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MYTH AND THE RECONCILIATION OF OPPOSITES: JUNG AND LÉVI-STRAUSS

BY VERNON W. GRAS

I. Claude Lévi-Strauss in his "The Structural Study of Myth" (1955) attacked Jung's interpretation of myths as pre-scientific. Just as linguistics had first to learn that there was no intrinsic tie between sounds and meaning in order to become a science, so also does the study of myth need to utilize Saussure's principle of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign (but on a higher level) to become scientific:

. . . some of the more recent interpretations of mythological thought originated from the same kind of misconception under which those early linguists were laboring. Let us consider, for instance, Jung's idea that a given mythological pattern—the so-called archetype—possesses a certain meaning. This is comparable to the long-supported error that a sound may possess a certain affinity with a meaning.¹

Jung, as a practising psychiatrist, naturally kept the therapeutic relevance of archetypal psychology in the forefront. His orientation would tend towards the semantic, making the interpretation of mythic figures relevant to the context of this or that individual patient. Yet a reading of Jung's works does not support the one-to-one correlation of archetype and meaning that Lévi-Strauss asserts. In fact, this article will attempt to prove that Jung is as formalistic, dialectical, and bi-polar as Lévi-Strauss.

II. Both Jung and Lévi-Strauss cherish the unconscious and agree that only when its function is clearly revealed will modern man acquire the self-understanding so lacking in contemporary existence. At first glance, however, the two describe the structure and function of the unconscious quite differently. Let us take Jung first. Jung very early in his career became dissatisfied with Freud's explanation that in the unconscious reposed the denied and repressed wishes of an individual. He accepted repression and its distorting mechanisms only partially. It covered the personal unconscious, that which was idiosyncratic and symptomatic in the life of a particular patient or dreamer. However, another class of contents, also of unknown origin, cannot be ascribed to individual acquisition. These contents have one outstanding peculiarity: they have a mythological character and

¹ C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Schoepf (Garden City, 1967), I, 204. Hereafter, *SA*.

their pattern is peculiar to *mankind in general*. This pattern, so widespread among different peoples and epochs, Jung labelled the *collective unconscious*.

. . . to the degree that human brains are uniformly differentiated, the mental functioning thereby made possible is also collective and universal. This explains, for example, the interesting fact that the unconscious processes of the most widely separated peoples and races show a quite remarkable correspondence, which displays itself among other things, in the extraordinary but well-authenticated analogies between the forms and motifs of autochthonous myths. The universal similarity of human brains leads to the universal possibility of a uniform mental functioning. This functioning is the *collective psyche*.²

Jung argued his case for the collective unconscious many times and quite effectively. He pointed out that just as the human body has an anatomical conformity in its two eyes, two ears, one heart, etc. with only slight differences between individuals, so also has the human mind a universal similarity in its fundamental structure. "The brain has a history exactly like the body and in the basic structure of the mind you will naturally find traces of the archaic mind."³ Unlike the body, however, this archaic mind is not directly observable. Instead, we have the next best thing: its products, the myths and universal symbols from whose presence we infer the existence of Jung's archetypal unconscious. From the dreams, fantasizings, and creative work of children, normal adults, and asylum inmates, Jung uncovered the perplexing and inexplicable repetition of motifs from myths, fairy tales, or rituals of whose history their begettors were totally ignorant. Neither diffusion nor personal experience could account for the widespread occurrence of these "primordial images" or archetypes amongst all peoples, everywhere, and at all times. The only adequate hypothesis, says Jung, is to view myths and certain universal symbols (i.e., other than personal images) as products of the psyche itself which emerge from the unconscious when the psychic conditions they are said to symbolize call them forth. Unlike Freud, Jung is not interested in isolating and identifying complexes. He agrees that they exist, that many of them emanate from the personal unconscious, and that Freud's regressive methods of analysis (condensation, displacement, sublimation) find their proper object here. But images deriving from the personal unconscious are "signs," says Jung, not symbols. A symbol is not a symptom repeating like a bro-

² C. G. Jung, "The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious," *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York, 1971), 93.

