



OUTLINE OF
A THEORY OF PRACTICE

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Generative schemes and practical logic: invention within limits

The opposite gesture, that of inverting a spoon, should automatically, as it were, provoke a contrary action. This is what the wife of a *fqi*h does, among the Mtougga, to ward off imminent rainfall.

E. Laoust, *Mots et choses berbères*

"I think I've made a new theological discovery . . ."

"What is it?"

"If you hold your hands upside down, you get the opposite of what you pray for!"

Charles M. Schulz, *There's No One Like You, Snoopy*

Man differs from other animals in that he is the one most given to mimicry (*mimetikotaton*) and learns his first lessons through mimesis (*dia mimeseos*).

Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b

Objectivism constitutes the social world as a spectacle presented to an observer who takes up a "point of view" on the action, who stands back so as to observe it and, transferring into the object the principles of his relation to the object, conceives of it as a totality intended for cognition alone, in which all interactions are reduced to symbolic exchanges. This point of view is the one afforded by high positions in the social structure, from which the social world appears as a representation (in the sense of idealist philosophy but also as used in painting or the theatre) and practices are no more than "executions", stage parts, performances of scores, or the implementing of plans. With the Marx of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, the theory of practice as practice insists, against positivist materialism, that the objects of knowledge are *constructed*, and against idealist intellectualism, that the principle of this construction is practical activity oriented towards practical functions. It is possible to abandon the sovereign point of view from which objectivist idealism orders the world, without being forced to relinquish the "active aspect" of apprehension of the world by reducing cognition to a mere recording: it suffices to situate oneself *within* "real activity as such", i.e. in the practical relation to the world, the quasi-bodily "aiming" which entails no representation of either the body or the world, still less of their relationship, that active presence in the world through which the world imposes its presence, with its urgencies, its things to be done or said, things "made" to be said and said "to be done", which



directly command words and deeds without ever deploying themselves as a spectacle.

The arguments that have developed as much among anthropologists (ethnoscience) as among sociologists (ethnomethodology) around classifications and classificatory systems have one thing in common: they forget that these instruments of cognition fulfil as such functions other than those of pure cognition. Practice always implies a cognitive operation, a practical operation of construction which sets to work, by reference to practical functions, systems of classification (taxonomies) which organize perception and structure practice. Produced by the practice of successive generations, in conditions of existence of a determinate type, these schemes of perception, appreciation, and action, which are acquired through practice and applied in their practical state without acceding to explicit representation, function as practical operators through which the objective structures of which they are the product tend to reproduce themselves in practices. Practical taxonomies, instruments of cognition and communication which are the precondition for the establishment of meaning and the consensus on meaning, exert their *structuring* efficacy only to the extent that they are themselves *structured*. This does not mean that they can be adequately treated by "structural", "componential", or any other form of strictly *internal* analysis which, in artificially wrenching them from their conditions of production and use, inevitably fails to understand their social functions.¹

The coherence to be observed in all products of the application of the same habitus has no other basis than the coherence which the generative principles constituting that habitus owe to the social structures (structures of relations between groups – the sexes or age-classes – or between social classes) of which they are the product and which, as Durkheim and Mauss saw, they tend to reproduce.² The practical operators which constitute the habitus and which function in their practical state in gesture or utterance reproduce in a *transformed form*, inserting them into the structure of a system of symbolic relations, the oppositions and hierarchies which actually organize social groups, and which they help to legitimate by presenting them in a misrecognizable form.

The calendar and the synoptic illusion

Analysis of the agrarian calendar will enable us to demonstrate, by a sort of proof *per absurdum*, the error which results from the intellectualist theory of social systems of classification. Owing to the extremely important social function which it fulfils in orchestrating the group's activity, the calendar is indeed one of the most codified aspects of social existence.³ The organization



of practices is not entrusted in this case exclusively to the practical schemes of the habitus: it is the object of explicit injunctions and express recommendations, sayings, proverbs, and taboos, serving a function analogous to that performed in a different order by customary rules or genealogies. Although they are never more than *rationalizations* devised for semi-scholarly purposes, these more or less codified objectifications are, of all the products of habitus structured in accordance with the prevailing system of classification, those which are socially recognized as the most representative and successful, those worthiest of being preserved by the collective memory; and so they are themselves organized in accordance with the structures constituting that system of classification. They thereby come to be endowed with a common "physiognomy" rendering them immediately "intelligible" for any agent equipped with the "sense" of linguistic and/or mythic roots, and are thus predisposed to make up for the lapses or uncertainties of the habitus by setting out codified references and strict guidelines.⁴

What one derives from questioning informants, thereby inviting them to adopt a quasi-scientific attitude, is a mixture, in variable proportions, of knowledges drawn from one or the other of the available traditions which, except when mechanically reproduced, is selected and often *reinterpreted* in terms of the schemes of the habitus and of representations produced *ad hoc* from the same schemes. As soon as one undertakes to draw up a synoptic calendar which combines the features most frequently attested and indicates the most important variants (instead of presenting a single calendar chosen for the sake of its particular "quality", or a set of particular calendars) one comes up against a primary difficulty: identical periods are given different names, and still more often, identical names cover periods varying considerably in length and situated at different times in the year, depending on the region, the tribe, the village, and even the informant. Moreover, at two different points in the same conversation, an informant may offer two different names (e.g. one Berber, one drawn from the Islamic tradition) for the same moment of the year.

There is a great temptation to amass and collate these different productions in order to construct a lacuna-free, contradiction-free whole, a sort of *unwritten score* of which all the calendars derived from informants are then regarded as imperfect, impoverished *performances*.⁵ The problem is that the calendar cannot be understood unless it is set down on paper, and that it is impossible to understand how it works unless one fully realizes that it exists only on paper (see fig. 2).⁶ Moreover, when it is a matter of transmitting all the useful information as quickly as possible, there is no more efficient and convenient way than a linear narrative, which permits the rapid unfolding of the succession of "periods" and "moments" (treating rival accounts as "variants").



Most informants spontaneously make the year start with autumn (*lakhriif*). For some of them, the season starts around the 1st of September in the Julian calendar; for others, it starts on about the 15th of August, on the day called "the door of the year" (*thabburth usugas*), which marks the entry into the wet period, after the dogdays of *smaim* and at the beginning of *lakhriif*: on that day, each family sacrifices a cock, and associations and contracts are renewed. But for other informants, the "door of the year" is the first day of ploughing (*lahlal natsharats* or *lahlal n thagersa*), the most decisive turning-point of the transitional period.

The tillage period (usually called *lahlal*, but sometimes *hartadem*) begins with the first day's ploughing (*awdjeb*), after an ox bought collectively has been sacrificed (*thimechret*) and the meat shared out amongst all the members of the community (*adhrum* or village). Ploughing and sowing, which begin immediately after the inaugural ceremony (which is also a rain-making rite), as soon as the land is sufficiently moist, may go on until mid-December or even longer, depending on the region and the year.

It is doubtless incorrect to speak of *lahlal* as a "period": this term, and the corresponding temporal unit, are defined practically, within the universe of the wet season, in opposition to *lakhriif* (ploughing and sowing being opposed to the picking and drying of the figs, gardening work in *thabhirth*, the summer garden, and with *la'laf*, the special attention given to the oxen weakened by treading out, so as to prepare them for ploughing); but within the same universe it may also be defined in opposition to *lyali*, the slack moment in winter. Within a quite different logic it can also be contrasted with all the other periods held to be licit for a particular type of work which would be *haram* (the illicit) if done outside those periods: for example, *lahlal lafth*, the licit period for sowing turnips (from the seventeenth day of autumn, the 3rd of September in the Julian calendar), *lahlal yifer*, the licit period for stripping the fig-trees (the end of September), etc.

For some informants, winter begins on the 15th of November, for others on the 1st of December, without any special rite (which tends to show that the opposition between autumn and winter is not strongly marked).⁷ The heart of winter is called *lyali*, the nights, "a period of forty days", within which a distinction is almost always drawn between two equal parts, *lyali thimellaline*, the white nights, and *lyali thiberkanine*, the black nights (a distinction which, as is suggested by its range of applications, is the product of an entirely abstract, formal principle of division, although informants find justifications for it in climatic changes). Once the autumn work is over, the peasants keep themselves busy, repairing their tools when they cannot leave the house, gathering grass and leaves for the cattle, and clearing the paths after heavy snowfalls. This is the slack season of the year, contrasted, as such, with *smaim*, the slack period of the dry season, or, as we have seen, with *lahlal*, a time of intense activity; but it is contrasted in another respect with the



transition from winter to spring (*essba't* or *essuba*, the "sevens"); and from yet another point of view, these are the "great nights" (*lyali kbira*) as opposed to the "lesser nights" (*lyali esghira*) of February and March, to the "shepherd's nights" and to the "nights of Hayan". The first day of *ennayer* (January), in the depth of winter, is marked by a whole set of renewal rites and taboos (in particular on sweeping and weaving), which some informants extend to the whole period of *issemaden* (the cold days) running from late December to early January.

The end of *lyali* is marked by the ritual celebration of *el'azla gennayer*, separation from *ennayer*: life has emerged on the face of the earth, the first shoots are appearing on the trees, it is "the opening" (*el ftuh*). The farmer goes out into the fields and sets up oleander branches, which have the power to drive away *maras*, the cockchafer grub; as he does so, he says, "Come out, *maras*! The *khammes* is going to kill you!" On the same day, it is said, the peasants go to their stables before sunrise and shout in the ears of the oxen: "Good news! *Ennayer* is over!" Some informants say '*azri*, the bachelor, for '*azla* ("because from that day on, spring is coming, and marriages start to be celebrated"), with a sort of play on words which is no doubt also a play on mythic roots. This is beginning of a long transitional period, a time of waiting, covered by a terminology as rich as it is confused: whereas autumn is "a whole", as one informant put it, the passage from winter to spring is a patchwork of moments which are ill defined, almost all malign, and variously named.

