obtained from informants belonging to other clans. Further, these documents are arranged in an order which he endeavours to make objective. Thus, Boas and Tate's work begins with cosmological myths, followed by the adventures of the transformative and trickster god who continues and completes the work of creation. Immediately following come narratives relating either to excessively distant marriages (the symbolism of which also has a cosmic dimension) or to other kinds of relations that individuals sometimes enter into with supernatural forces. Then there are myths devoted to political relations considered under a triple aspect: internal politics, intertribal politics, and relations of the group with the supernatural worlds. There follow narratives dealing with shamanism and the origin of religious brotherhoods. The collection concludes with narratives that claim historical truth. Comparison with the collection of Barbeau and Benyon shows that their versions of the same myths tend to be

[1] C. M. Barbeau, *The Downfall of Temlaham* (Toronto, 1928).

[2] W. Robinson, *Men of Medeek* (Kitimat, 1962).

[3] Kenneth B. Harris, *Visitors Who Never Left: The Origin of the People of Damalahamid* (Vancouver, 1974).

[4] Franz Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology* (Washington, DC, 1916).

[5] C. M. Barbeau, *Tsimsyan Myths* (Ottawa, 1961).

grouped according to principles largely similar to those we have just cited.

Contrariwise, a text like *Men of Medeek*, dictated by Chief Wright, and the book by Harris already mentioned, are presented in the form of a continuous narrative with chapters following each other in an order which, from the beginning, claims to be strictly historical. For these authors, the primary concern is with tracing the origin of a clan and, within the clan, of a lineage; with following the ancestors in their wanderings, describing their encounters, their victories and defeats, explaining how they came to occupy such-and-such a territory, which subsequently became their property; and also how the sins they committed are at the origin of a particular tragic fate. This predominant concern with history leaves scant room for cosmology, so the myths dealing with the creation of the world disappear; those describing the works of the trickster god are likewise suppressed, or else, in very abbreviated form, interpolated in seemingly arbitrary fashion towards the end of the narrative.

Nevertheless these interpolations have a meaning that emerges when one examines more closely how Chief Harris handles this matter in the conduct of his intrigue. Each of the successive events in time (of which several correspond to myths of the classical corpus) serve to found a name, a rank, a title, a privilege among these, and they are extremely numerous, that the author of the book, himself of noble blood, possesses from birth or which he has acquired during his life. In other words, the successive moments of a diachronic account claiming to cover centuries, if not millennia, are projected as a pattern on a screen depicting a hierarchical social order which exists entirely in the present.

It is unhappily certain that history exists, and that the synchronic order bears its marks. These appear in the narratives of the two chiefs, but with significant differences. That of Chief Wright is dogged by an implacable fate. The clan or the local group (the two ideas are fused in the early narrative) go from disaster to disaster; every time that peace and prosperity seem attained a new misfortune befalls, nearly always because of the clan's or group's own doings. This pessimistic vision of history contrasts with that of Chief Harris, though not to the extent that the latter is able to avoid allowing a place to contingencies. For example, he has to explain how, in the order of precedence, the principal title of which he is so proud is found to be relegated to the rank below. For him, consequently, history appears as the genesis of a social order, but a genesis into which is introduced, one is tempted to say by a roundabout way, a residual disorder which remains irreducible. Chief Wright's narrative more nearly approaches what we could call a history of events: the social order is, at every

moment, simultaneously constructed and brought into question by historical developments.

These texts thus have as their major interest the fact that they place themselves, and us with them, at the intersection of two domains: that which by general consent can be called mythical, and another, which corresponds to what their respective authors understand by history. Whence the problem: what characteristics should we expect of a history that is, if one can put it thus, in direct contrast with myth?

These appear to be four in number. In the first place, this history is made up of immovable narrative cells, nearly all of which reproduce myths already present in the classical collections; taken over by a historical narrative that impoverishes their details and reduces their dimensions, they conserve the properties we have elsewhere found in myths, notably the invariance of internal relations under a series of transformations. Thus, the same cell will appear in the following forms; some men kill the lover of their married sister, a husband kills his wife's lover, a husband kills his wife who has a lover. The consequence in the three cases is a war between two villages, the defeat of one and the migration of the survivors. But, if each cell has its own existence as a mini-myth, the order that presides over their concatenation does not derive from myth, but results from a creation that is free or, at least, very unrestricted. It is somewhat as though each narrator had a fixed number of cells at his disposal to begin with and had the right to use them like toy pieces in a game to construct such-and-such a history of which he has a model in his own mind.

In the second place, this history is repetitive. To carry forward his narrative, the narrator does not shrink from employing the same type of event several times in succession, and independent narrators on occasion make use of the same type of event in narratives that do not occur at the same period or in the same places, and in which the protagonists also differ.

A third characteristic, which moreover flows from the two preceding ones, is that this history falls apart when one seeks to identify with some precision the events narrated in it. Even if one has a solid point of reference, such as an archaeological relic or a place-name, the facts attached to them by the different narrators, although often having much in common, are never identical: they concern other personages or, if these are the same, their respective roles diverge. Fourth, and finally, this history tends to assume a cyclical form: it ends with events of a kind already encountered, frequently even at the beginning of the narrative.

Although still close to myths, these narratives are not lacking in indications for the resolution of historical problems that have long exercised specialists. Sixty years ago, Swanton and Boas took opposing

positions on the question of the quadripartite structure of Tsimshian society as found, with differences of terminology only, among the coastal groups, the Gitksan of the Skeena, and the Nishga of the Nass. For Swanton, this structure was the result of the aggregation, over a period of time, of previously isolated groups; local traditions, of which Swanton provided several examples, appeared to support this thesis. For Boas, on the contrary, it was a matter of a social structure as much anterior to attested or inferred movements of population, but not excluding the possibility that the primitive system had anomalies or gaps, consequent on the disappearance of particular subdivisions. Indeed, there is no solid proof that exogamic divisions did not exist in ancient times, with the implication that there were originally several of them, as the concept of exogamy requires.

The documentary evidence examined this year leads us to consider an intermediate solution, based on three observations. First, dualism would appear to be a primitive element of the social organization. Secondly, the occasional emergence of tripartite groupings seems to result from the preference of the ancient Tsimshian for marriage with the matrilateral cross-cousin, which requires a minimum of three exchanging units. Thirdly, the quadripartite organization would itself result from a duplication of the primitive dualism, without this second stage needing to be a structural reform. From a reading of recently published chronicles, one can see it rather as an accidental effect of alliances and conflicts leading, at the end of a whole series of schisms and fusions, to a relatively stable structural state; only such a state would permit all local groups to have the same composition and allow to each, on its own or in its relations with others, the richest possibilities of alliance compatible with the initial diversity.

Between the stationary structure of the myth and the open development of history, there is therefore a place for an intermediate form: that of a development conceived as the product of a combinative that presents itself under two aspects. In the first aspect, this combinative produces mythical history or, if you will, historicized myth, juxtaposing or superimposing with great freedom of choice elements that are themselves strictly defined, and made use of to form open or closed series which, in both cases, may be of several models. As to the exogamic divisions generated by what this time is a real history, they would result from operations comparable to those of players using cards classified by colours, shuffled and reshuffled so as to provide a reasonable assurance that a sequence of cards, drawn from the deck at random, would provide a sampling of all four colours, even though each colour was not represented by the same number of cards. In the same way, each local group observed most often contains representatives of the four divisions, though almost always in unequal numbers.

In conclusion, we tried to define in terms of its distinctive characteristics what would be a history without archives, written according to the oral traditions of several families whose ancestors experienced more or less the same events. Of this history that is common in principle, if not always in fact, each family would retain only fragments, and to fill the gaps would borrow from the others, while imposing its own perspective, events analogous to those in which, or so it believed, its members had formerly participated. Thus would be constituted, as the raw material of history, what one could call type-events that are not rigorously true, but are not entirely false either.

As commentators have observed, the peoples we have been considering this year have so little concept of fiction that their vocabulary lacks a word to denote it, or to distinguish it from falsehood pure and simple. However, they have no conception either of the idea of a unique history which, from the Western point of view, can alone meet a requirement of truth. They accept that the traditions of the different clans are authentic, and restrict themselves to believing their own to be more correct than those of their neighbours. They thus accommodate themselves to an equivocation where we would see contradictions.

This equivocation emerges admirably from the title given by Chief Harris to his work, for these 'visitors who never left' are alternatively presented therein as established protectors of the lineage and as intruders who cannot be got rid of, sometimes as venerable ancestors whose names and offices, transmitted from generation to generation, perpetuate down the centuries a social order that is theoretically unchangeable; but sometimes also as uninvited guests who are received with bad grace, because their sudden eruption into the system was the cause of its existing irregularities. This is evidence that, despite all the pains taken to bring them together, the forces of myth and of history pull in opposite directions.

PART IV

Current Controversies in Social Organization and Kinship

1

Investigations into Kinship and Marriage (1961–2)

With the title 'Recent Research into Kinship and Marriage', Wednesday's course aimed to review the major anthropological developments of the past ten or twelve years, since the publication of our book *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949). Three problems in particular were concentrated upon.

1 BILINEAL DESCENT SYSTEMS

Not only in Indonesia and Polynesia, but also in Melanesia and Africa, there has been an increasing emphasis on the existence of cognatic systems, that is, those founded on an equal recognition of both lines. In America, these have been given the name of non-unilineal systems. They are certainly much more plentiful than was suspected twenty years ago, and it is probable that they represent at least one-third of all the descent systems presently recorded. We had previously suggested that such systems be left to one side because we thought, like Radcliffe-Brown himself, that they constituted the exception. Although that no longer seems accurate, this attitude of reserve need not be so much altered, for even though they are frequent, such systems are not strictly speaking relevant to the elementary structures of kinship. As Goodenough has already indicated in his article 'Malayo-Polynesian social organization', it is necessary, in order to understand them, to employ a new typology.[1] In effect, these systems bring in a new dimension, since they define, perpetuate and transform the mode of social cohesion through a relation that is no longer to a fixed rule of descent, but to a system of rights in land.

[1] Ward Goodenough, 'Malayo-Polynesian social organization', *American Anthropologist*, LVII (1) (1955).

The difference between cognatic societies and those with unilineal descent is therefore roughly comparable with the difference observed between arthropods and vertebrates. In one case, the societal 'skeleton' is internal, and consists of a synchronic and diachronic mesh of personal statuses, in which each individual status is tightly bound to all the others. In the other case, the 'skeleton' is external and consists of a mesh of territorial statuses, that is to say a system of land tenure. These territorial statuses are exterior to individuals, who are thus able, within the limits imposed by these outside constraints, to define their own position with a certain freedom.

It follows that cognatic systems differ also from unilineal systems in a second respect: in them, diachrony and synchrony are, to a certain extent, dissociated by the freedom of choice they accord to each individual. Societies that possess cognatic systems may thus accede to historical existence, to the extent that statistical fluctuations embodying a large number of individual choices are sometimes found to be oriented in the same direction.

However that may be, the importance of bilineal or undifferentiated systems for anthropological theory is nowadays beyond doubt. We understand better that the line separating societies traditionally called primitive from those called civilized does not in any way coincide with that between elementary structures of kinship and complex structures. Among the so-called 'primitive' societies heterogeneous types exist, and the theory of some of these types remains to be constructed. A large number of these societies in fact relate to complex structures of kinship. It is only in relation to elementary structures that we can provisionally leave out of account examples of undifferentiated descent.

2 GENERALIZED EXCHANGE IN AUSTRALIA

The interpretation we have put forward of the Murngin kinship system of Arnhemland, northern Australia, has aroused numerous discussions and objections. Thus we have been accused by Leach, Berndt and Goody of confusing two kinds of anthropologically distinct phenomena: local groups and lineages. According to these critics, only local groups have a real existence, lineages existing only in the minds of the indigenes (and, after them, of the anthropologists) as a convenient way of classifying kinship terms. In the particular case of the Murngin, the manner in which we have expressed this distinction appears to us, even today, as more satisfactory than that of our opponents. It is not accurate to say, as Leach does, that the Murngin system comprises

seven lineages and four local groups.[a] In fact, Murngin society observed at any particular time comprises a finite (but relatively large) number of local groups, the exact number of which is unknown to us. To define his kinship relations, each individual refers to four local groups, three fixed and one mobile, which allow him to situate himself in relation to four lineages: his own, that of his 'wife-givers' and that of his 'wife-takers', and one which may be, according to his choice, that of the wife-givers of his wife-givers, or that of the wife-takers of his wife-takers. And as it appears that the cycles of exchange bring into play more than four local groups, Ego is led to invest supplementary terms (although derived from the preceding ones) to designate eventual local groups' patterns in the same cycle of exchange as his own.

Moreover, the distinction between local groups and lineages is still too simplistic. In fact, it is necessary to distinguish three things: the *obligated* lineages, which number three (plus one); the *optional* lineages, which number four (minus one); and the local groups, the number of which is unknown, being always variable according to place and time, but which cannot be less than four and which (by reason of the extension of the terminological system) must generally be much greater.

A second complaint made against us is that of postulating the circularity of the system. This complaint results from a confusion between model and empirical reality. The model of a generalized system necessarily entails a certain circularity, even though this circularity may be simple or complex or assume the most varied forms. Empirical reality is much more flexible. Among all the alliance cycles empirically observable, one will find a certain proportion of circular ones, either in the short or long term; others never 'loop' because they 'lose' themselves. All that would be required for the model to remain valid is that the gross number of cycles 'lost' in one sense be approximately equal to the number of those 'lost' in the other, in such a way that, negatively here, the losses balance out with the gains.

To claim, as Leach does, that a system of matrilateral marriage is not necessarily circular, at least in theory, is equivalent to asserting that a cyclist whose handlebar is permanently turned in one direction will not go round and round. It is certainly possible that he will never return to his point of departure, but it is statistically probable that if

[a] E. R. Leach, 'The structural implications of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage', Curl Prize Essay (London, 1951).

several cyclists make a sufficiently large number of revolutions of the course, they will retrace each other's points of departure a great many times. For a matrilateral system to be totally devoid of circularity would require the number of local groups to be infinite. And the less numerous they are, the more likely it is that circularity will be approached. Effectively, the circularity of asymmetric systems does not arise from a pre-ordained disposition of local groups in unchanging cycles of exchange, but from the fact that, in whatever fashion they forge relationships between themselves, the genealogical space in which they move is structurally curved.

3 GENERALIZED EXCHANGE IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

The most animated discussions have occurred in relation to our interpretation of the kinship system of the Kachin, a tribal grouping of northern Burma. Leach has accused us of claiming that the Kachin system conceals a contradiction, and to have gone on to conclude that the model of the system was necessarily unstable. Two aspects of his argument should be distinguished.

In the first place, Leach disagrees that the Kachin system tends to increase the inequality between wife-takers and wife-givers. According to him, matrimonial prestations consist essentially of cattle. However, and on our critic's own evidence, the prestations also consist of labour service; unlike cattle, one cannot see how labour service could be restored to those who provide it. But above all, it is false to say that the cattle are returned to the donors in the form of ceremonial feasts; for, from the fact that it is due to cattle that the chief is able to provide festivities, there results for him a gain in prestige which is truly capitalized. There is therefore a constant tendency for prestige to grow, at the expense of that renounced by the donors when they denude themselves of cattle in order to obtain wives.

But we have never suggested that in Kachin society women are exchanged for goods. It is clear that, in this society as in others, women are exchanged for women. The reason that we have posited a fundamental instability in the Kachin system is different. It does not relate to the economic nature of an alleged counter-gift, but to the distortion effected by the matrimonial exchanges themselves in a system of generalized exchange. In effect, the more the cycle of exchanges has a tendency to lengthen, the more often it will happen that at each stage an exchanging group, not being immediately compelled to furnish a counter-prestation to the group to which it is directly indebted, will be tempted to increase its advantage in the

form either of an accumulation of women or of a claim to women of a higher rank. Moreover, if, as Leach emphasizes, meat can be given back, the prestige acquired through its distribution is not restored.

However, several years later, in his book *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, Leach appears to have arrived at a different interpretation, one that is much nearer our own. In his article of 1951, only one form of Kachin social organization was observed. In his book, which was published in 1954, on the contrary, Leach places the emphasis on the structural duality of the two forms of matrimonial and political organization, which he calls respectively *gumlao* and *gumsa*. He further suggests that Kachin society constantly oscillates between the two types. Finally, he shows that each type is affected by a structural instability, which periodically condemns it to disappear in favour of the other type. After having thus maintained that Kachin society was in equilibrium, Leach is led to recognize that it alternates between two mutually contradictory forms, each of which itself contains a contradiction.

The same author has further accused us, in the case of the Kachin system, of not adequately distinguishing between hypergamy and hypogamy. The reason is that, from a formal point of view, it is unnecessary to make the distinction between the two forms. We therefore proposed that in order to designate marriage between partners of unequal status — without concerning ourselves with whether it is the man or the woman who occupies the more elevated rank — we should borrow from botany the term *anisogamy*, which does not prejudge the orientation of the system.

Just as matrilateral and patrilateral marriage are both compatible with the two modes of unilineal descent, although patrilateral marriage is more likely in a matrilineal system (by reason of its structural instability, which favours short cycles), and matrilateral marriage more likely in a patrilineal system (which better permits the lengthening of the cycles), so hypogamy (which constitutes the maternal aspects of anisogamy) is, in a patrilineal system, the sign of a relatively unstable structure, and hypergamy the sign of a relatively stable structure.

In a patrilineal society with a tendency towards feudality, the practice of hypogamy bears the sign of instability because it means that lineages are seeking in alliance (that is to say, in a recognition of cognates) a means to assert their own position as agnates; it therefore makes of cognation a means to agnation. Contrariwise, and more logically, hypergamy postulates that, in an agnatic system, cognatic relationships are not relevant. Consequently, hypogamy constitutes a major structural phenomenon evidenced worldwide in the taboos affecting parents-in-law. It corresponds to a state of tension between

paternal and maternal lineages, which are not yet unbalanced in favour of the former, as we find with true hypergamy.

The final lessons were devoted to a critical analysis of the investigations of Professor Rodney Needham into the kinship systems and marriage rules of other south-east Asian groups, and particularly to his interpretations and discussion of *Elementary Structures of Kinship* in a slim volume, publication of which coincided with the last phase of our teaching.[2]

[2] Rodney Needham, *Structure and Sentiment* (Chicago, 1962).

2

On the Atom of Kinship (1971–2)

Monday's course this year was devoted to problems of kinship. In particular, we were concerned with clarifying and developing the concept of the 'atom of kinship' introduced in 1945, and in so doing to reply to diverse criticisms, both old and recently formulated.

These criticisms proceed in part from a hypothesis originating with certain Anglo-Saxon anthropologists, according to which, in every kinship system, the number of descent lines required to provide an adequate model of the system is the same as the number of distinctive terms applied to the grandparental generation. However, this rule of construction shows itself to be inapplicable when submitted to the arbitration of the facts. To restrict ourselves to Australia, which provides the material for most of the current debates, the Andingari of the Great Victoria Desert and the Kokata practise cross-cousin marriage. One therefore needs to distinguish four descent lines among them: however, all the 'grandfathers' and 'grandmothers' are denoted by a single term. The Gunwinggu of western Arnhemland terminologically distinguish the father's father, the mother's father and the mother's brother; but as two kinds of marriage are possible for this latter group, to these three terms there in fact correspond four lines. The Ungarinyin prohibit the marriage of cross-cousins in favour of that with the father's mother's brother's son's daughter. Their system thus implies four descent lines, that of the father's father, of the father's mother's brother, of the mother's father and of the mother's mother's brother; but to these four lines, five distinctive terms are applied: for the father's father, mother's father, the father's mother's brother, the mother's mother's brother, and the father's father's sister's husband. These examples could be multiplied.

Under these conditions, the principal argument advanced in favour of interpreting the system of the Wikmunkan of Cape York Peninsula as a two-section system fails. Divergent interpretations of this system have been put forward by observers still able to study it in action

about forty years ago (even though the population size was already less than one-tenth of what it was at the beginning of the colonial period). But all are agreed that the system must consist of at least three lineages. According to McConnel, these would be that of Ego in one exogamic moiety, those of this wife-takers and wife-givers in the other.[a] According to Thomson, who excludes the rule of generalized exchange and shows himself more doubtful about the existence of exogamic moieties, the lineages would be that of Ego, on one side, and, on the other, at least two lineages of which the number, greater than that which the system would appear to require, results — as among the Ompela and the Walbiri — in the distinction between 'true' and 'classificatory' female cousins, marriage being possible only with the latter.

More notice would no doubt have been taken of McConnel's description if it had been duly compared with that due to Spencer and Gillen on the Arabanna system, and confirmed by Elkin, which in at least one respect offered a symmetric image of it. For a man, the women of the clan into which his own can marry are divided into four categories, out of which he can select only one: that of the daughters of the mother's elder brothers (daughters of younger brothers being excluded). The result is that, as in the system described by McConnel, an 'elder' and a 'junior' lineage come to be placed respectively to the right and left of Ego's lineage, and marriage can be made in only one direction, the converse to that reported for the Wikmunkan. To this Elkin adds the detail that the mother's father can marry the father's father's sister, but that the converse does not hold, the father's father having to marry elsewhere. A system with two exogamic societies can thus accommodate itself to recognizing three lineages: in this case, that of the mother's father, that of the father's mother's brother, and that of the father's father conflated with that of the mother's mother's brother.