³ Jung, *Analytical Psychology: Its Theory and Practice*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York, 1968), 45.

ken record some childhood trauma. It points to the future, to an unknown prospective potential, to that for which no verbal concept yet exists: "The true symbol differs essentially from this (symptom), and should be understood as an expression of an intuitive idea that cannot yet be formulated in any other or better way."⁴

The presence of an archetypal symbol instead of a repressed symptom is confirmed in two ways. Invariably, an emotional heightening accompanies its occurrence in patient or audience and the wider its appeal or fascination, the more collective the symbol. But the more objective way to spot archetypal symbols is through *amplification*. Jung describes this method in his Tavistock lectures (1935):

I adopt the method of the philologist, which is far from being free association, and apply a logical principle which is called *amplification*. It is simply that of seeking the parallels. For instance, in the case of a very rare word which you have never come across before, you try to find parallel text passages, parallel applications perhaps, where that word also occurs, and then you try to put the formula you have established from the knowledge of other texts into the new texts. If you make the new text a readable whole, you say, 'Now we can read it'. That is how we learned to read hieroglyphics and cuneiform inscriptions and this is how we can read dreams.⁵

To interpret dreams and fantasies through amplification is to find certain mythological parallels with the patients' situation so that his difficulties become generalized and "spiritualized." He comes to understand his present plight as participating in a collective meaning which has always been true and is true now for him in particular. Mythological dreams never point back to a forgotten early crisis but obliquely hint at a potential synthesis which will move the present conflict or impasse to a higher level of integration and meaning.

Such a synthesis always operates between the conscious and unconscious levels of the psyche. This mediating through symbols has gone on since the beginning of history, ever since consciousness emerged from the unconscious. Jung calls it the process of individuation. All of us share in this inheritance which makes it possible to translate excess psychical energy into spiritual products, instinct into culture. The unconscious, affirms Jung, retains a compensatory relationship with the ego. The inevitable one-sidedness and extravagances of the conscious mind which arise when it substitutes its partial activities for the whole psyche bestirs the unconscious (archetypes) whose purpose is "to compensate or correct in a meaningful manner" this aberration. Individuation means coming to Self-hood or Self-

⁴ *The Portable Jung*, 307.

⁵ Jung, *Analytical Psychology*, 92-93.

realization. It is an ongoing synthesis of a conscious content with its unconscious opposite, which in turn becomes the conscious pole in another opposition and synthesis in a renewable and unending cycle. The Self is a projection of the psyche and is experienced as the ultimate meaning or significance of life. This quest for complete fulfillment gives both the psyche and its products a purposive character. To strive after such completion (*teleiosis*) is legitimate and inborn in man as a peculiarity which provides civilization with one of its strongest roots. When the archetype of Self predominates, its completeness is *forced* upon us against the will of conscious strivings. We may desire perfection (only possible through exclusion) but must suffer the opposite of this intention for the sake of completeness. Pictorial representations or symbols of wholeness show that they all incorporate the synthesis of opposites which, Jung affirms, is not always easy to achieve.⁶

The Self archetype, says Jung, "is the *eidos* behind every supreme idea of unity and totality in monotheistic and monistic systems."⁷ Religious and metaphysical concepts which have lost their connection with contemporary experience can now be related to living universal psychic processes by drawing mythological/psychic parallels. Originally projected out of the psyche and then reified, these dead dogmas and superstitions should now be able to recover their original relevance. The basic archetypes Jung retrieves in his analysis of myths, religions, and fairy tales are few in number. Subordinated to the *imago Dei* of the Self, these other archetypes owe their existence and function to the attainment of the former. In the "Aion" Jung virtually recapitulates all the main archetypes and their function. Wholeness or psychic completeness, the fundamental need of the psyche, is projected out of the unconscious in a variety of modes and symbols. In visual modes: the four-sided mandala, the medieval rose window, the Tao, primitive magic circles give it expression. In myths, fairy tales, and alchemy, the recognition and overcoming of opposites to achieve some ultimate treasure like the Philosopher's Stone, paradise, or other totality, patterns the universal "middle way." Jung particularly likes the mandala symbol because he can link the integration of the four conscious processes of thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition to the four-sided square within the mandala circle. The domination of one of these four functions gives an individual his particular psychology. When thinking dominates, then feeling is inferior. Sensation and intuition are also opposed as dominant and inferior. In Western psychology, the thinking function dominates, sup-

⁶ Jung, "Aion" in Violet S. deLaszlo (ed.), *Psyche and Symbol*, trans. R. F. C. Hull and Cary Baynes (Garden City, 1958), 35 ff.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 31

ported by sensation so that their respective opposites—feeling and intuition—descend into the unconscious.⁸

To reintegrate these four functions and simultaneously bridge the gap between the conscious and the unconscious for the continued growth and benefit of the ego is the aim of the individuating process. Images of the Self universally reveal its paradoxical nature, containing within itself the union of elements eternally opposed. To fulfill the individuating principle, consciousness must become ever more differentiated and self-conscious. Yet it cannot sever itself from the unconscious and believe its historically acquired personality autonomous and self-sufficient. What ensues then is an eternal dialectic between conscious and unconscious levels with the products of the ego constantly in need of compensation and transcendence via the images and symbols deriving from the archetypal unconscious.

