CLAUDE LEVI-STRAUSS: The Man and His Works

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by  

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INTRODUCTION  

"Claude Lévi-Strauss, Professor of Social Anthropology at the College de France, is, by common consent, the most distinguished exponent of this particular academic trade to be found anywhere outside the English speaking world..."  
(Leach 1970:7)  

With this in mind, I am still wondering how I came to be embroiled in an attempt not only to understand the multifaceted theorizing of Lévi-Strauss myself, but to interpret even a portion of this wide inventory to my colleagues. There is much (the majority, perhaps) of Claude Lévi-Strauss which eludes me yet. To quote Edmund Leach again, "The outstanding characteristic of his writing, whether in French or in English, is that it is difficult to understand; his sociological theories combine baffling complexity with overwhelming erudition" (Leach 1970:8). In addition, the whole corpus of Levi-Strauss' writings is packed with plays on words, oblique references and puns. I ask that the reader bear with my tentative exploration into the mind of this enigmatic man.  

EARLY YEARS  

Claude Lévi-Strauss was born in Belgium in 1908, son of a French Jewish-turned-agnostic artist who raised his son in an intellectual atmosphere of artistic culture and skepticism. Cuddihy (1974:155) makes much of Levi-Strauss' Jewish heritage, even to the point of stating that the development of his intellectual tool, structuralism, was for the purpose of putting an end to the "trauma of status-loss inherent in Jewry's entry into the modernized West in the nineteenth century". Cuddihy contends Levi-Strauss uses this tool for these ends, but I can find little evidence to justify the contention. Even while having spent his early childhood years with his grandfather, who was (the rabbi of Versailles), Lévi-Strauss claims, "My only contact with religion goes back to a stage in my childhood at which I was already an unbeliever" (emphasis added) (Lévi-Strauss 1973b:215).  

Lévi-Strauss says very little in his published works about his
childhood and youth. References to this time of his life are found primarily in the enchanting "travelogue", Tristes Tropiques, and are also salted sparingly and occasionally in other publications. However, Gardner (1973:113) reveals that he was a "serious and somewhat romantic youngster" given to long, solitary walks, often musing over flora and fauna, and contemplative of philosophical problems. From an early age he was deeply interested in geology, later acknowledging that science as one of the three major intellectual influences in his life. The other two, psychoanalysis and Marxism, which Lévi-Strauss regarded as methods of science rather than as dogma, joined geology to become Lévi-Strauss' "three mistresses."

All three showed that understanding consists in the reduction of one type of reality to another; that true reality is never the most obvious of realities... in all the cases the problem is the same: the relation between reason and sense perception..." (Lévi-Strauss 1973b:61)

This question of the relationship between reason and sense perception effected an increasing importance in Lévi-Strauss' theorizing over the ensuing years.