McConnel has been treated equally badly in being accused of irrelevance in distinguishing marriage prohibitions according to whether they affected Ego or his grandson, on the pretext that the choice of Ego being at the investigator's discretion, the latter was able to situate Ego in either generation, so that the prohibitions were necessarily the same for both. This is to forget that, whatever individual be chosen to occupy Ego's position, his freedom to marry will always be limited by

[a] Ursula H. McConnel, 'The Wik-Munkan tribe of Cape York Peninsula', *Oceania*, 1 (1930), pp. 97, 104; 'The Wik-Munkan and allied tribes of Cape York Peninsula', *Oceania*, 4 (1934), pp. 310—67; 'Social organization of the tribes of Cape York Peninsula', *Oceania*, 10 (1939), pp. 54—72.

that of his grandfather married before him, if, as McConnel stated and as recent observations confirm, Ego has the right to marry at the generation level where his grandson would normally marry. The two men can therefore enter into competition, and we have interpreted as allowing the avoidance of conflict, that rule according to which a man marries a woman of a younger generation in an elder lineage, or a woman of a junior lineage in his own generation. This hypothesis is in no way incompatible with the other data on the system, if one bears in mind that, contrary to what we have been made out as saying, we do not define the first woman as 'daughter's daughter', but as 'grandson's cousin'; a granddaughter therefore, though in the classificatory sense, whom both men are allowed to marry.

There was moreover no negligence on our part when we wrote that 'the third lineage to Ego's right, and the third to his left, duplicate Ego's own lineage', for ordinary common sense should enable anyone to understand that we were here counting from Ego's lineage inclusively, the latter therefore constituting the first. Finally, we took the occasion to clarify the meaning of a formula which some have found incomprehensible, if not contradictory. We had written that, among the Wikmunkan, 'for each woman, there are . . . two possibilities of marriage: either in a direct cycle of generalised exchange, or in an indirect cycle of restricted exchange'. Then, was it not restricted exchange that should be called direct, and generalized exchange indirect? Certainly, but we wished here to underline a paradoxical side of the system as described by McConnel. According to this authority, in effect, generalized exchange functions therein in the most direct manner compatible with its nature, that is to say from A to B, from B to C, from C to *n*, and from *n* to A. Whereas restricted exchange, instead of linking two partners directly, called for the intervention of a third (who, conversely to what occurs in generalized exchange, has no necessary place in the system), as the preceding lines underline: 'I marry my female cross-cousin and I borrow from a parallel lineage a woman whom I give in exchange to my brother-in-law'. In such a system, consequently, a complication appears, giving to restricted exchange a more indirect character than one normally finds with generalized exchange, with which, among the Wikmunkan, no complication of the same kind occurs. This is so much so that, by a dialectic reversal, what in the ordinary way appears indirect here becomes relatively more direct, and conversely in the opposite case.

McConnel, however, who had constructed her diagrams according to the formula of generalized exchange, knew that even in her time the system could also function in terms of restricted exchange: the particulars already given, taken from her analyses, suffice to show that. There is therefore no need to become imprisoned in a choice

between the two formulae of exchange. Quite another problem is posed by the early description of the Wikmunkan system. Several aspects of the system, notably the near-equality of terms between lineages, suggest restricted exchange. But if we push the interpretation too far in this direction, we condemn ourselves to arbitrarily detaching from the system, and treating as so many isolated and insoluble puzzles, several characteristics that are incompatible with a formula of restricted exchange. For example, the exclusion of the father's sister's daughter from the number of permitted marriage partners among the groups of the Archer River; the exclusion of the bilateral cross-cousin by those of the Kendall-Holroyd River; the matrilateral orientation of the network of alliance; the systematic differentiation of each generation level in terms of relative age, except in respect to the father's sister, for whom there is but a single term. Many such small puzzles add up to a big problem, and one is justified in looking for a solution in a mixture of the two formulae of exchange, rather than sticking to one and casually disregarding all the empirical data that do not agree with it. Indeed, the problem posed by the Wikmunkan seems hard to resolve now that we are acquainted, if only partially, with analyses by Thomson which are richer than those published during his lifetime, and which can hardly be reconciled with those of McConnel. In any case, it is difficult to see how the issues will be clarified without also taking account of Thomson's observations on the Ompela, whose kinship terminology gives evidence of some points in common with that of the Wikmunkan. Provisionally, at least, and pending the announced publication of new information, it is best to suspend judgement.

We have dwelt on the Wikmunkan case because recent discussion about the concept of the atom of kinship has been concerned with their case, but we must also take note of some errors of interpretation sufficiently serious to vitiate the debate from the start. Neither our 1945 text nor that of 1952 (reproduced in the second and fourth chapters of *Structural Anthropology* volume 1) has ever affirmed that this elementary structure of kinship was universally observable. To the contrary, we had made many attempts to circumscribe its domain:

> It would be incorrect to assume that the kinship system constitutes the principal means of regulating interpersonal relationships in all societies. Even in societies where the kinship system does function as such, it does not fulfil that role everywhere to the same extent. (*Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1, p. 38)

A few pages later, we emphasized the case in which 'the avuncular relationship continues to prevail, but it is no longer the predominant

one. In structures of still greater complexity, the avunculate may be obliterated or may merge with other relationships.' On the subject of the formal system of attitudes serving to define the atom of kinship, the 1952 text states as follows:

> It can be shown that a great many different combinations can be found and illustrated by specific ethnographical observations . . . On the other hand [other] arrangements . . . often are poorly developed, or perhaps impossible in a well defined form. (*Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1, p. 73)

All these formulations exclude in the clearest possible fashion the notion of the atom of kinship having a universal field of application, and it would be puerile to go to the trouble of accumulating counter-examples, particularly if it is recognized, as is certainly the case, that the instances where the concept applies are sufficiently numerous that this frequency is itself significant. We have never said otherwise, adding merely that 'it is not enough to note the frequency of this theme; we must also account for it'. We even took pains to give advance notice of the cases, necessarily limited in number, where the elementary structure of kinship would have the opportunity of appearing with clarity:

> each time the system under consideration reaches a crisis — either because it is undergoing rapid transformation . . . or because it is a focus of contact and conflict between radically different cultures . . . or, finally, because it is in the throes of a mortal crisis . . . (*Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1, p. 49)

In the same way that the texts of reference do not affirm the universality of what has been called 'the law of the atom of kinship' (and we have just seen that, on the contrary, they preclude it), neither can they be made to say that this 'law' applies to any patrilineal or matrilineal kinship system. The sentence invoked in support of this tendentious assertion has been twisted out of context, 'the two groups in our example' relating, as the context clearly shows, not to patrilineal and matrilineal systems in general, but to two societies in particular, those of the Cherkess and the Trobriands. If the 1945 text took its examples from patently patrilineal or matrilineal societies, and if it emphasized the mode of descent, this was only to show that descent was not relevant to the system of attitudes, contrary to prevalent views at that time. We wished to show, indeed, that identical systems of attitudes were found in societies with different modes of descent, and that different systems of attitudes appeared in societies where the modes of descent were none the less identical. There was so little question of linking the atom of kinship with any particular mode of

descent or filiation that we wrote that the avunculate, the constitutive element in some of the most tenuous (*'légère'*) kinship systems, 'does not occur in all matrilineal or all patrilineal systems, and we find it present in some systems which are neither matrilineal nor patrilineal'.

But supposing that the texts say what they are being made out to say (and which is the contrary of what they in fact do say), then one would not have the right to invoke against them the example of the Walbiri of the Central Australian Desert, since these indigenes have a mode of descent that is neither patrilineal nor matrilineal, but ambilineal. It therefore does not satisfy the arbitrary conditions that some have been pleased to impose. And to say, what is more, that Walbiri society differs from the Wikmunkan in belonging to a normal Australian type and exhibiting nothing extraordinary is to do a singular violence to the facts. For the Walbiri have a kinship system so aberrant in relation to the Aranda type, which it resembles in all other respects, that it recognizes five lines of descent instead of four.[1] As to the system of attitudes, in respect of which we made some observations showing it to be less simple than had been supposed, it bears little resemblance to that described by Elkin to illustrate the 'general principles' underlying Australian societies, particularly those with kinship systems of the Aranda or Nyul-Nyul type.[2]

Then why are there these misunderstandings? And how have they led to statements making out that our texts propose the contrary of what they assert in the most explicit manner? It would seem that two things have been confused: on the one side, the necessary presence in any kinship system, no matter how simple, of a relationship of alliance; and on the other, the manifestation of this universal feature by means of the system of attitudes which, in a way that is doubtless not universal, but significantly frequent, would appear unbalanced if, together with a relationship of descent and one of consanguinity, one did not pose a relationship of alliance which, in consequence, should not appear less 'primitive' than the other two. As against Radcliffe-Brown and the majority of anthropologists of his time who were, like him, imbued with naturalism, we therefore demonstrated that it was impossible to derive kinship, even at the most elementary level, solely from biological considerations. Kinship cannot arise solely from the union of the sexes and the procreation of children; it implies from the

[1] M. J. Meggitt, *Desert People: A Study of the Walbiri Aborigenes of Central Australia* (Chicago, 1965), p. 195.

[2] A. P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines* (Sydney, 1938), pp. 115—22. For a somewhat different approach to the same problems, see our *The View from Afar* (Oxford, 1984).

start something quite other, namely the *social alliance* of biological families of which at least one gives up a sister or a daughter to another biological family. There, and there only, is the universal principle announced in the 1945 text and of which *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* proposed to provide the proof. But there has been so little thought of extending this universality to the system of attitudes, which illustrate the principle in certain specially favourable cases, that the following question has also been posed: Why is it, then, that we do not find the avunculate always and everywhere? For even though the avunculate occurs frequently, it is none the less not universal. It would be fruitless to have avoided explaining the cases where it was present only to give up before its absence.

The 1945 text, originally a journal article, limited itself to illustrating the thesis by reference to a small number of the most simple and obvious cases available. The choice of the maternal uncle to occupy the position of wife-giver was made in the same spirit, this choice offering, in the most economical fashion, an illustration of a four-term structure united by the three canonical relationships of alliance, descent and consanguinity. It did not follow that, always and everywhere, the maternal uncle had to be the only or the principal occupant of the position of donor. This would not hold either for the Walbiri (among whom the relationship between the uncle and the nephew is not relevant as such), or, in Africa, among the Lele. The hypothesis advanced would require only that, in every elementary structure of kinship, the position of donor be effectively filled. If it is not so occupied by the maternal uncle and by him only, one would be dealing with a more 'heavy' structure, implying a number of terms that would be eventually more than four. But the atom of lead is no less an atom than that of hydrogen, just because its constituents are more numerous. In order that the metaphor remain valid, it is necessary only that the relations uniting them be of the same type and that the forces composing them form a balanced system. All that was clearly spelled out in 1945 (*Structural Anthropology*, pp. 48—9), but, instead of following the programme outlined therein, some have searched everywhere for the 'lightest' possible form without considering that they will frequently come upon systems in which, as had been foreseen and enunciated, 'the building blocks of the system are already of a more complex order', and where, in consequence, 'the avuncular relationship . . . may be submerged within a differentiated context' (ibid.).

This is what we have sought to establish this year with respect to several controversial cases. Not so much that of the Lambumbu of the New Hebrides, where a careful reading of Deacon's text enabled us to correct a faulty interpretation and to establish a simple system of

attitudes of a type that might be called classical. But the analysis of the system of attitudes in three societies which have also been involved in the debate — the Wikmunkan, of which we have already spoken at length, the Mundugumor of the Sepik Basin in northern New Guinea, and the Lele of the Kasai, in Africa — has allowed us, on the very basis of the facts cited, to illustrate systems of attitudes which, though more 'heavy' than the preceding one, are not less well balanced. Some of these analyses will form the subject of a forthcoming publication, to which a reference will suffice.[3]

But before that we had looked into the question of the eagerness evinced by several contemporary Australianists to demolish earlier ideas about social organization on the continent, although, by their own admission, such organization belonged to a vanished past and was no longer directly observable. The problems are indeed related, for the idea one can form of the system of attitudes strictly depends on the close relations that exist between individuals. We showed that the motive behind these polemics should be sought in the area of the theory of matrimonial exchange: what is really being contested is that patrilineal groups are the exchanging entities. But although certain risky statements have been made, notably in England, we have emphasized that in associating us with them these writers have mistaken their target, for, since 1949 in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, we have established the extreme generality of phenomena in which today, not without naïvety, certain people claim to discover a distinctive property peculiar to Australian systems.

To present the system of the Murngin of Arnhemland, contrary to all accepted views, as a system with two matrilineal sections in which the mother's mother's brothers exchange between themselves their sister's daughter's daughters first of all entails the singular paradox that Ego's section would need, to be completely represented, only five generation levels, whereas, without even avoiding the duplication of terms, the alternate section would require ten.

But most importantly, this hypothesis is placed by its author himself in a more proper perspective when he recognizes that this direct exchange does not occur 'in a great majority of cases'.[b] We are dealing here with a 'non-customary' reading of a system of which individuals may occasionally avail themselves, and which is particularly noticed by informants who have lived close to stranger tribes practising sister exchange, because they can more easily translate a

[3] Lévi-Strauss, 'Reflections on the atom of kinship', reprinted in *Structural Anthropology* vol. II, chapter VII.

[b] The reference is evidently to Warren Shapiro (see below).

system into the language of another system with which they are already familiar. In fact, subsequent publications returned to the more correct view of a quadripartite system in which the constitutive categories are bound together by a rule of generalized exchange. And the thesis according to which exogamy would not be obligatory between these semi-moieties does not hold, if one consults Warner's diagrams, where it is evident that each semi-moiety in fact includes two old lineages situated on one side and the other of Ego's own: one lineage being 'true', the other a 'reflection', according to the interpretation we had advanced ourselves. In this way, two readings are possible by reason of this redoubling of the terminological system: a reading in one sense does not contradict, but translates into different terms the reading that could also be made in the other sense.[4]

What, then, remains of these contributions, the interest of which we do not wish to deny, any more than we deny the ingenuity and theoretical acumen of their authors? Essentially, it would seem that the right to dispose of a wife (or sometimes, in Australia, a mother-in-law) does not belong to the father or brother of the woman in question, but to a maternal ascendant: in the case of the wife, the mother's mother or mother's mother's brother. But are we dealing here with an innovation or a distinctive characteristic of Australian societies which, as has been affirmed all too readily, is unknown in south-east Asia and the rest of the world? As early as 1949, we pointed out that in speaking of the maternal uncle's intervention in marriage, observers rarely bothered to make clear whether they were referring to the maternal uncle of the bridegroom or of the bride. Frequently both, no doubt. But in the whole Asiatic region it seems that pre-eminence, if not exclusive participation, belongs to the second. It is thus, we said, that in India, out of 67 groups where the maternal uncle intervenes in marriage, the sources clearly indicate that in 32 of these cases the role belongs to the maternal uncle of the bride; and the proportion must be greater still, since in the majority of the remaining cases the uncle's identity is not stated. The same holds for the Lakher, the Lushai, the Kohlen, the Rengma Naga and the Kachin, among all of whom the maternal uncle of the bride receives either a part or the

[4] This discussion took as its point of departure four articles by Warren Shapiro, namely 'Relational affiliation in "unilineal" descent systems', *Man*, n.s., 2 (3) (1967); 'The exchange of sister's daughters' in Northeast Arnhemland', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 24 (4) (1968); 'Semi-moiety organisation and mother-in-law bestowal in northern Arnhemland', *Man*, n.s. 4 (4) (1969); and 'Asymmetric marriage in Australia and Southeast Asia', *Bijdragen tot de taal—, land— en Volkenkunde*, 125 (1969).

whole of the bridewealth. This primacy of representatives of the maternal lineage is reinforced by the fact that among the Kachin and the Haka Chin, the bride's parents absent themselves from the marriage ceremony, the young wife being supported by the maternal lineage, and the uncle and his wife receiving a considerable portion of the bridewealth. At the other extremity of the Asiatic continent, facts of the same kind have been noted among the Gilyak and the Gold.

The classic authorities to whom we are indebted for these observations had little hesitation in explaining them: according to them, it was a question, among peoples who are now patrilineal, of a survival of matrilineal descent. This is a hypothesis that is nowadays out of fashion, but it is singularly close to one presently proposed by a certain avant-garde who invoke, if not a survival, in any case a preponderance of matrilineal lineages. Struck, on the contrary, by the frequency of a situation for which the facts recently recorded for Australia usefully furnish additional examples, we have suggested seeing in it a major structural phenomenon which can be accounted for only in general terms:

> although, in a system of generalized exchange, A is debtor solely to B from whom he receives his wives and, for the same reason, B is debtor solely to C, C to *n*, and *n* to A, when there is a marriage it is as if B had also a direct claim over *n*, C over A, *n* over B, and A over C. (*Elementary Structures of Kinship*, p. 376)

Moreover, the interpretation we advanced has the advantage over the return to the old matrilineal hypothesis that it integrates the symmetrical role devolved on to the bridegroom's father's sister: the two actors are those who, in the absence of a symmetrical marriage rule, will have no longer an indirect, but a direct interest in the marriage of the nephew of one (the father's sister) and the niece of the other (the mother's brother). We are here therefore in the presence of an 'internal limit of generalized exchange' (the title of our chapter XVIII) of which, by this means, the cycles of exchange conceived in terms of patrilineages, and which are in danger of over-extension, find themselves in some way short-circuited.

This is not, however, the only case where would-be novel interpretations do no more than return to old and, one would have thought, outmoded ones. Since about 1930 all the authorities on Australia have repeatedly said that the sections and subsections related to a division of the natural and social worlds into categories and did not play a major part in the ordering of marriage, which was essentially based on genealogical considerations. No attention was paid as to why the tribal elders would have thought up such rules if, in gerontocratic

societies such as these, their main objective was to appropriate the young women at the expense of their sons and grandsons; and most of all why, supposing them to be thus conceived, these systems should show themselves to be ineffective in achieving the results aimed for. Rather than surrender anthropological theory to these little games, we prefer to adhere to the more complex notion we have always had about the role of the sections and subsections: that of a code which is doubtless simplified, but easy to use when faced with questions of equivalence between several dialects or languages and which, to fulfil its function, can in no way contradict the more complex coding that expresses itself through, in and by the kinship system.

3

The Present State of Bororo Studies (1972–3)

Tuesday's course was devoted to the Bororo kinship system. We pursued this study through the use and discussion of some recent publications: the two volumes of the *Bororo Encyclopaedia*, several articles by J. C. Crocker, and an important unpublished manuscript by Zarko D. Levak, kindly lent by the author. It emerges from all these documents that Bororo kinship terminology, being reduced to about fourteen terms, indeed exhibits the extreme simplicity portrayed nearly a century ago by von den Steinen. However, this terminological poverty is compensated through the employment, singly or combined, of two qualifiers which modify the meaning of the basic terms in ways that remain obscure, despite the efforts made to elucidate them. Moreover, a comparative analysis of all the available village plans brought to light certain anomalies in the distribution of clans of the southern moiety, where members of the same clan, and often two clans, occupy huts separated from those belonging to other clans; however, these anomalies appear to conform to a regular pattern.

The kinship system is characterized by a consecutive terminology, which is applied to men and women of the same matrilineage, regardless of generation level. Such systems have been well described elsewhere and can be interpreted in one of two ways: either like the Kachin systems, of which the Bororo system would offer a mirror image by reason of the matrilineal descent reckoning observed by these Amerindians; or like the Crow–Omaha systems which, having regard to the rule of descent, would indicate a Crow system. The two types have been wrongly assimilated by Lounsbury, but, in the Bororo case, each interpretation initially encounters several difficulties. If the system conforms to the Kachin model, the preference for marriage with the patrilateral cross-cousin, which is attested by ethnographic inquiries and by a close scrutiny of mythical genealogies undertaken by ourselves, becomes incomprehensible — for the matrilateral cross-cousin should be preferred in such a system. If the system conforms

to the Crow model, it is the fact of cross-cousin marriage, whatever the type preferred, that poses a problem — the characteristic of Crow—Omaha systems being to exclude all possibility of marriage between cousins, at least of the first degree. But this is not all: treatment of the Bororo system as a Crow system demands many more reduction rules than those normally required to bring the categories denoted by the same term to simple genealogical positions, from which the categories would be derived by successive extensions.