The other archetypes, the shadow and the anima/animus syzygy function similarly, but are subordinated to the Self. Once again, urgent psychic needs project mythological motifs. Sex makes one's consciousness predominantly male or female and the compensatory unconscious either female or male, respectively. Every man carries the anima archetype within himself: the ageless image of the loving mother and mistress to which he relates erotically as spouse and sleeping infant all in one. Every woman carries an animus archetype within herself: a father figure, a paternal logos, which with cognitive lucidity voices traditional philosophical and religious ideas. The anima/animus relationship is full of animosity because it is very difficult to overcome the thought/feeling polarity. Then, too, these psychic archetypes seem sex-linked in the pattern of their dominance. Being polar opposites to one's own sex, they become buried in the unconscious whence they fascinate and enthrall the conscious ego. To liberate the ego, to have it come to greater self-awareness, the unconscious anima/animus projection must be lived through. From such experience the individual may come to recognize the projection whose effects always isolate the subject from his environment. Instead of a real relation to it, he builds an illusory one which "changes the world into a replica of his unknown face."⁹ Even though the anima/animus archetypes are "factors transcending consciousness," their personified contents or effects can indeed be made conscious and can find their ubiquitous mythological correlate in the "divine pair":

. . . the father and mother . . . together . . . form a divine pair, one of whom in accordance with his Logos nature, is characterized by *pneuma* and *nous*,

⁸ Jung, *Analytical Psychology*, 21.

⁹ Jung, "Aion," 8.

rather like Hermes with his evershifting hues, while the other, in accordance with her Eros nature, wears the features of Aphrodite, Helen (Selene), Persephone, and Hecate. Both of them are unconscious powers, "gods" in fact, as the ancient world quite rightly conceived them to be.¹⁰

The shadow archetype is much easier to bring to consciousness. When projected, the shadow is always of the same sex as the subject. Its message can be made conscious without too much difficulty because it represents "first and foremost the personal unconscious."¹¹ All those dark, hidden, and offensive aspects of the personality have to be recognized as real and present. Qualities evinced by the shadow are emotional (obsessive, even possessive) and autonomous. Becoming aware of the shadow takes considerable moral effort because this self-knowledge leads us to recognize those primitive levels of personality wherein we resemble the beasts. Mythology is replete with shadow figures: demons, evil spirits, witches, and Satans. The effort of Christian mythology to do away with evil, to separate Christ and Anti-Christ, heaven and hell, into static and irreconcilable opposites leads to a sterile dead-end, to the embalmed dogmas of conventional religion. Jung prefers the open-ended Yin and Yang of the Tao which expresses the everlasting reconciliation of light and dark that man must suffer and endure.

III. Lévi-Strauss' originality as a structural anthropologist lay in his application of the linguistic model—the phonological model of N. S. Troubetzkoy (1890-1938) (*Principes de phonologie* [Paris, 1949]) and Roman Jakobson ("Principien der historischen Phonologie," in *Travaux du Cercle linguistique de Prague*, IV [1931])—to culture in general. He changed anthropology into a semiology, from a study of behavior to a study of signs. Social life in effect was a system of messages or codes all of which were homologous because they reflected the human mind which had engendered them. Language, art, marriage rules, myths are all communication systems which have a common structure. Whereas Jung's originality lay in psychologizing mythic tales and religious dogma, in making them the externalization of unconscious psychic processes, Lévi-Strauss psychologized every aspect of culture. Nothing is exempt from the unconscious structuring of the human mind. The ordering capacity of language which operates unconsciously and universally, which makes possible the conscious speech used by individuals, serves as the model for all meaning-giving activities. In practice, the semantic component (what is said) of any discourse (e.g., in history, politics, literature, religion) is subordinated to the rules or relationships which govern and make possible their having any meaning at all. These rules and relationships

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

operate unconsciously but can be described analogously to the phonological model developed by Troubetzkoy and Jakobson. A sound has meaning only when it operates within a cultural context; outside such a context, it is just noise. Similarly, all meanings that come to exist, do so only as a part of a context or code. The ways in which these elements are differentiated and brought together produce their meaning. In acoustics, sound is articulated through a process of selection and combination. These two principles, also known as the metaphoric and metonymic or paradigmatic and syntagmatic functions, account for the mechanical arrangements of units whereby language produces meaning.¹² (See the appendix below for Bierwisch's explanation of these principles using an acoustic model.) Ultimately, the binarism of the phonological model is accepted as a general description of how the mind imposes order unconsciously and universally in all forms of social life. Lévi-Strauss illustrated the binary functioning of this unconscious mind in his studies of mythology.