Thus, the term *thimgharine*, the old women, or *thamgharth*, the old woman,⁸ also known as *amerdil* (the loan) in Great Kabylia, denotes either the moment of transition from one month to another (from December to January, or January to February, or February to March, and even, at Ain Aghbel, from March to April), or the moment of transition from winter to spring. *Husum*, a learned term of Arabic origin, referring to a sura of the Koran, coexists with *hayan* (or *ahgan*) to denote the passage from *furar* to *maghres*.⁹ But the logic of magic insists that it is never possible to know exactly which is the most unpropitious moment in a period which is uncertain as a whole,¹⁰ so that the terms *thimgharine* or *husum*, relating to highly unpropitious periods, are sometimes used to denote the whole transitional period from late January to mid-March: in this case, they are made to include the four "weeks" which divide up the month of February, known collectively as *essba't* ("the sevens"), i.e. *el mwalah* (sometimes called *imighane*), the salt days; *el quarah*, the pungent days; *el swalah*, the benign days; *el fwatah*, the open days.¹¹ As the names of this series themselves testify, we find here, as in the case of the nights of January, one of the semi-explicit dichotomies which always involve an attempt at rationalization: the first two periods are malign and come at the end of winter; the last two are benign and come at the beginning of spring. In the same way, informants who identify *husum* with the fortnight straddling the end of January and the beginning of February, concentrating within it all the features characteristic of the period as a whole, distinguish a first, dangerous week and a second, more favourable week. And similarly, numerous informants (especially in the Djurdjura region) distinguish two *ahgans* (or *hayans*) – *ahgan bu akli*, the *hayan* of



the Negro, seven intensely cold days during which the freeman, seven days in which "everything on earth comes back to life".

During "*hayan week*" (the first week of March), life completes its work. Man must not disturb it by going into the fields or orchards.¹² The animals too seem to have completed their growth: weaning (*el hiyaz*) is carried out at the end of *hayan week*, on the day of the spring equinox (*adhwal gitij*, the lengthening of the sun). A tin can is struck to make a noise which will prevent the oxen – who can understand human speech on that day – from hearing what is said about "the lengthening of the days" for if they heard it, they would take fright at having to work harder. By virtue of its position, *husum* (or *hayan*) is endowed with an inaugural – and augural – character very similar to that conferred on the morning, in the cycle of the day (for example, if it does not rain, the wells will not be full all year; if it rains, that is a sign of plenty; if there is snow at the beginning, there will be many partridge eggs); it is therefore an occasion for acts of propitiation (almsgiving) and divination.

Once the days of the old woman and *husum* are over, the flock is reckoned to be saved: it is now *el fwatah*, the time for coming out, the time of births, both on the cultivated land and among the flock, and the younglings are no longer threatened by the rigours of winter. The first day of spring (*thafsuth*), the feast of greenness and infancy,¹³ has already been celebrated. All the ritual of this inaugural day of an augural period is placed under the sign of joy and of objects that bring good fortune and prosperity. The children go out into the fields to meet spring. In the open air they will eat a semolina of grilled cereals and butter. The couscous served on that day is cooked in the steam of a broth containing *adhris* (*seksu wadhris*), thapsia, a plant which causes swelling. The women abandon the taboos of the ploughing period and dye their hands with henna. They go off in groups of fifteen or twenty and bring back heath shrubs to make brooms, the euphemistic name for which is *thafarahth*, from *farah*, joy, and which, made in joy, will bring joy.

The days grow longer. There is not much work to be done (apart from tillage in the fig orchards); man has to wait for life to do its work. "In March", they say in Great Kabylia, "go and look at your crops, and take a good look"; and elsewhere: "the sun of the flowering [of the long-awaited peas and beans] empties the *douar*." The food stocks are exhausted, and the lengthening of the days is accentuated by the ban on going out into the fields (*natah* is not over) and on eating beans or other green vegetables. Hence the proverbs: "March (*maghres*) climbs like a hillside"; and "The days of March are seven-snack days."

With *natah* or *thiftirine*, the transitional period comes to an end. These terms, which denote the same period to within a few days, are both of Arabic origin and are rarely known to the peasants of the Djurdjura region (where *hayan*, or rather *ahgan*, as it is known locally, has shifted to this time of the year). During *natah* "the trees are shaken and knock together"; excessive



rain is likely, and the weather is so cold that the goat shivers in its lan-
 As in *husum*, there is a ban on entering the cultivated fields and the orchards
 (for fear of causing the death of a person or an animal). For *natah* is also the
 season of nature's awakening, of the blossoming of crops, life, and marriages.
 It is the moment for weddings and village feasts.¹⁴ And so, by a familiar device,
 some informants divide *thiftirine* or *natah* into an unfavourable period, in
 March ("the difficult days") and a favourable period ("the easy days") in
 April.

The passage from the wet season to the dry season is effected ritually and
 collectively, during *natah*, on the day of *tharurith wazal* (the return of *azal*),¹⁵
 on a date which varies from region to region because of climatic differences,
 coming either in March, after weaning, *el hiyaz*, or in April, at shearing time
 or just after, or, at the very latest, at the beginning of May: from that day
 on, the flock, which up to then went out late in the morning and came back
 relatively early, leaves early in the morning, comes back and goes out again
 in the early afternoon, and returns at sunset.

The bad weather is over for good; the *green* fields and the gardens are now
 ready to receive the rays of the sun. This is the start of the cycle of dryness
 and ripening; with *ibril*, a particularly beneficent month ("April is a downward
 slope"), a trouble-free period of relative plenty begins. Work of all sorts starts
 up again: in the fields, where the critical period of growth is over, the men
 can start the hoeing, the only important activity (which used to be inaugurated
 by the abduction of *Mata*, the "bride" of the field, a rite intended to call down
 the rain needed for the ears of the corn to develop); in the gardens, the first
 beans are picked. During the period of *nisan*, whose beneficent rain, bringing
 fertility and prosperity to every living thing, is invoked with all sorts of rites,
 the sheep are shorn and the new lambs are branded. The fact that *nisan*, like
 all transitional periods (*natah*, for example), is an ambiguous period, ill
 defined in relation to the opposition between the dry and the wet, is here
 expressed not in a division into two periods, one auspicious and the other
 inauspicious, but by the existence of inauspicious moments (*eddbagh*, the 1st
 of May, at a mysterious hour known to none), marked by various taboos
 (pruning or grafting, celebrating weddings, whitewashing houses, setting up
 the loom, setting eggs to be hatched, etc.).

As the period known as *izegzawen* "the green days" comes to an end, the
 last traces of greenery fade from the landscape; the cereals, which had been
 as "tender" (*thaleqaqth*) as a new-born baby, now begin to turn yellow. The
 changing appearance of the cornfields is indicated by the names of the ten-
 or seven-day periods into which the month of *magu* (or *mayu*) is divided. After
izegzawen come *iwraghan*, the yellow days, *imellalen*, the white days, and
iquranen, the dry days. Summer (*anebdhu*) has begun. The characteristic tasks



of the wet season, tillage (in the fig orchards) and sowing, which is still permitted in the "green days", are absolutely banned from the period known as the "yellow days". The only concern is to protect the ripening crops against the dangers which threaten them (hail, birds, locusts, etc.). The means used against predators – showers of stones, shouts (*ahahî*), scarecrows – like the collective expulsion rites (*asifedh*) that are intended to transfer the malignant forces from the territory to be protected into a cave, bush, or heap of stones, after "fixing" them on objects (dolls) or animals (e.g. a pair of birds) which are then sacrificed, are simply applications of the scheme of "transference of evil" which is set to work in the treatment of a large number of diseases – fever, madness (possession by a *djin*), sterility – and also in rites performed on fixed dates in certain villages.

According to most informants, summer begins on the seventeenth day of the month of *magu*, also called *mut el ardh* "the death of the land".¹⁶ By the last day of *iquraranen*, known as "a fiery ember has fallen into the water" (*thagli thirgith egwaman*), an expression which alludes to the tempering of iron, the action proper to the smith, everyone should have started harvesting (*essaiif*), which is completed around *in sla*, the day of the summer solstice (24 June), when purificatory fires are lit everywhere.¹⁷ When treading-out and winnowing are completed, the forty dogdays of *smaim* begin and work is suspended (just as it is in *lyali*, a period to which *smaim* is always opposed).¹⁸

In opposition to the harvesting and treading-out, *lakhriif* is seen as a slack period in the agrarian year, or rather in the grain cycle. It is also a period devoted to rest and to the celebrations of a plentiful harvest;¹⁹ as well as the newly harvested grain there are figs, grapes, and various fresh vegetables, tomatoes, sweet peppers, gourds, melons, etc. *Lakhriif* is sometimes said to begin in mid-August, at *thissemtith* (from *semti*, to start ripening), the moment when the first ripe figs appear, and *el haq* "the law" is imposed – a ban on fig-picking, even from one's own trees, with fines for disobedience. When *ichakhen* comes round (*ichakh lakhriif*, it is *lakhriif* everywhere), the fig-harvest is at its peak, and the men, the women, and the children are all kept busy; the 1st of October is *lahal yifer* (of the leaves), and now the leaves may be stripped from the fig-trees (*achraw*, from *chrew*, to strip) to feed the oxen. This date is the signal for the "withdrawal of life", the work of *iqachachen* ("the last days"), which are devoted to a thorough cleaning of the kitchen gardens, orchards, and fields, with *thaqachachth lakhriif* (the last fruit is shaken from the trees and the remaining leaves are stripped off) and "the rooting up of the garden". When all traces of life persisting in the fields after the harvest have thus been removed, the land is ready for ploughing.

This linear diagram of the agrarian year (like all discourse) at once masks



and reveals the difficulties that are encountered as soon as one ceases to take practical relations of analogy or homology singly (or in pairs) and successively, and endeavours instead to fix them simultaneously so as to cumulate them systematically. These difficulties would, no doubt, not merit our attention (in spite of the trouble and time they have cost) were it not that, as with, in another order, the statistical analysis of genealogies, they have the effect of forcing us to call into question the very operation which gave rise to them. Rigour demands not that one should occlude these contradictions by means of some rhetorical or mathematical device, so as to fall into line with the rules of the profession, but rather that one should make them the object of a reflection capable of discovering in them both the logic of the practical use of temporal oppositions (from which the contradictions arise) and, inseparably from this, the principle of the transmutation to which scholarly objectification subjects this logic.

Just as genealogy substitutes a space of unequivocal, homogeneous relationships, established once and for all, for a spatially and temporally discontinuous set of islands of kinship, ranked and organized to suit the needs of the moment and brought into practical existence gradually and intermittently, and just as a map replaces the discontinuous, patchy space of practical paths by the homogeneous, continuous space of geometry, so a calendar substitutes a linear, homogeneous, continuous time for practical time, which is made up of incommensurable islands of duration, each with its own rhythm, the time that flies by or drags, depending on what one is *doing*, i.e. on the *functions* conferred on it by the activity in progress. By distributing *guide-marks* (ceremonies and tasks) along a continuous line, one turns them into *dividing marks* united in a relation of simple succession, thereby creating *ex nihilo* the question of the intervals and correspondences between points which are no longer topologically but metrically equivalent.

