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Professor Claude Lévi-Strauss arouses a storm of controversy with the publication of each new work. Recently, the Association of Social Anthropologists of Great Britain published a volume of essays interpreting his work and theories and, as the editor remarks, for each contribution there is a different interpretation (Leach 1967). Perhaps this is only appropriate for a scholar with as complicated and, in its own way, playful a mind as Lévi-Strauss has. Much of his writing is designed to trap his commentators. After Edmund Leach observed that *La Pensée Sauvage* could be translated as either "Savage Thought" or "Wild Violets," Lévi-Strauss pointed out that it was a typically British trait to replace pansy with violet merely to avoid using that word! After several learned essays on the significance of musical notions in Lévi-Strauss' analysis of South American culinary myths, *Le Cru et Le Cuit*, the author tells us that he entitled one chapter "Sonata" because he found it long and boring (Steiner 1966). All of this is appropriate in discussing the work of a scholar whose major method of analysis seems to be the resolution of apparent contradictions. It would be easy, given these kinds of reactions, to dismiss the furor over Lévi-Strauss as a passing fad. This is an attitude that is not uncommon in anthropology today, and I believe that it is a mistake.

As someone who is mildly addicted to *La Pensée Lévi-Straussienne*, I think that Lévi-Strauss provides us with a useful tool for the analysis of cultural systems and their relationship to social systems. I intend to devote the body of this paper to demonstrating that point. The remainder of the paper will be divided into two sections. The first one will be a survey of some of Lévi-Strauss' general ideas. The purpose of this section will be not so much to criticize Lévi-Strauss' work as to make it intelligible. The presentation will be what I think is the most sensible and useful way to view Lévi-Strauss' ideas. The second section will begin with a presentation of that topic on which Lévi-Strauss' ideas are clearest, totemism, and then go on to my own analysis of the totemic system of the Tallensi of Ghana, after the manner of Lévi-Strauss. This analysis will be drawn from the empirical work of Meyer Fortes, who in some ways is the theoretical figure in social anthropology most opposed to Lévi-Strauss. The analysis will be useful in three ways: 1) it will be an empirical test of the usefulness of Lévi-Strauss' ideas in that it will demonstrate that further conclusions can be drawn from a seemingly familiar body of data; 2) it will show that some modifications of Lévi-Strauss' model are necessary if it is to be used for structural concerns; and 3) it will show that certain types of data which are
not ordinarily collected in social anthropological research are required for the kind of analysis that Lévi-Strauss' ideas propose.

I.

It is extremely difficult to present a coherent picture of Lévi-Strauss' ideas. He has written on many disparate subjects. His first theoretical monograph was on the role of cross-cousin marriage in human society and since then he has written on totemism, primitive art, the caste system of India, models of social structure, and the poetry of Charles Baudelaire. I do not find Lévi-Strauss' own theoretical pronouncements about his intellectual affinities to be very useful. They lead to conclusions, like Murphy, that Lévi-Strauss is a "Zen-Marxist" (1965), which shed no light for me on the nature or validity of Lévi-Strauss' ideas.

There are, however, two themes which occur repeatedly in his works and which are useful to me in attempting to understand what he is trying to do. 1) He says that he is interested in structures which are not empirical entities but rather models, and 2) his mode of analysis often consists of applying the methods of linguistics to other domains of culture. This is a vague enough program and the same could be said, for example, about what is called the "new ethnography," the work of those anthropologists who have applied the methods of linguistics to the analysis of indigenous conceptual systems. The goals of Lévi-Strauss and the new ethnographers seem to be quite different, however. The new ethnographer's aim is to present a complete repertoire of the culture which he is studying so that he can respond as a member of that culture would respond. (This is a goal which could be criticized in itself.) Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, seems to be attempting something quite different. If a member of a culture whose religious system he had analyzed were presented only with the results of that analysis, he would never recognize the results, the "structural model," as belonging to his culture as, indeed, it does not.