COLLEGE YEARS AND EARLY TEACHING CAREER

Between the years 1927 and 1932, Levi-Strauss attended the University of Paris, graduating under the Faculty of Law with a degree in Philosophy. (His studies had included readings of the masters of the "French School of Sociology," notably Durkheim and Mauss; in fact, it was Mauss' "Essai sur le Don" which later piqued Lévi-Strauss' interest in alliance theory.) Following graduation, Levi-Strauss accepted a position in a French lycee, which he held for two years. But in 1934, two events occurred which were to have lasting consequence in the life of Levi-Strauss. The first of these was his reading of Robert Lowie's Primitive Society, Lévi-Strauss' first introduction to specialist anthropological writing. Enchanted by the life described in this book, he eagerly took advantage of the opportunity provided by the second event. Through the patronage of Celestin Bouglé, Director of the Ecole Normale Superieure, Lévi-Strauss was offered a post as Professor of Sociology at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. He accepted within three hours. During the four years in which Levi-Strauss was at Sao Paulo, he made several brief visits to the interior of Brazil, engaging in ethnographic investigations. The empirical data and intellectual capital accrued during those years have been a major source of ideas for most of Lévi-Strauss' subsequent works. Lévi-Strauss' first anthropological publication was in 1936 - a forty-five page article on the social organization of the Bororo Indians.
In 1938, having resigned from the University of Sao Paulo, he obtained from the French Government financial support for an extensive expedition to central Brazil. While on the move much of the time, Levi-Strauss collected enough material on the Nambikwara and Tupi-Kawahib Indians to provide the basis for one of his best-known publications, *Tristes Tropiques*. Going in search of infinite variety, and expecting to find either bloodthirsty cannibals or Rousseau-like "noble savages", Lévi-Strauss instead discovered the common humanity of mankind. He came to recognize that the similarities between himself and the long-isolated Nambikwara far out-weighted the differences. Lévi-Strauss' recognition of "Certain fundamental properties of the physical and psychical universe" (Levi-Strauss 1973b:61), was to become a recurrent theme in all of his writings. However, it is important to mention that in spite of his "visionary" experience, the actual concrete ethnographic data which Lévi-Strauss compiled at this time could not have been of the quality which we have come to expect from Malinowski-style fieldwork. In the whole course of his Brazilian travels, Lévi-Strauss could not have spent more than a few weeks at a time in any one place; nor was he ever able to converse easily with any of his informants in their native language. In his subsequent writings, he assumes that the initial "model" generated by an observer's first impressions actually represents ethnographic reality. It has become apparent in recent etic/emic anthropological theorizing that such a first stage model can be little more than the observers' own pre-packaged suppositions. This type of data can hardly be considered impeachable source material on which to base the foundation of one's life work. But my primary criticism of Lévi-Strauss in this regard is not that he has relied so heavily on insufficient fieldwork, but that when called to defend his position wherever other data runs counter to his theories, he will either by-pass the evidence or sidestep the issue all together. (cf. Harris 1968:499-512). Any data is acceptable as long as it correlates with his calculated expectations. One is reminded of Lévi-Strauss' training in philosophy and law—his behavior is that of an advocate defending a cause rather than that of a scientist in pursuit of truth.

What was perhaps the most pivotal event in the life of Lévi-Strauss was his meeting of the noted linguist Roman Jakobson in the year 1941. During the two years prior to this date, Levi-Strauss had been in France on military service and had made his way, via Martinique and Puerto Rico, to New York, where he took up a post at the New School of Social Research, a position engineered for him by Robert Lowie. It was there that Jakobson introduced Levi-Strauss to the scientific approach which had wrought a "revolution" in linguistic study. The linguistic analysis of the Prague School, of which Jakobson was a prominent figure, proposed that underlying the diversity of languages and phonological components there was a small set of basic distinctions (binary oppositions) which generated the diversities. Lévi-Strauss seized upon this concept, feeling that if one could discover the underlying distinctions
which generated the diversities of culture, one could present an accurate and economical description of the range of cultural manifestations. To implement the tenets of Jakobsonian linguistics into cultural anthronology required studying the infrastructure of cultural phenomena rather than their apparent manifestations; it is the relationships between the units of this realm as independent entities, and not the units themselves which will reveal the structure of a culture. "It is not a question, naturally, of transferring linguistic analysis into anthropology, but of translating it into anthropological terms" (Lévi-Strauss 1963b:37). However, such structural analysis in linguistics was not so neatly transferred to the discipline of anthropology. Linguistics deals with signs and symbols which acquire meaning when cognitively associated with particular objects; but there are no conventional signs or symbols associated with social structure, political organization or family relationships. Levi-Strauss nevertheless proposed that cultural phenomena could, for the purpose of analysis, be assigned arbitrary symbols which would reflect the principle parameters of cultural domains, and which could be manipulated to reflect genuine relationships among the phenomena. By cross-checking these results against ethnographies and personal observation, he hoped to confirm the production of empirical correlates. The three principal phases of Lévi-Strauss' scholarly works (i.e. kinship theory, the theory of primitive classification, and the logic of myth) have been an attempt to implement this research method -- Structuralism.