Myths are narratives made out of language. They would, of course, share in the meaning-giving capacity of language, but if they form a separate code of their own (as Lévi-Strauss claims), then their constituent units must be more complex than the words and sentences of language. Lévi-Strauss calls these complex units *mythemes*.¹³ A mytheme is constituted out of sentence bundles that already assert relationships, e.g., in the Oedipus myth, "Oedipus kills Laius." The particular meaning of this sentence is subordinated to a higher meaning which emerges from repetitive variation of like events: e.g., "Eteocles kills his brother, Polynices"; "the Spartoi kill one another." The generalization they all point to is *the underrating of blood relations*. One could say that these "sentence bundles" function like "distinctive features" in articulating the mytheme. Meantime, other sentences in the myth constellate around an opposite meaning: "Oedipus marries his mother"; "Antigone buries her brother, Polynices, despite prohibition"; "Cadmos seeks his sister Europa, ravished by Zeus." Again, such recurrence points to a higher, more abstract mytheme which Lévi-Strauss describes as *the overrating of blood relations*. To read the myth correctly, one must dispense with narrative line and segmentalize by distinguishing the recurring motifs which constitute mythemes. In the Oedipal myth, this procedure uncovers two other mythemes: (1) the killing of monsters by Cadmos and Oedipus—a *denial of man's autochthonous origin*, says Lévi-Strauss; and (2) the repetition of a common feature

¹² For a discussion of these principles and their semiological extension see Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *The Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague, 1971), and Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and C. Smith (Boston, 1970).

¹³Lévi-Strauss, *SA*, I, 210 ff.

in the names of Labdacos, Laios, and Oedipus which refers to *difficulties in walking straight and standing upright*. It is a universal characteristic in myths, says Lévi-Strauss, that men born from Earth, upon emerging, either cannot walk or walk clumsily.

So, now that he has isolated the mythemes, how does Lévi-Strauss proceed to find out what the myth means? Because the myth juxtaposes the two pairs of oppositions, he concludes that the myth provides

. . . a kind of logical tool which relates the original problem—born from one or born from two?—to the derivative problem: born from different or born from same? By a correlation of this type, the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it. Although experience contradicts theory, social life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure. Hence cosmology is true.¹⁴

The purpose of all myths is “to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction.”¹⁵ If the nature of the contradiction is real and therefore impossible to overcome, the myth will displace the original opposition with another which allows mediation.

Two opposite terms with no intermediary always tend to be replaced by two equivalent terms which admit of a third one as a mediator; then one of the polar terms and the mediator become replaced by a new triad, and so on.¹⁶

All of these mediations, of course, are illusory, but the structuring process innate to the human mind finds exercise in reconciling these oppositions. The activity produces a pleasurable emotion similar to “aesthetic experience” but could more accurately be described as a catharsis of clarification.¹⁷

IV. Both Jung and Lévi-Strauss assert meaning-giving as the essential human function, and they both use mythology to illustrate how this function operates unconsciously within the psyche. Both interpreters are motivated by a sense of crisis. If the future is to be livable, they say, man must stay in touch with the archaic and unconscious psychic levels. Jung quite openly internalizes the traditional religious and metaphysical beliefs by treating them as projections of the psyche. To rescue the past and now defunct efficacy of religion,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966), 22 ff. For the marriage of clarification with the traditional catharsis theory in aesthetics, see the commentary in O. B. Hardison and Leon Golden (eds.), *Aristotle's Poetics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1968), 133 ff.

he uncovers its true roots. Supplanting the bogus claims of divine revelations, Jung gives mythology a new origin in Nature itself. We must dispense with worn out images of God, themselves products of a particular age and time, and realize that God is a psychic projection embodying itself over and over again in history. One must not reify any of these historical images into an entity but focus on their true source in "an omnipresent, unchanging, and everywhere identical condition or substrate of the psyche per se."¹⁸ This condition demanded and anticipated by the psyche is wholeness or completion. God is but a symbol of Self, of a psychic wholeness that man eternally pursues. Jung, like Freud, believes that most traditional religion is an illusion. Unlike the Freudian reduction, however, Jung's psychologizing of religion doesn't offend many religionists because his psyche and nature includes an inherent teleology. Says Jung, "the spiritual . . . is not derived from any other instinct, as the psychologists of instinct would have us believe, but is a principle *sui generis*, a specific and necessary form of instinctual power."¹⁹ The concept of God remains impossibly paradoxical because it is a projection of the necessary reconciliation of spirit and instinct within the psyche itself. In fact, God is just another name for nature (as it was for Spinoza) but now viewed as psychic energy, a bipolar process:

. . . the spiritual principle (whatever that may be) asserts itself against the merely natural conditions with incredible strength. One can say that this, too, is "nature," and that both have their origin in one and the same "nature." I do not in the least doubt this origin, but must point out that this "natural" something consists of a conflict between principles, to which you can give this or that name according to taste, and that this opposition is the expression, and perhaps also the basis, of the tension we call psychic energy.²⁰

It is this psychic energy or tension of opposites that underlies the attempted mediation of all symbolism and mythology. Man, the symbol-producing animal, transforms excess instinctual energy into religious, artistic, scientific, and other social products of value. Because the symbol mediates between and reconciles the conscious and unconscious levels of the psyche, the symbolic function belongs to the nature of the psyche itself and operates necessarily and always. But as man's consciousness widens and civilization progresses, human will imposes itself more and more imperiously and self-sufficiently. The ego tends to displace the Self, the part to usurp the whole, and a healthy ongoing dialectic becomes immobilized and paralyzed by an ego no longer servant and beneficiary of the indi-

¹⁸ Jung, "Aion," 6.