Proof that *lyali*, which every informant mentions, is not "a period of forty days" (all that is said is "We are entering *lyali*") but a simple scansion of passing time, is found in the fact that different informants ascribe to it different durations and different dates: one of them even situates the first day of *ennayer* both in the middle of winter and in the middle of *lyali*, although he does not set *lyali* in the (geometric) middle of winter, thereby demonstrating that the practical grasp of the structure which leads him to think of *lyali* as the winter of winter overrides calculative reason. A number of ill-defined guide-marks (e.g. the "old women") shift according to the region and the informant, but never beyond the bounds of winter. The same logic is found in the belief that it is impossible to know exactly when a certain action should be avoided, the "period" being nothing other than the field of uncertainty between two guide-marks. A question as innocuous in appearance as "And what comes next?", inviting an informant to situate two "periods" in relation to one another in a continuous time (which does no more than state what the genealogical or chronological diagram does implicitly), has the effect of imposing an attitude to temporality which is the exact



opposite of the attitude involved practically in the ordinary use of temporal terms. Quite apart from the form which the questioning must take so as to elicit an ordered sequence of answers, everything about the inquiry relationship itself betrays the interrogator's "theoretical" (i.e. "non-practical") disposition and invites the interrogatee to adopt a quasi-theoretical attitude: the situation in which the interrogation is carried on rules out any reference to the use and conditions of use of the temporal guide-marks; the interrogation itself tacitly substitutes for discontinuous marks, intended to be used for practical ends, the calendar as an *object of thought*, predisposed to become an object of discourse and to be unfolded as a totality existing beyond its "applications" and independently of the needs and interests of its users. This explains why informants who are invited to give the calendar often start by setting out the scholarly series of successive units, such as *mwalah*, *swalah*, and *fwatah*, or *izegzawen*, *iwraghan*, *imellalen*, and *iquranen*. And also why, when they do not send the anthropologist (whom they always see as a scholar) to other scholars with his scholar's questions, they endeavour to produce the forms of learning which seem to them worthiest of being offered in reply to scholarly interrogation, substituting for the guides which really organize their practice as much as they can mobilize of the series of the constructed calendar, the months of the Moslem calendar or the "houses".²⁰ In short, by tacitly excluding all reference to the practical interest which a socially characterized agent – a man or a woman, an adult or a shepherd, a farmer or a smith, etc. – may have in dividing up the year in such-and-such a way, and in using such-and-such a temporal guide, one unwittingly constructs an *object* which exists only by virtue of this unconscious construction of both it and its operations.

The cancelling out of the practical functions of temporal guide-marks that results from the context of interrogation and from scientific recording is the hidden condition of cumulating and seriating the aggregate of the oppositions which can be produced in relation to different universes of discourse, that is, with different functions. By cumulating information which is not and cannot always be mastered by any single informant – at any rate, never on the instant – the analyst wins the *privilege of totalization* (thanks to the power to *perpetuate* that writing and all the various techniques for recording give him, and also to the abundant time he has for analysis). He thus secures the means of apprehending the logic of the system which a partial or discrete view would miss; but by the same token, there is every likelihood that he will overlook the change in status to which he is subjecting practice and its products, and consequently that he will insist on trying to answer questions which are not and cannot be questions for practice, instead of asking himself whether the essential characteristic of practice is not precisely the fact that it excludes such questions.

The totalization which the *diagram* effects by juxtaposing in the simultaneity of a single space the complete series of the temporal oppositions applied successively by different agents at different times, which can never all be mobilized together in practice (because the necessities of existence never require this sort of synoptic apprehension, tending rather to discourage it by their urgency) gives full rein to the *theoretical neutralization* which the inquiry



relationship itself produces. The establishment of a single series thus creates *ex nihilo* a whole host of relations (of simultaneity, succession, or symmetry, for example) between terms and guide-marks of different levels, which, being produced and used in different situations, are never brought face to face in practice and are thus compatible practically even when logically contradictory. The synoptic diagram takes all the temporal oppositions which can be collected and assembled and distributes them in accordance with the laws of succession (i.e. (1) "y follows x" excludes "x follows y"; (2) if y follows x and z follows y, then z follows x; (3) either y follows x or x follows y). This makes it possible to apprehend at a glance, *uno intuitu et tota simul*, as Descartes said, *monothetically*, as Husserl put it,²¹ meanings which are produced and used *polythetically*, that is to say, not only one after another, but one by one, step by step.²²

Depending on the precision with which the event considered has to be localized, on the nature of the event, and on the social status of the agent concerned, different systems of oppositions are seen to emerge: for example, the period known as *lyali*, far from being defined – as in a perfectly ordinate series – in relation to the period which preceded it and the period which follows it, and only in relation to them, can be opposed to *smaim* as well as to *el husum* or *thimgharine*; as we have seen, it can also be opposed, as "lyali of December", to "lyali of January", or, by a different logic, be opposed as the "great nights" to the "lesser nights of *furar*" and the "lesser nights of *maghres* (the same combinative logic which leads to the oppositions between "essba't of winter" and "essba't of spring"; between "es-ba't of late spring", with the "green days" and the "yellow days", and "essba't of summer", with the "white days" and the "dry days"; and between *smaim* of summer and *smaim* of autumn). The same informant may at one moment, thinking in terms of ritual practices, oppose *lakhrif* taken as a whole ("autumn is without divisions") to *lahlal*, the licit period for ploughing; and the very next moment, thinking in terms of the cycle of the fig harvest, oppose *lahlal* to *achraw*, which is the end of *lakhrif* and one of the activities of *thaqachachth*, through which it is implicitly opposed to *thissemtith* (the first figs), or *achakh* (the ripeness of the figs).

When one knows that many other oppositions could be produced, one sees the artificiality and indeed unreality of a calendar which assimilates and aligns units of different levels and of very unequal importance. Given that all the divisions and sub-divisions which the observer may record and cumulate are produced and used in different situations and on different occasions, the question of how each of them relates to the unit at a higher level, or, *a fortiori*, to the divisions or sub-divisions of the "periods" to which they are opposed, never arises in practice. If another seemingly ethnocentric analogy be permitted, one might suggest that the relation between the constructed series obeying the laws of succession, and the temporal oppositions put into practice successively so that they cannot be telescoped into the same spot, is homologous with the relation between the continuous, homogeneous, political space of graduated scales of opinion, and practical political positions, which are always taken up in response to a particular situation and particular interlocutors or opponents and make distinctions and divisions of greater or lesser refinement depending on the political distance between the interlocutors (left:right::left of the left:right of the left::left of the left of the left:right of the left of the left of the left::etc.) so that the same agent



may find himself successively on his own right and on his own left in the "absolute" space of geometry, contradicting the third law of succession.

The same analysis applies to the terminologies serving to designate social units: ignorance of the uncertainties and ambiguities which these products of a practical logic owe to their functions and to the conditions in which they are used leads to the production of *artefacts* as impeccable as they are unreal. Perhaps no anthropologist has been more sensitive than Edmund Leach to "the essential difference between the ritual description of structural relations and the anthropologist's scientific description", or, in particular, to the opposition between the "completely unambiguous" terminology of the anthropologist, with his arbitrarily devised concepts, and the concepts which agents use in ritual actions to express structural relations. Indeed, nothing is more suspect than the ostentatious rigour of the diagrams of the social organization of Berber societies offered by anthropologists. Jeanne Favret provides an example in a recent article in which she follows Hanoteau on to a "field" on which her general ideas are most redolent of generals' ideas, as Virginia Woolf would have put it. If her taste for provocative paradox had not led her to rehabilitate the worthy brigadier-general's "wild [*savage*] ethnography" against professional ethnology (which happens to be somewhat under-professionalized in this area), Ms Favret would not have gone to the "innocent and meticulous ethnography of Hanoteau and Letourneux" for the basis of the pure, perfect taxonomy of political organization which she opposes to the anthropological tradition, accusing the latter both of being "merely more sophisticated and more ignorant of its limits" than the general's military anthropology and of failing to observe the distinctions which his work makes it possible to draw.²³ A more penetrating reading of the texts in question, produced in the main by administrators and soldiers (or law professors), would show that the vagueness of the social terminologies they offer could only result from a certain familiarity with Kabyle reality combined with ignorance of the theoretical traditions and of the corresponding pretensions to theoretical systematicity. Without entering into detailed discussion of Ms Favret's schematic presentation of the terminology collected by Hanoteau, one can only restate certain basic points of the description of the structure of the village of Ait Hichem²⁴ which perhaps erred only by excessive "rationalization" of native categories. Though the vocabulary of social divisions varies from place to place, the fact remains that the hierarchy of the basic social units, those designated by the words *thakharubth* and *adhrum*, is almost always the *opposite* of what Ms Favret, following Hanoteau, says it is. A few cases can be found in which, as Hanoteau maintains, *thakharubth* includes *adhrum*, probably because terminologies collected at particular times and places designate the results of different *histories*, marked by the splitting up, the (no doubt frequent) disappearance, and the annexation of lineages. It also often happens that the words are used indifferently to refer to social divisions at the same level; this is the case in the Sidi Aïch region, in which the terms used, starting with the most restricted and hence most real unit, are (a) *el hara*, the undivided family (called *akham*, the house, *akham n'Aït Ali*, at Ait Hichem), (b) *akham*, the extended family, covering all the people bearing the name of the same ancestor (as far as the third or fourth generation) – *Ali ou X*, sometimes also designated by a term probably suggested by the topography, since the path bends as one passes from one *akham* to another: *thaghamurth*, the elbow, (c) *adhrum*, *akharub* (or *thakharubth*), or *aharum*, bringing together the people whose common origin goes back beyond the fourth generation, (d) the *suff*, or simply "those above" or "those below", (e) the village, a purely local unit, in this case including the two leagues. The synonyms, to which must be added *thar'ifith* (from 'arf, to know one another), a group of acquaintances, equivalent to *akham* or *adhrum* (elsewhere, *thakharubth*) may not have been used