THE STRUCTURALIST APPROACH

Before discussing the products of Lévi-Strauss' Structuralism in the range of study indicated above, it would perhaps be instructive to consider the general arguments for, or justifications of, structuralist methodology. During the years between the first publication of The Elementary Structures of Kinship (1949) and the long-overdue publication of Tristes Tropiques (1955), Lévi-Strauss engaged in investigation of certain other aspects of culture in an effort to "test" his general concept of structural analysis. Some of the articles produced by these investigations appeared in 1958 in the form of Structural Anthropology, a collection of essays which serves as an introduction to structural dogma. For those interested in the potential of Structuralism, a later publication, Totemism (1963), clarifies the actual techniques of application of the discipline.

The central thesis of Structuralism can be interpreted as follows: The phenomena of the external world, which we perceive through our senses, are apprehended as having distinct characteristics because of the way our senses communicate these perceptions to the brain and the way the human brain interprets these stimuli. It is typical of this process that
the continuum of perceptions (space, time, etc.) is cut up into separate units or segments, thereby disposing our conception of the environment as consisting of discrete things belonging to recognizable, named classes, with the passage of time consisting of sequences of distinct events. Therefore, when men produce material objects of culture, divise belief systems and associated ceremonials, and keep written records of the past, it is in imitation of their apprehension of nature. All products of culture, whether material or behavioral, are patterned after man's perception of nature as segmented and ordered.

Is this mode of perception truly characteristic of the human brain in general, or Lévi-Strauss' brain in particular? How does one actually use this explanation to implement structural analysis of phenomena? There is a big step between cause and effect, and to my way of thinking, a great deal of conjecture necessary to take this step. Irrespective of my way of thinking, the following is an example of the "strategy" of the thesis: Given a continuum, such as the color spectrum, there is no natural point at which one color changes to another, for instance, green to yellow or yellow to red. Nevertheless, the human brain is able to discriminate between green and yellow, and yellow and red. This "ordering mechanism" allows for anyone not colorblind to be able to recognize that green is the opposite of red, and, because of this, we may assign the signals - and + as if they corresponded to green and red. It is interesting that in many cultures besides our own, red is consistently treated as a sign of danger, perhaps from its "natural" association with blood. At any rate, with traffic lights in our culture, green means GO and red means STOP. If we need a further signal to indicate intermediate meaning (about to STOP, about to GO), we choose the color yellow. This is done because, in the spectrum yellow lies halfway between green and red. In this system, then, the ordering of the colors is the same as that of the instructions: GO-CAUTION-STOP: green-yellow-red. They both have the same "structure;" the one is a transformation of the other, and the final cultural product, a three-color traffic signal, is a simplified imitation of a phenomenon of nature as apprehended by the human brain. However,

"because this viewpoint offers distinct advantages, allowing properties of human societies - what Marcel Mauss called 'facts of general functioning' - to emerge which might otherwise remain hidden under a mass of exotic and incomprehensible surface detail, how can it guarantee the reality of these structural categories which exist only at the unconscious level" (VonSturmer 1970:11)?
In the above example, the sequence of colors in the spectrum very neatly transfers to the sequence of colors in the traffic signal, and the selection of red for "STOP-DANGER" seems to be a natural one, as mentioned previously. Therefore, the correlation between the two triads is more or less predetermined, and we do not need to consider alternative possibilities offered by the rest of the matrix. But suppose, in a general case, that there is no apparent correlation between the patterns. Structural analysis needs to proceed by setting out all the possible combinations of components and examining the empirical evidence on a comparative basis.

"The method we adopt, . . . consists of the following operations:

1. define the phenomenon under study as a relation between two or more terms, real or supposed;
2. construct a table of possible permutations between these terms;
3. take this table as the general object of analysis which, at this level only, can yield necessary connections, the empirical phenomenon considered at the beginning being only one possible combination among others, the complete system of which much be constructed beforehand" (Levi-Strauss 1963a:16).