What then is Lévi-Strauss trying to get at and why all this talk about linguistics? It is here that the relationship between Lévi-Strauss' work and modern linguistics can be discussed. The goal of an analysis in linguistics is to elicit spoken units of language and then to analyze from these units the elements out of which they are composed. The result of this analysis is a model called the structure of the language, and, at different levels, there are different structures. Thus, the phonological level contains the significant sounds which contrast with each other and give meaning to units of language; the morphological level contains units (somewhat corresponding to words) which contrast with each other and give meaning to spoken units of language and the syntactical level contains units (elements of grammar) which contrast with each other and give meaning to language. The kind of analysis that Lévi-Strauss does is related in a number of ways to the kind of linguistic analysis that is described above. First, Lévi-Strauss' analysis takes place on a number of levels. In his interesting analysis of a Northwest coast myth, the story of Asdiwal (1966), he analyzes the myth on a number of different levels: the geographical, the sociological, and the cosmological.

Another way in which his analysis is like that of a linguist's is that the result, the structure, is not made up of the recognizable elements. An ordinary speaker of a language is no more aware of the sound system of that language than he is aware of the "structural" meaning of his myths. Finally, the methods of Lévi-Strauss are those of linguistics. Lévi-Strauss establishes the elements of his structures by use of the linguistic methods of complementarity and opposition. I can best illustrate these methods with reference to the phonological level of linguistic analysis. In some languages the sounds represented by P and B are used interchangeably in words and there is no difference in meaning between the two. In English this is not so. If one looks at the words pit and pit, he can see that the initial sounds are opposed in that the difference in the two sounds is correlated with the difference in meaning between the words. On the other hand, in some languages such as Zulu, a stressed P, represented by P’, constrasts with an unstressed P. In English, once again, this is not so. The stressed P, P’, always occurs at the beginning and end of words and the unstressed P occurs in the middle of words. This is illustrated by the word P’aPer. P’ and P are then said to complement each other. By dividing whatever system it is that he is studying into opposed and complementary units, Lévi-Strauss hopes to establish a set of interdependent elements which he calls the structure of the original system.

We are now brought to the question of the kind of phenomena to which Lévi-Strauss applies his methods and ideas. For the purpose of this paper, I am going to restrict myself to Lévi-Strauss' analysis of cultural systems, particularly to what is conventionally called religion. There is a discontinuity between Lévi-Strauss' analysis of social systems and his analysis of cultural systems. I think that this is because the phenomena that constitute social systems do not respond as well as cultural phenomena to Lévi-Strauss' methods. He seems at times to be aware of this and there is an interesting discussion of the problems involved in the differing modes of analysis in his essay on social structure (1963b). In his more programmatic statements, however, he does not make this distinction.

Most social anthropologists, when analyzing religion, generally take ritual behavior as their basic unit of analysis. Gluckman and his colleagues provide an excellent example of this (1962, 1965). Two problems are examined: 1) the relationship of the ideas and values expressed in the ritual to the social structure of the participant's society, and 2) the contribution of ritual values to social cohesion (see esq. Fortes 1936). Lévi-Strauss rarely deals with problems of ritual. He restricts himself almost entirely to conceptual systems, myths, and stories. I think this is because Lévi-Strauss' theoretical position is inadequate for dealing with standard social anthropological problems. (It can be said with equal justice that the theoretical position of the conventional social anthropologist is inadequate to do justice to standard Lévi-Straussian problems.) Lévi-Strauss seeks to discover the underlying inherent meanings of the myths, etc., that he
examin es. In the linguistic and computer terminology that he is fond of using, he seeks to discover the "messages encoded" in the myths, etc. It is quite clear from his analysis that the meanings are not manifest at the content level of whatever phenomenon it is that he seeks to study; the meanings are inherent at the "structural" level and members of the cultures from which he draws his data need not be conscious of the meaning of the myths, as they need not be conscious of the phonological structure of their language.