To these difficulties others must be added, for the division of the Bororo village into exogamic moieties should normally entail preferential marriage between bilateral cross-cousins, whereas, as we have noted, a preference for the patrilateral cousin is so clearly evident that, in the mythical genealogies, no example of the other type has been found. By their reciprocal use certain terms, such as *iorubadare*, suggest only a division into moieties. But these terms, which are in disagreement with the doubly consecutive and asymmetric character of the system, may refer to another dimension than the others and translate relations of a kind one would want to call politico-juridical; they would therefore be external to the kinship system proper. In fact, among the Bororo, marriage alliances are concluded within the framework of more general alliances: social alliance exists before and persists after matrimonial links. By reason of the patrilateral orientation of these latter, each individual marriage establishes an inequality and asymmetry between lineages which is situated amid a more general network of egalitarian and symmetrical relations expressed only at the moiety level. These internal contradictions may explain those apparent between the researchers who, in describing the rites of naming and of initiation, frequently make reference to the roles attributed respectively to the matrilineages of the father and the mother's brother.

The social organization of the Bororo and their kinship system thus contribute to a veritable tangle of puzzles. In trying to solve them, we looked first at mythology, which among the Bororo often takes the form of legendary traditions. However, as Crocker has well understood, these myths do not so much clarify social contradictions as reflect them. Sometimes they make the clans descend from unlike beings, who come from different regions and who themselves take their origin from fiercely antagonistic animal species; sometimes, on the contrary, the founding ancestors of clans and lineages are the joint and pacific progeniture of a man, the sole survivor of a flood, and a female antelope. The accent is thus placed alternately on the specificity of social segments and on their identity. Elsewhere, we have given particular attention to myths which claim to explain how certain privileges or prerogatives were at first acrimoniously contested between clans or sub-clans and then, the negotiations over, shared according to

the principle that the mystical property accorded to one social segment implies, for another segment in the opposite moiety, a corresponding right to the exercise of the same privilege. The whole mythology thus turns on the search for a difficult balance between the two contradictory principles of equivalence and of inequality.

These narratives, as has been said, often give the impression of being history, slightly altered so as to appear marvellous. It therefore seemed appropriate to consider comparatively the social conditions of the Bororo on one side, and, on the other, the conditions of the different Ge-speaking groups who abut on the Bororo to the north and east and whose culture has features in common with them, suggesting earlier contacts and possibly a single origin. Twenty years ago, we had pointed to contradictions between the kinship system and marriage rules of one of these groups, the Sherente, which are similar to those which we have just referred to among the Bororo.

Basing our thoughts on our earlier works and on the recent findings of Maybury-Lewis, of Fathers Giaccaria and Heide among the Shavante, of Dreyfus-Gamelon and T. S. Turner (who kindly supplied us with a copy of an important, unpublished work) among the Kayapo, we have been led to two kinds of consideration. In the first place, and whatever reservations one may have about the assimilation of the Shavante kinship system to a Dakota-type system, it is striking that these Amerindians, whose kinship terminology is based on a fundamental distinction between kin and affines, nevertheless do not have a marriage rule congruent with this system, which normally places siblings and parallel cousins on one side, and cross-cousins on the other, in separate categories. However, the Shavante prohibit the exchange of sisters; it would seem that only unilateral cross-cousins are excluded from the list of preferred partners. Their system thus exhibits a paradoxical character like that of the Bororo, though in converse form.

In the second place, all those researchers who have worked recently among the Ge are in agreement that, in the social life of these people, kinship links play a less important role than political conflicts between factions. As among the Bororo, the Ge tribes manifest a notable indifference to genealogies. But, conversely to what happens among the Ge, these conflicts are remarkably absent from Bororo society where, more precisely, it would seem as if they had been interiorized in each clan and manifest, though in greatly attenuated fashion, between their component lineages. Under these conditions, we are less inclined to interpret the Bororo kinship system as one of the Kachin type than to see in it, following Levak, a Crow-type system — as is incontestably the case among the Kayapo — but profoundly altered by the creation of reciprocal links between clans, sub-clans and

lineages belonging to opposed moieties. These reciprocal links, of which the marriage alliances illustrate only one aspect, and that doubtless not the most important, could have resulted from a reform or collection of reforms instituted by what could well be called 'legislators to put an end to a factionalism which the Ge groups have not been able to rid themselves of, and of which the first group of Bororo myths mentioned earlier preserves the memory. One would then understand how it came about that, among these Amerindians, the marriage rules should be in such manifest contradiction with those implicit in the kinship terminology.

If this hypothesis was well founded, it would follow that the Bororo offer an example of a so-called 'primitive' society motivated by properly political concerns which certain of their myths, of a truly singular kind, reflect by illustrating the fantasy of a total identity between individuals and groups, or again between the group of the dead and that of the living. Disproving the presuppositions of a naïve evolutionism, the Bororo would seem, in fact, to have resolved a political problem by abandoning a complex kinship structure, still evidenced by the terminology, in favour of an elementary structure thenceforth called upon to order their social practice.

PART V

Clan, Lineage, House

1

The Concept of 'House' (1976–7)

In various parts of the world we are familiar with societies made up of units which cannot be defined either as families or as clans or lineages. The object of this year's course was to show that, in order to understand them, it was necessary to introduce into anthropological terminology the notion of 'house' (in the sense in which one speaks of a 'noble house'), and therefore that a type of social structure hitherto associated with complex societies is also to be found in non-literate societies.

The Kwakiutl Indians of British Columbia provided an initial example. At the time when they were originally studied, towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was at first believed that they were in the process of evolving from a matrilineal to a patrilineal system. Then, on the basis of further information, the converse hypothesis was adopted. Today most anthropologists suppose the Kwakiutl to have a non-differentiated system of descent, which is just as unsatisfactory because certain features of their social organization are obviously patrilineal, whereas others have a matrilineal tinge, but without these principles having such clearly demarcated fields of application as would allow us to classify the Kwakiutl among societies with bilateral descent.

As to the neighbouring coastal peoples to the north, a patently matrilineal descent system does not prevent them having institutions of the same type. Considerations restricted to the rules of filiation and descent are therefore unable to explain them.

The case of the Yurok of California reinforces this negative conclusion, while also suggesting an answer to the questions posed. For the Yurok have appeared to observers as lacking a well-defined rule of descent, government, authority and even social organization. But the fact is that among the 'houses' — called by this name in their language — and taken by anthropologists as mere buildings, are the actual bearers of rights and duties. The Yurok house cannot be reduced to a dwelling

place. Its hereditary occupants, agnates or cognates, to whom are attached more distant relatives, affines and occasionally clients, exert control over material and immaterial goods. It has therefore been a mistake to describe Yurok social organization exclusively in terms of missing features, and thus adducing its practical non-existence. The fault lies in the disregard of the concept of 'house' as a moral person possessing a domain, perpetuated by transmission of its name, wealth and titles through a real or fictitious descent line which is recognized as legitimate as long as the continuity can be expressed in the language of descent or alliance or, most often, of both together.

Moreover, in Europe and other parts of the world, the medieval 'houses' present us with precisely the same characteristics. They too are initially defined by the possession of a domain consisting of material and immaterial wealth or 'honours', the latter even including goods of supernatural origin. In order to perpetuate themselves, houses make extensive use of fictive kinship, in terms of both alliance and adoption. In the absence of male heirs, and sometimes concurrently with them, sisters and daughters assure the transmission of titles, either in their own right or, as used to be said then, as 'bridge and plank' (*'le pont et la planche'*); much the same happens among the Kwakiutl, where women transmit to their children prerogatives that they receive, through the mediation of their mothers, from their maternal grandfather. Whence, perhaps, in ostensibly patrilineal systems, the frequent importance of wealth transmitted maternally.

Finally, in all societies with 'houses', we find tensions and often conflict between antagonistic principles that are, moreover, mutually exclusive: descent and residence, exogamy and endogamy, and, to use medieval terminology which is none the less perfectly applicable to other cases, right of 'race' and right of election.

To conclude, we looked into the common social-structural characteristics that might explain this appearance of the same institutions among peoples far distant in both time and space. It seemed that they originated in a structural state where political and economic interests tending to invade the social field did not yet have distinct languages at their disposal and, being obliged to express themselves in the only language available, which is that of kinship, inevitably subverted it.

The course will continue in the coming year. The themes considered this year will be taken up in the form of an article.[1]

[1] This became chapter II of the second part of *La Voie des Masques* (*The Way of the Masks*) (Paris, 1979).

2

On Indonesia (1977–8)

This year we continued the inquiry begun in 1976–7 into so-called cognatic societies. We examined a culture region – Indonesia – where this mode of descent appears to be widespread, for which reason anthropologists have recently devoted much attention to it. However, because these discussions have been conducted and published for the most part in English, terminological problems have arisen which are often disconcerting for investigators and analysts from other countries, and the first task was therefore to attempt to resolve these problems.

It was first of all necessary to clarify what Anglo-Saxon anthropologists understood by *corporate groups*, an expression for which some fantastic equivalents have been proposed. However, there is no doubt that the expression refers to what we ourselves call groups endowed with a moral or legal personality. How, then, to explain the perplexity of numerous French anthropologists? It seems to us that it results from two causes.

In the first place, it emerges from the works of Maine that English juridical thought holds that only the *corporation aggregate* is real, the *corporation sole*, in contrast, being but a fiction. However, the converse view obtains in France, since it is only in make-believe that we can accord the juridical attributes of the person to a collective of individuals. As Roman law had already said, *personae vice funguntur*. But *corporate groups* began and developed in England in the form of boroughs, as institutions of customary law; and it was easier to extend the notion to non-literate societies lacking formalized juridical rules, than to apply to these societies the notion of 'moral person', which belongs to written law.

In the second place, English-speaking anthropologists dispose, to elude the distinction between law and custom, of a conceptual tool connoted by the adjective *jural*, 'a useful but vague term', as Firth admits, 'to cover a mixture of law and morality', and for which we

have no equivalent.[a] Perhaps we should congratulate ourselves, for the vagueness of the term *jural* encourages all sorts of abuses, opposed as it is to 'legal' — but then tending to be confused with notions of moral or customary constraint — or, on the contrary, to 'moral'; but then this latter category finds itself relegated to the domain of individual consciousness and the interior world, as if, in the eyes of the anthropologist and of the sociologist, there could be moral values exempt from collective sanctions, however diffuse.

The ambiguities inherent in the term *jural* have led to two consequences among British and American anthropologists. Sometimes, as with Fortes, we find a tautological definition of the *corporate group*, for, in successively rejecting the criteria of descent, residence and property to retain only that of a group subject to rights and obligations, one says no more, translated into French, than that a moral person is a moral person. Sometimes, among certain American anthropologists, there is a lack of awareness of the originally juridical character of the concept, with the result that all sorts of liberties are taken with it as it is applied to any fashion whatever of cutting up social reality, without worrying whether the arbitrarily chosen sections correspond to collective cognition.

After these preliminary admonitions, we considered the present uncertainties of anthropological theory which seeks, seemingly in vain, for the organizing principle of cognatic societies in either descent or property or residence. Drawing principally on the works of Freeman, Appell, Sather and King, we observed that the society of the Iban of Borneo reposed on a division into families, each endowed with the perpetual title of a legal person; but that, among the Rungus, analogous social units lack the characteristic of perpetuity; and among the Bajau Laut, we find all the attributes of the legal person disappearing. In order to find the basis of the social order, one is thus obliged to move successively from relations of kinship and descent to property relations, then, in the absence of a rule of perpetual succession to a hereditary office or domain, to relations of residence, the greater part of them contingent. The theoretical perspective is changed in a corresponding fashion. For if the *bilek* family of the Iban and the *nongkob* family of the Rungus still appear to be concrete groups, thus validating a 'substantivist' approach, the approach can be only 'formalist' in the case of the Bajau Laut, among whom only the type of grouping, but not their variable content or their always brief duration, remains constant.

[a] Raymond Firth, *Essays on Social Organization and Values* (London, 1964), p. 155.

With the enlargement of the field of investigation, we thus witness the progressive dissolution of the idea of groups constitutive of the social order and considered as legal persons. But simultaneously with the dissolution of the successive criteria of descent, property or residence to which recourse has been had, an unexpected criterion has emerged, that of alliance: for it emerges from the data that, in Borneo as in Java, the conjugal couple constitutes the true kernel of the family and, more generally, of the kindred. Moreover, this central role of alliance manifests itself in two ways: as a principle of unity, underpinning a type of social structure which, since last year, we have agreed to call the 'house'; and as a principle of antagonism because, in the cases considered, each new alliance generates a tension between families on the subject of the residence — viri- or uxorilocal — of the new couple, and therefore of that of the two families which it is the couple's duty to perpetuate. We know that, among the Iban, and also elsewhere, this tension is expressed in and through a mode of descent that Freeman calls 'utrolateral', that is to say the incorporation of children with which at the moment of their birth their two parents have chosen to reside, by their free choice and also in response to pressures from one side and the other.[b] Anthropologists have therefore been mistaken in seeking, in this type of institution, a substratum which they have variously thought to find in descent, property and residence. We believe, to the contrary, that it is necessary to move on from the idea of *objective substratum* to that of *objectification of a relation*: the unstable relation of alliance which, as an institution, the role of the house is to solidify, if only in an illusory form.

One could, indeed, apply to the house the concept of 'fetishism', as Marx applied it to commodities.[c] In Marxist theory, exchange value is fetishized in the form of merchandise, as an intrinsic property of a relation which, as a relation, cannot be the substratum of any attribute. However, in the societies that Marx would have called 'pre-capitalist', the socio-economic infrastructure achieves its most articulated expression in unilineal descent systems that consist of social relations between groups and persons that fulfil between themselves, in continuing or transitory fashion, the functions of wife-givers and wife-takers; which is to say, if the approximation be allowed, a relation of reproducers rather than of producers . . . And if, in certain social configurations which need to be clearly identified, this relation of reproducers becomes strained, it will be perceived as a thing and

[b] J. D. Freeman, 'The family system of the Iban of Borneo', in *The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups*, ed. J. R. Goody (Cambridge, 1958).

[c] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, chapter 24.

objectified in the 'house'; this is a specific institution which deserves a place in our nomenclature, for it owes its existence neither to descent, property or residence as such, but as a projection of a relation capable of manifesting in one or more of these illusory forms.

It remains to identify in the geographical region considered concrete examples of the 'house' as a fetish, and to discover the structural origin of this representation. The Karo Batak of Sumatra and the Atoni of Timor constitute two particularly significant cases, for among them, and especially among the latter, the wealth of decoration, the complicated architecture, the symbolism attaching to each element in the total construction, the arrangement of furniture and the distribution of its inhabitants make of the house a veritable microcosm reflecting in its smallest details an image of the universe and of the whole system of social relations. The Karo Batak have the further merit of being the subject of a recent monograph by Mr Singarimbun, himself a member of this group and therefore able to study it from the inside.[d]

Although in some ways privileged, this belonging of the observer to the society he describes is not always so in others, for the model of a society elaborated by one of its members is not necessarily more veridical than that by an outside observer. Thus, Mr Singarimbun does not take account of former observations by Dutch writers, who paint a rather different picture of Karo Batak institutions from that obtaining after the Japanese occupation and the accession of Indonesia to independence. Moreover, Mr Singarimbun wastes his energies on a false problem, when he tries to contest the so-called 'Kachin-Gilyak' model in terms of the Batak data. For even if it is true of both cases that the terminology of alliance distinguishes between wife-givers and wife-takers, and that the matrilateral cross-cousin is included in the category of preferred spouses, it suffices to examine the kinship vocabulary to ascertain that organized among the Karo Batak in horizontal generation levels, and therefore lacking the obliqueness characteristic of the former systems (where the same terms are applied to members of consecutive generations), this vocabulary is evidence of a quite different type of society. It would therefore be apposite to invoke this vocabulary in order to invalidate an interpretation attributed in an excessively simplistic manner to various authors, including ourselves, who were discussing other societies.

For the problem which concerned us this year, the main interest of the Karo Batak case, emerged in the evident contradiction between, on the one hand, the system of marriage alliances and, on the other, the

[d] M. Singarimbun, *Kinship, Descent and Alliance among the Karo Batak* (Berkeley, California, 1975).

political and residential rules. In the first domain, wife-givers are superior to wife-takers, and alliance therefore has a hypogamic character. However, the foundation of a village always requires the participation, beside a dominant or ruling lineage, of its wife-takers and wife-givers who, at least in this respect, occupy a subordinate position in relation to it. But the traditional Karo Batak house, in which ideally four, six or eight families live in juxtaposed apartments, reflects this contradiction at the same time that its layout seems intended to resolve or mask it: the family of the dominant lineage occupies the so-called 'base' apartment, and its wife-taking family occupies the so-called 'summit' apartment, inferior as such (because the base is larger and stronger), but favoured because it is situated on the eastern side, from whence comes the fresh morning breeze, which is more agreeable to the inhabitants than the oppressive heat of the afternoon, which has a negative connotation, and which the dominant family faces in order to protect the other apartments.

Moreover, if wife-takers are inferior to wife-givers, the Karo Batak woman is inferior to her brother and, at the time of marriage, finds herself incorporated into her husband's family which, as 'wife-taker', is inferior to that from which the wife comes. In other words, an initially agnatic relationship between relatives of opposite sex is transformed into a relationship of alliance, for, with her marriage, the wife becomes an affine in relation to her family of origin; or, at the least, the new conjugal couple articulates two agnatic families, that of the wife and that of the husband. In this case also, in consequence, the system's centre of gravity is displaced from consanguinity to alliance.

An analogous situation obtains among the Atoni of Timor, with the added detail, made amply apparent in the findings of Schulte Nordholdt and of Cunningham, that the contradiction between, on the one side, the unequal rankings of wife-takers and wife-givers and, on the other, their identical subordination to the dominant lineage in the political and ritual domains, has its precise equivalent in the contradiction that inside the house or village, subordinates the feminine 'interior' to the masculine 'exterior' and, at the same time, the 'periphery' to the 'centre'; and notwithstanding that the periphery corresponds to the outside (exterior), and the centre to the inside (interior). In this case, also, it would be vain to seek to understand the nature and origin of these contradictions by selecting the genealogical group as the point of departure and trying to find in it any principle of social order. Nor will the problem be resolved by turning, as has been attempted, towards territorial organization. For this is also not a primary datum, but the spatial projections of a relation between two groups, in order to establish a unity so greatly fictitious that the house — as the Iban are

wont to say — is able to bring even enemies together. What really happens in societies with 'houses' is the hypostasization of the opposition between descent and alliance that has to be transcended; as was shown last year, in such systems these are equivalent. The Atoni example confirms it, since, among them, the maternal uncle can claim a nephew to perpetuate his name: by ceding one of its women, the group is compensated with an heir, and it is as though the woman had procreated him in her group of origin without the intervention of affines.

We concluded with some remarks on Balinese society, drawing on old Dutch works and the more recent observations of Belo, Bateson, Mead, H. and C. Geertz and Boon. The difficulties of the Geertzes in dealing with the institution called *dadia* in Bali has seemed especially revealing to us. When they encounter it in an aristocratic context, the word 'house' comes spontaneously and with justification to their pen; but in the village context they no longer know what definition to choose, and hesitate inconclusively between lineage, caste, cultural association and faction.[e] It is 'a little of all these, and even sometimes a political party', as Boon acutely comments.[f] Was it not the peculiarity of the house, as described by historians of medieval Europe, to bring together all these aspects? And did not the houses also come into being and fade away? To understand the nature of the village *dadia*, it would doubtless suffice to augment the ethnographic data with these other social experiments that the fieldworkers all too rarely recognize in the facts they observe, because it is necessary for them to seek information outside anthropological monographs and in the works of historians.

Under the guidance of these, they would learn moreover that in the Middle Ages more or less durable social formations of diverse natures and origins — communes, commercial or religious associations, guides, brotherhoods, etc. — could at certain moments acquire an independence and autonomy comparable to that enjoyed by fiefs; that a commune sometimes consisted of only a minority of a town's inhabitants; that power therein was sometimes exercised by the assembly of all the inhabitants, and sometimes remained in the hands of a few powerful lineages; that family solidarity provided a model, albeit fictitious, for associations such as guilds, whose functions were initially religious, before becoming also, and most importantly, economic; finally, that

[e] Hildred Geertz and Clifford Geertz, *Kinship in Bali* (Chicago, 1975).

[f] James Boon, *The Anthropological Romance of Bali 1597—1972: Dynamic Perspectives in Marriage and Caste, Politics and Religion* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 145.

the local community could occasionally become part of the feudal hierarchy. Despite, or rather because of, their heterogeneity, all these traits apply exactly to the *dadia*, which has not been able to evolve towards types of social formation compatible with the feudal house only because this latter already included them with its *sacra*, its genealogical tree, its sense of caste, its economic and political interests . . . Having begun with the feudal house at the start of the 1976—7 course, it was therefore this same institution that we encountered again as a source of reference at the end of this year's lessons, which forms the second stage of an inquiry that will continue next year.

3

Melanesian Problems (1978–9)

Monday's course, which was entirely devoted to Melanesia, concerned itself with the question of whether this region was acquainted with the 'house' type of social institution, possibly resulting from cognatic descent, or from a conflict between two competing modes of descent and therefore from the necessity to provide the social order with a foundation other than genealogical, to escape from the reality of myth of 'blood ties' in favour of residence or some other way of determining status.