haphazardly, since they emphasize either integration and internal cohesion (*akham* or *adhrum*) or the contrast with other groups (*taghamurth*, *aharum*). *Suff*, used to suggest an "arbitrary" unit, a conventional alliance as opposed to the other terms which denote individuals bearing a common name (Ait...), is often distinguished from *adhrum*, with which it coincides at Ait Hichem. Everything takes place as if one passed by insensible gradations from the patriarchal family to the clan (*adhrum* or *thakharubth*), the fundamental social unit, with the intermediate units corresponding to more-or-less arbitrary points of segmentation (which would explain the informants' uncertainty with vocabulary they often inadequately master). These points become especially apparent when conflict arises (by virtue of the fact that the units are separated only by differences of degree, as can be seen, for example, in the different shades of obligation in the case of mourning, with the closest relatives offering the meal, and the others making their own small contribution, by helping with the cooking, bringing jars of water or some vegetables, and the most distant relatives – or friends from another clan – giving a meal for the family of the deceased after the mourning is over); and they are subject to constant change: the virtual limits may become real ones when the group extends itself (thus at Ait Hichem, the Ait Mendil, who were originally united, constitute two *thakharubth*) and the real limits may disappear (the Ait Isaad group together several reduced *thakharubth* in a single *thakharubth*). In short, the systematic picture of interlocking units, presented by "wild" or civilized anthropologists from Hanoteau through Durkheim to Jeanne Favret, ignores the unceasing dynamism of units which are constantly forming and reforming, and the *fuzziness* which is an integral part of native notions:asmuch as it is at once the precondition and the product of their functioning. What is true of genealogical and political taxonomies is equally true of the temporal taxonomies of the agrarian calendar: the level at which the oppositions actually mobilized are situated depends fundamentally on the situation – that is to say, on the relationship between the groups or individuals who are to be demarcated by means of taxonomies.

Economy of logic

Symbolic systems owe their *practical coherence*, that is, their regularities, and also their irregularities and even incoherences (both equally *necessary* because inscribed in the logic of their genesis and functioning) to the fact that they are the product of practices which cannot perform their practical functions except insofar as they bring into play, in their practical state, principles which are not only coherent – i.e. capable of engendering intrinsically coherent practices compatible with the objective conditions – but also practical, in the sense of convenient, i.e. immediately mastered and manageable because obeying a "poor" and economical logic.

One thus has to acknowledge that practice has a logic which is not that of logic, if one is to avoid asking of it more logic than it can give, thereby condemning oneself either to wring incoherences out of it or to thrust upon it a forced coherence.²⁵ Analysis of the various but closely interrelated aspects of the theorization effect (forced synchronization of the successive, fictitious totalization, neutralization of functions, substitution of the system of products



for the system of principles of production, etc.) brings out, in negative form, certain properties of the logic of practice which by definition escape theoretical apprehension, since they are constitutive of that apprehension. Practical logic – practical in both senses of the word – is able to organize the totality of an agent's thoughts, perceptions, and actions by means of a few generative principles, themselves reducible in the last analysis to a fundamental dichotomy, only because its whole economy, which is based on the principle of the economy of logic, presupposes a loss of rigour for the sake of greater simplicity and generality and because it finds in "polythesis" the conditions required for the correct use of polysemy.

Thanks to "polythesis", the "confusion of spheres", as the logicians call it, resulting from the highly economical, but necessarily approximate, application of the same schemes to different logical universes, can pass unnoticed because it entails no practical consequences. No one takes the trouble to systematically record and compare the successive products of the application of the generative schemes: these discrete, self-sufficient units owe their immediate transparency not only to the schemes which are realized in them, but also to the *situation* apprehended through these schemes and to the agent's practical relation to that situation. The principle of the economy of logic, whereby no more logic is mobilized than is required by the needs of practice, means that the universe of discourse in relation to which this or that class (and therefore the complementary class) is constituted, can remain implicit, because it is implicitly defined in each case in and by the practical relation to the situation. Given that it is unlikely that two contradictory applications of the same schemes will be brought face to face in what we must call a *universe of practice* (rather than a universe of discourse), the same thing may, in different universes of practice, have different things as its complement and may, therefore, receive different, even opposed, properties, according to the universe.²⁶ The house, for example, is globally defined as female, damp, etc., when considered from outside, from the male point of view, i.e. in opposition to the external world, but it can be divided into a male-female part and a female-female part when it ceases to be seen by reference to a universe of practice coextensive with *the* universe, and is treated instead as a universe (of practice and discourse) in its own right, which for the women it indeed is, especially in winter.²⁷

The fact that symbolic objects and practices can enter without contradiction into successive relationships set up from different points of view means that they are subject to *overdetermination through indetermination*: the application to the same objects or practices of different schemes (such as opening/closing, going in/coming out, going up/going down, etc.) which, at the degree of precision (i.e. of imprecision) with which they are defined, are all *practically*



equivalent, is the source of the polysemy characterizing the fundamental relationships in the symbolic system, which are always determined in several respects at once. Thus a relationship such as that between the house and the *thajma'th* (for which one could substitute the market, or the fields) condenses a good number of the system's fundamental oppositions – the full and the empty, the female and the male, night and day, etc. – which are also found, with only slight differences, in relationships as accessory in appearance as those between the cooking-pot and the wheatake griddle or the stable and the *kanun*.

The most specific properties of a ritual corpus, those which define it as a system coherent in practice, cannot be perceived or adequately understood unless the corpus is seen as the product (*opus operatum*) of a practical mastery (*modus operandi*) owing its practical efficacy to the fact that it makes connections based on what Jean Nicod calls *overall resemblance*.²⁸ This mode of apprehension never explicitly or systematically limits itself to any one aspect of the terms it links, but takes each one, each time, as a whole, exploiting to the full the fact that two "data" are never entirely alike in *all* respects but are always alike in some respect, at least indirectly (i.e. through the mediation of some common term). This explains, first, why among the different aspects of the at once undetermined and overdetermined symbols it manipulates, ritual practice never clearly opposes aspects symbolizing something to aspects symbolizing nothing and hence disregarded (such as, in the case of the letters of the alphabet, the colour or size of the strokes, or, in a page of writing, the vertical word-order). For example, although one of the different aspects through which a "datum" like gall can be connected with other (equally equivocal) data – viz. bitterness (it is equivalent to oleander, wormwood, or tar, and opposed to honey), greenness (it is associated with lizards and the colour green), and hostility (inherent in the previous two qualities) – necessarily comes to the forefront, the other aspects do not thereby cease to be perceived simultaneously; the symbolic chord may be sounded either in its fundamental form, when the fundamental quality is emphasized, or in its inverted form. Without wishing to push the musical metaphor too far, one might nonetheless suggest that a number of ritual sequences can be seen as *modulations*: occurring with particular frequency because the specific principle of ritual action, the desire to stack all the odds on one's own side, is conducive to the logic of *development*, with variations against a background of redundancy, these modulations play on the harmonic properties of ritual symbols, whether duplicating one of the themes with a strict equivalent in all respects (gall evoking wormwood, which, like gall, unites bitterness and greenness) or modulating into remoter tonalities by playing on the associations of the secondary harmonics (lizard → toad).²⁹



Ritual practice effects a *fluid*, "fuzzy" abstraction, bringing the same symbol into different relations through different aspects or bringing different aspects of the same referent into the same relation of opposition; in other words, it excludes the Socratic question of the *respect in which* the referent is apprehended (shape, colour, function, etc.), thereby obviating the need to define in each case the principle governing the choice of the aspect selected, and, *a fortiori*, the need to stick to that principle at all times. But in relating objects and selecting aspects, this practical taxonomy applies, successively or simultaneously, principles which are all indirectly reducible to one another, and this enables it to classify the same "data" from several different standpoints without classifying them in different ways (whereas a more rigorous system would make as many classifications as it found properties). The universe thus undergoes a division which can be said to be logical, though it seems to break all the rules of logical division (for example, by making divisions which are neither exclusive nor exhaustive), for all its dichotomies are indefinitely redundant, being in the last analysis the product of a single *principium divisionis*. Because the principle opposing the terms which have been related (e.g. the sun and the moon) is not defined and usually comes down to a simple contrariety (whereas contradiction implies a preliminary analysis) *analogy* (which, when it does not function purely in its practical state, is always expressed elliptically – "woman is the moon") establishes a homology between oppositions (man:woman::sun:moon) set up in accordance with two indeterminate, overdetermined principles (hot:cold::male:female::day:night::etc.) which differ from the principles generating other homologies into which either of the two terms in question might enter (man:woman::east:west or sun:moon::dry:wet). In other words, fluid abstraction is also false abstraction. Because the properties distinguishing one "datum" from another remain attached to non-pertinent properties, the assimilation is comprehensive and complete even when fundamentally motivated in only one respect. The aspect of each of the terms which is (implicitly) selected from a single standpoint in any particular connection made between them remains attached to the other aspects through which it can subsequently be opposed to other aspects of another referent in other connections. The same term could thus enter into an infinite number of connections if the number of ways of relating to what is not itself were not limited to a few fundamental oppositions. Ritual practice proceeds no differently from the child who drove André Gide to despair by insisting that the opposite of "blanc" was "blanche" and the feminine of "grand", "petit". In short, the "analogical sense" inculcated in the earliest years of life is, as Wallon says of thinking in couples, a sort of "sense of the contrary", which gives rise to the countless applications of a few basic contrasts capable of providing a minimum



of determination (a man is not a woman → a toad is not a frog) and cannot give any information about the relations it relates, because it is precisely their indeterminacy and fuzziness that permit it to operate. The uncertainties and misunderstandings inherent in this logic of suggestion and ambiguity are thus the price that has to be paid for the *economy* which results from reducing the universe of the relations between opposites and of the relations between these relations to a few basic relations from which all the others can be generated.

Sympatheia ton holon, as the Stoics called it, the affinity between all the objects of a universe in which meaning is everywhere, and everywhere superabundant, is achieved at the cost of the fuzziness and vagueness of each of the elements and each of the relationships between them: logic can be everywhere only because it is really nowhere. If ritual practices and representations are objectively endowed with partial, approximate systematicity, this is because they are the product of a small number of generative schemes that are *practically interchangeable*, i.e. capable of producing equivalent results from the point of view of the "logical" demands of practice. If they never have *more* than partial and approximate systematicity, this is because the schemes of which they are the product can be quasi-universally applied only because they function *in their practical state*, i.e. on the hither side of explicit statement and consequently outside of all logical control, and by reference to practical ends which are such as to impose on them a *necessity* which is not that of logic.