The purpose of this exercise is to establish how relations which are inherent in nature and recognized as such by the human mind are used to generate cultural phenomena involving the same relations. It is Levi-Strauss' contention that by discovering how different peoples apprehend nature, it will be possible to infer crucial facts about the mechanism of thinking as manifested in cultural diversity. It is important to understand that, in spite of the cultural differences which can be observed in cross-cultural comparisons, because all cultures are the product of human minds, there must be, beneath the surface, features that are universal. These universals exist only at the level of structure, and never at the level of manifest fact. Levi-Strauss attaches no importance to the recurrence or lack of occurrence of particular customs on a worldwide basis. In his view, we may usefully compare only the patterning of the relations which might link together sets of human behavior; there is nothing to be gained from comparing single cultural items as isolates. The general object of analysis is conceived as a kind of algebraic matrix of possible permutations and combinations located in the unconscious human mind; the empirical evidence is merely an example of what is possible.
"The structure of relations which can be discovered by analyzing materials drawn from any one culture is an algebraic transformation of other possible structures belonging to a common set and this common set constitutes a pattern which reflects an attribute of the mechanism of all human brains" (Leach 1970:53).

This is a grand conception, but its usefulness is a matter of opinion. Among his professional colleagues, there is little doubt as to Levi-Strauss' brilliance and fecundity, but suspicion remains and in some quarters is hardening into open hostility (Hammel:1972). One of the reasons for this, I believe from my own encounter with the writings of Levi-Strauss, is that many of his colleagues have not or can not read him! He is charged with imposing his own mentality on the world, with endowing the intelligible with intelligence, and with revealing more about Levi-Strauss than about the objects of his inquiry.

"An analysis of his ... work is illuminating for it reveals an obsession with the Nature/Culture opposition and the notion of alliance. The patterns of Lévi-Strauss' thoughts emerge clearly, but what of the Indians" (emphasis added) (VonSturmer 1970:13)?

His is an unfamiliar style of discourse and it must be admitted that there is an element of verbal sleight of hand which invites caution rather than enthusiasm. However, those who weary of the tortuous gymnastics of Levi-Straussian argument need to recognize his unique capacity of leading the reader all unaware into the innermost recesses of his "secret"motivations. Clearly, the abundance of theory generated by Levi-Strauss over the past thirty years has been a significant contribution; while many of his theses remain muddy water to the uninitiated, they have certainly stimulated a flurry of interest in his "intellectual tool" and by this means, hopefully, generated the kind of research investigation which may ultimately produce a methodology which could enjoy broad-spectrum application. At any rate, Levi-Strauss is not to be taken lightly.

SCHOLARLY WORKS

Turning to the aspects of Levi-Strauss' scholarly works, we may conceive of them as a three-pointed star radiating around a nucleus of Structuralism. It is beyond the scope of this paper and my expertise to treat fully the entire range of theory which has sprung from the mind of Levi-Strauss.
But I will attempt to give a brief synopsis of the major points on which his primary areas of endeavor pivot.

KINSHIP

In his study of kinship, Lévi-Strauss proceeds in a fashion contrary to most of his predecessors. Rather than explaining the incest taboo on the basis of marriage rules, he explains marriage rules on the basis of the incest taboo. In a vein smacking of social Darwinism, Lévi-Strauss maintains that, in the course of evolution, human societies had the choice of giving away their women to cement political alliances, or of keeping them to themselves and running the risk of being annihilated by superior enemies. In this situation, natural selection would favor societies enforcing rules of exogamy. This equates with the function of the incest taboo. The fatal flaw of incest is that it precludes the possibility of formation of larger kinship systems by restricting the possibility of exchanging women and establishing alliances. If survival of a society is dependent upon alliance, strong sanctions against incest must be interdicted.

"The primitive and irreducible character of the kinship unit is a consequence of the incest taboo... In human society a man cannot get a woman except from another man, who entrusts him with his daughter or sister" (Lévi-Strauss 1969a: 41).

The taboo has no other object than to permit the circulation or women, and in this sense, is a counterpart of the obligation to give a thesis of Mauss to which Lévi-Strauss' contention ". . . that exogamy . . . was the archetype of all practices based upon reciprocity, and that marriage alliances were the essential basis of the social structure" (Gardner 1973:127). But the important thing for Levi-Strauss, in consideration of the incest taboo, is that the existence of this phenomenon provides the "missing link" in man's transition from a state of nature to a state of culture. It was the first self-sacrifice in sexual matters and all of its attendant subsequent forms of reciprocity which elevated man from an animal state to a cultural state, with language, customs, and traditions following.