This is not to say that the 'house' in the strict sense does not exist in New Guinea and neighbouring islands; several tribes include sub-groups, whose members live together in habitations sometimes of great size, in spite of the shortage of building materials, and possessing a complex structure that reflects and symbolizes all aspects of social and political organization. But this representation of social relations in material form can assume other shapes, such as the 'clan boat' (Wirz: Numfoor, Biak, Marind Anim, Gogodara, etc.), the 'great fishing net' (Groves: Motu) or, in a metaphorical instance, the 'shield' (Panoff: Maenge) . . .[a] In general, these formations that are united around a material object or that take the name of such transcend, cross-cut or exceed familial and lineage groupings. And even when their core is essentially lineal, they have no difficulty in incorporating additional members recruited on the basis of marriage alliance, cognatic kinship, economic patronage or political sponsorship.

Whence comes an extensive range of institutional arrangements that we illustrated from a summary sampling made up of the Busama and Toambita (Hogbin), the Siuai (Oliver), the south-west of New

[a] P. Wirz, *Nova Guinea: résultats des expeditions scientifiques à la Nouvelle Guinée* (Leiden, 1924); M. Groves, 'Sacred past and profane present in Papua', *Quadrant*, 3 (1957), pp. 37–48; M. Panoff, *Inter-tribal Relations of the Maenge People of New Britain* (Canberra, 1969).

Britain (Todd), the Choiseul and Simbo (Scheffler), the Maenge (Panoff), and a few others. Whence, also, the perplexity of observers and analysts, when confronted with social structures of disconcerting fluidity, which they have sought to interpret in various ways. Do we have to credit the peoples of this region with a special gift for improvisation (Held)? Or should we, on the contrary, endeavour to compile a detailed typology in which each institutional modality will find its place (Hogbin—Wedgewood)? Further, how should we resolve the problem posed by the diversity of Melanesian systems in comparison with African systems, which are based, at least in appearance, on different principles? Should we replace the concept of patrilineal descent with that of 'cumulative patrifiliation' (Barnes)?[b] Should we invoke the prevalence of individual strategies (Kaberry)? Or should we attribute a heuristic value to the notion of descent, while reducing it to the role of 'analytic concept' (La Fontaine)?[c] Or should we retain for it a concrete reality, but defined by other criteria than merely genealogical (Strathern)?[d]

We approached these problems with the example of the Mae Enga, the subject of numerous publications by Meggitt, who treats them as an agnatic people, even though the patrilineages are endowed with cognatic fringes that are possibly more important (McArthur) than at first believed. According to Barnes, it is necessary to go still further and recognize that, among the Mae Enga, agnation constitutes a convenient language for talking about social relations that do not always have an objective basis. In this view, Melanesian and African societies would differ both in structure and in recruitment. Analogical in one case, the structure would be genealogical in the other; and whereas here recruitment is through descent, there it is through filiation.

We took advantage of the opportunity thus offered to take up the problem posed by the originally English distinction between these two last terms. However, it was hard to distinguish what there was of one and the other in the father—son relation (supposedly filiation) and in the grandfather—grandson relation (which, according to Fortes's definition, would involve descent):

[b] J. A. Barnes, 'Descent and alliance in the New Guinea highlands: some problems of comparison', *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (London, 1968).

[c] Jean La Fontaine, 'Descent in New Guinea', in *The Character of Kinship*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge, 1973).

[d] Andrew Strathern, 'African models in the New Guinea highlands', *Man*, n.s., 62 (1962), pp. 5—9.

> Descent refers to a relation mediated by a parent between himself and an ancestor, defined as any genealogical predecessor of the grandparental or earlier generation . . . Filiation is the fact of being the child of a specific parent.[e]

Indeed, we tried to show that this thesis implies a contradiction. On the one side, its supporters demand that the two notions be opposed; on the other, as emerges from the subsidiary distinction, due to Barnes, between 'genealogical descent' and 'analogical descent', they allow the full sense of the term only to descent resulting from consecutive filiations. But, as the English say, you cannot both have your cake and eat it, claiming to separate filiation and descent completely, while reserving the sole legitimate acceptation of this latter to a genealogical succession of relatives.

All in all, we are up against an aporia of the Eleatic kind, which consists of thinking about terms instead of about relations. Among these relations, we should particularly note those among *dominance*, *status* and *power*. Like so many others, Mae Enga society is male-dominated in the sense that the men exchange women; but this aspect does not affect the rule of descent, since it is as clearly evident in matrilineal societies as in patrilineal ones. The same goes for the respective statuses of wife-takers and wife-givers; hypogamic and hypergamic marriage are the respective adaptations to both rules of descent. Further, when the power of the wife-takers, which should not be confused with their status (last year we examined Indonesian examples of wife-takers, who were superior in power, though inferior in status), is greater than that of the wife-givers, the society takes on a patrilineal or agnatic appearance, and a matrilineal appearance in the converse case. Cognatic kinship represents an intermediate state, when tensions between the exchange groups are more or less in equilibrium. Consequently, cognatic kinship is always generated by a relation, whether the line of cleavage cuts across the exchanging groups or, as often in New Guinea, passes between the sexes and assumes the form of an antagonism opposing the masculine principle to the feminine principle.

[e] This appears to be a slightly garbled quotation from Meyer Fortes, 'Descent, filiation and affinity: a rejoinder to Dr Leach', part II, *Man*, 331 (1959), pp. 206—12, where Fortes says: 'By filiation, in its primary sense, I mean the "fact of being the child of a specified parent" as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it. . . . More precisely, it denotes the relationship created by the fact of being the legitimate child of one's parents. [p. 206] . . . whereas filiation is the relation that exists between a person and his parents only, descent refers to a relation mediated by a parent between himself and an ancestor, defined as any genealogical predecessor of the grandparental or earlier generation, [p. 207]

In this particular case, as in many others, the mistake is to confuse the sociological concept of agnation with data of a biological or even psychological order, for then one inevitably falls into the traps of naturalism and empiricism. The investigations of Cook among the Manga lead us, on the contrary, to see in the cognatic aspects of New Guinea systems a manifestation of structural properties characteristic of so-called Iroquois kinship terminologies, which permit the automatic transformation of certain categories of non-agnates in agnates.

When we compare the social organization of the Mae Enga with that of the Mendi (D'Arcy Ryan) and the Huli (Glasse), we initially have the impression of a progressive distancing from an agnatic structure, which finishes in the second case with another, patently cognatic. In fact, this reversal is illusory. The work of D'Arcy Ryan among the Mendi illustrates the role of the agnatic formula, which in no way translates facts of a genealogical order (not even in Africa, moreover), but which, at least in New Guinea, provides a sort of schema, almost in the Kantian sense of the term, by means of which a mediation is effected between empirical reality (which does not correspond, non-agnates representing up to 50 per cent of clan members) and a patrilineal ideology. Things do not seem to be very different among the Huli, except in degree, as Jackson has amply demonstrated in his critical analysis of Glasse's monograph. Even among the Telefolmin (Craig), where patrilineal descent groups do not exist, the social structure has a markedly agnatic orientation.

Diverse authorities (Langness, Lepervanche) have interpreted these hybrid formulae, mixtures of the cognatic and the agnatic, as reflecting the necessity, in warlike societies, of increasing through various procedures (incorporation of cognates, adoption, 'naturalization', etc.) the available numbers of men of fighting age. But we are dealing here with an ancillary phenomenon rather than a cause. In societies where the power dimension coincides with that of kinship and alliance, the one can be expressed completely or in principle by the other. Contrariwise, when there is a separation between these dimensions, the language of kinship ceases to be relevant, and there is a movement towards that of residence (with one or several chiefs) and political rivalry. In this context, we have devoted much attention to the coexistence, in several New Guinea societies, of what European medievalists call ancestral and land names, and in the manner in which, as in Europe, the first become hidden behind the second. This re-occurrence of the same phenomenon in widely distant regions of the world and at different times suggests that we are here dealing with a characteristic property of certain types of society.

These societies are all facing the same problem, that of integrating an agnatic lineage and a cognatic kindred. It is therefore necessary to

create or adopt mechanisms that will automatically distance part of the kindred; otherwise it will extend indefinitely through the generations and the agnates will soon be submerged beneath the proliferation of non-agnates. The question, then, arises of whether the procedures described by Cook and which we have already cited, rather than transforming non-agnates into agnates, do not have the result, and perhaps the object, of distancing a part of the cognates from the agnatic core. In other words, what seems to be operating here in the kindred is a sort of selection procedure, operating in such a way that some elements come to reinforce the agnatic lineage, whereas others are definitively excluded from it. Moreover, this is what appears to be happening in a number of different societies: the Kamano, Usurufa, Jate and Fore (Berndt), the Daribi (Wagner), the Trobriand (Leach, Weiner). The Trobriand are not alone in calling a number of relatives 'taboo'. This custom also exists in New Guinea and Australia. In Madagascar, the name of the daughter of the sister of the King Andriamanelo, Rafotsitahinamanjaka, could mean 'That which is forbidden'. The phenomenon therefore seems susceptible of a wider interpretation than that advanced by Leach solely on the basis of the Trobriand data. We also referred to a recent study by Feil who, in connection with the Tombema Enga, clearly illustrates how the rules inherent in the nomenclature (and very like those described by Cook) facilitate the transformation of agnates into non-agnates, with whom ceremonial exchange relations can be established that would be impossible with the former. As MacDowell has shown for a Yuat River group, in these societies the concept of exchange enjoys a kind of priority over those of descent and filiation.

Before returning to this point, it seemed important to formulate in theoretical terms the essential problems that a survey of a large number of New Guinea societies had allowed us to identify. The first of these problems concerns the definition of kinship terminologies. Those of New Guinea are not easy to place in the accepted categories. It is often difficult to decide whether a given system is of 'Hawaiian' or 'Iroquois' type (see the controversy between Pouwer and van der Leeden on the Sarmi), or if another is 'Iroquois' or 'Omaha' (Enga, Manga, etc.). These uncertainties are also characteristic of a former state of European societies, and we were able to note a suggestive convergence between current debates on New Guinea and those among Indo-Europeanists according to a recent paper by M. Szemerenyi.

Another problem concerns the disharmony observed in New Guinea between the terminologies and the marriage rules. At the risk of over-simplification, one could almost say that there are 'Omaha' systems accompanied by 'Iroquois' preferences (Iatmul, Star Mountains, Dani,

Trobriand, Manus, etc.), and 'Iroquois' systems with 'Omaha' prohibitions. But among the Enga and the Melpa, who afford an excellent illustration of the second case, it is a striking fact that matrimonial exchanges related to complex structures go along with ritual exchanges which, proceeding from wife-takers to wife-givers and then going along the chain in the other direction, themselves relate to structures that could be called elementary. We are dealing, in fact, with a double cycle of generalized exchange, not of women, but of wealth, creating what Strathern has well called an 'alternating disequilibrium', and which neutralizes on another terrain the inequality that is often, and the instability that is always, inherent in relations between wife-takers and wife-givers.[f]

A single weakness thus afflicts all the current theoretical debates. They are haunted by the idea of descent, as if the New Guinea systems did nothing else than put it in question, and as if this were their sole claim to originality. Thereby the problem of alliance is bypassed and the error of Schneidner and Gough is perpetuated of explaining the difference between patrilineal and matrilineal systems by the relative 'force' of the ties between husband and wife, on the one side, and between brother and sister on the other, without seeing that the significant relation of force is that established not between the individual occupants of certain positions in the terminology, but between the partners in a network of matrimonial exchanges.[g] Strathern is therefore correct in proposing a typology of New Guinea systems based on the nature of relations of exchange between groups.[h] But that is insufficient, because, in New Guinea, the opposition between consanguinity and alliance is not definable in the classical terms. Instead of, as among the majority of societies that have provided the theoretical basis of anthropology, consanguinity being on one side, and alliance and exchange on the other, New Guinea displaces the line of demarcation: here, consanguinity and alliance are placed together, with exchange constituting almost a separate order. As the late Margaret Mead had already emphasized in 1934 — nearly a half-century ago — the essence of such systems is in the freedom they allow themselves, in incorporating or rejecting cognates, to assimilate

f Andrew Strathern, 'Descent and alliance in the New Guinea highlands: some problems of comparison', *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (1967); Strathern notes, however, that 'alliance relations themselves are not easy to define or measure' (p. 50).

g Harold Schneider and Kathleen Gough, *Matrilineal Kinship* (Berkeley, California, 1962).

h Strathern, 'Descent and alliance'.

cross-cousins either to siblings or to affines.[i] A marginal area exists where the distinction between consanguinity and affinity, so clear-cut elsewhere, is obliterated; and another distinction appears, but on a new level, between two categories of relative: those with whom one exchanges, and those with whom one shares. Instead, therefore, of the distinction between consanguinity and affinity serving to delimit the domain of exchange, it is the practice of exchange that serves to differentiate the kindred between consanguines and affines. It is possible to formulate matters in another fashion: unlike unilineal systems, which are based on a clear distinction between parallel relatives and cross-relatives, New Guinea systems transpose this distinction into the very midst of the category of cross-relatives, who are treated, by virtue of rules inherent in the terminology, either as sharing partners, characteristic of relations between consanguines, or as partners in ceremonial exchanges, characteristic of relations between affines.

Finally, it appears that a striking correspondence exists between this problematic and the way in which New Guinea thought conceives relations between the sexes in the form of an insurmountable antagonism, as clearly reported by all investigators (Read, Berndt, Salisbury, Meggitt, Reay, Brown, Langness, Bulmer, Glasse, Strathern, Wagner, Godelier, etc.). In New Guinea, a theory of conception prevails according to which the masculine and feminine principles struggle against each other in each individual whom they have, moreover, combined together to form. In connection with the Daribi, Wagner has well demonstrated the implications of such a theory of kinship.[j] Cross-kinship exhibits two contradictory aspects, being based at once on recognition of a blood tie with the maternal clan, and on the rule that exchange relations should be created between clans. There thuse arises an 'interference zone' in which the political game (as expressed, for example, in the freedom allowed to each individual in choosing his clan allegiance) can be played. In this respect, it is remarkable that Wagner should have analysed the Daribi theory of kinship in terms analogous to those employed some time ago by Margaret Mead in describing the systems of the Admiralty Islands; and which, let it be said in passing, lends a certain plausibility to the hypothesis of van der Leeden on the former presence of a bilineal (and not undifferentiated) system on the north-west coast of New Guinea.

[i] Margaret Mead, 'Kinship in the Admiralty Islands', *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, XXXIV (1934), pp. 181—358.

[j] Roy Wagner, *The Curse of Souw: Principles of Daribi Clan Definition and Alliance* (Chicago, 1967).

In the more general perspective of a course that has already lasted three years and will continue next year, two lessons can be drawn from the preceding considerations. In the first place, the question arises of whether the phenomenon of 'sexual affiliation', first recorded by Williams among the Koiari and subsequently described under various modalities in other New Guinea societies (Burridge: Tangu; Hogbin: Busama; Berndt: Kamano; Wagner: Daribi; Davenport: Santa Cruz), is not a structural property of certain forms of cognatic system. In the second place, it emerges from all the facts reviewed this year that the substantialist theory of conception and alliance found in most New Guinea societies affords, at the organic level, a striking equivalent to the 'house' which, in the preceding years, we had sought to define as an institutional form, on the basis of examples drawn from medieval Europe, from north-west America and from Indonesia. Everywhere, it would seem, the point is to transcend a conflict between two claimants, to obscure what opposes them and, if possible, to join them together at the price of cutting off, at the boundaries of the 'house', the domains with which its constituents were formerly identified. The result is a social crisis at once inevitable, wished for and feared, of which New Guinea has had the originality to propose a physiological version, with the individual body as locus of an unending scenario.

4

Melanesia (continued) and Polynesia (1979–80)

This year's course had two parts. We first returned to New Guinea, to which last year's course had been entirely devoted, to consider some problems of interpretation posed by several recent works. That of Raymond G. Kelly presents as a great novelty the thesis that the essence of social structure consists in the organization of contradictions.[1] However, as the author himself recognizes, all his predecessors have emphasized that New Guinea social organization is based on the interplay, sometimes even called dialectic, of opposed principles; and the idea that social structures have the function of reconciling, surmounting or masking contradictions is not new. Do we still lack a 'general theory' of facts of this order? Dr Kelly thinks to provide one based on what he calls the 'relation of transitivity', which is, according to him, a relation between two terms resulting from their identical relation with a third. Obviously one could thus define the relation between siblings, but also any other relation whatever and not only in the domain of kinship, because it expresses merely the fact that, pictured in a certain light, two terms, two individuals or two positions in any network of relations whatever resemble each other.

Such a vague and elastic notion cannot serve as the basis of a theory. Moreover, it emerges from a book by E. L. Schieffelin that if the Kaluli, neighbours of the Etoro, also posit an opposition between siblingship and descent, the 'relation of transitivity' appears among them as a general procedure for establishing all sorts of ties (ritual friendship, consubstantiality, homonymy, etc.).[2] To suppose, then, that the relation is relevant to the definition of the social structure

[1] Raymond G. Kelly, *Etoro Social Structure: A Study in Structural Contradiction* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1977).

[2] E. L. Schieffelin, *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers* (New York, 1976).

necessitates discovering reasons why it should have a heuristic value in the particular case of siblings, and reaching the concrete reality concealed by this formal expression.

Moreover, the so-called 'Omaha' characteristics of the kinship terminologies of this region entail, as Schieffelin has well understood, that the position of cross-cousins inverts that of siblings: there is symmetry in the one case, asymmetry in the other. According to the Kaluli, matrilateral cousins 'descend' through their father from the clan of Ego's mother, and are 'put down' by a third clan (that of their own mother), whereas patrilateral cousins are 'put down' by a woman of Ego's clan, and 'descend' from a third clan; however, one is nearer one's matrilateral than one's patrilateral kin, for, when the mother's brother's daughter marries and has children, she becomes a 'mother' to her cross-cousin, and her children become 'brothers' and 'sisters'. The situation thus created much resembles that described for the Etoro, where the matrilateral cross-cousin is from the outset classified with the mother, and her children with siblings. As enunciated by the Kaluli, the theory of the phenomenon fits well in both cases: one is, they say, a sibling (brother or sister) of whoever has been 'put down' by the same maternal clan; the matrilateral cousin thus is or becomes a 'mother' by reason of the fact that her children, 'put down' by a woman of the same clan as Ego's mother, are Ego's siblings. Better than a formalist interpretation, this indigenous 'substantialism' which, as we showed last year, is based in New Guinea on the opposition of the sexes and on a clearly articulated theory of conception and alliance, takes account not only of the opposition between descent and siblingship, but also of the partially or weakly 'Omaha' systems so often found in New Guinea. These systems permit and defer at one and the same time the renewing of matrimonial alliances with the mother's clan. The matrilateral cross-cousin being identified with a mother, her children with siblings and their children with the children of siblings, marriage in the mother's clan does not become possible again until the generation of the great-grandchildren, thus two generations later than in the father's clan. The 'intransitive' aspects of these systems thus have an explanatory value much superior to that of their 'transitive' aspects (in Kelly's sense of the terms). But that becomes evident only if one precept be remembered: in the anthropological sense of the term, structure is defined as a totality formed of relations between the elements of a system *and of their transformations*. By treating a group in isolation from its neighbours, who do, however, pose problems of the same kind, Kelly invokes the notion of structure without that of transformation, which is none the less inherent in it. Contrariwise, if one treats New Guinea kinship terminologies as transformations within a single totality, one would probably succeed in surmounting the

apparent heterogeneity of the systems — some with Omaha characteristics and others with Iroquois features — that co-exist in this part of the world. We have sought to do this in comparing one with another the systems of the Etoro, the Kaluli and, in the light of the researches of Roy Wagner, those of the Daribi and the Foraba.

The work of A. Gell affords among other interests that of describing a rudimentary Omaha system, curiously accompanied by a terminology of generation levels.[3] The system is rudimentary because the same type of marriage again becomes possible after only two generations; as to the generation levels, they are explained by the fact that Umeda society formulates its rule of exogamy in terms of hamlets, not of lineages, which are therefore irrelevant.

On the general topic of Crow—Omaha systems, the author makes two singular complaints against us. According to him, we have rightly located these systems in an intermediate position between elementary and complex systems; but we should, he claims, have subsequently abandoned this view in favour of a radical opposition between elementary and Crow—Omaha systems. Furthermore, we would seem to have failed to translate the negative rules laid down by these latter systems into positive ones.

On this last point, it suffices to refer the author to the work of Mme Françoise Héritier who, with the indispensable aid of the computer, has successfully carried through the programme that we were able only to outline. The other complaint arises out of a confusion between two oppositions that it is, on the contrary, important to distinguish: that between elementary and complex, and that between generalized exchange conceived as the upper limit of elementary systems, and Crow—Omaha systems as the lower limit of complex systems. All elementary systems change kin into affines, and all complex systems, including ours, change affines into kin (in the sense that marriage gives rise to restrictions). Crow—Omaha systems occupy this pivotal position where a slight movement can change one form into another.