It is by "practical sense" that an agent knows, for example, that a given act or object requires a particular place inside the house; that a given task or rite corresponds to a particular period of the year or is excluded from another. He only needs to possess, in their practical state, a set of schemes functioning in their implicit state and in the absence of any precise delimitation of the universe of discourse, to be able to produce or understand a symbolic series such as the following: when a cat enters the house with a feather or a wisp of white wool in its fur, if it heads for the hearth, this presages the arrival of guests, who will be given a meal with meat; if it goes towards the stable, this means that a cow will be bought if the season is spring, an ox if it is autumn. The question-begging and the approximations in this series are obvious: the cat, an intruder which enters by chance and is driven out again, is only there as a bearer of symbols, which realizes practically the movement of entering; the feather is implicitly treated as the equivalent of the wool, no doubt because both substances are called upon to function as the mere supports of a beneficent quality, "the white"; the opposition between the hearth and the stable, the centre of the rite, is engendered by the scheme which structures the internal space of the house, opposing the top and the bottom, the dry and the wet, the male and the female, the noble part where guests are received and where meat is roasted (the dish served to guests par excellence), and the lower part, the place reserved for the animals. This scheme only has to be combined with the scheme generating the opposition between two seasons – autumn, the time of the collective sacrifice of an ox followed by the ploughing, and spring, the season of milk – to give the ox and the cow.³⁰



Another example occurs in a well-known tale, the story of Heb-Heb-er-Remman. A girl who has seven brothers falls foul of the jealousy of her sisters-in-law. They make her eat seven snake's eggs, concealed in dumplings: her belly swells and people think she is pregnant; she is driven from the house. A wise man discovers the cause of her ailment: to cure her, a sheep must be slaughtered and its meat roasted, with a lot of salt. The girl must eat it and then be suspended by her feet with her mouth open over a pan of water. When this is done, the snakes come out and they are killed. The girl marries; she has a child whom she calls Heb-Heb-er-Remman "pomegranate seeds". She goes back to her brothers, who recognize her when she tells them her story, showing them the seven snakes which she has dried and salted. It can immediately be seen that to produce this narrative, or to decode (at least in an approximate form) its significance, it is sufficient to possess the set of schemes which are at work in the production of any fertility rite. To fecundate is to penetrate, to introduce something which swells and/or causes swelling: the ingestion of food, and of food which swells (*ufthyen*) is homologous with sexual intercourse and ploughing.³¹ But here there is a false fecundation: the snakes, a symbol of the male life-principle, of semen, of the ancestor who must die in order to be reborn, and thus of the dry, are ingested in the form of eggs, i.e. in their female state, and return to maleness inopportunely, in the girl's stomach (in a fertility rite reported by Westermarck, it is the heart – a male part of the snake – that is eaten). The swelling which results from this inverted procreation is sterile and pernicious. The cure is logically self-evident. The dry must be made to move in the opposite direction, from the high to the low – the girl simply has to be turned upside down – and from the inside to the outside – which cannot be done by a simple mechanical operation: the dry must be further dried, parched, by adding to it what is pre-eminently dry, salt, and reinforcing its propensity towards the moist, which in normal fecundation – procreation or sowing – carries it towards the inside, towards the damp womb of woman or of the earth opened by the ploughshare. At the end of the story, the woman's fecundity is proved by the birth of Heb-Heb-er-Remman "pomegranate seeds" (the symbol par excellence of female fecundity, identified with the womb), i.e. the many sons born (or to be born) from the fertile womb of a woman herself sprung from a womb prolific of men (her seven brothers). And the seven snakes end up dried and salted, i.e. in the state to which they are structurally assigned as symbols of male seed, capable of growing and multiplying through the cycle of immersion in the wet followed by emergence towards the dry.

The body as geometer: cosmogonic practice

Understanding ritual practice is not a question of decoding the internal logic of a symbolism but of restoring its practical necessity by relating it to the real conditions of its genesis, that is, to the conditions in which its functions, and the means it uses to attain them, are defined. It means, for example, reconstituting – by an operation of logical reconstruction which has nothing to do with an act of empathic projection – the significance and functions that agents in a determinate social formation can (and must) confer on a determinate practice or experience, given the practical taxonomies which organize their perception. When confronted with myth and ritual, social theory has always hesitated between the lofty distance which the most comprehensive science seeks to keep between itself and the elementary forms of reason and



the mystical participation of the great initiates of the gnostic tradition. The objectivist reduction which brings to light the so-called objective functions of myths and rites (for Durkheim, functions of moral integration; for Lévi-Strauss, functions of logical integration) makes it impossible to understand how these functions are fulfilled, because it brackets the agents' own representation of the world and of their practice. "Participant" anthropology, on the other hand – when it is not merely inspired by nostalgia for the agrarian paradises, the principle of all conservative ideologies – regards the human invariants and the universality of the most basic experiences as sufficient justification for seeking eternal answers to the eternal questions of the cosmogonies and cosmologies in the practical answers which the peasants of Kabylia or elsewhere have given to the practical, historically situated problems which were forced on them in a determinate state of their instruments of material and symbolic appropriation of the world. Even when they are asymptotic with scientific truth, the inspired interpretations fostered by such a disposition are never more than the inversion of the false objectification performed by colonial anthropology. By cutting practices off from their real conditions of existence, in order to credit them with alien intentions, by a false generosity conducive to stylistic effects, the exaltation of lost wisdom dispossesses them, as surely as its opposite, of everything that constitutes their reason and their *raison d'être*, and locks them in the eternal essence of a "mentality". The Kabyle woman setting up her loom is not performing an act of cosmogony; she is simply setting up her loom to weave cloth intended to serve a technical function. It so happens that, given the symbolic equipment available to her for thinking her own activity – and in particular her language, which constantly refers her back to the logic of ploughing – she can only think what she is doing in the enchanted, that is to say, mystified, form which spiritualism, thirsty for eternal mysteries, finds so enchanting.

Rites take place because and only because they find their *raison d'être* in the conditions of existence and the dispositions of agents who cannot afford the luxury of logical speculation, mystical effusions, or metaphysical anxiety. It is not sufficient to ridicule the more naive forms of functionalism in order to have done with the question of the practical functions of practice. It is clear that a universal definition of the functions of marriage as an operation intended to ensure the biological reproduction of the group, in accordance with forms approved by the group, in no way explains Kabyle marriage ritual. But, contrary to appearances, scarcely more understanding is derived from a structural analysis which ignores the specific functions of ritual practices and fails to inquire into the economic and social conditions of the production of the dispositions generating both these practices and also the collective definition of the practical functions in whose service they function. The



Kabyle peasant does not react to "objective conditions" but to the practical interpretation which he produces of those conditions, and the principle of which is the socially constituted schemes of his habitus. It is this interpretation which has to be constructed in each case, if we want to give an account of ritual practices which will do justice both to their reason and to their *raison d'être*, that is, to their inseparably logical and practical necessity.

Thus, technical or ritual practices are determined by the material conditions of existence (that is, in this particular case, by a certain relationship between the climatic and ecological conditions and the available techniques) as treated in practice by agents endowed with schemes of perception of a determinate sort, which are themselves determined, negatively at least, by the material conditions of existence (the relative autonomy of ritual being attested by the invariant features found throughout the Maghreb, despite the variations in the climatic and economic conditions). It is in a particular relationship between a mode of production and a mode of perception that the *specific contradiction* of agrarian activity is defined as the hazardous or even sacrilegious confrontation of antagonistic principles, together with the ritual apparatus whose function it is to resolve that contradiction. It is through the mediation of the function thereby assigned to technical or ritual practice that the relationship observed between the economic system and the mythico-ritual system is established practically.³²

Rites, more than any other type of practice, serve to underline the mistake of enclosing in concepts a logic made to dispense with concepts; of treating movements of the body and practical manipulations as purely logical operations; of speaking of analogies and homologies (as one sometimes has to, in order to understand and to convey that understanding) when all that is involved is the practical transference of incorporated, quasi-postural schemes.³³ Rite is indeed in some cases no more than a practical *mimesis* of the natural process which needs to be facilitated: unlike metaphor and explicit analogy, *mimetic representation* (*apomimema*) establishes a relationship between the swelling of grain in the cooking-pot, the swelling of a pregnant woman's belly, and the germination of wheat in the ground, which entails no explicit statement of the properties of the terms related or the principles of their relationship; the most characteristic operations of its "logic" – inverting, transferring, uniting, separating, etc. – take the form of movements of the body, turning to the right or left, putting things upside down, going in, coming out, tying, cutting, etc.

To speak, as we have here, of overall resemblance and uncertain abstraction, is still to use the intellectualist language of representation – the language which an analyst's relation to a corpus spread out before him in the form of



documents quite naturally forces on him – to express a logic which is acted out directly in the form of bodily gymnastics without passing through the express apprehension of the “aspects” selected or rejected, of the similar or dissimilar “profiles”. The logicism inherent in the objectivist standpoint leads those who adopt it to forget that scientific construction cannot grasp the principles of practical logic without changing the nature of those principles: when made explicit for objective study, a practical succession becomes a represented succession; an action oriented in relation to a space objectively constituted as a structure of demands (things “to be done” and “not to be done”) becomes a reversible operation carried out in continuous, homogeneous space. For example, as long as mythico-ritual space is seen as an *opus operatum*, that is, as a timeless order of things coexisting, it is never more than a theoretical space, in which the only landmarks are provided by the terms of relations of opposition (up/down, east/west), and where only theoretical operations can be effected, i.e. logical displacements and transformations which differ *toto coelo* from movements and actions actually performed, such as falling or rising. Having established that the internal space of the Kabyle house receives a symmetrically opposite signification when re-placed in the total space outside, we are justified in saying, as we did earlier, that each of these two spaces, inside and outside, can be derived from the other by means of a semi-rotation, only on condition that the mathematical language expressing such operations is reunited with its basis in practice, so that terms like displacement and rotation are given their practical senses as *movements of the body*, such as going forwards or backwards, or turning round. Just as, in the time of Lévy-Bruhl, there would have been less amazement at the oddities of the “primitive mentality” if it had been possible to conceive that the logic of magic and “participation” might have some connection with the experience of emotion, so nowadays there would be less astonishment at the “logical” feats of the Australian aborigines if the “savage mind” had not been unconsciously credited, by a sort of inverted ethnocentrism, with the relation to the world that intellectualism attributes to every “consciousness” and if anthropologists had not remained silent about the transformation leading from operations mastered in their practical state to the formal operations isomorphic with them, failing by the same token to inquire into the social conditions of production of that transformation.