To complicate matters, Lévi-Strauss recognizes further characteristics of these forms of exchange, which he distinguishes by the terms "harmonic" and "disharmonic," a distinction based on the relationship between rules of residence and rules of descent. He recognizes only two types of descent - patrilineal and matrilineal, and two types of residence - viriloclal and uxorilocal. Systems which are patrilineal/
virilocal or matrilineal/uxorilocal are harmonic; systems which are patrilineal/uxorilocal or matrilineal/virilocal are disharmonic. Lévi-Strauss maintains that harmonic structures are unstable and that disharmonic structures are stable, so that structures of the first type will tend to evolve into structures of the second type. Harmonic systems of restricted exchange, therefore, provide the foundation from which harmonic systems of generalized exchange may emerge.

"A harmonic system with restricted exchange, he reasons, can never rise above a dual organization or a combination of separate dual organizations; that is, can never embrace the whole community in a total exchange system, unless it becomes either asymmetric or disharmonic" (DeJong 1952:19).

Regardless of the merits of this argument, it should be pointed out that Lévi-Strauss' general procedure for marriage alliance analysis is the same as that discussed in an earlier portion of this paper in the context of traffic signals. He treats possible preferences for marriage with particular cousins as forming a set of logical alternatives, compliance with which results in different overall patterns of social solidarity within the total society. These different kinship system possibilities constitute a set of components which are manifested in sets of kinship terms and in institutions of marriage and exchange. Taken all together, the components will embody clues as to the internalized logic of the human mind.

THE HUMAN MIND

By now it should be clear that Lévi-Strauss is very nearly obsessed with the internal working of the human mind, to the point that he regards anthropology properly as the study of the mind. Only by the confirmation of his theory of the brain's operation on the basis of distinction of perception through binary opposition of characteristics, can Lévi-Strauss' position on the nature of cultural manifestations be verified. It was this interest, this need, which stimulated the composition of two of his most erudite works, Totemism and The Savage Mind, both published in 1962. His purpose in this endeavor was to demonstrate the basic principles of the working of the human mind and to illustrate that there is no qualitative difference between the minds of so-called "primitives" and minds of sophisticated Westerners. Because of the limitations placed on the mind by such reality factors as length of lifetime, proximity of other tribes, availability of women and natural resources, etc., Lévi-Strauss' attention later turned increasingly toward domains such as myth classification, in which, he reasoned, there were fewer
restraints upon the mind and it could be given free rein to reveal its organization and parameters of functioning. These efforts culminated in the "Mythologiques" (the logic of myth), a tetralogy consisting of The Raw and the Cooked (1964), From Honey to Ashes (1966), On the Origin of Table Manners (1968), and The Naked Man (1972).

Levi-Strauss begins his illustration of the universal aspects of the functioning of the human mind by a consideration of the widespread practice of totemism, a phenomenon which has long been used as an example of a state of primitive mentality. It is Levi-Strauss' contention that the naming of individuals or clans after particular plant or animal species is not due to those individuals or clans thinking themselves to be, for instance, beavers or eagles, nor is it due to the members living like beavers or eagles; rather as one plant or animal species differs from another, so do the members of one totemic group differ from members of another. "It is not the resemblances but the differences which resemble each other" (Levi-Strauss 1963a:63). It is a recognition of a "class structure," if you will, in the state of nature which is transferred, and therefore analogous to, a system of social ordering in the state of culture. Furthermore, the "primitive" does not confer the name of beaver or eagle upon his clan because these creatures provide him with something "good to eat" (bonnes a manger), but because they provide him with something "good to think" (bonnes a penser). In other words, totemic species are not given social value because they are of economic value, but because the species are considered as categories which in themselves are socially valuable. "They are appropriate vehicles for capturing the perceptual distinctions which have impressed themselves upon the individual or group" (Gardner 1973:135-136). Because all minds perceive stimuli on the basis of contrasts and oppositions, it must also have some mechanism for mediation between them. As a result, objects which are "good to think" are those which embody the opposing qualities which originally captured the feeling of "identification" of the thinker. The very existence of these mediators helps to resolve the contradictions and, if not that, at least provides a suspension of the oppositions.