When all of the linguistic sleight-of-hand is finished, we find that the kinds of meanings which Lévi-Strauss abstracts tend to be all of one kind. The messages that Lévi-Strauss extracts from his cultural phenomena are attempts at solutions to problems that are irresolvable at an empirical level. These problems are of two kinds. The first are problems endemic to the human condition. The second are problems endemic to specific societies. An example of the second exam ines.

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Lévi-Strauss' linguistic affinities do not necessarily lead him to view the structure of cultural systems as attempts to resolve empirically irresolvable problems. This is a consequence, I think, of his Durkheimian influences. I note that Luckmann, a scholar with whom Lévi-Strauss has very little in common except Durkheimian influence, has the same perspective on religion. In his chapter on "the anthropological condition of religion" in The Invisible Religion, he views religion as resolving the problem of the transition from Nature to Culture, a major theme of Lévi-Strauss. Luckmann, however, is a more optimistic writer than Lévi-Strauss. For him, religion fulfills its function; for Lévi-Strauss (even though he nowhere defines religion), it does not. This can be seen in the following uncharacteristically clear quote:

\[\ldots\] the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if, as it happens, the contradiction is real) (1963b: 229).

So far I have attempted to present a general outline of Lévi-Strauss' ideas about and methods for the analysis of cultural systems. In doing this, I have neglected a number of important aspects of Lévi-Strauss' ideas: the role of the concept of reciprocity in his theories, his attempt to reduce all structures to dualistic oppositions, and the debate over his so-called intellectualist psychological reductionism. I am not sure that Lévi-Strauss would recognize what I have presented above as bearing a functional relationship to his ideas. However, for me, it is the most understandable perspective on a complex body of ideas. It must be recognized that a Lévi-Straussian perspective does not present a comprehensive view of religious systems. Lévi-Strauss' perspective is what Fortes would call a "message-centered" perspective rather than an "actor-centered" one. The message-centered perspective fails to take account of the actor-centered view in which "... observances are primarily moral imperatives... their contents objectify norms and principles that focus a person's conception of his social identity and of his commitment to his roles and statuses" (1967, p. 5).

In order to objectify what has been presented above, the next section will deal with specifics: Lévi-Strauss' ideas about totemism and my own analysis of Tallensi totemism.

II.

Lévi-Strauss has put forward a deceptively simple theory of totemism (1963a). One of the essential aspects of human thought, he says, is its dualistic nature. Contrast and opposition are essential qualities of the logical processes of thought. One contrast that has occupied a prominent place in human thought has been the contrast between nature and culture and this contrast has been used, in the case of so-called "totemic peoples," to exemplify differences and similarities between social groups, relations, and/or categories. Thus, one might arrive at the not unstartling conclusion that totems serve as diacritical markings for some social series. That is, totems are emblems. But Lévi-Strauss goes further. He suggests that the real essence of the nature-culture duality involves similar contrasts on both the conceptual level of nature and culture in the thought of a totemic people. Thus, those distinctions that in a classificatory system are used to separate two otherwise identically classified members are the same distinctions applied in a different system. These distinctions, in the case of totemism, are in one instance natural and, in the other, cultural. We may say that distinctions in a natural series are paralleled by distinctions in a cultural series. In any totemic system, what distinguishes A from B in any given natural series is that same criterion which distinguishes X from Y in any given cultural series.

One illustration of this is Leach's analysis of Trobriand clans and the kin category tabu (1958). He tries to demonstrate that a cultural series, four indigenously defined categories of hamlets where potentially to non-potentially marriageable women may reside, is replicated in a natural series, the animals associated with the emergence of clans, that is, clan origin. His otherwise ingenious analysis is incomplete, however, in that he does not state the differentiating factors of both the natural series and the cultural series. In the end, he leaves us unconvinced. A mere assertion of numerical similarity (4 and 4) is not enough.