¹⁹ Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche* (Princeton, 1969), 58.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

viduating process but a jealous dictator imperiously extending its domain. Thus it is that modern man is both alienated in and alienator of his condition. Instead of subordinating the ego to the individuating process, he allows the ego to oppose itself to nature and the unconscious.

As scientific understanding has grown, so our world has become dehumanized. Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional unconscious "identity" with natural phenomena. These have lost their symbolic implications . . . and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied. Dream symbols which compensate for this loss and remain in touch with our original nature find it difficult to be translated into "the rational words and concepts of modern speech." Our language no longer participates mystically in the things it describes. We have "matter" instead of "the Great Mother" and "intellect" instead of "the Father of All." All our thoughts have to fit the limited ego-rationality of man and this denial of the unconscious puts modern man at the mercy of his psychic "underworld."²¹

The remedy for the dissociation described above is to help and strengthen the unconscious in its performance of the compensatory function.

Contrasted with Jung's optimism and teleology, Lévi-Strauss comes on *triste* and nostalgic about the past. Despite their temperamental differences, however, Lévi-Strauss' message is remarkably similar to that of Jung. We must swing away from our accelerating "hot" culture which exploits men and materials and learn from the so-called "primitives" how to live in harmony with Nature and our fellow man. Lévi-Strauss shares Rousseau's attitude towards Western civilization: that it is decadent and hostile to man. By "exposing the flaws of a humanism decidedly unable to establish the exercise of virtue among men," Rousseau helped overcome an illusion of the "exclusive dignity of human nature, which subjected nature itself to a first mutilation" and which led, after this first separation of humanity from animality, to that of a superiority of some over others. By studying primitive man (not just the Greeks and Romans or Eastern civilizations) ethnology advocates that the "identification with all forms of (human) life proposed to man today is the principle for all collective wisdom and action." Man can no longer claim any special privilege in order to dominate either Nature or other beings.²² The beneficiary of this attitude is the entire earth, for man and nature would be reconciled "in a generalized humanism."²³ The latent universal laws re-

²¹ Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (Garden City, 1964), 95.

²² Lévi-Strauss, *SA*, trans. Monique Layton (New York, 1976), II, 49.

²³ *Ibid.*, 274.

vealed by structural anthropology as working in human minds everywhere and always will help induce brotherhood and humility in a Nature of which man is not master but a subordinated part.

Not only are Jung and Lévi-Strauss alike in their aim to jump the gap from culture back to nature, but so are their means: their remedy seeks to relate conscious to unconscious functions in a proper fashion. If man is the animal symbolicum, then the norm will have to be to keep him signifying and producing meaning. Blockages or failure to achieve meaning become the greatest dysfunction or adversary. The two words that establish this norm in their respective systems are *compensation* and *equilibrium*. As the words already indicate, the problem will continually be to balance between two extremes (whatever they might be). In both systems, the extremes function with and against each other, never in isolation.

Time and again, Jung elevates the compensatory process over any historical result:

Not for a moment dare we succumb to the illusion that an archetype can be finally explained and disposed of. Even the best attempts at explanation are only more or less successful translations into another metaphorical language. (Indeed, language itself is only an image.) The most we can do is to *dream the myth onwards* and give it a modern dress.²⁴

While the results of "dreaming the myth onwards" should be beneficial to the dreamer in that the ego draws ever nearer the Self, yet this approximation is never ending. Never will these two coincide. As Jung says elsewhere, "the serious problems in life, however, are never fully solved. If ever they should appear to be so, it is a sure sign that something has been lost. The meaning and purpose of a problem seem to lie not in its solution but in our working at it incessantly. This alone preserves us from stultification and petrification."²⁵ Again, though Jung identifies such recurring archetypes as the Wise Old Man, the Child, Earth Goddess, Shadow, etc., they function positively or negatively depending on what compensation is called for.

It is an essential characteristic of psychic figures that they are duplex or at least capable of duplication; at all events they are bipolar and oscillate between their positive and negative meanings. Thus, the "supraordinate" personality can appear in a despicable and distorted form, like . . . Mephistopheles, who is really more positive as a personality than the vapid and unthinking careerist Faust.²⁶

²⁴ Jung, *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (Princeton, 1969), 79.