"For human (as distinct from animal) survival every member of society must learn to distinguish his fellow men according to their mutual social status..... The simplest way to do this is to apply transformations of the animal level categories to the social classification of human beings. This is the key point in Levi-Strauss' Structuralist approach to the classic anthropological theme of Totemism" (Leach 1970:40).
Clearly, this type of association is evidence of conceptual thought and the capacity for abstraction.

Levi-Strauss expands on this argument by providing examples of precise, scientific knowledge on the part of primitive peoples. (Examples of this kind are common enough knowledge among anthropologists, and I will not reiterate any of them here.) He recognizes in these examples a quality of scientific knowledge which is not exactly the same as that of the Western scientist, but rather a parallel mode of acquiring knowledge, which he labels the "science of the concrete." Lévi-Strauss maintains that the scientific operations of both Western and Primitive societies is based upon the classification of objects and phenomena. The science of the concrete, however, engages in classification by sensory properties, such as odor and appearance, and does not engage in classification on the basis of anatomical properties or evolutionary development of species. Lévi-Strauss establishes that both modes of acquiring knowledge nevertheless give rise to organized, self-consistent systems; they are the products of identical mental manipulations, differing only in the types of phenomena under consideration and the parameters for qualification for membership in a classification.

Conversely, to demonstrate that the thought process of "civilized man" is indeed not so very far removed from that of "primitives," Lévi-Strauss illustrates circumstances in which Western man unhesitatingly displays primitive reasoning. An example which very convincingly substantiates this is the emotional attachment we have to historical documents, landmarks, shrines, etc. When one is told, for instance, that "George Washington slept here," it is not really crucial whether or not, in fact, he did. What is important is that the person believes that George Washington slept there and thereby experiences the appropriate emotion. In addition, one can imagine the emotional trauma which would occur should some sacred family object, such as Great-Grandpa's gold watch, be lost or damaged. It is as if all the ideals and concepts of value and permanence associated with these objects were lost as well. One final example, which would have been equally volatile ammunition for Levi-Strauss' artillery in the discussion of totemism, should suffice in exposing this tenet.

"It is a fact of empirical observation that human beings everywhere adopt ritual attitudes towards the animals and plants in their vicinity. Consider, for example, the separate, and often bizarre, rules which govern the behaviour of Englishmen towards the creatures which they classify as: (i) wild animals, (ii) foxes,
(iii) game, (iv) farm animals, (v) pets, (vi) vermin. Notice further that if we take the sequence of words: (ia) strangers, (iia) enemies, (iiiia) friends, (iva) neighbors, (va) companions, (via) criminals, the two sets of terms are in some degree homologous. By a metaphorical usage the categories of animals could be (and sometimes are) used as equivalents for the categories of human beings. One of Lévi-Strauss' major contributions to our understanding has been to show how very widespread is this kind of socialisation of animal categories" (Leach 1970:40).

It becomes apparent that "primitives" alone do not have the corner on primitive reasoning.

To finalize his arguments for the universality of the structure of thought, Lévi-Strauss turns to practices of naming, classifying, categorizing, universalizing and particularizing. He demonstrates that the rationale for labeling and grouping, while most clearly reflected in the thinking of primitive societies, is not solely the property of primitive societies and that it is not based on utilitarian or functional considerations. It is Lévi-Strauss' thesis that it is the mind's capacity for and characteristic of sorting, clustering, opposing and mediating which predetermine its organization of percepts. In demonstration of this assertion, he goes to great lengths in consideration of Western practices of naming pets, and domestic and wild animals, claiming that such practices are universal human modes of expression of recognition of attributes. Whether or not such modes of expression are in fact universal, the discussion does shed some light on unfamiliar aspects of our own familiar behavior.