A better example, which is borrowed from Radcliffe-Brown, is the one Lévi-Strauss uses in his book Totemism (1963a). Two Australian moieties have as totems Eaglehawk and Crow. When the proper questions are asked, we find that Eaglehawk and Crow are both classed as meat-eaters, but one is a hunter and the other is a carrion-eater. Instead of competing for meat, they cooperate
63. in the quest. This, ideally, is the state the two moieties should be in, cooperation. Returning to the theme of religion as cognitive problem-solving, Lévi-Strauss says about this example:

Totemism is thus reduced to a particular fashion of formulating a general problem, viz., how to make opposition, instead of being an obstacle to integration, serve rather to produce it (1963a: 89).

A further example will be an aspect of the totemic system of the Tallensi of Ghana. The Tallensi are an appropriate object for analysis for a number of reasons. They have been studied by Fortes who in many ways is the theorist most opposed to Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss has carefully examined and discussed the Tallensi data (1963a), so it will be interesting to see if conclusions can be obtained from his methods which he did not obtain himself. Lastly, as will be seen from the analysis, the data are interesting for a number of theoretical reasons.

The Tallensi are the classical example of the patrilineal-patrilocal society. They are located in the "Sudanic zone" of tropical West Africa. When studied by Fortes, 1934–1938, they had had little contact with Western culture and the Pax Britannica seen from the analysis, the data are interesting for a number of theoretical reasons.

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I do not want to go into all of the totemic observances of the Tallensi. They have been fully analyzed by Fortes. Instead, I want to discuss the major totems of both the Namoos and Talis, which I think can be further analyzed. The Namoos first-born are obliged to avoid the guinea-fowl and this is explained by the following myth:

The fowl taboo, Namoos say, came about because 'a fowl did a great service to our ancestor.' He had a wife, and people came to her with slander of her husband, trying thus to persuade her to leave him. This made her very unhappy. But one day a broody hen sitting in the woman's grinding room told her not to weep. When her husband returned from the farm she must prepare a drink of flour-water for him, said the fowl, and it would fly up and dash the calabash from his hand. If he then killed the fowl in anger the woman would know that he was a wicked man, and if he spared it she would know that people were slandering him maliciously. When the man came home, the plan was carried out. Far from injuring the fowl, the man merely said, "The fowl is thirsty." Thus his wife knew that people had been deceiving her and she remained with him. Afterwards she bore a daughter, and vowed solemnly that her child should never eat fowl. Later a son followed, and the man declared that the boy too must refrain from eating fowl. That is why the first-born son and the first-born daughter of all Namoos have the fowl-avoidance; but later children may eat it, for if they, too, were prohibited, who would consume the fowls which men sacrificed to their ancestors? (1967a: 67–68).

The myth (one of several) which the Talis have to explain their avoidance of the tortoise is as follows:

Thus, . . . . the avoidance of the tortoise and the water-tortoise among the Hill Talis began in this way: "Our (anonymous) ancestor" was suffering severely from thirst once and could find no water. He saw a tortoise crawling along and followed it. The animal reached a heap of dry leaves, which it scratched aside revealing a spring. Thereupon "our ancestor" vowed that never again would he or his descendants eat the tortoise; and as the water-tortoise is merely another species of the same family, this taboo naturally extends to it as well (1967a: 128).

At first glance the fowl and the tortoise have little in common beyond being animals. Yet, if the myths associated with the totems are manipulated in a Lévi-Straussian fashion, two complementary themes appear in both myths and apply to both men and animals. These are the themes of thirst and water-giving. In the Namoos myth, the fowl knocks the flour-water out of the anonymous ancestor's hand because the fowl is thirsty, according to the ancestor. In the Talis myth, the tortoise leads the Talis ancestor, who is very thirsty, to water. When we compare the myths we find a thirsty fowl contrasted with a water-giving tortoise as a natural series and a thirsty Tali and a water-giving Namoos as a cultural series. Two other facts may be noted. The fowl is the ritual animal par-excellence of the Tallensi and flour-water is always used in Tallensi rituals, particularly the ritual in which the Tendaana of Gbeog initiates a new chief of Tongo (1967b).