The science of myth is at liberty to describe the syntax of myth in the language of group theory, so long as it is not forgotten that this language destroys the truth it makes available to apprehension, because it has been won and built up *against* the experience it enables one to name: it is scarcely necessary to insist that we can no more identify the scientific study of oxidation with the experience of fire than we can offer the continuous,



homogeneous space of geometry as the practical space of practice, with its dyssymmetries, its discontinuities, and its directions conceived as substantial properties, left and right, east and west. We may say that gymnastics or dancing are geometry so long as we do not mean to say that the gymnast and the dancer are geometers. Perhaps there would be less temptation to treat the agent implicitly or explicitly as a logical operator if (without entering into the question of chronological priority) one went back from the mythic logos to the ritual praxis which enacts in the form of real actions, i.e. body movements, the operations which objective analysis discovers in mythic discourse, an *opus operatum* concealing the constituting moment of "mythopoeic" practice under its reified significations. Like the acts of jurisprudence, ritual practice owes its *practical coherence* (which may be reconstituted in the form of an objectified diagram of operations) to the fact that it is the product of a single system of *conceptual schemes immanent in practice*, organizing not only the perception of objects (and in this particular case, the classification of the possible instruments, circumstances – place and time – and agents of ritual action) but also the production of practices (in this case, the gestures and movements constituting ritual action). Performing a rite presupposes something quite different from the conscious mastery of the sort of catalogue of oppositions that is drawn up by academic commentators striving for symbolic mastery of a dead or dying tradition (e.g. the Chinese mandarins' tables of equivalences) and also by anthropologists in the first stage of their work. Practical mastery of principles neither more complex nor more numerous than the principles of solid statics applied when using a wheelbarrow, a lever, or a nutcracker³⁴ makes it possible to produce ritual actions that are *compatible* with the ends in view (e.g. obtaining rain or fertility for the livestock) and intrinsically (at least relatively) *coherent*, that is, combinations of a particular type of circumstances (times and places), instruments, and agents and, above all, of displacements and movements ritually qualified as propitious or unpropitious. These include going (or throwing something) upwards or eastwards, downwards or westwards, together with all the equivalent actions – putting something on the roof of the house or throwing it towards the *kanun*; burying it on the threshold or throwing it towards the stable; going or throwing to the left or with the left hand, and going or throwing to the right or with the right hand; turning something from left to right, or right to left; closing (or tying) and opening (or untying), etc. In fact, an analysis of the universe of mythically or ritually defined objects, starting with the circumstances, instruments, and agents of ritual action, makes it clear that the countless oppositions observed in every area of existence can all be brought down to a small number of couples which appear as fundamental, since, being linked to one another only by weak analogies, they cannot be reduced to one



another except in a forced and artificial way. And almost all prove to be based on movements or postures of the human body, such as going up and coming down (or going forwards and going backwards), going to the left and going to the right, going in and coming out (or filling and emptying), sitting and standing (etc.). The reason why this practical geometry, or geometrical practice ("geometry in the tangible world", as Jean Nicod puts it),³⁵ makes so much use of inversion is perhaps that, like a mirror bringing to light the paradoxes of bilateral symmetry, the human body functions as a practical operator which reaches to the left to find the right hand it has to shake, puts its right arm in the sleeve of the garment which had been lying on the left, or reverses right and left, east and west, by the mere fact of turning about to "face" someone or "turn its back" on him, or again, turns "upside down" things which were "the right way up" – so many movements which the mythic world-view charges with social significations and which rite makes intensive use of.

I catch myself defining the threshold
As the geometric locus
Of arrivals and departures
In the House of the Father.³⁶

The poet goes straight to the heart of the relationship between the space inside the house and the outside world: the reversal of directions (*sens*) and meanings (*sens*) in going in and coming out. As a belated, small-scale producer of private mythologies, it is easier for him to sweep aside dead metaphors and go straight to the principle of mythopoetic practice, that is, to the movements and gestures which, as in a sentence of Albert the Great's picked up by René Char, can reveal the duality underlying the seeming unity of the object: "In Germany there was a pair of twins, one of whom opened doors with his right arm, the other of whom shut them with his left arm."³⁷

If we simply follow the opposition defined by Wilhelm von Humboldt, and move from *ergon* to *energeia*, i.e. from objects or acts to the principles of their production, or, more precisely, from the *fait accompli* and dead letter of the already effected analogy ($a : b :: c : d$), which objectivist hermeneutics considers, to analogical practice as *scheme transfer* carried out by the *habitus* on the basis of acquired equivalences facilitating the interchangeability of reactions³⁸ and enabling the agent to master by a sort of practical generalization all similar problems likely to arise in new situations, then at once we break the spell of the *panlogism* encouraged by the exoteric version of structuralism, in which the revelation of a non-intentional coherence, often described by linguists (Sapir and Trubetzkoj, for example) and even anthropologists as an "unconscious finality", serves as the basis for a metaphysics of nature dressed



up in the language of natural science. We are then in a position to question the perfect coherence which tends to be conferred on historical systems by those who convert the methodological postulate of intelligibility into an ontological thesis. The fallacy, which Ziff points out, of converting regularity into a rule, thus presupposing a plan, is only apparently corrected in the hypothesis of the *unconscious*, held to be the only alternative to final causes as a means of explaining cultural phenomena presenting themselves as totalities endowed with structure and meaning.³⁹ In fact this plannerless plan is no less mysterious than the plan of a supreme planner, and it is understandable that the structuralist vulgate should have become for some people an intellectually acceptable form of Teilhardism – that is to say, one acceptable in intellectual circles.

The language of the body, whether articulated in gestures or, *a fortiori*, in what psychosomatic medicine calls “the language of the organs”, is incomparably more ambiguous and more overdetermined than the most overdetermined uses of ordinary language. This is why ritual “roots” are always broader and vaguer than linguistic roots, and why the gymnastics of ritual, like dreams, always seems richer than the verbal translations, at once unilateral and arbitrary, that may be given of it. Words, however charged with connotation, limit the range of choices and render difficult or impossible, and in any case explicit and therefore “falsifiable”, the relations which the language of the body suggests. It follows that simply by bringing to the level of discourse – as one must, if one wants to study it scientifically – a practice which owes a number of its properties to the fact that it falls short of discourse (which does not mean it is short on logic) one subjects it to nothing less than a change in ontological status the more serious in its theoretical consequences because it has every chance of passing unnoticed.⁴⁰

Ritual practice, which always aims to facilitate *passages* and/or to authorize encounters between opposed orders, never defines beings or things otherwise than in and through the relationship it establishes practically between them, and makes the fullest possible use of the polysemy of the fundamental actions, mythic “roots” whose polysemy is partially reproduced by linguistic roots: for example, the root FTH may mean – figuratively as well as literally – to open (transitive) a door or a path (in ritual, extra-ordinary contexts), the heart (cf. opening one’s heart), a speech (e.g. with a ritual formula), the sitting of an assembly, an action, the day, etc.; or to be open – applied to the “door” in the sense of the beginning of a series, the heart (i.e. the appetite), the sky, a knot; or to open (intransitive) – applied to a bud, a face, a shoot, an egg; and more generally, to inaugurate, bless, make easy, place under good auspices (“May God open the doors”), a cluster of senses covering virtually all the meanings attached to spring. But, being broader and vaguer than the



linguistic root, the mythical root lends itself to richer and more varied interplay, and the scheme: to open (trans.) – to open (intrans.) – to be open makes it possible to set up associations among a whole set of verbs and nouns that go far beyond simple morphological affinity: it can evoke the roots FSU, to unbind, untie, resolve, dissolve, open, appear (used of young shoots; hence the name *thafsuth* given to spring); FRKH, to blossom, give birth (hence *asafrurakh*, blossoming, and *lafrakh*, the sprouts which appear on the trees in spring, and more generally, offspring, the outcome of any business), to proliferate, multiply; FRY, to form (trans.), to form (intrans.) (applied to figs), to begin to grow (applied to wheat or a baby), to multiply (a nestful of birds: *ifruri el'ach*, the nest is full of fledglings ready to take wing), to shell, or be shelled (peas and beans), and thus, to enter the period when fresh beans can be picked (*lahlal usafruri*), to sift and be sifted (wheat being prepared for grinding), separate or be separated (opponents), and thus, to reconcile, appease, pacify, dawn (daylight which "fights" with the night and "separates" from it, *ifruri was*), to become brighter (the weather, *ifruri el'hal*); finally, by opposition, it can evoke the root FLQ, to break, burst, smash, to be broken, burst, smashed, to split and be split like the egg or pomegranate broken at the time of marriage and ploughing.⁴¹

One would only have to let oneself be carried along by the logic of associations in order to reconstruct the whole system of synonyms and antonyms, synonyms of synonyms and antonyms of antonyms, and so on. On one side, one could approach the roots 'MR, fill – be filled, or FTH, increase (intrans.), multiply (intrans.), or UFF, inflate, and through them pass to the root ZDY, unite (trans.) – unite (intrans.) – be in unity (the house "full" of men and goods is a numerous, united house); on the other side, through the antonyms, one would find empty – be emptied or ruin – be ruined (KHL), separate (trans.) – separate (intrans.) – be separated (FRQ), cut – be sharp (QD'), extinguish – be extinguished (TF), etc.⁴² Similarly, starting from the mythical root "go up" one would find go eastward or be turned eastward, go toward the light, go toward the open country, go rightward, go forward, go into the future, be born, sprout, grow up (a bridge to the previous set of roots), stand up, be awake, be above, etc. or, through the antonyms, go down, go toward the darkness, go leftward, decline, fall, lie down, sleep, be below, etc.