The presentation engages in this manner: For us, dogs, because they are pets, are a part of human society while being not quite human. This relationship finds expression in the kinds of names we attach to dogs, names which are like human names but nearly always slightly different. Birds, on the other hand, are given nicknames fully comparable to normal human names, e.g. Jenny Wren, Robin Redbreast, etc. The difference is that the "non-human" names given to pet dogs are names of individuals, while the "human" names assigned to birds are indiscriminately applied to any member of a whole species. This type of distinction is that of metonymic vs. metaphoric modes of symbolic association. Lévi-Strauss contends that birds may be given human Christian names more easily than other animal classes because, since they are so different, they may be permitted to resemble men! Because of this ready difference between men and birds, and because of birds' independence of our own society, it is permissible
to recognize those attributes of aviary society which appear to us as homologous to that in which we live, i.e., love of freedom, building of homes and nurturing of the young, engaging in social relations, and communicating by acoustic means. "Consequently everything objective conspires to make us think of the bird world as a metaphorical human society" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:203). Exactly the opposite holds true in the case of dogs. Forming an integral part of human society, and dependent upon it, dogs must be designated in a fashion which imitates but does not duplicate human designations. The names given to dogs "are like stage names, forming a series parallel to the names people bear in ordinary life or, in other words, metaphorical names. Consequently when the relation between (human and animal) species is socially conceived as metaphorical, the relation between the respective systems of naming takes on a metonymical character; and when the relation between species is conceived as metonymical, the system of naming assumes a metaphorical character" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:204-205).

Levi-Strauss then goes on to make further learned generalizations about the names which French farmers give to their cows and the names conferred upon racehorses:

'Now the names given to cattle belong to a different series from birds' or dogs'. They are generally descriptive terms referring to the colour of their coats, their bearing or temperament: 'Rustaud', 'Russet', Blanchette', 'Douce', etc. these names have a metaphorical character but they differ from the names given to dogs in that...the former...tend to derive from speech (oral tradition), the latter from language (learned tradition)" (parenthetical notations added) (Lévi-Strauss 1966:206).

(The names of racehorses have the quality they do have because racehorses:) "do not form part of human society either as subjects or objects. Rather, they constitute the desocialised condition of a private society; that which lives off race-courses or frequents them" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:206).

Cattle are viewed as objects of economic value, with no interest in their individual identities; they are seen in relationship to humans merely as extensions of our technology. Racehorses, on the other hand, are named in a way which will reflect their distinctiveness and individual identities; though isolated, they belong to a society founded on competition, and are therefore parallel to
humans. Despite these differentiations, neither cattle nor racehorses form an actual part of human society and are therefore considered inhuman beings. Lévi-Strauss sums up the situation with a statement which is totally recondite:

"If therefore birds are metaphorical human beings and dogs metonymical human beings, cattle may be thought of as metonymical inhuman beings. Cattle are contiguous only for want of similarity, racehorses similar only for want of contiguity. Each of these two categories offers the converse image of one of the two other categories, which themselves stand in the relation of inverted symmetru" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:207).

I suspect that Lévi-Strauss is playing semantic games. Is the juxtaposition of a type of name and a type of social context anything more than a debating trick? The train of thought is fascinating, but what sort of "truth" is involved? I am tempted to cast my lot with those who charge that Lévi-Strauss is revealing more about the workings of his own mind than about the subject matter proper!

Moving on to consideration of the "Mythologiques", we find ourselves on even less sure footing. In fact, Von Sturmer (1970:16) claims that one anthropologist has remarked that "reviewing the second book in the series was the most arduous task of that sort he could remember having assumed". My own exposure to the tetralogy is incomplete, and unfortunately, no analysis of it, comparable to that by DeJong on kinship and marriage, has, to my knowledge, been published. Nevertheless, I will attempt to give a brief overview of the principles motivating Lévi-Straussian myth analysis.

MYTH

For some time previous to his actual involvement with the analysis of myth, Lévi-Strauss had been concerned with the basic issue of how and why it is that men, who are a part of nature, are able to see themselves as distinct from nature, even though, in order to exist, they must continuously function as a part of nature. It was Lévi-Strauss' reasoning that the answer to this question would reveal itself in the context of myth analysis. As stated previously in this paper, it is in the domain of myth construction that the mind is freed from the obligations and restrictions of reality and is able, therefore, to display its innate low of operation which reflects the structure of all men's minds. Taken at face value, any body of mythological tales gives the impression of a tremendous diversity of trivial
incidents in association with frequent repetition and recurrent emphasis on rather primary themes. Lévi-Strauss postulates that behind the conspicuous sense of the tales there must be an inconspicuous non-sense, a message concealed in the "code" of myth. According to Gardner (1973:147),

"He tries to show that simple empirical categories - the perception of light, darkness, smell, noise, silence, etc. - can be treated as conceptual tools for such abstract ideas as the relationship between Nature and Culture, the characteristics of the incest taboo, and the importance of certain kinship and social arrangements; and that these ideas, moreover, can be incorporated into logical propositions".