²⁵ Jung, "The Stages of Life" in *Collected Works* (New York, 1960), VIII, 394.

²⁶ Jung, *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, 157.

In her book, *C. G. Jung: His Myth for Our Time* (1975), Marie-Louise von Franz cites a study of "a number of criminals who had lived out their darker side uninhibitedly," which found that "the shadow figure in the unconscious (of these criminals) exhibited moral, even noble traits."²⁷ Similarly, Jung's other archetypes incorporate opposed values, e.g., Old Wise Man/Spirit Goblin; Earth Goddess/Witch; clever, helpful animal/animal sorcerer; precious mineral/poison. While the archetypes do seem to operate with certain universal oppositions—male/female, light/darkness, life/death—the images themselves do not have a fixed inherent value but fluctuate according to compensatory demand.

Lévi-Strauss' criticism of Jung is then only partially correct. Jung's unconscious may have content, but the archetypes are so ambivalent that in their compensatory function they operate as rigorously binary and formal, as does Lévi-Strauss' system. In his turn, Lévi-Strauss abstracts from myths quite general latent oppositions which resemble Jung's reconciliations and operate just as flexibly. He insists that the correspondence which exists between the unconscious meaning of a myth—the problem it tries to solve—and the conscious content it makes use of to reach that end (i.e., the plot or narrative) can appear as a logical transformation instead of an exact reproduction. If meanings are diacritical and arise from units in oppositional relationship, then the same unit can have either positive or negative value, depending on context. For example, in the various Hopi myths about the origin of Shalako, the god Masauwu is depicted as both helpful and harmful to mankind. His role and function changes relative to his oppositional relationship to other gods who appear in the many variants. By applying a law of permutation (an algebraic formula), Lévi-Strauss can interpret a host of myths as variations of a few underlying oppositions. The chaotic and impenetrable mythic narratives can then find their resolution as inverted repetitions or mirror images of a few latent problems which engendered and power them all. His four-volumed *Mythologiques* study the permutations of a few themes through several hundred American Indian myths. To make this more concrete and also to indicate how myths are exercises in equilibrium, let us return to the Oedipus myth. The Oedipal myth has incest as its motif. Furthermore, the incest motif appears in myths invariably accompanied by the solving of a riddle. The reason "why diverse cultures always assimilate the discovery of incest to the solution of a living puzzle personified by the hero" (the Sphinx riddle) is that "like the solved riddle, incest brings together terms meant to remain separate." Incest and riddles go together, says Lévi-Strauss,

²⁷ Franz, 69-70.

because they are analogues of reason. What permutation happens if we replace our incestuous hero with one innocent and chaste, e.g., like Parsifal? We find a situation equally bad but for the exact opposite reason: the hero fails to ask the right question. The Oedipal and Parsifal myths reflect the same problem but as inverted mirror-images, so that "there is a relationship between incest: the question without an answer and chastity: the answer without a question." Tautologically repetitive, the myths obliquely affirm this truth:

To the two possibilities which could capture his imagination—a summer or a winter equally eternal, the former licentious to the point of corruption, the latter pure to the point of sterility— man must resign himself to preferring the equilibrium and periodicity of seasonal rhythm. In the natural order, the latter fulfills the same function as the exchange of women in marriage and the exchange of words in conversation do in society, provided that they are both practiced with the frank intention of communicating: in other words, without ruse or perversity, and above all without hidden motives.²⁸

The attraction of imposing an Hegelian formalism on the working of the unconscious psyche (which both these systems do) lies in stabilizing time and history in an eternal present. When an anthropological positivist and a psychological idealist leave their causal and teleological positions to meet in a transhistorical formalism, they contribute to and participate in the main intellectual current of the last half century. But if formalism has peaked with the recent awareness of the "structuring of structure," as Roland Barthes claims, what critique could a post-structuralist view offer to man as reconciler?²⁹ To continue functioning without getting stuck on self-serving interests or group ideology, obviously, has merit. What must not be retained is the desire to break through the culture/nature gap in order to bolster the human enterprise of giving meaning. Particularly, is this true of myth interpretations. Myths are no more privileged than any other cultural phenomena to be direct emanations of an unconscious "natural psyche." Myths are not natural objects but symbolic conventions. Mythemes and archetypes reverberate in the given conventions of a particular culture, not as harmonies of a universal mind. Both Jung and Lévi-Strauss are guilty of wanting to establish an Archimedean point outside history, in Derrida's terms, to establish a Presence or Origin which will legitimize their system.³⁰ They naturalized the reconciliation of oppositions so that mythology became an

²⁸ Lévi-Strauss, *SA*, II, 24.