In the second part of the course, we passed on from Melanesia to the peripheral region of western Polynesia, and examination of the kinship systems and social organization of the islands of Fiji, Tonga and Samoa.

Fijian social organization was for a long time associated with patrilineal descent and cross-cousin marriage. In fact, as is already evident in the work of Hocart, the situation is much more complex.

[3] Alfred Gell, *Metamorphoses of the Cassowaries: Umeda Society, Language and Ritual* (London, 1975).

In the Lau Archipelago, in Vanua Levu, and even in Viti Levu, matrilineal or undifferentiated features co-exist with patrilineal ones (in Vanua Levu, the latter dominate); and marriage, often prohibited between cross-cousins, is possible only between their children or more distant kin. The researches of Nayacakalu and of Groves show, however, that the kinship system belongs to the Dravidian type; in other words, it classifies cognates and affines as if all members of the group are distributed between patrilineages that are continually exchanging sisters or daughters. In support of this fiction, once the marriage is consummated, the spouses become nominally cross-cousins and an appropriate terminology is applied between the close kin of one and the other.

Consequently, and conversely to the Kaluli, who were discussed in the first part of the course and who transform a cousin into a 'mother', the Fijians transform a female stranger (or a distant kinswoman) into a 'cousin'. In the first case, the concern is with distancing the 'returns'; in the second case, with making out that the 'returns' are not distanced. The Fijian transformation of spouses into cross-cousins also occurs in the mode of cognatic descent, notwithstanding the patrilineal characteristics prevailing at Moala (Sahlins); at Vanua Levu, oblique features of Crow—Omaha type appear in the terminology (Hocart, Quain).

To these complex factors must be added those resulting from a rigid social stratification and from a division, sometimes more theoretical than actual, of the society into functional groups: chiefs, acolytes and executives, heralds, priests, warriors, serfs, fishermen, carpenters. Finally, it appears that the workforce of the village was also divided into specialized groups to facilitate economic co-operation on the occasion of ceremonies and festivals. But, at whatever level one seeks to define them, all these kinds of grouping seem to result from a political alignment that may itself originate in a distant common ancestorhood, cognatic kinship, the desire to share the same place of residence — diverse initial motives legitimated by the subsequent adoption of a single functional structure.

In the perspective from which, for four years now, we have sought to place ourselves, it is pertinent that on several occasions, and each from his own standpoint, Hocart and Quain used the word 'house' to characterize the groups at various levels. The existence between the Fijian princes of intransitive hierarchical relations, noted by Williams and Calvert and then by Hocart, evokes relations of the same kind in Royalist France before Philippe Auguste. We tried to justify this comparison by applying to the Fijian data the medieval distinction between fiefs and offices, and by comparing, following the lead given by Hocart in respect to England, the Fijian 'sergeanteries' with the

offices of the Crown and those of the king's house in the French *ancien régime*.

One could not leave Fiji without considering the institution of the *vasu*, which has been exclusively associated by all analysts, even the most recent, with patrilineal descent. That is to ignore the fact that the matrilineal Fijians of Vanua Levu, described by Quain, have an institution which they described with the same word; it is therefore important to understand this word in its complete semantic extension. Limited to noble or royal lineages, the *vasu* seeks in both cases to overcome problems inherent in the social structure.

In the western part of Vanua Levu, where aristocratic blood is transmitted in the maternal line, Ego is identified with his maternal kin by virtue of being a sister's son; but for them he becomes, not necessarily inferior, but in any case alienated as an agnate of the wife-takers. Contrariwise, among the patrilineal people, the social structure is entirely based on two paradigms: the founding marriage of a divine conqueror with an autochthonous 'daughter of the earth', and the recognized superiority of the brother. Consequently Ego, who is inferior to his maternal kin as a sister's son, is at the same time superior to them as a son of a noble agnate and of divine extraction.

Quain, however, emphasized that at Vanua Levu the real *vasu* rights, those pre-eminently proclaimed as such, are those exercised by the mother's mother, rather than the maternal uncle. But *vasu* rights assume opposed characteristics in matrilineal and patrilineal systems. In the first instance they refer to a territorial domain, in the second exclusively to consumable goods and items of furniture. Finally, the taboo between brother and sister, rigorous elsewhere, does not exist among the matrilineal people of Vanua Levu, who are, however, divided into moieties. What the *vasu* right allows an individual to overcome in a matrilineal system is the progressive *distancing* that affects him by reason of his patrilineal ancestry in respect of the territorial domain of his matrilineal ancestors. What the same right allows one to overcome in a patrilineal system appears rather as a *contradiction* between the inferiority inherent in descent through women within the maternal lineage, and the superiority of the immigrant wife-takers over the autochthons who have ceded them women. Thus, in one case there is a quantitative separation, and a qualitative separation in the other.

It is therefore correct, as Walter has recently done, to interpret the *vasu* institution as an unstable balance between agnatic and uterine lineages. But this instability is of a structural order; we should not reduce *vasu* rights to a mere compensation imposed on uterine kin in exchange for the duty, sometimes required of the sister's son, to return to his maternal lineage to perpetuate it in the event that it lacks

a male heir and is thus threatened with extinction. Overly narrow, this interpretation goes along with an overly wide interpretation advanced by Goody in respect of customs of the same kind in Africa. For the idea of 'submerged line' employed by this authority appears unnecessarily abstract and of an almost metaphysical nature. For agnates as for uterine kin, the other line is not submerged, but has an ostensible and very real existence.

Our reflections on the Fijian institution thus lead us to take a position in a debate between Africanists. In interpreting data comparable to the *vasu*, Adler and Cartry have not erred in emphasizing the relation between siblings of opposite sex. The result of a 'paradox' has already been noted by S. F. Moore: marriage alliance binds groups together only in so far as the woman, ceded as wife to one group, retains her allegiance to the other under the title of sister. In the Japanese house (*ie*), the husband—wife couple are superior to the brother—sister pair. The adoptive son-in-law, who has come from outside, but who will perpetuate the house, is more important than the sister, married outside, or than the brother, who will leave to found another house (*bunke*), so long as he does not live with his elder brother, heir of the house of origin (*honke*), in which case he will be reduced to a servile state. As a proverb cited by Nakane says: 'The sibling (brother or sister) is the beginning of the stranger.'

But it is also true (de Heusch) that institutions of this kind are situated at the boundary between elementary structures of kinship and complex structures. This is not by reason of the oblique marriages that are sometimes found with them, for such marriages occur in elementary structures, as among the Tupi and the Miwok, and those invoked in support of this thesis have a preferential and in no way contingent character, as would be necessary to attach them to complex structures. It is evident, however, that in Fiji everything occurs as though the society with its Dravidian kinship system (which, as we have seen, does not correspond to reality) betrayed nostalgia for an elementary structure.

Sahlins has shown that at the basis of Fijian society we find 'founding relations' consisting of the double alliance, hypergamic in one case and hypogamic in the others, of a chiefdom with domestic subjects and stranger affines.[a] This double alliance is, in fact — the preceding years' courses have established it by means of American and Indonesian examples — constitutive of the institutional form that we have agreed to call the 'house'. Fiji, however, has had the originality

[a] Marshall Sahlins, *Moala: Culture and Nature on a Fijian Island* (An Arbor, Michigan, 1962).

to offer a mechanical model of 'house' society. This is a society that persists, at least on paper, in reproducing an initial model, instead of using it to go forward and make new alliances. In ideological, if not real fashion, Fijian society is opposed to that of Japan in the Heian Epoch, whose literature systematically denigrates marriages between cousins in favour of more adventurous ones, whereas Fiji remains faithful in imagination to a prototype that is, however, given the lie by actual practice.[4]

One may construe in the same sense the fact that in Fiji widows were not committed to new matrimonial speculations by their respective houses. Their brothers immolated them, burying the corpse beneath that of the dead husband. Women were thus used once and for all, but this sacrifice required a surrender of land in exchange; thus we have two kinds of irrevocable transfer, executed one after the other, which also bear witness to a short-winded sociological inventiveness lacking in subtlety.

In various forms, analogous institutions to the *vasu* exist in Tonga, Samoa, Uvea and Futuna, but, conversely to what is described for Fiji, the rights called *fahu* in Tonga go along with a pre-eminence of the sister over the brother. They thus belong to a totality characterized, according to Mabuchi, by the 'spiritual predominance of the sister', and notable also in the Ryukyu Islands, in Taiwan and in certain parts of Indonesia.

Before the colonial period, Tonga was a veritable empire, receiving tribute from neighbouring islands and extending its influence to the eastern part of Fiji. Several princely and often rival lineages were established over the centuries, either through a well-placed younger brother, or through the usurpation of a palace mayor. This is an interesting fact in view of its Merovingian and Japanese parallels, and it may be illuminated by the particular status in Samoa of the so-called class of heralds ('talking chiefs'). Inferior in rank to the royal lineage, they become progressively superior to it in wealth and power because, as wife-takers, they receive from their wife-givers precious and durable goods (*toga*) in exchange for perishable goods (*oloa*). The social rank was hereditary in the maternal line, but it is possible that, as in the American north-west, the wife transmitted to her children only rights received from her father and thus was, in the medieval phrase, 'the bridge and the plank' (*'le pont et la planche'*).

The two regulating principles of the social structure of predominance of the sister over the brother and superiority of elder over younger

[4] Cf. *The View from Afar* (Oxford, 1984), chapter V.

moreover prevented the majority of individuals from having more than a precarious title to a social class. For each individual who gained in rank within a hierarchy with a limited number of noble titles, there were several others who lost rank. One is therefore not surprised to come upon the expression 'princely house' in the writings of observers, who make it clear that each house included nobles, lesser nobility and even peasants, all of whom were related by kinship, but whose statuses were increasingly unequal with a growing genealogical distance separating them.

Formed about a patrilineal core, these houses also perpetuated themselves by adoption (which was very frequent when offspring were lacking), and by the assimilation of cognatic and even unrelated lineages. Endogamy was permitted, except when the relationship was too close. In Samoa, where the taboo between brother and sister excluded marriage between their respective children and all the descendants of these latter until common origin was forgotten, there were a considerable number of houses with matrilocal residence, for example among highly placed families; contrariwise, a woman who was married above her station tried to incorporate members of her kin group into her husband's house. As well as the kin of the husband and the wife, each house included adoptive children, and, more generally, persons who could claim kinship links and enjoy rights of inheritance in distant groups (Mead). In Tonga as well as in Samoa, the houses bore 'descent names' and 'land names', the latter tending progressively to eclipse the former.

The earliest travellers, beginning with Cook, had already observed that the sister of the Tongan sovereign, called the *tamaha*, held supreme rank in the whole empire; even her brother owed her respect. The position of the *tamaha* therefore resembles that of the *taupu* in Samoa, who is theoretically a sister's daughter or father's sister's daughter, but frequently in practice the chief's own daughter, chosen by him in his house.

Subordination of the brother to the sister, even in the reigning family, is complicated in Tonga by a subordination of the maternal to the paternal line, which appears to contradict the principle of inherited nobility in the maternal line. Discussing a recent article by Garth Rogers, we have proposed, in order to resolve this problem, to invoke three parameters: the social class inherited in the maternal line, the particular title held by the father within his class, and the age rank of Ego in his descent group.

In Tonga and in Samoa, an extremely strict taboo exists between brother and sister, who are separated in childhood, to the extent that Mead was able to record in Samoa 'a loss of intimate relationships'

between young people of both sexes.[b] Further, in both groups of islands, the father's elder sister exerted supreme authority over her nephews and nieces. She could even curse them and render them sterile, thus depriving them of offspring in compensation — one is tempted to say by analogy with the Fijian *vasu* — for her inability to succeed to her brother's titles in his agnatic group and, once married and living with her husband, to involve herself in the affairs of her family of birth. In fact, in Samoa, the *tamafafine* (descendants in the female line) have no rights in the land which, as in Tonga, are inherited in the paternal line.

Finally, we considered the question of whether, as in New Guinea, these institutional variations on the same theme are not related to the respective roles assigned to both sexes in conception. In Tonga, Rogers has recorded two different theories on this subject. According to some informants, blood comes from the mother and bone from the father; according to others, everything comes from the mother and nothing from the father, so that the 'blood line' ends with the son and only the daughters continue it. It is evident that, in this case, each individual receives his organic substance exclusively from his maternal line, but it emerges also from indigenous testimony that, by way of exchange, the paternal kin hold familial authority, political power and social control. The natural is therefore all on one side, the cultural all on the other.

However, it is noteworthy that the Fijian paradigm of a marriage between a divine conqueror and an autochthon, generating the social structure, does not exist in Tonga, where the whole population is held to have a common origin. An opposition of an extrinsic order (between noble immigrant and peasant) gives place to an intrinsic order (between cultural and natural attributes), but is always accompanied by a marked distinction between these terms which, in both cases, relate exclusively to one sex or the other.

Moving from Fiji to Tonga, we thus see a transformation from the outside to the inside. It is tempting to relate this transformation to the inverted statuses of brother and sister, without modification of the taboo which, in both places, equally prohibits or restrains their reciprocal freedom.

But if, from New Guinea to western Polynesia, despite the various forms of its manifestation, there invariably prevails the principle of a dichotomy of functions and roles between the two sexes, we are

[b] On p. 138 of *Coming of Age in Samoa* (London, 1929), Margaret Mead notes 'the strong institutionalized antagonism between younger boys and younger girls and the taboo against any amiable intercourse between them'.

confronted with the possibility of consolidating customs that had at first appeared heterogeneous. In several New Guinea tribes, the paternal kin make voluntary payments to the maternal kin in order to cleanse their sons of the impurity communicated by the mother, thus assuring their exclusive membership in the father's clan. This institutionalized practice could be the converse of that recorded by the names of *vasu* or *fahu* in western Polynesia. For, if our interpretation is valid, it would in the latter case be a matter of imposing on the maternal kin involuntary payments attesting that, even if he belongs by right of birth to the paternal clan, the sister's son retains an organic link with the clan whence his mother came. This maternal substance, communicated at the time of conception, confers in Polynesia a privilege enjoyed by the nobility instead of, as in Melanesia, representing a stain which it is imperative to remove.

5

Comparisons: New Zealand, Madagascar, Micronesia (1980–1)

Last year we reviewed the kinship system and forms of social organization of western Polynesia, principally Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. The same type of inquiry was extended this year to the confines of the Austronesian linguistic region in New Zealand, Madagascar and Micronesia, three parts of the world that afford characteristic examples of cognatic descent. It is, moreover, in relation to the Maori *hapu* that most discussions about this system of descent have originated and developed during the past half-century.

Through the researches of Firth, Metge, Biggs, Scheffler, Webster, Oppenheim, Schwimmer and others, the nature of the *hapu* has progressively emerged. This has not come about by multiplying, as certain authorities have done, the conceptual tools in an effort to delineate an object that escapes us because it is badly or incompletely described, but in carefully examining concrete cases and making use of all, including the most recent, observations. One then becomes convinced that the *hapu* cannot be strictly defined as a local group, nor as a descent group, and that maternal links play a role in it that is principally explicable in political terms. A federation of frequently heterogeneous elements that come into being and dissolve as a result of migrations and wars, the *hapu* fabricates a genealogy for itself for opportunistic reasons, rather than being engendered by it. It is thus a dynamic formation that cannot be defined in itself, but only in relation to others of the same kind, situated in their historical context.

Firth was assuredly right to affirm that automatism is not a necessary attribute of descent, which may have an optative character without the boundaries between groups becoming confused or disappearing.[a] To establish their outlines, it suffices to call on other

[a] Raymond Firth, 'A note on descent groups in Polynesia', *Man*, 57 (1957), pp. 4–7.

criteria, such as common residence or recognized right to cultivate collectively owned land. Let us note, none the less, that these latter criteria do not refer to a state of fact as in the case of rule-governed descent. They translate or reflect unstable relations in time between individuals and groups, and thus throw light on a difficulty inherent in the study of cognatic societies, which accomplish a leap forward in history — but a history which, through lack of documents, we hardly know.

Undoubtedly, history also exists in unilineal societies. However, among them descent, or, in other words, genealogical links, are not means at the disposal of historical creativity. That is produced from outside, in the effects of wars, migrations, epidemics, famines, etc., rather than from inside. In this sense cognaticism, when it appears, offers the society a means of interiorizing history, by allowing it to give the culture a natural foundation. Up to the present, we have been pre-eminently concerned with the question of whether the systems bizarrely called 'non-unilineal' are or are not compatible with the existence of distinct descent groups within a total society. Such groups can exist in all cases, but it is the idea of descent which changes from one type to another; descent provides unilineal societies with the means of reproduction, and cognatic societies with the means of self-transformation.

It is true that contemporary anthropology, particularly in the UK, affirms that all societies, regardless of their rules of descent, include a zone or sector of relative indeterminacy, in which individuals are able to make choices and turn official rules to their private advantage. In this respect, the distinction made by Leach between real behaviour, statistical norms and ideal rules echoes the less easily translated distinction due to Firth between *structure of action, structure of expectations* and *structure of ideals*. The British theoreticians thus accept a kind of compromise between a traditional conception, which makes of culture a totality of rigid rules imposed on individuals from the outside, and their own view of the social (as opposed to the cultural), understood as a system of more flexible relations between individuals. In the terminology of Cambridge, 'descent' is on one side, and 'filiation' (by reason of its optative character), on the other.

However, the very fact that there exist 'statistical averages' (Leach) and 'types of probable behaviour' (Firth) suggests that the violence of individual desires, if the expression be allowed, does not go unchecked, but obeys constraints, running in channels that do not depend on 'rules' or 'ideal structures', though the latter rather reflect those channels.[b] As for statistical averages, they merely reproduce at the

[b] E. R. Leach, *Pul Eliya, a Village in Ceylon: A Study of Land Tenure and*

surface of action the deep structures that do not correspond to any of the three levels. Of these deep structures, these levels are merely the manifestations and indices, if they do not disguise or present misleading images of them.

But neither can one conceive historical development as a simple empirical product, the outcome of a multitude of psychological motives. This would be to forget that cognatic societies provide themselves with the mechanisms for their own development, and these mechanisms do not consist of ideal rules, static by definition. These are rather the strategies elaborated and put into practice, not by individuals, but by moral persons assured of a lifetime longer than those of the individuals composing them. In such cases (not more, however, than anywhere else), we do not have the society on one side and individuals on the other. Efficient causality belongs to groups, and these groups pursue their own ends in terms of norms, which are not those of the society in general, but of intermediary bodies which, in the society, are opposed to one another as rivals.

If therefore Firth has justly defined the *hapu* as an 'optative' descent group, one understands the profound, almost philosophical reasons that have led him to reserve this term for cases where the individual chooses the group he belongs to, and to exclude the converse cases, where it is the group that choose its members.[c] However, even in New Zealand (and in many other places also), facts of diverse orders show that the group chooses individuals rather than the contrary. That is evident from customs of marriage and adoption, and even more in funeral rites, when the chiefs of several *hapu* make rival claims on the corpse. Death and funerary ceremonies thus provide the occasion for retroactively defining the *hapu* as a 'house' composed of dead ancestors as well as of living people, cognates together with agnates and even, eventually, of non-kin.

Despite the geographical distance, and the different origin of their respective peoples, this strategic role devolved on to the family tomb brings together in a remarkable fashion the Maori institutions and those of Madagascar, and, more particularly, the *hapu* and the type of grouping called *foko* or *raza* in Madagascar.

Traditions recorded in Madagascar by Father Callet and published in his *Histoire des rois* and those, sometimes different, used by Grandidier, Father Malzac, Julien show us a genealogical model to

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Kinship (Cambridge, 1961), p. 9. Despite its Firthian ring, an extensive search has failed to identify the source of the phrase 'types of probable behaviour.'

[c] Firth, 'A note on descent groups'.

which one hesitates to attribute absolute veracity, but which at least shows how, during the final period of the Merina dynasty, the memorialists reconstructed ancient history to make it accord with more recent history. Further, the schema that emerges offers a classic appearance to the anthropologist: in the beginning, there is a union of conquerors and autochthons, owners of the land who are progressively dispossessed and who receive in return privileges of a religious and spiritual kind. The special interest of the more recent history (from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century) is that it shows how the unification of Imerina was achieved to some extent at the price of a resurgence of the old alliance, and led, during the second half of the nineteenth century, to a complete overturning of the system: succession to the throne was established in the matriline and from woman to woman. As in Japan during the Heian Epoch, but according to different modalities, maternal links prevail over paternal ones, in such a way that the descendants (or would-be descendants) of the old maternal-uncle owners of the land came into real power. Parallel to this transformation, a hierarchical order, initially based on genealogical privilege, gave place to another system in which ranks were defined in terms of territorial ownership.[1]

We thus rediscover this duality of 'blood' and 'land' which, during preceding years, has come to seem typical of 'house' societies, and of which the royal institutions of Indonesia (Bali) and Africa (Cameroon) provide additional examples. To overcome this dualism, Malagasy cultures for their part assimilate common residence to kinship, favouring marriage between neighbours, who in turn become creators of real kinship. Recent studies by French and North American investigators (Faublée, Molet, Ottino, Lavondès, Vianès, Koechlin, on one side; Kent, Kottak, Wilson, Southall, Huntington, on the other) confirm the generality of this practice in other parts of Madagascar, such as Bara, Betsileo, Tsimihety, Masikoro and Vezo. But at the same time one notes the striking fact that, working in what is quite often the same field, researchers from similar backgrounds adopt opposing points of view in describing aspects of the social structure such as the two types of group called respectively *foko* and *tariki*. Among the French fieldworkers, some locate the *foko* on the side of 'land' and the *tariki* on the side of 'blood', whereas others adopt the converse position. A comparable oscillation is apparent among the American investigators, although it is manifested in another domain, that of descent and filiation, which are respectively patrilineal and matrilineal for some, and respectively undifferentiated and patrilineal for others.