Here, as elsewhere, Lévi-Strauss' ultimate concern is with "the unconscious nature of collective phenomena" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:18).

By a sampling of the variety of myths produced cross-culturally, Levi-Strauss expected to be able to isolate those elements which constitute the essence of myth. He was convinced that many of the different myths in any culture operate with the same basic constituents, which do not have an accidental relationship to one another, and that the rules for combination of the constituents to transform one myth into another could be determined. After a survey of more than 800 North and South American Indian myths, Lévi-Strauss claims to have found a formula for doing this and it has been his intention to demonstrate, through the success of this approach, the logic inherent in the body of myth.

In the first two volumes of the "Mythologiques", Lévi-Strauss is concerned with the eating of food and how eating differentiates man from other animals. The Raw and the Cooked is an attempt to demonstrate a logic of properties based upon the opposition between what is raw and therefore part of Nature, from what is cooked and therefore part of Culture. It is Lévi-Strauss' proposition that, on the plane of food, the distinction between raw and cooked is the same as the distinction between Nature and Culture on the plane of society, between sacred and profane on the plane of religion, and between silence and noise on the plane of sound. His justification for this proposition is roughly that, because we are all men, we are all part of Nature; because we are human, we are all part of Culture. Survival as men requires the eating of food (a part of Nature); survival as humans require the utilization of social categories which are derived from cultural classifications imposed on elements of Nature. When we eat, a direct identity is established between food (Nature) and ourselves (Culture); cooking is thereby a universal means of converting Nature into Culture. This line of reasoning is expanded in From Honey to Ashes, in which Lévi-Strauss tries to demonstrate a logic of form, between above/below, this world/other world, and (of course) Nature/Culture, which is the foundation of the properties described above. Honey is acquired from Nature and is consumed as food;
tobacco is acquired through Culture and is consumed other than as food.

It is Lévi-Strauss' thesis that the function of mythology is to exhibit publicly, though in disguise, ordinarily unconscious paradoxes of the kind described, and that the ultimate conclusion of analysis is not that all myths say the same thing but that, taken collectively, what all myths say is said collectively. Having not read the final two volumes of the "Mythologiques", I cannot speak personally of their content and will demur to the excellent summary of the material as presented by Gardner (1973:148):

"The Mythologiques represent, overall, Lévi-Strauss' comprehensive effort to demonstrate that all patterns of human behavior are codes; that the mind's inherent structuring tendency - operating in terms of a limited set of inborn principles - conditions and determines the form of social phenomena, and of important forms of relations among human beings: differences in status, networks of friendship, feelings of hostility, etc. Such relations are dealt with in myths by means of various codes relating to categories of food, sound or silence, smell and taste landscapes, seasonal changes, climate, celestial bodies, shelter, animal and plant life. The terms or objects appearing in myths may differ, but the underlying laws of discourse, and the operative ecological and social constraints, are invariable. Myths are designed to deal with problems of human existence which seem insoluble; they embody and express such dilemmas in the coherently structured form, and so serve to render them intelligible. Through their structural similarity to given 'real world' situations, myths establish a point of repose or equilibrium which men can come to grips with the crucial components of the problem, and become aware of the 'fix' they are in. Thus, a myth is both intellectually satisfying and socially solidifying".

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

An evaluation of the work of Lévi-Strauss can only be assessed in operational terms. If, by application of the techniques of analysis expounded by Lévi-Strauss to an actual body of anthropological data, one is able to discern
insights not had before and if these insights provide illumination of other related ethnographic material which were not previously considered, then the exercise has been worthwhile.

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