²⁹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers and C. Smith (New York, 1972), 109 ff.

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1978), 278 ff.

unconscious immanent aesthetic balancing the psyche with itself as well as the individual with his environment. What is now necessary to realize is that the metalanguage whereby one interprets myths cannot escape having the same conventional basis as do myths themselves.

The fact that form is not a necessary and sufficient determination of meaning is a continuing condition of the production of meaning. Sign is not governed by any *arche* or *telos*, origin or final cause. The conventions which govern signs in particular types of discourse are epiphenomena: they are themselves transitory cultural products.³¹

What post-structuralist criticism concedes to our two myth analysts is that they brilliantly exposed the contributions of the unconscious psyche in creating man's world. In doing so, they expanded our consciousness of something hidden operating behind our backs. By making us aware of unconscious workings and compulsions they made it possible to further our rational self-understanding. But their theories did not go far enough. Equilibrium and compensation are relational terms expressing the dominance of process and function over substance and essence. Both theorists try to escape the undermining of their first principles by making the unconscious an open-ended activity whose semantic claims are subordinated to the psyche's unconscious balancing function. In both cases, however, this adjustment to historic change is nestled safely in a timeless, synchronic system. While deeply aware of the power of historic change, both Jung and Lévi-Strauss still assert a privileged a-historical position for their attempts at self-understanding. What post-structuralism and also the hermeneutical philosophy of Heidegger and Gadamer criticize is that self-reflection cannot escape finite limits and operate free from all prejudices but must itself be included in the ongoing dialogue of the present with the past out of which comes the future. The situationless, "natural" psyche on which both Lévi-Strauss and Jung secure their methodology does not exist universally in Nature but historically in Culture. In Gadamer's words:

In the last analysis, all understanding is self-understanding, but not in the sense of a preliminary self-possession or of one finally and definitively achieved. For the self-understanding only realizes itself in the understanding of a subject matter and does not have the character of a free self-realization. The self that we are does not possess itself; one could say that it "happens."³²

Both Derrida and Gadamer claim that the function of self-understanding can never sink to a self-transparency or self-

³¹ Jonathan Cullers, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca, 1975), 248.

³² Hans Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley, 1976), 55.

possession, something static and timeless. The gap between nature (the Other) and culture cannot be bridged.

V. Undoubtedly, this attack on formalism brings to end an intellectual epoch dominated by such referential concepts as organicism, gestalt, system, holism, and structuralism. We have moved "beyond formalism" into the self-reflexivity of post-structuralism, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, and the pragmatics of literature. What produced this move is the realization that epistemic formalism is still a variant of Western metaphysics. Both the Heideggerian destruction of metaphysics and the Derridean deconstruction of the metaphors of presence have as their intent to "demystify," to liberate mankind from intellectual procedures leading to bogus transhistorical entities. The outcome of this "demystification" has been to historicize human existence into the meaning-giver who can never separate or disengage his product from the process which brings it into being. Yet it does make a small difference to account for this process negatively rather than positively. Both Derrida and Heidegger view language as the mediator between man and his environment. For Derrida, language communicates through a present/absent relationship, building its meanings not on identity but on difference, with the result that meanings so founded are ultimately "undecidable."³³ This approach with its "free-play of signifiers" makes "free-play" an ultimate value and showcases it in the "deconstruction" of existing texts. We become free (demystified) of our bondage to existing ideologies and myths by a nihilistic interdiction within the meaning-giving procedure itself that precludes forever the identification of Culture with Nature, a sign with its referent. Left then with having to explain the motivation for meaning-giving as a fruitless attempt to "fill the void," Derrida and other post-structuralists go to Nietzsche, Marx, or Freud for their energy source. Meaning-giving becomes disguised sexuality, self-interest, or will-to-power. All language becomes valorized and politicized.³⁴ Consequently, as there is no interest-free meaning,

³³ The whole issue of deconstruction (with its rejection of binary logic) is much too complicated to go into here. The reader is referred to the special number on "Deconstructive Criticism: Directions," *SCE Report 8* (Fall 1980) of the Society for Critical Exchange. Other helpful discussions include Jonathan Culler's essay on Derrida in *Structuralism and Since* (Oxford, 1979) and Gayatri Spivak's introduction to Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, 1976). The undecidability of language is best expressed in Derrida's *La Dissémination* (Paris, 1972) soon to be published in English by the University of Chicago Press.

³⁴ For an attack on post-structuralist criticism, especially Roland Barthes' critique of Balzac's *Sarrasine*, as an example of "the liberation of the text from its own constraints . . . affirmed in a language unabashedly political," see Eugene Goodheart, *The Failure of Criticism* (Cambridge, 1978).

every closure declaring itself “foundational,” the really “real,” the “ultimate” particle or *telos*, must be undercut because every such closure must perforce be idolatry. In this version, there is no truth of correspondence; there is only conventional truth, the coherence of conventional agreement limited by time and place.