[1] Cf. *The View from Afar*, chapter V.

These complementary divergences between first-rate observers manage to persuade us that no more in Madagascar than in other cognatic societies are the oppositions between descent and filiation, or between descent groups and local groups, truly relevant. In societies of this type, one should avoid confusing the rule of descent, which may variously be patrilineal, matrilineal or undifferentiated, with the position of descent groups so defined within a structure of exchange, that is to say their position as paternal or maternal kin or, rather, as wife-takers or wife-givers. As wife-taker, a group makes use of its men to reinforce its position; as wife-giver, it makes use of its women, and does so regardless of mode of descent or filiation. The ransom of the child by its paternal kin, as described in Melanesia and among the Masikoro and Vezo in Madagascar, thus has nothing to do with patrilineal descent. It results rather from a claim of the wife-takers on the wife-givers, and the position of strength in which the former find themselves with regard to the latter. The incorporation of children in the mother's descent group reflects the converse relation.[2]

After this detour among other Malagasy societies, we returned to the central plateau of Imerina, no longer considered from the point of view of the royal dynasty, but from that of rural communities as described by G. Condominas and M. Bloch. Although sometimes in disagreement, these reports none the less confirm the analogies already drawn between the Maori *hapu* and the Malagasy *foko* or *raza*. In both cases, we are dealing with a non-exogamous group or even one with an endogamic preference, based on cognatic descent, and former or present owner of an ancestral domain; in both cases, the act of allowing or refusing access to the collective tomb permanently enables the group to define and redefine itself, either by enlargement or by restriction. In New Zealand, as in Madagascar, the 'house' in the sense we have given this term, prospectively constructs itself by marriage — the occasion of a choice between 'blood' (marriage within the kindred) and 'land' (marriage in the neighbourhood) — and retrospectively in funeral ceremonies, in the right to the tomb, at once ancestral soil and genealogical chain where, in order to achieve togetherness, the dead with whom one is united lose their distinct individuality as agnates, cognates or affines.

A brief survey of the eastern region of Polynesia, where the Maoris originated — the Marquesas, Society Islands and Tuamotu — sufficed to identify their social structures on the same model and with characteristics explicable, as in New Zealand and Madagascar, by

[2] Cf. *The View from Afar*, chapter VI.

historical conjunctures. Sometimes conquerors had subdued a local population, sometimes demographic pressure in a restricted territory had generated rivalries in a homogeneous population. In both cases, we are dealing with societies in external or internal disequilibrium, for whom a dream of unchangeability would be a luxury they could not, or could no longer, afford.

The last part of the course, devoted to Micronesia, strengthened these provisional conclusions. In this part of the world, societies occupying restricted areas and sometimes with dense populations afford many examples of institutions under strain or, as the zoologists would say, *hypertelic*, as much in terms of aristocratic hierarchies as in the extraordinarily complex dialectical game between patrilineal and matrilineal ties, between factors of filiation and of residence. From one island to another, one has the impression that the same principles are at work, but that each has evolved an original social formula to combine in its own way elements common to all. Some German studies, certain of them more than a century old and for the most part reissued in the publications of *Südsee Expedition*, allow us to reconstruct the picture before the great upheavals caused by two world wars.

Several North American writers (Mason, Alkire, Labby) have sought to correlate these institutional forms and local ecological conditions. The most obvious correspondences are those between social organization and mode of cultivation. Whence the thesis that, in the formulation of social structures, the sexual division of labour has been the determining factor. More precisely, the role assigned to women in agricultural work would explain why the matrilineal clan appears to be the basis of Micronesian institutions.

It seems, however, that this role is not everywhere the same and that the division of tasks between men and women varies from one island to the next; in this respect the economic interpretation is inadequate and it is necessary to take into consideration other factors, sociological (J. B. Thomas, MacMarshall) and, in particular, historical (Damas). Some Micronesian societies have lived in relative isolation; elsewhere migrations, wars and intermarriages have mixed up the populations. Further, we find in the first group of societies a retreat from matrilineal institutions: left to themselves these institutions, by reason of their well-known instability, have a tendency to evolve spontaneously towards other forms. Contrariwise, they provide the second group of societies with a sort of common denominator and a convenient means — the men being more mobile than the women — of incorporating immigrants.

The Palau example offers the same lesson. This society, Barnett and Goodenough have shown, with its members engaged in fierce economic

and political competition, possesses institutions that can be called neither patrilineal nor matrilineal, but which take on either aspect as a function of relations of power between rival houses. These conflicts unfold in an atmosphere curiously evocative of Italy at the end of the Middle Ages or the beginning of the Renaissance. This parallel should remind us that Micronesia, inhabited since several millennia before our era, has a rich and complex history, and that certain islands, such as Yap, exercised a political and cultural influence on their neighbours. From one end of Micronesia to the other the institutions share what might be called a family resemblance, with differently permuted elements issuing from a common basis. It would be overly simplistic to treat this temporal depth as non-existent or insignificant and, without assuming a necessary distance, to reduce all the complications of social structure to the replacement of a primitive, itinerant and diversified agriculture by the semi-permanent cultivation of the taro and other aroides.

Anthropologists are rightly cautious about claiming ever to have encountered people that could be called 'primitive' in the full sense of the term. The word is even less appropriate when describing the Micronesians, Malagasies and Maori. To attempt to derive their social organization from conditions that are not only primitive, but that have remained so contemporaneous that one could claim to be able to observe them all the time, would be to ignore the fact that the historical dimension constitutes an essential component of the problems posed by 'house' societies.

6

On Africa (1981–2)

This course, the last in a series covering six years devoted to cognatic societies (1976–82),[1] could not avoid Africa, especially in so far as this continent is generally considered by anthropologists as the favourite domain of unilineal institutions. The vast extent of the territory ruled out an exhaustive inquiry and we therefore restricted ourselves to three sample areas: among the states bordering the Gulf of Guinea, the Central Bantu and the Nilotic peoples.

From our perspective, the area of southern Nigeria between the Cross River and the Niger Delta affords a particular interest. As an integral part of the continent said to exemplify more than any other the reality of the lineage, this region includes societies that appear to be based on the 'house', which exists there in two forms: the house properly so called, and thus termed in the local languages, and the *canoe house* of the British anthropologists (C. D. Forde, G. I. Jones).*a*

Moreover, in both cases we are dealing with groups that are theoretically constituted about a patrilineage, but include non-agnates, who are often in the majority. Further, the attempts by observers to analyse these societies according to the segmentary model soon fail. The problem of their true nature is further complicated by the fact that it is hard to distinguish the 'house', defined by geneealogical criteria, from the 'quarter' of the town or village. This residential unit is often itself confused with the city, in the sense of a 'collection of houses forming a separate group', according to the best dictionaries; this term we consider preferable to 'concession', part of normal usage, but which tells us nothing, or to some inevitably unfortunate translation

[1] And my last teaching course.

[a] The source of the reference to 'canoe house' is G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria* (London, 1963).

of the English *compound*. Quarter and city appear as the territorial aspects of groups, which in respect of kinship would rather constitute nuclear lineages surrounded by cognates and non-kin. It follows from this ambiguity, in which we have seen a characteristic feature of African societies, that the purported distinction between levels of segmentation disappears: when it comes to concrete situations, it is frequently noticed that the terms 'house', 'quarter' and 'village' become interchangeable. During the preceding years, the Polynesian data have led us to analogous conclusions.

Have true unilineal descent groups evolved towards the 'house' form when former chiefs became 'kings' and based their power, not on ties of descent, but on military and economic successes for which, from the eighteenth century, the trade in slaves and palm oil provided the means? The authorities on these societies are hesitant. Sometimes the house appears to them an aberrant social form, produced by historical circumstances and particular environments. Sometimes they consider it a normal outcome of traditional institutions that are solidly anchored in African customs: two kinds of marriage according primacy respectively to the husband's family or to the wife's; rights of inheritance by the sons to certain goods, by the daughters to certain others; succession to the crown frequently accorded to the sons of daughters in the royal line. All these features suggest the latent operation, which often may even be explicit, of an undifferentiated rule of filiation.

It is a fact that to the west of the Niger Delta, among the Itsekiri (P. C. Lloyd), the reality of the patrilineage tends to fade away and the house, often indistinguishable from the village or village quarter, emerges as the basis of the social structure. These houses compete with each other for members, for each individual can theoretically claim membership in the houses of all his ascendants up to and including the seventh generation, or be solicited by them. These details invite us to enlarge the inquiry beyond the main area of the oil and slave trades; indeed, the Itsekiri originate in Benin and their language encourages us to look still further west, because they speak a Yoruba dialect.

Further, more than in any of the previously examined cases, that of Benin exemplifies the pre-eminence of the quarter as the basic unit of society, while exhibiting the same two inseparable characteristics of a descent group whose members recognize a common ancestor, and of a local assembly of co-residents administered by a political chief. In addition, the origin myths reveal on analysis a scheme that is also found among the Nupe, the Central Bantu and even the Nilotics. According to this schema, the society began in a marriage between a male stranger of noble birth and the daughter or sister of the autochthons, or those who claimed to be such, who brought as dowry

the land and sovereignty over it — an unexpected application of the medieval distinction between 'blood' and 'land'.

The variation in the rule of filiation or descent observable among the Yoruba (W. Bascom, P. C. Lloyd), combined with facts of the same order recorded further west among the Gonja and the Lowiili (E. and J. Goody), to the north among the Nupe (S. F. Nadel), and to the east of the zone where our inquiry began, on the other side of the Cross River among the Yakö (D. Forde) and among the Mambila of western Cameroon (F. Rehfisch), provides evidence of features common to a vast region that extends even into the Sudan, in the Nuba Mountains area (S. F. Nadel). Those features are the rotation of offices — chiefly or royal — between collateral lineages, a principle according to which, as has been noted since the eighteenth century with respect to the Gulf of Guinea peoples, 'men inherit from men and women, from women' (Bosman); the essentially magical and religious functions of the matrilineal groups with dispersed memberships, who are jealous guardians of social identity and traditional values; political functions of localized patrilineal groups that tend to diversify and enlarge themselves through new marriage alliances or by recruiting outsiders.[b]

One is therefore led to question whether, when anthropologists multiply labels by which to distinguish each shade of difference in systems called patrilineal (but with matrilineal aspects), matrilineal (but with patrilineal aspects), bilineal, double descent, cognatic, etc., they are not the victims of an illusion. These subtle qualifications often belong more to the particular perspective of each observer than to intrinsic properties of the societies themselves.

In the course of her research among the Central Bantu, Audrey I. Richards understood long ago that groups exhibiting unequally distributed matrilineal features within the same geographical region did not differ among themselves in terms of specific modes of filiation or descent, but in the varying degrees of power upon one another in each case by the wife-takers and wife-givers. One could indeed find the solution to various problems of African sociology in this type of relation. In approaching the problems from this angle, one would not expect to find the 'house' in its definitive form. But one would better understand how it is prefigured in social units founded simultaneously on genealogical descent and a relation to the soil, the elements by means of which the majority of African societies are constructed. Finally, this approach verifies in its way a formula that is certainly

[b] William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London, 1705), chapter 12.

not universal, but that has a much larger field of application worldwide than is commonly believed. That is the formula according to which the wife-takers, prestigious through birth or power, hold from the beginning a social or political authority, whereas the wife-givers bring the land, while retaining magical or religious powers.

Around a real, legendary or mythical domain, these hybrid social units gather either cognates and agnates, or cognates and uterine kin, not so much in terms of different modes of descent as of rivalries between different houses (or what stands in their places). Two kinds of marriage that favour sometimes wife-takers, sometimes wife-givers, are the normal means through which these rivalries develop in Africa, while other mechanisms — of limited effectiveness, seemingly — appear to have the objective of neutralizing such rivalries. Such is the compensating role of 'king-makers', which is assigned in monarchical states to whichever of the two groups, paternal or maternal, the dynastic rule excludes from the succession.

Among the Central Bantu, the social organization of the Yao (J. C. Mitchell) provides a particularly clear example of the antagonism between paternal and maternal kin. The chief distrusts his brothers and uterine nephews, who are for him potential rivals, and trusts his sons, who are prevented from succeeding him by the rule of descent. We have already encountered this system of attitudes among the Ashanti (M. Fortes); it inverts in a revealing fashion that illustrated by the *chansons de geste* of the European Middle Ages. A historian of this period (K. Schmid) has defined the 'house' as a hierarchical system of ranks and titles transmitted in a theoretically hereditary line to successive incumbents: what the people with a comparable organization studied by anthropologists often call 'stools'.[c] In Africa, notably among the Yao and the Lunda (I. Cunnison, D. Biebuyck), the principle of perpetual succession is evidence for the existence of the same system; it is important to note that the respective position of paternal and maternal kin, of wife-takers and wife-givers, assumes in it the value of an archetype. Moreover, J. C. Mitchell, the ethnographer of the Yao, is led to call 'houses', respectively elder and younger, the 'sororal groups' (*mbumba*) that are engaged in political rivalry; these houses mobilize one or more patrlineages around a dominant matrilineage.[d] Here we have, in terms of maternal rights, a configuration

[c] Karl Schmid and Joachim Wollasch, *Societas et Fraternitas: Begründung eines kommentierten Quellenwerkes zur Erforschung der Personen und Personengruppen der Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1975).

[d] J. Clyde Mitchell, *The Yao Village: A Study in the Social Structure of a Nysaland Tribe* (Manchester, 1956).

encountered several times in the course of the preceding years, but formulated in the idiom of patrilineal filiation.

On the borders of Zambia and Zaïre, the Lunda illustrate the same features. They recognize patrilineal links, although in their society, except for royal or noble lineages, matrilineal descent is the rule; theirs is a system symmetrical with those in which, according to the medieval saying, women (but here men) act as 'the bridge and the plank'. Among the Lunda also, the rotation of offices goes along with another institution concerning the clans entrusted with providing royal wives and thus heirs to the throne. We noted the functional analogy between these systems and perpetual succession. All such systems endeavour (which is not to say they succeed) to neutralize the accidents of history by bringing about a regular return to the period $n \leqslant 1$ (corresponding to the interval of a generation in the case of perpetual succession) or to the period $n \geqslant 2$, according to the number of lines called upon to reign in alternation, or to the number of the clans providing royal wives (about fifteen out of forty among the Baganda, who have the same system). One could say that these African societies have sought, no doubt in vain, to draw a rough balance, to reconcile the accidents of the historical process — to which, their remote and recent pasts give evidence, they were largely exposed — and the illusory assurance that, despite the risks involved, the game would be concluded without gain or loss. In this sense the African 'houses' if it were necessary to define them according to the rules theoretically neutralizing rivalries and guaranteeing that each would have this turn, would rather appear as 'anti-houses'.

We indeed observe among these peoples a concern with overcoming the antagonism between paternal and maternal kin. When he accedes to the throne, the Lunda king abandons his maternal clan, but he provides an important place about his person for his relatives of origin; to the contrary of what we see among the Yao and the Ashanti, it is his children and grandchildren, as the royal chronicles attest, who constitute a danger for him.

The origin myths of the Central Bantu have particularly attracted our attention, not in order to find historical evidence in them, but because they reveal how these peoples conceptualize their social order and its genesis. A schema underlies them that is comparable to that already discovered in the myths of Benin and the Nupe kingdom: one or more conquerors establish successive conjugal links with the existing occupants of the country, among whom they take wives and from whom they receive, at the same time as a sister or a daughter, sovereign rights over the land; this occurs in such a way that, by a series of successive improvements, the land changes from wild bush to inhabited terrain; it then becomes inhabited land, going from the

state of cultivated plantation to that of royal domain, and finally, from land conceived as means of production to the harvested products themselves, stored in granaries at the monarch's disposal.

It eventually became evident that the opposition of paternal and maternal kin, as well as the institutional means intended to overcome this opposition, though always in a precarious manner, could throw light on an old problem: that of the slaying of the king, a custom made famous by the work of Frazer. Attributed with more or less credibility to about fifty African societies, it appeared to be established in several. Moreover, the rule by which the relatives or the rivals of the king induced him to suicide or put him to death by strangulation, suffocation, or by burying him alive when they judged his strength to be declining, presents a remarkable symmetry with other customs formerly observed in Old Calabar. In this part of the Cross River estuary, on the death of the king his brothers and nephews massacred all those against whom they held grudges or whom they suspected of wishing to seize power. To the murder of the king, by associates who are also his rivals, we can thus join the murder, by his associates, of the rivals or adversaries of the dead king.[2]

In a lecture in memory of Frazer delivered in 1948, Evans-Pritchard was the first to cast doubt on whether the king was immolated for religious or mystical reasons.[e] It was necessary, according to Evans-Pritchard, to uncover the sociological bases of a custom better understood in terms of inherent tensions in the social structure; thus among the Shilluk, these tensions became evident between paternal and maternal kin when it was a question of designating an heir to the throne. Like other African peoples (we have also instanced the cases of the Yoruba and the Swazi), the Shilluk disposed of institutional means of enlarging the royal lineage and of reducing to commoner status collaterals whose daughters the king could marry, women on whom devolved the duty of killing their royal husband by suffocation.

A dozen years later M. W. Young was to contest this sociological interpretation on the basis of his own research among the Jukun of Northern Nigeria. There agnates and uterine kin are collectively responsible for the death of the king, the first group deciding it and the second executing it. Moreover, a rule of alternation between two dynastic lineages ensures that the benefits derived from the king's death are enjoyed by a third lineage, unrelated to the two dynastic lineages, and which therefore holds them at a distance from power. To

[2] Another illustration of the 'canonic formula' discussed on pp. 4—5, 114—17.

[e] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan* (Cambridge, 1948).

discuss this case profitably, it would be necessary to know what is generally unknown, as Evans-Pritchard has already affirmed in respect of the Shilluk, and that is whether marriage alliances are made between the two lineages that alternately hold the kingship and, if so, what sort of marriages. Careful examination of the Jukun material suggests that such alliances were real.

A book and two articles by R. G. Lienhardt, devoted to the Dinka, Shilluk and Anuak, clarify to a certain extent these problems of interpretation.[f] The Dinka buried alive not kings, of whom they had none, but priests, masters of a sacred spear. In addition, they conceived relations between their clans, divided between 'priests' and 'warriors', on the model of those between mother's brothers and uterine nephews, which accords with Evans-Pritchard. However, there is indigenous testimony to the fact that, as among the Jukun, the two clans, paternal and maternal, participated in executing the priest or the monarch. To escape the contradiction, it is necessary to invoke the conceptual schemas that underlie, among the Nilotics, origin myths that resemble those of the Central Bantu down to minor details. In both cultural regions, the social order presupposes that an initial conflict between paternal and maternal kin, between wife-takers and wife-givers, has been overcome. An objectified relationship between wife-takers and wife-givers, nobles and commoners, conquerors and authochthons, may thus provide the model of society in the abstract; at the same time, within each village, social practice exploits this relation, conceived in relative terms; every warrior wants to marry a wife from one of the priestly clans, to capture the vitality present in them for the benefit of children to come. Finally, the Nilotic case shows us admirably (as also does the case of ancient Japan where, in the eleventh century, conflicts erupted between collateral lineages of the Fujiwara clan, the virtually exclusive provider of wives to the imperial dynasty) in what ways the 'house' can take shape. On the occasion of crises between collateral lineages, the closest affines make common cause with their son-in-law; the former cleavage between paternal and maternal kin disappears, while among both groups a division emerges or increases between collaterals.

Such considerations help to dissolve the obscurities which, among many authorities, still envelop the notion of *kindred* (French: *parentèle*). Efforts have been made to define the kindred as a group of a particular

f R. G. Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: the Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford, 1961); 'The Shilluk of the Upper Nile', ed. C. Daryll Forde, *African Worlds* (London, 1954); 'Nilotiques: Dinka, Anuak, Shilluk: mythes d'harmonie cosmique et sociale', *Dictionnaire Mythologique* (Paris, 1980).

kind, having the same objective reality of, let us say, the clan, the lineage, the extended family or the nuclear family; but it soon became evident that the kindred could be differentiated by only negative characteristics, by enumerating everything it was not. The truth is that one should not see in the 'kindred' of English-speaking anthropologists a distinctive social formation, but rather an *operative scheme* that allows the *ad hoc* delineation of boundaries in the confused mass of those with whom one possesses, or discovers for the needs of the moment, bonds of kinship.