All of the above, however, is merely suggestive and, I think, lacking in significance until it is related to a central fact of Tallensi social structure. That is, that the Namoos and Talis are tied together in ritual collaboration in order to assure the fertility of the land, and that the function of the Namoos is to provide rain while the Talis ensure fertility. Thus the significance of the totemic avoidance is that each group taboos the totem of the other group. The Namoos do not taboo the fowl because it symbolizes themselves, but rather because it symbolizes the Talis, and vice versa.

From this we can obtain a possible, if unverified, hypothesis: social ties of collaboration (especially ritual collaboration) involve an inversion of the ordinary relations between totem and group. This tends to be confirmed by the fact that Talis Tendaanas must avoid cloth and guns, which are associated with the Namoo chiefship.

Among the Nuer, another African people, inversion is not found. The Nuer are a society in which relations between groups are characterized by opposition at any given level and amalgamation at a higher level. There are no
ties of political-ritual collaboration. In this society, the natural series is organized on a model taken from the cultural series. Hence, groupings of animals are believed to be descended from a common ancestor and to form lineages. These lineages are then related to human lineages (Evans-Pritchard 1956).

The negative evidence given above lends support to the hypothesis. What is now needed are positive instances from unrelated societies. I think that is the only kind of evidence which can confirm a hypothesis of this kind, which is to some degree intuitive. Further, this analysis has been fortuitous in that the totemic myths were available. Anthropologists do not ordinarily collect enough information about totemic animals, or any other kind of animals to make this kind of analysis possible. As a final comment, I would suggest that this analysis is in one way more satisfying than an ordinary Lévi-Straussian one because I have tied both totemic practices and myths about totems to a specific element of social structure, and there has been a serious lack of this in Lévi-Strauss' work.

NOTES
1. A more typically unclear Lévi-Straussian statement is the following definition of myth: "Myth is an intermediary entity between a statistical aggregate of molecules and the molecular structure itself" (1965b, p. 229).
2. This account of the Tallensi, unless otherwise stated, will be drawn from Fortes 1938, 1940, 1967a and b, and will refer to the ethnographic present of 1938.

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Changing Factors in Limbu Death Rituals

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INTRODUCTION

Eastern Nepal is a multi-ethnic or plural community, the composition and organization of which is the result of forces more frequently operating outside the area than within it (Caplan 1970; Jones 1976a). These forces must be taken into consideration in the analysis of patterns of human adaptation in the area. Consequently, an understanding of human ecology in the mountains of eastern Nepal involves not only the study of how members of a given society and their cultural traditions relate to the techno-environmental situation but also how members of different societies with different cultural traditions relate to one another in an historical milieu.

Studies in human ecology, though quite sophisticated in many ways, sometimes gloss over the complex problems of social change, historical process, and ethnicity in their analyses of human adaptation and human "eco-systems". We are often left with the impression that people live in an historical vacuum. This is especially the case with recent attempts in America to explain belief and ritual (Harris 1974; Rappaport 1968) in ecological terms. Such analyses frequently deal with societies that lack historical records and, therefore, are either unable to consider changes that occur as a result of contact or treat such changes as incidental to "rational adaptations" to the environment. Preoccupied with ecological factors of human populations, they frequently fail to consider historical process even where written records are available. For example, Harris' (1966; 1974) explanation of the prohibition of cow slaughter in India glosses over the tremendous amount of historical material available to the classical Indian scholar. Many groups in India and Nepal have adopted such prohibitions as a result of political conquest and subjugation, not out of a "rational" appreciation for the value of the animal.

With belief and ritual, as I intend to demonstrate in this paper, there is something more involved than simply "adaptation to an ecological niche" or the "rationalization of the material means of existence". Beliefs and rituals are frequently modified, altered, accommodated, discarded, and renewed on the basis of power relations as a result of human contact that has little or nothing to do with "rational" techno-environmental adaptation.

In this paper, I will deal with only one aspect of this complex problem, that is, some of the ecological and political conditions that influence the death rituals of a Tibeto-Burman speaking tribal group, the Limbu. In limiting the analysis to one feature of Limbu culture and society, I point out that the