The nearest equivalent to this series of generative schemes bound together by relations of practical equivalence is the system of adjectives (*lourd/leger, chaud/froid, terne/brillant*, etc.)⁴³ which are available in French to express the ultimate values of taste and which can be applied equally well to a dish or a school exercise, a play or a painting, a joke or a walk, an accent or a garment, and so on. This practical taxonomy owes its efficacy to the fact that,



as is evidenced by the numerous senses recorded in the dictionaries, the meaning of each adjective, and of its relationship with its antonym, is specified in each case in terms of the logic of each of the fields in which it is applied: *froid* may be synonymous with *calme* or *indifférent*, but also with *frigide* or *grave*, or again with *austère* and *distant*, *dur* (hard) and *sec* (dry), *plat* (flat) and *terne* (dull), depending on whether it is applied to a man or a woman, a head or a heart, a melody or a tone of voice, a tint or a work of art, a calculation or a fit of anger, etc.; and it will have as many antonyms as it has different senses: *chaud* (hot) or *course*, but also *ardent* or *emporté* (irascible), *sensuel* or *chaleureux* (cordial), *brillant* or *expressif*, *éclatant* (dazzling) or *piquant* (pungent), etc. It follows that, considered in each of their uses, the pairs of qualifiers which as a system constitute the equipment of the judgment of taste are extremely "poor", quasi-indeterminate, and extremely rich, their indefiniteness predisposing them to inspire or express the sense of the indefinable: on the one hand, each use of one of these pairs is only meaningful in relation to a universe of practice which is different each time, usually implicit, and always self-sufficient, ruling out the possibility of comparison with other universes. On the other hand, the meaning which these pairs are given in a particular field has for harmonics all the meanings which they themselves, or any of the couples that are interchangeable with them to within a matter of nuances, may be given in other fields, i.e. in slightly different contexts.

This is true, for example, of the way in which the opposition between "in front" and "behind" functions in ritual practice: behind is where things one wants to get rid of are sent⁴⁴ (e.g. in one of the rites associated with the loom, these words are uttered: "May the angels be before me and the devil behind me"; in another rite, a child is rubbed behind the ear so that he will send evil "behind his ear"); behind is where ill fortune comes from (a woman on her way to market to sell the products of her industry, a blanket, yarn, etc., or the produce of her husbandry, hens, eggs, etc., must not look behind her or the sale will go badly; the whirlwind - *thimsiway* - attacks from behind the man who faces the *qibla* to pray); "behind" is naturally associated with "inside", with the female (the eastern, front door is male, the western, back door is female), with all that is private, hidden, and secret; but it also is associated with that which follows, trailing behind on the earth, the source of fertility, *abru'*, the train of a garment, an amulet, happiness: the bride entering her new house strews fruit, eggs, and wheat behind her, symbolizing prosperity. These meanings interweave with all those associated with "in front", going forward, confronting (*qabel*), going into the future, going eastward, toward the light, and it would not be difficult to reconstruct the quasi-totality of Kabyle ritual practices from this one scheme.

This plurality of meanings at once different and more or less closely interrelated is a product of scientific collection. Each of the significations collected exists in its practical state only in the relationship between a scheme



(or the product of a scheme, a word for example) and a specific situation. This is why it is not legitimate to speak of the different meanings of a symbol unless it is borne in mind that the assembling of these meanings in simultaneity (or on the same page of a dictionary, in the case of words) is a scientific artefact and that they never exist simultaneously in practice. On the one hand, as Vendryès pointed out, a word cannot always appear with all its meanings at once, without turning discourse into an endless play on words; on the other hand, if all the meanings a word is capable of taking were perfectly independent of the basic meaning, no play on words would ever be possible. This is equally true of the symbols of ritual. Among the forms which a basic opposition may take, there are always some which function as "switchers", concretely establishing the relationship between the universes of practice: here, for example, the relationship between "behind" and "inside", which provides the passage from "behind" to female prosperity, i.e. fertility – male prosperity being linked to "in front" through the intermediary of the bond between "in front", the future, and light. The objectified path of these passages is sometimes marked out by sayings which state the analogies ("the maiden is the wall of darkness", or "woman is the west", or "woman is the moon") between the different series.

The universes of meaning corresponding to different universes of practice are at once self-contained – hence protected from logical control through systematization – and *objectively* consistent with all the others, insofar as they are the loosely systematic products of a system of more or less completely integrated generative principles functioning in a structurally invariant way in the most diverse fields of practice. Within the "fuzzy" logic of approximation which immediately accepts as equivalents "flat", "dull", and "insipid", favourite value-judgment terms of the French aesthete or teacher, or, in the Kabyle tradition, "full", "closed", "inside", "underneath", which on closer inspection are perfectly incommensurable, the generative schemes are interchangeable practically; this is why they can only generate products that are indeed systematic but are so by virtue of a fuzzy systematicity and an approximate logic which cannot withstand the test of rational systematization and logical criticism.⁴⁵ Lacking symbolic mastery of the schemes and their products – schemes which they *are*, products which they *do* – the only way in which agents can adequately master the productive apparatus which enables them to generate correctly formed ritual practices is by making it operate.⁴⁶ This is what the observer is likely to forget, because he cannot recapture the logic immanent in the recorded products of the apparatus except by constructing a model which is precisely the substitute required when one does not have (or no longer has) immediate mastery of the apparatus.

Every successfully socialized agent thus possesses, in their incorporated



state, the instruments of an ordering of the world, a system of classifying schemes which organizes all practices, and of which the linguistic schemes (to which the neo-Kantian tradition – and the ethnomethodological school nowadays – attribute unjustified autonomy and importance) are only one aspect. To grasp through the constituted reality of myth the constituting moment of the mythopoeic act is not, as idealism supposes, to seek in the conscious mind the universal structures of a “mythopoeic subjectivity” and the unity of a spiritual principle governing all empirically realized configurations regardless of social conditions. It is, on the contrary, to reconstruct the principle generating and unifying all practices, the system of inseparably cognitive and evaluative structures which organizes the vision of the world in accordance with the objective structures of a determinate state of the social world: this principle is nothing other than the *socially informed body*, with its tastes and distastes, its compulsions and repulsions, with, in a word, all its *senses*, that is to say, not only the traditional five senses – which never escape the structuring action of social determinisms – but also the sense of necessity and the sense of duty, the sense of direction and the sense of reality, the sense of balance and the sense of beauty, common sense and the sense of the sacred, tactical sense and the sense of responsibility, business sense and the sense of propriety, the sense of humour and the sense of absurdity, moral sense and the sense of practicality, and so on.

Union and separation

To the foregoing list should be added what might be called the *sense of limits and of the legitimate transgression of limits*, which is the basis at once of the ordering of the world (known, since Parmenides, as *diakosmesis*) and of the ritual actions intended to authorize or facilitate the necessary or unavoidable breaches of that order. “The world is based on the limit [*thalasth*]”, said an old Kabyle. “Heaven and earth are separated by the limit. The eyes have an enclosure [*zerb*]. The mouth has a limit. Everything has a limit.” To bring order is to bring distinction, to divide the universe into opposing entities, which the primitive speculation of the Pythagoreans set out as two “columns of contraries” (*sustoichia*).⁴⁷ But the necessities of practice demand the reunion of things which practical logic has sundered – in marriage or ploughing, for example – and one function of ritual is precisely to euphemize, and thus to make licit, these unavoidable transgressions of the boundary. Not surprisingly, it proved difficult to find a place in the “columns of contraries” for an opposition as productive as that of the *odd* and the *even*, and more generally, for all the symbolic objects and actions which can be generated from the scheme *unite* (trans.) – *unite* (intrans.) – *be in unity* (the root ZDY) and its



opposite *separate* (trans.) – *separate* (intrans.) – *be separated* (the root FRQ, or *qḏ'*, cut – be sharp, and all the roots associated with them from the point of view of ritual meaning, close – be closed, extinguish – be extinguished, kill, slaughter, harvest, etc.). The principle of division cannot easily be classified among the things that it makes it possible to classify. This difficulty was encountered by Empedocles, who set aside *philia* and *neikos*, love and strife, as two ultimate principles irreducible to the oppositions which thanks to them can be dialectically combined.⁴⁸ When Empedocles gives as synonyms of *diakrisis* and *synkrisis* – an opposition which seems to belong to the order of logic, in which union and division do indeed figure, but in a very sublimated form – words as loaded as *phthora*, corruption, or *genesis*, generation, and for the second, *mixis*, which can also be translated as union, but this time in the sense of marriage, he points to the principle of the practical logic of rite, whose operations are inseparably logical and biological, as are the natural processes which it reproduces, when thought in accordance with the schemes of magical thought.⁴⁹

It is thus possible to describe the whole system of ritual symbols and actions by means of a small number of *antagonistic symbols* (the paradigm of which is the opposition between the sexes, and which are produced from a small number of schemes) and a small number of (logical and biological) *practical operators* which are nothing other than natural processes culturally constituted in and through ritual practice, such as marriage and ploughing seen as *the union of contraries* and murder or harvesting seen as *the separation of contraries* (processes which the logic of ritual *mimesis*, as such, reproduces). Because the union of contraries does not destroy the opposition (which it presupposes), the reunited contraries are just as much opposed, but now in a quite different way, thereby manifesting the duality of the relationship between them, at once antagonism and complementarity, *neikos* and *philia*, which might appear as their own twofold “nature” if they were conceived outside that relationship. Thus the house, which has all the negative characteristics of the dark, nocturnal, female world, and is in this respect the equivalent of the tomb or the maiden, changes its definition when it becomes what it equally is, the place par excellence of cohabitation and of the marriage of contraries, which, like the wife. “the lamp of the inside”, encloses its own light. When the roof has been put on a new house, it is the marriage lamp that is called upon to bring the first light. Each thing thus receives different properties according as it is apprehended in the state of union or the state of separation, but it is not possible to consider either of these states as its objective truth, with the other being regarded as an imperfect, mutilated form of that truth. Thus cultivated nature, the sacred of the left hand, the male-female, or male-dominated female, for example married woman or



ploughed land, is opposed not only to the male in general – united or separated – but also and especially to natural nature, which is still wild and untamed – fallow land and the maiden – or has returned to the twisted, maleficent naturalness into which it falls outside marriage – the harvested field or the old witch, with the cunning and treachery which relate her to the jackal.⁵⁰