With the exception of certain peoples of Southern Nigeria, Africa no doubt offers no more than embryonic forms of the 'house'. None the less, we are certain of the existence, in all the regions studied this year, of a true invariant. This invariant consists of the dualism of paternal and maternal kin who provide, at the dynastic level, one or more royal lineages and 'king-makers', roles attributed to one or other group as a function of the local pre-eminence of either wife-takers or wife-givers. Diverse facts from the interlacustrine kingdoms of Rwanda and Buganda confirm this thesis in the light of the researches of Roscoe, Vansina, Fallers, Low, Southwold, Maquet and L. de Heusch.

Moreover, it is beyond doubt in the area of undifferentiated filiation and of the 'house' as an institutional form that it is necessary to examine, if we wish to clarify the uncertainties of many Africanists on the subject of elements of the social structure which they consider fundamental, but which they none the less have difficulty describing. These are residential groups treated as lineages, and agnatic lineages transformed into groups of cognates which Evans-Pritchard, for example, confessed to being unable to place in any anthropological category; one notes the same perplexity among other authorities in respect of the Yoruba (W. Bascom) and the Lovedu (E. Krige). We also noted the uncertainties regarding the nature of the Bemba *nganda*: a matrilineage according to Richards, but irreducible to criteria drawn from common residence, wealth or power, a descent line of a kind left obscure by Cunnison, while Biebuyck, seeking to define the Lunda *ngaand*, finally proposes to see in it a *local* group resembling a *lineage*, disposing of a *domain*, and forming a unit (which A. Richards considers to be based solely on the principle of *perpetual succession*). We have italicized the terms corresponding to the four dimensions of the 'house'.

Even in Africa, consequently, we see emerging a type of institution transcending the traditional categories of anthropological theory, and integrating descent and residence, exogamy and endogamy, filiation and alliance, paternal and maternal right, at the same time as inheritance and election, antiquity and power, and — to express it in still more general terms — solidarity (the totality of virtues connoted

by 'blood') and extension (the totality of capital goods denoted by 'land').

All the same, integration is never complete. Perhaps more than elsewhere, the regions where a transition is apparent between patrilineal and matrilineal systems, or indeed between more or less marked modalities of one or the other, show that, in respect of the 'house', parity between the two systems is absent. If, as is usually the case, the men taking part in the great game of alliances are the agents, while women are acted on by them, it is necessary to recognize that the wife-givers enjoy an initial advantage: among the wife-givers, behind the women there stand the men. The converse situation prevails on the other side: the wife-takers have only women behind them.[3] Whence, for the paternal kin, is the need to carry out for their agnates the role of agents — which is to say men — to improve their chances in respect of the wager of all matrimonial alliances constituted by the children.

Perhaps one can see here the deep reason — at any rate, one of the reasons — for the mystical power over her nephews and nieces or her siblings attributed to the father's sister or to the sister, as if, despite its ideological nature, this power counterbalanced the vexations always to be feared by the maternal kin from an agnatic lineage, where their uterine kin are to be found. During recent years, this spiritual power attributed to agnates would appear to be a feature found in an area almost co-extensive with that of 'house' societies, notably in Polynesia and Micronesia; and we now find it again in Africa, in a number of societies including the Nyakyusa, the Lovedu and the Swazi, and in Rwanda.

But if, as this series of courses covering six years has tried to show, it is appropriate to include the 'house' in ethnographic typology, a more general conclusion follows. For it would have been impossible, or at any rate difficult, to discover the distinctive characteristics of the 'house' on evidence drawn solely from non-literate societies. These characteristics become more perceptible in archival documents and literary works produced in the European Middle Ages, as well as in the corresponding or later periods in the East and Far East. Nearer home, the problematic of the 'house' remains alive in writers from

[3] This was well understood in the 'house' society of seventeenth and eighteenth century France: '"One has to admit that in England the queens govern better than the kings, and do you know why, my dear aunt?" remarked one day, in the presence of Louis XIV, the Duchess of Bourgogne to Mme de Maintenon, "it's because under the kings it is the women who rule, while the men do so under the queens." ' Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, vol. III, xliv.

Saint-Simon to the Comtesse de Boigne and even later, and in the inheritance customs of the peasantry in several regions.

The time has passed when one turned to anthropology almost automatically to interpret old recent customs, the significance of which was unclear, as survivals or traces of a social state always exemplified by savage peoples. In face of this discarded 'primitivism', we can better understand how modes of social life and types of organization well attested in our history can throw light on those of other societies, where they appear less distinct and as if blurred, because poorly documented and observed for periods that are too short. Between so-called 'complex' societies and those wrongly called 'primitive' or 'archaic' there is less distance than is usually supposed. To bridge that distance, it is equally appropriate to climb up from there to here as to descend from here to there.

Anthropology will for a long time have as its principal mission that of recording everything that can still be learned about beliefs, customs and institutions constituting so many irreplaceable expressions of human richness and diversity. But it is well that anthropologists, without neglecting their primary duty, also take account of these interference zones, where messages coming from societies near and far often cancel each other, but more frequently reinforce each other. This is one of the tasks of present-day anthropology; even more so will it be a task of the anthropology of tomorrow.

PART VI

Appendix: Nine Course Reports

These courses were presented between 1951 and 1960 at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Religious Sciences Section, under the title 'Comparative Religions of Non-literate Peoples'.

1

The Visitation of Souls (1951–2)

We endeavoured to correlate two types of attitude of the living towards the dead. The first, found in the folkloristic theme of the *grateful dead*, appears to be based on the idea of a contract between the two parties: in return for the respect and periodic homage of the living, the dead refrain from harmful acts towards the living. They leave them in peace; more, they guarantee them the regular cycle of the seasons, the fecundity of land and women, and long life for those who faithfully observe their obligations.

Opposite to this *modus vivendi* is a second attitude expressed in another folkloristic theme, that of the *venturesome knight*; in this instance, dead and living appear to be engaged in an unending struggle for power. The living refuse to allow the dead the repose to which they aspire, holding them mobilized in the service of their ambitions and vanities, whether these are based on the magical domination of ghosts or, more sociologically, of a lineage of ancestors. By the fear they inspire, the prestige they retain, and the occult injuries they are believed capable of inflicting, the dead compel the living to pay dearly for this refusal of a final sleep. In one case, the dead and the living have made their peace, sanctioning an *equitable sharing* between them. In the other, the living retain for themselves the possibility of an *unbridled speculation* at the expense of the dead, but without being able to free themselves of the mystification they have created and which obliges them to concede to the dead a power equal to that of which they would fain be the sole possessors.

The two attitudes appear incompatible, and it is known that many societies exhibit only one of them. However, in some parts of the world they appear in correlation, as if one could be conceived only as a function of the other, and vice versa. Both North and South America afford examples of this complex formula and several of them were examined.

Among the Bororo of central Brazil, the two attitudes are respectively

associated with the collective cult of the *aroe*, a veritable 'society of souls' permanently represented in the village by the men's house and to which a special priest, the 'master of the road of the souls' or *aroettawaraare* is devoted; and by the individual sorcery of the *baire* (sing. *bari*), each joined by personal contract to a single spirit, but without it ever being known who is master and who the servant.

The articulation of these two systems, including beliefs and practices, occurs in funerary ritual: at once a respectful celebration to mark the moment when the dead person is incorporated into the society of souls, the protector of the tribe; and vengeance, executed by the men's society on the particular spirit held responsible for the death. Arbitration between the two formulae operates in and by the notion of *mori* or 'debt', sometimes of one living person to another, sometimes of a living to a dead person, sometimes of a dead to a living person. Abundant details show that the two sets of beliefs and customs form a system of oppositions in indigenous life and thought, one set being associated with day, water courses, the east—west direction, and collective norms, and the other with night, the heavenly bodies, the vertical dimension, individual vocations, etc.

An analogous system is to be found in North America, among the central and eastern Algonkin. But whereas among the Bororo we find a masculine society of the living playing for non-initiates the comedy of visitation by helpful souls, the Algonkin society of *midewiwin* or *mitawin* (respectively the Ojibwa and Menomini terms) is open to both sexes and composed of living persons who play to themselves the drama of their own death with the aim of ensuring that the souls do not return and visit the living. The two formulae are therefore opposed and complementary. In both cases we find a society of the living, but one facilitates, whereas the other prevents a return of the dead, desired in the first case as much as it is feared in the second. In both cases the method employed is the same: a brotherhood claims to represent the dead in order to give the living the illusion of being visited by souls, or else to persuade these latter that the living are playing their role so well that it is unnecessary to disturb them with too much solicitude. Also among the Algonkin, we find in the shamans called *jessakid* and *wabeno* an equivalent of the Bororo *baire*, and who fulfil the same functions.

Pursuing the inquiry as far as the Sioux-speaking tribes, particularly the Winnebago and Omaha, we found variants of the same themes in cosmological systems that were either binary (with oppositions between west and east, north and south, or high and low), or ternary (sky, earth, water), or even elaborated into a quinary system (the earth being then opposed, on one side to one couple, water and the sub-aquatic world, on the other to a second couple, atmospheric sky and

empyrean sky). It thus becomes possible to establish a series of congruences between cosmological systems based in each group on cosmology, spatial directions, colours, animal and vegetable families, and recurrent symbols in ritual: a star for the sky, a round stone for the earth, a shell for the water.

If these symbols are considered as a kind of algebra, it becomes possible gradually to simplify the equations and to reduce complicated systems of beliefs and rites to arrive at a more fundamental opposition of a formal order between a two-term and a three-term system. Moreover, earlier research, the results of which were presented in 1948—9 in the Sixth Section of this School, had enabled us to demonstrate that dualist organizations, characteristic of the societies considered here, exhibited anomalies in relation to the classical type, anomalies which occurred in one society after another and which appeared to indicate an underlying or older tripartite organization.[1]

In discovering the same anomalies in metaphysical ideas and religious beliefs, these ideas and beliefs were not only better understood, but we saw that they could not be isolated from other aspects of social life, since the representation found in these societies of the relation between the living and the dead is no more than the projection, on the screen of religious thought, of real relations between the living.

[1] Cf. *Structural Anthropology*, vol. I, chapter VIII.

2

Research in American Mythology (1952–3)

The course was entirely devoted to a comparative study of different known versions of the origin myth of the western and central Pueblo Indians (Hopi, Zuni and Acoma). We considered and analysed about thirty versions in the hope of eliciting some general principles.

In the first place, we agreed to consider all mythical discourse as a kind of metalanguage, of which the constitutive units were *theses* or *sequences* devoid of significance in themselves in the same way as the phonemes of a language, and assuming a sense only through their articulation in a system.

In the second place, we resolved in the negative the question of whether, as between several versions of the same myth, some deserved particular respect by reason of being older, more complete or more coherent. The myth consists of the totality of its versions, and as this totality is always incomplete by definition, and therefore open, we were led to consider the myth as a non-itemizable totality that can be known only by approximation. This structure of the myth to which new inserts, as it were, can be added *ad infinitum*, reproduces itself within each version of which the apparently successive episodes are not arranged in an irreversible order after the manner of historical events: these are rather reproductions of an underlying model presented in as many different perspectives.

In these conditions, in order to resolve the problem posed by the study of myths it is necessary to evolve appropriate methods for isolating the elements composing them, by following a more rigorous path with more claims to objectivity that that followed by the folklorists who arbitrarily identify 'themes' and 'motifs' according to considerations foreign to the nature of the documents studied.

The preceding remarks would seem to allow us to elaborate these rigorous methods, and in several ways.

1 One can first analyse a myth in terms of the reversible or irreversible

character of the sequences present in it. The discovery of irreversible transitions, by means of which linkages are made between sequences that are themselves reversible, enables us to isolate these latter and to acknowledge their individuality.

2 One can then apply to the myth the tests of *commutability* which, in the glossosemantics of Hjelmslev, have shown themselves so fruitful in determining the constitutive units of language. In a given version of a myth, if a sequence A is accompanied by a sequence B, and if this combination is found again in the form A′B′ in a second version, A″B″ in a third, etc., one can define A by the totality of its relations to B,B′,B″, and so on. Several examples were given of this analytical procedure.

3 Finally, the myth, considered as a *thought ritual*, is submitted to a dissection which is in some way natural and emerges from the analysis of ritual considered as an *acted myth*. This third method provides a valuable verification of the results obtained by the other two.

By applying these methods to the study of origin myths among the western and central Pueblo, we hoped to elucidate several problems. The function of the ceremonial clown had been associated with all activities considered as unnatural by indigenous thought; by means of a series of commutations bearing on death and agriculture, agriculture and hunting, hunting and war, and finally war and death, we were able to show that ceremonial clowns, the gods of war and divine messengers constitute varying combinations of the same type, and thus to explain the heretofore obscure role of ceremonial clowns in martial activities. We finally discovered in the different versions structural variations exhibiting great regularity and highly systematic characteristics, which correspond to the economic and sociological conditions in which each indigenous group lived and developed.

3

Research in American Mythology (continued) (1953–4)

Pursuing last year's inquiries into the origin myth of the western and central Pueblo Indians, we concentrated this year on known versions of the same myth among the eastern groups (Keres, Tiwa and Tewa), and on overall comparisons.

It had been established that the western versions sought to effect a continuous transition from life to the mechanical growth of plants, then to the foot value of wild plants, then to that of cultivated plants; from there to hunting, then to war, and finally to death. The encounter with hunting at the very centre of this dialectic confronted indigenous thought with an unforeseen contradiction, hunting being at one and the same time life (because nourishment) and death. This duality inherent in an intermediate concept is translated in the form of the myth by a proliferation of dioscuric couples whose function is to mediate between extreme terms, each one distinct in its own right and opposed to its fellow.

Eastern mythology poses from the beginning a state of identity between agriculture and hunting, and seeks to deduce both life and death from this global concept. But as this unity is no less illusory than in the preceding case, we find ourselves in the presence of a symmetrical structure that is the converse of that characterizing the western mythology: it is the extreme terms that are paired (as with the two sisters of Keresan mythology), while a unique personage of ambiguous characteristics (the Poshaiyanne of the Sia) is charged with bringing about an impossible mediation.

In order to interpret these reversals, we are led to pose in the most general terms the *problem of mediation*. A formal analysis produces the conclusion that the formula of the dioscuric couple (the war gods of the Pueblo Indians) and that of the messiah (Poshaiyanne) exhaust the solutions. But it is possible to go further: a brief exploration of the

mythology of the Plains Indians and a comparison with that of the Pueblo Indians allow us to identify a series of variants, the analysis of which shows how the transition is effected from one formula to the other. The 'fiancée of the Sun', the virtual and inoperative messiah in the cycle of 'the grandmother and grandson', is segmented into a non-dioscuric pair endowed with antithetical attributes. With the cycle of 'the child of the hut and the child of the torrent' the non-dioscuric pair wobbles, as it were, and yields to a true dioscuric couple. Publication during the year of Professor Dumézil's *La Saga des Hadingus* has come indirectly, and in an unforeseen manner, to the help of our argument, for the couple of the Drowned Man and the Hanged Man, which he has succeeded in identifying in Scandinavian mythology, appears symmetrical with the dominating American speculation.

Encouraged by these theoretical considerations, we returned to the personage of the messiah in Pueblo mythology and established, contrary to the views of the majority of commentators, his pre-Columbian character; a comparison between Pueblo traditions, certain chapters of the *Popol Vuh* and a variety of Mexican documents proved decisive in this regard. Further, we demonstrated the universality of this personage in Pueblo mythology, explaining his primordial or secondary role in terms of the structure of each myth, as well as his early or belated appearance in the myth, and his beneficial, punitive or mixed function.

In analysing, classifying and integrating all these aspects, we at length succeeded in identifying a central figure of American religious thought, one which has hitherto remained obscure because it constitutes a kind of common denominator for the innumerable 'trickster gods' who proliferate in that thought. This is a god of the dew, of blood and of ashes personified on the zoological level by the coyote and the crow, and on the botanical level by the corncockle. The indigenous tales of the region designate him as 'Ash Boy', 'Poker Boy' and 'Corncob Boy'.

A final comparison of these heroes of popular narrative with the personage of Cinderella has completed the proof of the pre-Columbian origins of the former characters, at the same time as allowing us to pose certain problems of principle and method in comparative mythology, and to illustrate with new examples a mythical logic which, for being qualitative, exhibits no less than the other logic (from which it is not certain that it differs) a character of necessity and universality.

4

Relations between Mythology and Ritual (1954–5)

We decided to take up this old and much debated problem with respect to a specific example. The basic document selected was the classic monograph of A. C. Fletcher, one of the few exhaustive analyses of a ritual in its entirety that we possess, and that is accompanied by a valuable indigenous commentary.[1]

After recalling the part played by this document in the development of the theoretical ideas of A. M. Hocart and discussing his conclusions on this matter, we endeavoured to take apart bit by bit, as it were, the mechanism of the ceremony. This exercise allowed us to make a preliminary classification of symbols, significant actions and motivating ideas, so as to produce a kind of 'instructions for assembly', the reality of which could only be unconscious, but which had in any case a heuristic value.

In a second part of the course, we undertook a methodical comparison between the elements of various kinds so produced, and those of the same kind revealed by a systematic scrutiny of the vast corpus of Pawnee mythology to be found in the collections of Dorsey, Grinnell, Dunbar, Weltfish, etc.

It became evident that, at least in this particular case, the theoretical views frequently put forward as to the close relations between mythology and ritual were in no ways confirmed. There is no myth underlying the ritual as a whole, and when foundation myths exist, they generally bear on details of the ritual which appear secondary or supernumerary. However, if myth and ritual do not mirror each other, they often reciprocally complete each other, and it is only by comparing them that one can formulate hypotheses on the nature of certain intellectual strategies typical of the culture under consideration. Among

[1] A. C. Fletcher, *The Hako: A Pawnee Ceremony* (Washington, DC, 1904).

the Pawnee, this complementarity between myth and ritual is manifest in a striking fashion. An example is the case of initiation customs, where the myths and rites concerned with initiation into the brotherhoods of sorcerer—healers exhibit structures that are rigorously identical, but inverse. One is thus led to postulate the existence of an underlying psycho-sociological system, of which mythology and ritual constitute facets.

Thus the unusual complexity of Pawnee religious and cosmological thought, together with the exceptional elaboration of their ritual, has been related to a dominant feature of their logic: by a curious paradox of which their history may throw light, the indigenous thinkers seem particularly sensitive to opposition and contradiction, which they find much difficulty in overcoming.

Moreover, the very terms in which these oppositions are expressed are always ambivalent; these are never simple terms, but syntheses in anticipation of these same oppositions, which analysis shows to be difficult to reduce. For example, the Hako ritual has as its object the mediation (conceived by indigenous thought as highly dangerous) between a whole series of couples: father—son, fellows—strangers, allies—enemies, men—women, sky—earth, day—night, etc. Further, the agents of this mediation are sacred objects, each of which represents an oppositional term, while also being composed of elements drawn in equal parts from two series of pairs.

Only the parallel examination of the mythology and the ritual could allow us to discover this dialectic, the complementary fragments of which have been juxtaposed by drawing on the two domains: on the one hand, the ritual dedication of a child to Tirawa, the supreme Being, and its subsequent manipulation in the course of secret ceremonies unintelligible in themselves; on the other, the theory, implicit in the myths, of the bisexuality of the non-initiate, a theory suggested by the most obscure aspects of the ritual, which in turn illuminates them.

Finally, we thought to have proved that the symbolic value of the ritual is entirely contained in its instruments and actions. The words — prayers, incantations, formulae — appeared meaningless, or at most endowed with only a slight functional utility. From this point of view, a veritable opposition appeared between the myth and the rite. Whereas the former is language, but draws its meaning from a peculiar use of that language, the ritual uses language in the ordinary way, and elects to signify at another level. The terms *metalanguage* and *paralanguage* were proposed to render this distinction.

It is to linguistics that the mythologist should best address himself in order to elaborate his explanatory modes; to study rituals, one should rather look for them in the theory of games. But if a game is defined by the collection of its rules which make possible an infinite

number of playings of that game, the ritual resembles a privileged example, the only one retained out of all the possible playings, because a certain kind of balance between the two sides results from it. The game thus appears *disjunctive*, creating a differential division between players or sides which was not present at the beginning. In symmetrical and converse fashion, ritual is *conjunctive*, establishing a union (one could say here a communion) or, at least, an organic relation between the two groups (which may, at the limit, be identified on one side with the person of the priest, on the other with the collectivity of the faithful) which are given as separate in the beginning. In conclusion, the question was raised of whether the concepts of strategy and tactics as understood in the theory of games might not profitably be exploited to explore the relations existing between the mythical and ritual orders.