The hermeneutical tradition of Heidegger comes to much the same conclusion but states it more positively. This tradition remains “theological” or “presence” oriented because Heidegger “de-structs” the history of Western metaphysics as the “forgetting of Being” so that in his critique there does still seem to be a cognitive reference to some entity called “Being” whose forgetting constitutes the history of metaphysics. But it is obvious that this term “Being” can never be defined or made “present”; it operates regulatively.³⁵ Whereas traditional theology “founds” cultural pursuits in terms of a deity more or less specified, Heidegger justifies meaning-giving as man’s answer to the call of Being, as a human function inherently religious as process but not as product. Human motivation expressed as *Gelassenheit* or “listening to Being” participates in divinity (the authentic), but human products, limited and distorted by their historical concerns and parameters, will always remain partial and mundane. Of the various justifications for human meaning-giving, I find the Heideggerian motivation of “letting Being be” somehow more adequate and less derivative than the post-structuralist offerings of Nietzschean will-to-power, Marxist materialism, and Freudian desire. These latter motivations can illuminate selected cultural activities but cannot serve adequately and without strain as motivation for culture as a whole.

However, I do not wish to argue the merits of hermeneutical justification over that of post-structuralism. Instead, I wish to draw attention to certain consequences for human self-understanding to which they both contribute. If it is true that we can never escape from the “hermeneutical circle” or from culture viewed as a “chain of

³⁵ See David Couzens Hoy, “Forgetting the Text: Derrida’s Critique of Heidegger” in *Boundary 2* (Fall 1972), 232: “Heidegger and Derrida do differ on whether language has built into it a transcendental need for referentiality, but this disagreement should not lead to the misconstrual of Heidegger as a metaphysical dualist with a correspondence theory of truth. Heidegger, in this respect like Derrida, is quite effective in showing the emptiness of traditional philosophical dualisms. Furthermore, there is no such thing as *the* meaning of Being, according to Heidegger, and one suspects that he gradually comes to realize that “Being” is merely a metalinguistic notion resulting from a transcendental deduction based on the *need* for something to which language could refer. Although this result still puts Heidegger at odds with Derrida, it is a much weaker conclusion than would follow if he were actually presupposing the metaphysics of presence.”

signifiers" which will never break through to their referents, that unmediated Nature is a phantasm, that Culture is a man-made horizon wherein both I and the Other find and transform our identities, that Truth is a matter of convention and that there is no neutral "objective" ground which can adjudicate rival truth claims, then how does one initiate cultural change and decide between alternatives in order to legitimize them? One cannot legitimate a specific change by referring it to the call of Being or to the general exercise of human freedom, except in the rhetorical manner of every reformer and prophet in the past. If the distinction between myth and science, traditionally expressed as between the false and the true, no longer holds and scientific descriptions of Nature receive their legitimation only from cultural beliefs and practices, then the sciences of today become the myths of tomorrow. No longer do "privileged representations" exist anywhere. The only standard or guide left to us is pragmatic.³⁶ Precariously balanced between the pluralism and rationalizations of the various interest groups on one side and the possible reactionary repression of monistic absolutists on the other, human existence should be viewed as an ongoing conversation wherein anomaly and convention face each other and become assimilated through human praxis. Change can only receive its legitimation through a consensus of opinion freely derived from as wide a circle of co-responders as possible. Only in the communication process itself, from which culture and individual *Bildung* emerge, does the ultimate value of human existence reside.

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³⁶ This is the conclusion found in Richard Rorty's recent book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979) which brilliantly weaves together the Anglo-American pragmatism of James, Dewey, Quine, and Wittgenstein with the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer. My position owes much to his arguments, especially to Part III of his book. Also relevant is Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston, 1979).

APPENDIX

	non-nasal			nasal		
labial	p	b		m		front
non-labial	t	d		n		
	k	g		n (ing)		back
	voiceless			voiced		

As the table above makes clear, the phoneme *p* is established as a unique acoustic category within the language system (only partially given here) through the presence of the distinctive features "voiceless," "labial," "front," "non-nasal" all operating simultaneously. If in the word *pes* (pace), the voiceless feature of *p* becomes voiced, the result would be *bes* (base). Similar substitutions of features can be made for each of the three phonemes while their combination still contributes to the articulation of a higher meaningful unit, e.g., *pis* (peace); *pez* (pays). To be able to substitute one phoneme for another is called the paradigmatic or metaphoric relationship in phonetics. The linkage of one phoneme to another to form a morpheme or word is called the syntagmatic or metonymic relationship.—from Manfred Bierwisch's *Modern Linguistics* (1971).