5

Marriage Prohibitions (1955–6)

This is a vast topic, which we have been able to approach from only a limited perspective. The question raised was to what extent a kinship system and its associated marriage rules could be treated as a totality independent of other aspects of social reality.

The question was doubly interesting. In the first place, it is implied in certain recent developments in the thought of Professor Talcott Parsons. The eminent Harvard sociologist, in unpublished works made available to this seminar, has sought to elaborate a kind of psycho-sociological parallelism which claims to integrate the findings of contemporary structuralists in the three fields of anthropology, linguistics and psychoanalysis.[1] This novel theory, which puts forward an interpretation of the origin and function of marriage prohibitions, became the object of extensive analysis and discussion.

In the second place, the problem of the relation between marriage rules and social structure has recently been raised, in a concrete form, by E. R. Leach in several articles and a book concerned with various societies of south-east Asia. We took the opportunity to survey the published material on this part of the world, particularly some recent Dutch contributions relating to Indonesia. Increasingly, this region appears as privileged terrain for the study of relations between

[1] It was towards the end of 1953, if I remember correctly, that Talcott Parsons, who happened to be in Paris, made an appointment to meet me in the Unesco building. He unexpectedly produced a contract relating to a tenured post of Full Professor at Harvard University, which he invited me to sign. He evidently assumed that, partly because I was taken by surprise, I would sign on the spot. To the humble director of studies at the École pratique des Hautes Études that I then was, such an offer might have seemed undreamed of. None the less I declined it, for, in spite of the fruitful years spent in New York (and, all told, not unhappy, having regard to the circumstances), I could not reconcile myself to the idea of remaining an expatriate to the end of my career. Parsons did not hold my refusal against me: intellectual exchanges continued between us, and he sent me several of his works before publication.

religious representations and social organization, the diverse modalities of which can be observed side by side, with extreme configurations being linked by a whole series of intermediate forms. Examination of a number of specific cases has led to the conclusion that the anthropologist is well advised to treat the facts of kinship as though they constituted an autonomous system, and to defer to a later stage the search for correlations among the different orders.

6

Recent Research on the Idea of the 'Soul' (1956–7)

Our first endeavour was, through a return to the texts, to elicit the main lines of the thought of Tylor, who can be considered the originator of the anthropological theory of the 'soul'. This theory appeared to remain valid to the extent that it poses the problem in terms of a psychology of the intelligence and calls for two correlative and opposed ways of conceiving the soul. These two aspects always appear simultaneously, and the form of their opposition is illuminated by recent work on linguistics, notably that of Professor Roman Jakobson, who distinguishes two fundamental modes of logical thought, associated respectively with metonymy and metaphor.[a]

The concept of soul thus appears as the immediate product of a primitive logical operation, meaning one that conditions all others. With the aim of integrating the elements of a system, this operation consists in elaborating, for each element, a sort of *duplicatum* reproducing all the characteristics of the element, but possessing in addition the quality of permutability, and hence of entering into combination with any other *duplicatum* of another element. One thus arrives at the idea of a 'world of souls' analogous to the world of experience, almost to the extent that it appears like an 'upside-down world'.

This interpretation was then compared with that of the French sociological school, especially as found in Durkheim, Mauss and Hertz. We discovered a similar approach in the work of Mauss, as in his contrasting of totemism and sacrifice. Particular attention was paid to the investigations of Robert Hertz, whose Indonesian data should no doubt be re-evaluated in the light of findings since 1909, but

[a] Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague, 1956).

in a way that preserves the full value of the distinction demonstrated by Hertz between *soul of the flesh* and *soul of the bones*.[b] Marshalling the Indonesian and Melanesian evidence allowed us to establish this opposition as well as another, no less essential, between the 'society of souls' and the organic grouping of functional souls held to be constitutive of the individuality of each human being.

Following the trail blazed by Hertz, we eventually sought to correlate the duality of souls with the custom of double burial. The latter was made the object of a detailed study, based on the mythology and ritual of the Indians of southern California, which are of particular relevance to this inquiry. Here, conversely to what is most often observed, their cult seeks to abolish rather than preserve the memory of their ancestors: we thus find among them a methodical and considered attempt to liquidate, if one may so express it, the soul and all the notions associated with it.

[b] Robert Hertz, 'Contribution a une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort', *Année Sociologique*, X (1907), pp. 48—137. An English version appears in Robert Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand*, tr. Rodney and Claudia Needham (London, 1960).

7

Dualism in Social Organization and Religious Representations (1957–8)

This problem, broached only in 1956–7, will continue to be the object of our researches next year. This year we undertook two distinct tasks, those of retracing the history of dualism in anthropological thought, and of sorting out and discussing an initial set of documents.

We understand by dualist organization a division of society into two groups, not exclusive of other divisions into more numerous groups, the role of which concerns other levels of social life. Lewis H. Morgan was the first, on the occasion of his investigations into the Iroquois, to apply himself to the theory of this bipartite structure.[a]

Moreover, in Morgan's analyses we see the outlines of a problem that has not ceased to preoccupy anthropologists. Dualist organizations can be interpreted in extension or comprehension, but the choice of approach leads to two very different theories of their origin. Do dualist structures result from the incomplete fusion of two groups, or from an elementary need for internal diversification that affects all social groups? And if one should invoke different origins in particular cases, how is it that all over the world the dualist schema, though doubtless unequally elaborated, everywhere gives evidence of such marked functional homogeneity?

This problem, already apparent in Morgan's thought, assumed first importance among several of his contemporaries. Thus we see in McLennan the founder of a mechanical and static conception of dualism, whereas Tylor was the inventor of a dynamic and functional theory.

After a lapse of nearly half a century, the controversy surfaced

[a] Lewis Henry Morgan, *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois* (Rochester, 1851).

again in Germany with, on the one hand, the diffusionist theories of Graebner, and, on the other, the functionalism of Thurnwald. But the credit for developing dualist theory belongs, at the beginning of the twentieth century, to W. H. R. Rivers.

A detailed analysis of *The History of Melanesian Society* (1914) enabled us to do justice to the English master, whose theoretical work tends nowadays to be underestimated. Despite a syncretic conception of dualism in a sense recalling that of Morgan, Rivers foreshadows all the developments in contemporary anthropological thought, particularly those associated with the names of Mauss and Malinowski. However, this powerful synthetic vision did not survive him, and his intellectual heritage was divided, according to a clearly defined line of cleavage, between the British diffusionist school (Elliot Smith, Perry) and the already structuralist thought of Hocart. There thus reappeared, well into the twentieth century, the theoretical conflict which, from the beginning of anthropological debate, had set Morgan against McLennan.

Only the African and Oceanic materials were surveyed during the year 1957—8, some of them very summarily. Beginning with the works of Hocart, examination of the Fijian documents was to permit identification of an unstable form of dualism and to suggest a theoretical interpretation of it as a form in which reciprocity disintegrates, as it were, into two symmetrical and converse modalities of the competition between groups of affines. In one case the wife-givers, in the other the wife-takers, occupy the dominant position. We showed how this fission between allies, becoming more intense, provoked a fission between collateral lineages, which ended in making matrimonial exchanges impossible and converting an exogamic system into an endogamic one.

By analysing the system of attitudes prevailing between maternal uncle and uterine nephew in different societies, we were able to put forward a typology that encompassed within a single framework institutions hitherto considered hard to compare: from the exogamic and matrilineal dualism of the Banaro of New Guinea to the Arab institutions, patrilineal, endogamic, and excluding all dualism, by way of the intermediate institutions of the *tauvu* of Fiji and of the different forms — medieval European, Melanesian and American — of the *vasu*, that is to say the existence of strongly marked (as the linguists say) relations between the maternal uncle and the nephew.

Finally, the analysis of certain African materials, notably those concerning the Galla of Ethiopia, the Ibo of Nigeria, and various other groups, allowed us to pose again, in another context, the problem of the relation between two forms of dualism: the territorial and religious bipartition as found in the urban and administrative structure of

Dahomey, and the organic and functional dualism found equally among the Sudanese and the Bantu, in the arrangement of clans or sub-clans into couples joined by networks of rights and obligations.

8

Dualism in Social Organization and Religious Representations (continued) (1958–9)

Last year, we considered the question of how anthropologists had conceived of dualist organization, consciously and historically. This year, we assumed a complementary perspective, considering how the participants had themselves thought of dual organization, unconsciously and mythologically.

The problem is enormous. Rather than arbitrarily juxtaposed heterogeneous facts, we preferred to restrict ourselves to one example and to examine it exhaustively. This inquiry bore on the indigenous societies of tropical America with a dualist organization, and this organization was examined under the triple aspects of social structure, kinship system and mythical representations.

Proceeding from north to south, we considered several cases in succession. We began with certain little-known societies of Central America, the Bribri, Guaymi and Talamanca; then the Yaruro and Guahibo of Venezuela; in the Amazon Basin, the Tukuna and the Mundurucu; and lastly, in central Brazil, the Bororo and various representatives of the Ge group (the Apinaye, Sherente and Timbira).

Special attention was paid to the Tukuna. These Amerindians are organized in patrilineal clans divided into moieties, one associated with the east and with vegetation, the other with the west and with birds.

The mythology is also replete with dualism, featuring as protagonists the two brothers Dyoi and Epi, associated respectively with fishing and hunting, with the smooth and the prickly, with the nocturnal monkey and the opossum. We were none the less persuaded of the Tupi origin of these myths, and the discussion was mainly concerned with how these motifs, which are very widespread in South America, had been transformed in contact with developed dualist institutions.

We then perceived that, far from developing in parallel in the mythical and social orders, dualist representations appeared to become less clear and persistent at the level of myth in the same measure that they became manifest in the social organization. Among the early Tupi, where the moiety system, if it existed, certainly did not play a great part, dualism is evident in mythical thought in the form of a genealogical series of dioscuric pairs whose logical product, so to say, is hardly, if at all, exhausted in the passage from one generation to the next. This dioscurism appears more diffuse among the Tukuna, since we find it duplicated from the beginning (two brothers and two sisters) only with the third generation, to be fused again in the person of a single descendant in whose conception the two brothers find themselves obliged to collaborate.

The Munduruku of the right bank of the Amazon are one of the few known examples of a patrilineal and matrilocal society. They also are divided into clans and moieties, here respectively 'white' and 'red'. We find again among these Amerindians mythical themes analogous to those already encountered among the Tukuna, but in the Munduruku case the discussion concentrated mainly on the relations between the dualist organization and the kinship system.

However, we found that there, too, the various 'codes' utilized by the society are 'redundant' only in part. Analysed according to the recently published research of Robert F. Murphy, the Munduruku kinship system cannot be formalized except by invoking a different type of dualism from that presented to ethnographic observation and indigenous consciousness, based on a dichotomy between 'elder' and 'younger' collateral lines (observed at first hand by ourselves among the Tupi-Kawahib, who are related to the Mundurucu).[a]

The discussion we have just outlined led to a reinterpretation of the well-known South American institution of preferential marriage by the maternal uncle with his sister's daughter. We hope to have shown that what is at issue here is not an arbitrary privilege enjoyed by a certain type of kin, but a phenomenon bound by a necessary connection to the social structure of the people concerned.

Finally, comparative study of the mythology and the social organization of the Bororo, on the one hand, and of the collectivity of Ge tribes, on the other, enabled us to formulate another problem: that of the inversion of certain mythical themes possessed in common by two widely separated peoples with undeniable affinities and also possessing

[a] R. F. Murphy, *Headhunters' Heritage: Social and Economic Change among the Mundurucú Indians* (New York, 1978).

very similar forms of social organization. This is what we find to be the case with several myths of the Bororo and Ge tribes.

To overcome this difficulty, it was necessary to introduce a distinction between two forms of mythological inversion (all relations of symmetry being conserved). Along with functional inversion, explicable in terms of correlative differences in the social organization of the peoples concerned (one having, for example, patrilineal descent, the other matrilineal), we have to recognize the existence of another type of inversion, linked not to structural changes, but to the raising of the threshold by which communication is effected between the two societies, by reason of their geographical separation or of linguistic difficulties. In both cases, despite the fundamental difference between the phenomena mentioned, the myths are transformed in the same way. It was suggested, by way of conclusion, that one could see here an almost experimental method of demonstrating the structural character of mythical thought.

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The Ritual Hunting of Eagles (1959–60)

We took as our key text an indigenous account of two eagle-hunting expeditions, recorded and published by G. I. Wilson under the title of 'Hidatsa eagle trapping'.[1] Eagle-hunting has a ceremonial character over most of the American continent. Restricting ourselves here to North America, we began by describing and classifying the different hunting techniques. The captured eagle is either put to death (California, the Plains, eastern United States), liberated (British Columbia) or held in captivity (Pueblo Indians). A cage is used in the west, but not in the east. The eagle is caught, sometimes while still a nestling (California and south-west United States), sometimes when adult, by a hunter concealed in a trench, which is the characteristic method of the Plains Indians, particularly in the area of the upper Missouri inhabited by the Pawnee, the Mandan and the Hidatsa.

We then explored the symbolism of eagle feathers, particularly among the Plains Indians, and so explained the significance of the hunt, which served to obtain them. The head-dress of eagle feathers validates and commemorates martial feats. Moreover, the Plains Indians place war-making under the control of sacred bundles called 'skinned things' because they principally contain the remains of birds. These bundles are seen as the scouts of war, the destroyers of the enemy and also, in so far as carrion-eating birds are concerned, the purifiers of the battlefield. In all these aspects, the birds 'possess' the feats of war until they have been redistributed among their human agents by means of an appropriate ritual in the course of which the birds are held to bear witness of the warriors' intentions.

The eagle-feather head-dress thus has a double meaning, representing

[1] G. I. Wilson, 'Hidatsa eagle trapping', *Anthropolical Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. XXX, part iv (New York, 1928), pp. 99–245.

the *relation with the supernatural* involved in all warlike action, as well as the *collective agreement* indispensable for its validation, that is to say, its sociological aspect. Effectively, the head-dress of feathers is awarded to the warrior by his comrades-in-arms who divest themselves for his benefit, not merely of the feathers they possess, but also of the mighty deeds of which each feather is the tangible evidence. Eagle feathers thus symbolize the dual system of reference, sociological and religious, without which no martial act can be recognized as legitimate, and lacking which the leader of the expedition would be held responsible for the deaths of his companions and treated not as an unlucky soldier, but as a murderer.

After these general considerations, we moved on to the analysis of the Hidatsa eagle hunt, on both the ritual and mythical levels. From the ritual point of view, particular emphasis was laid on the prohibition against shedding the blood of the eagle, which has to be killed by suffocation. We associated this feature in part with the indigenous theory of sickness, which links the eagle with bleeding, and in part with the remarkable connection, implied in the ritual, between eagles and women's menstruation; this female condition exercises a benign influence over the hunt, contrary to the ideas of most non-literate peoples (and of the Hidatsa themselves in other circumstances) with respect to this physiological phenomenon.

In order to interpret this anomaly, it was necessary to study the legitimizing myths of the eagle hunt and to compare them with corresponding narratives among other American groups. We had first to clarify the identity of the supernatural animals said to be the inventors of the hunt in the Hidatsa myths, and which American anthropologists have interpreted either as the bear or the badger (*Gulo luscus*). A brief survey of the place of the indigenous beliefs allowed us to decide in favour of the badger, which is generally seen as the 'master of traps' and particularly of the trenches where the Hidatsa hunters hide in order to catch eagles. The badger is therefore an 'infra-terrestrial' hunter, and the Indian digging a trench to conceal himself identifies himself with the badger.

But the eagle is himself associated with the empyrean heaven. The opposition between the eagle and the badger is therefore that between a celestial prey and a chthonic hunter, which is to say the strongest possible opposition, in relation to the hunt, between high and low. This hypothesis has been confirmed by an analysis of references to the eagle hunt in Hidatsa myths relative to two culture heroes who are able to transform themselves into arrows and are masters of hunting with the bow. This latter appears to be a technique concerned with the region situated immediately above the ground, the atmospheric or middle heaven, in which arrows fly. From this point of view, the

religious attributes of the eagle hunt and the extraordinarily detailed character of the ritual concerning it could be seen as the counterparts of its extreme position within a mythical typology characteristic of the region under consideration, in which this hunt sets up a *maximal separation* between the hunter and his prey.

This somewhat 'excentric' position of the eagle hunt does not belong to it merely on the level of myth, but is also found in way of life and environment. The Hidatsa are divided between village agriculture, a feminine occupation, and the masculine hunting of bison, which occurs in the open plains. However, the eagle hunt for its part takes place in the 'bad lands' which are also a 'no man's land' where, unlike the sedentary life in the fortified villages, and the large-scale movements necessary in the pursuit of the bison herds, a tiny band of hunters is exposed to the danger of ambush and surprise attack. In this respect also, the eagle hunt assumes an extreme character, no longer mythical, but sociological, being the form of hunting that is closest to war at its most perilous. We see, then, why, from a religious point of view, captured eagles are ritually identified with enemies and, from a sociological point of view, why mutually hostile tribes observe a tacit truce during the hunting season, which begins in the autumn and lasts until the ground freezes in winter.

If the religious character of the eagle hunt is explained through its representation in the form of a maximal separation, the rites accompanying it should have as their main object that of providing a mediation between polar terms initially presented in a state of dissociation. At the technical level, the bait (a piece of meat or a stuffed animal), plays the intermediary role between man and bird. Moreover, the myths and the language itself attest that the bait is conceived as a feminine term, the same verb meaning 'to take a woman' in everyday language and, in the ritual language of the hunters, expressing the action of an eagle in seizing the bait. The symbolism of the eagle hunt is thus part of a system of categories widespread among the Plains Indians, wherein the woman appears as a mediating term between two men. The gifts of women that occur at the time of the handing over of ranks within the male brotherhoods provide the most striking exemplification of such mediation.

In these circumstances, it proved interesting to compare the Hidatsa myths of the eagle hunt with those of other groups where, other things remaining equal, the personage of the eagle is permuted into a feminine position. Analysis of a series of myths allowed us to identify an invariant element: the apparent pollution of menstrual blood, sanctifying the eagle hunt among the Hidatsa, constitutes the weak term of a series of which the strong term is provided by the 'phantom fiancée' or the 'corpse woman' of Pueblo mythology, seductress of the terrestrial

husband of the eagle—princess, a man who is allied with Heaven against Earth, the symmetrical and converse counterpart of that illustrated by the alliance of the Hidatsa hunter with the 'earth-dwelling' badger.

However, in both cases the underlying idea is the same, pollution appearing as the condition and the means of conjunction, and the mixed occupying a secondary place in relation to the pure. If one wants the mixed, that is to say the conjunction of extremes (as realized, as we have seen, in the eagle hunt), it is necessary to accept one of the two greatest conceivable forms of pollution: that conveyed by death or, more exactly, the renunciation by man of immortality; or that represented, in this case, by the use of carrion as bait and the participation of an indisposed woman in the most sacred rites. The only difference is that the Pueblo conceive pollution from the viewpoint of *periodicity*, the Hidatsa from that of *corruption*. Thus, borrowing formulations from the Saussurean tradition, a pollution that relates, in the one case, to the 'axis of succession' and, in the other, to the 'axis of simultaneity'.

Chronological Table

To make this collection more manageable, I have preferred to group the courses according to theme. They are listed below in chronological order. The reader will notice that I sometimes gave two courses a year on various subjects, sometimes a single course because of a reduced teaching commitment or, more often, because the chosen topic required a full year.

Beginning with the academic year of 1974—5, I adopted a different teaching format, comprising a course and a seminar. There are therefore nine seminars which, for various reasons, I have not included in the present collection. They have been, should or may be the objects of separate publications; more importantly, the contributions of participants assumed such a large place in them that these seminars were not so much my work as theirs, together with the contributions of the members of the *Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale* who took on the task of organizing them, MM. J.-M. Benoist, M. Izard and M. Godelier.

1959—60	The Future of Anthropology
	Three Hopi Gods
1960—1	Totemism and the Savage Mind
	An Iroquois Myth
1961—2	The Raw and the Cooked
	Investigations into Kinship and Marriage
1962—3	From Honey to Ashes
1963—4	The Origin of Table Manners, 1
1964—5	Sketches for an American Bestiary
1965—6	The Naked Man, 1
1966—7	The Origin of Table Manners, 2
1967—8	The Naked Man, 2
1968—9	Interlude: Fog and Wind
1969—70	The Naked Man, 3
1970—1	The Naked Man, 4

1971—2	The Way of the Mask
	On the Atom of Kinship
1972—3	Asdiwal Revisited
	The Present State of Bororo Studies
1973—4	The Grail in America
1974—5	Cannibalism and Ritual Transvestism
1975—6	Order and Disorder in Oral Tradition
1976—7	The Concept of 'House'
1977—8	On Indonesia
1978—9	Melanesian Problems
1979—80	Melanesia and Polynesia
1980—1	Comparisons: New Zealand, Madagascar, Micronesia
1981—2	On Africa

(The nine courses given at the École Pratique des Hautes Études were left in chronological order.)

Index

Index by Ann Hall

Lévi-Strauss, Claude.
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