This opposition between a female-female and a male-female is attested in countless ways. The female woman par excellence is the woman who does not depend on any man, who has escaped from the authority of her parents, her husband, and her husband's family, and has no children. Such a woman is without *hurma*: "she is bad wood"; "she is twisted wood". She is akin to fallow land, the wilderness; she has affinities with the dark forces of uncontrolled nature. Magic is her business (*thamgarth thazemnith*, the old witch; *settuth*, the witch in the tales). A sterile woman must not plant in the garden or carry seeds. Every woman partakes of the diabolic nature of the female woman, especially during menstruation, when she must not prepare meals, work in the garden, plant, pray, or fast (*elkhaleth*, the collective noun for "womanhood" is also emptiness, the void, the desert, ruin). And conversely, the unbridled, sterile old woman who no longer has any "restraint" brings the virtualities inherent in every woman to their full realization. Like the young shoot which, left to itself, tends to the left and has to be brought back to the right (or the upright) at the cost of a "knot", "woman is a knot in the wood" (*thamtuth diriz*). The "old woman" is in league with all that is twisted (*a'waj*, to twist) and all that is warped or warping: she is credited with *thi'iwji*, the maleficent, suspect craftiness which also defines the *smith*; she specializes in the magic which uses the left hand, the cruel hand (a "left-hander's blow" is a deadly blow), and turns *from right to left* (as opposed to man, who uses the right hand, the hand used in swearing an oath, and turns from left to right); she is adept in the art of slyly "twisting her gaze" (*abran walan*) away from the person to whom she wishes to express her disapproval or annoyance (*abran*, to turn from right to left, to make a slip of the tongue, to turn back to front, in short, to turn in the wrong direction, is opposed to *geleb*, to turn one's back, to overturn, as a discreet, furtive, passive movement, a female sidestepping, a "twisted" move, a magical device, is to open, honest, straightforward, male aggression).⁵¹

The fundamental operators, uniting and separating, are the practical equivalents of filling and emptying (*plerosis* and *kenosis*): to marry is *'ammar*, to be full. Through this, they can even be reduced to the fundamental oppositions: to moisten and to dry, to feminize and to masculinize. This is seen clearly in the significance assigned to everything symbolizing the union of contraries. Thus the crossroads, which is opposed to the fork as the place "where the paths meet" (*anidha itsamyagaran ibardhan*) to the place "where the paths divide" (*anidha itsamfaraqen ibardhan*), is the point of convergence of the four cardinal directions and of those who come and go in those directions. As such, it is the symbol of fullness (*i'mar ubridh*, the path is peopled, full), and, more precisely, of male fullness, which is opposed on the one hand to the emptiness of the field and forest (*lakhla*) and on the other hand to female fullness (*la'mara*), the village or the house.⁵² A sterile woman,



or a girl who cannot find a husband, goes to a *crossroads*, a tun place peopled by men, to bathe naked in the water from the tempering vat just before sunrise, that is, at the moment when the day is struggling with the night; and the water in which she has bathed is poured away at a crossroads regularly used by the flocks (a promise of fecundity).⁵³ The fearfulness of any operation reuniting contraries is particularly emphasized in the case of tempering (*asqi*, also meaning broth, sauce, and poisoning), which stands in the same relation to copulation as the crossroads – fullness in emptiness, male fullness – to the house: *sequi* is to unite the wet and the dry, in the action of sprinkling couscous with sauce: to unite the hot and the cold, fire and water, the dry and the wet, in tempering; to pour out burning (or burnt) water, poison. Tempering is a terrible act of violence allied with cunning, performed by a terrible being, the smith, whose ancestor, Sidi-Daoud, could hold red-hot iron in his bare hands and would punish tardy payers by offering them one of his products with an innocent air after first heating it white-hot.

Uniting and separating each entail the same sacrilegious violence, which breaks the natural order of things to impose on them the counter-natural order which defines culture. Witness the fact that the acts consisting of mixing or cutting, uniting or dividing, in fact fall to the same persons, all equally feared and despised – the smith, the butcher, and the corn-measurer.⁵⁴ It is almost always the smith who is appointed to perform all the sacrilegious, sacred acts of cutting, whether it be the slaughter of the sacrificial ox or circumcision (although he does not sit in the assembly, his opinion is always taken into account in matters of war or violence), and, if certain testimonies are to be believed, in some villages he is even entrusted with the inaugural ploughing. Conversely, in at least one village, the person charged with starting the ploughing, the last descendant of the man who found a piece of iron in the earth at the spot where lightning had struck, and made his ploughshare out of it, is responsible for all the acts of violence by fire and iron (circumcision, scarification, tattooing, etc.).⁵⁵ The reason for this is that in all such cases man's intervention, his very presence at the crossroads of the opposing forces which he must bring into contact in order to ensure the survival of the group, is a supremely dangerous operation. Just as a man cannot confront woman until assured of the magical protection given by circumcision, so the ploughman puts on a white woollen skull-cap and *arkasen*, leather sandals which must not enter the house, in order to avoid making himself the meeting-point of sky and earth and their antagonistic forces (whereas, to glean and clear the fields, the women, who partake of the terrestrial powers, go barefoot into the fields).⁵⁶

The temporal distribution of tasks and rites, that is, the chronological structure of the agrarian year or of the cycle of life, is the product at once



of the *diacritical intent* (separation) which orders by opposing, and the *synthetic intent* (union) which creates *passages* between the contraries by means of *rites* (of passage) which attain their full intensity when the union or separation of the antagonistic principles is effected by human agency. On the one hand, there is the fundamental opposition, always mentioned by informants, between the two "upbeats" structuring the year, *lyali*, "the nights", and *smāim*, the dogdays, in which the properties of the wet season and the dry season are brought to their highest degree of intensity; on the other hand, there are the insensible, ever-threatened transitions between opposing principles, and the rites of passage of a particular kind which are intended to ensure that men and the elements respect "the order of time" (*chronou taxis*), that is, the order of the world: feminization of the male in autumn, with ploughing and sowing and the rain-making rites which accompany them, and masculinization of the female in spring, with the progressive separation of the grain and the earth which is completed with the harvest.

The primary reason why *lyali*, "the nights", is referred to by all informants, and always in relation to *smāim*, is that the winter of winter and the summer of summer in a sense concentrate within themselves all the oppositions structuring the world and the agrarian year. The period of forty days which is believed to represent the time the seed sown in autumn takes to emerge is the prime example of the slack periods, during which nothing happens and all work is suspended, and which are marked by no major rite (except a few prognostication rites).⁵⁷ The fecundated field, duly protected, like a woman, with a thorn fence (*zerb*), is the site of a mysterious, unpredictable toil which no outward sign betrays, and which resembles the cooking of wheat or beans in the pot or the work accomplished in woman's womb. This period is indeed the winter of winter, the night of night, when the boar mates, the moment when the natural world is given over to the female forces of fecundity – natural, wild forces which can never be said to be perfectly, finally domesticated.⁵⁸ The continuing assaults of winter, cold, and night serve to remind men of the hidden violence of the female nature. In the "quarrel between winter and man",⁵⁹ winter is presented as a woman (the name of the season, *chathwa*, being treated as a personified woman's name), and doubtless an *old woman*, the incarnation of the maleficent forces of death and destruction, disorder and division, who is forced to renounce her lust for violence and show more moderation and clemency when defeated in her struggle with man. This is a sort of origin myth emphasizing the fact that winter, like woman, is dual-natured: winter contains both the purely female woman, unadulterated, untamed, incarnated in the old woman, empty, dry, sterile woman, i.e. the female principle which old age reduces to its objective,



purely negative truth;⁶⁰ but there is also the tamed, domesticated woman, woman fulfilled, i.e. fertility, the work of gestation and germination accomplished by nature when fecundated by man. It is within this logic that the famous "days of the old woman", and the other moments of transition and rupture, must be understood. The whole of nature – the earth with its buried seed, but also the womb – is the scene of a struggle similar to that between the cold and darkness of winter, an evil, sterile old woman, and the springtime forces of light with which man is in league. In all the legends of the borrowed days (*amerdil*, the loan), which are perhaps more than just a way of accounting for the unexpected return of bad weather, a being partaking of the nature of winter, usually an old woman (like Winter herself), a goat, or a Negro (the slave Hayan), sometimes even a jackal, the embodiment of natural disorder,⁶¹ is sacrificed by winter, or, no doubt, sacrificed to winter, as a scapegoat. This is perhaps the price that has to be paid for the old witch Winter to agree to respect the *limits* assigned to her, as she does when she asks the following period to lend her a few days.

Smaïm, the dogdays, is to the dry season exactly what *lyali* is to the wet season: this slack period, which is opposed to *essaïf*, the harvest, just as within the wet season *lyali*, another slack period, is opposed to *lahlal*, ploughing, presents all the properties of the dry season. The dry, sterile kingdom of summer is entered in May, a month regarded as unpropitious for any act of procreation (hence for marriages).⁶² The rites which mark the "first day of summer", also known as "the death of the land", and even more, the rites of the summer solstice, *in sla*, which occurs at the beginning of *smaïm*, make use of iron and fire, and instruments forged with fire – the ploughshare, the sickle, the carding-comb, and also the dagger (which cuts the throats of sacrificial animals and men's throats too) – instruments used to cut, chop, pierce, burn, or bleed (tattooing; preventive or curative scarification with a stick of oleander, a plant not used in the *azal* bouquet; piercing the little girls' ears; bleeding performed on the men and the animals, etc.).⁶³ The night of *in sla*, in the course of which sterile, purifying fires are lit in the house, in the midst of the flock, in the orchards, in the fields, by the hives, on the threshing-floor, etc., is given over to sterility; it is said that women cannot conceive then, and that children born on that day are themselves condemned to sterility (as are marriages celebrated then). The time of the dry is also the time for salt, for roast, spiced food, virile and virilizing, like the dried herbs used to make it, the time for wheatcake and oil, which is to summer food as butter is to winter food.⁶⁴ According to Destaing, the Beni Snous used to set an *upturned* cooking pot (a symbol of the blackness and wetness of winter) with its bottom coated with lime (blackness whitened) in the kitchen gardens (the place for female cultivation) at the time of *in sla*. *Smaïm* presents all the



features of summer in their pure state, i.e. without admixture or attenuation; it is to the year what *azal* (the hottest time of the day) or, more exactly, the middle of *azal* (*thalmasth uzal*), is to the cycle of the day. Like *azal*, *smaim*, the desert (*lakhla*) of the harvested fields, the time of iron and fire, violence and death (the time of the sword-edge, *semm*) is the male time par excellence.

Thresholds and rites of passage

The transitional periods have all the properties of the *threshold*, a sort of sacred boundary between two spaces, where the antagonistic principles confront one another and the world is reversed. The rites of these moments also obey the principle, already encountered, of the maximization of magical profit. They aim to ensure the concordance of the mythical calendar, which requires rain to come *at the right moment*, ploughing time, and the climatic calendar, with its whims and vagaries, by facilitating the passages, accompanying or if need be accelerating the passage from the dry to the wet in autumn or from the wet to the dry in spring, endeavouring at the same time to conserve for as long as possible the advantages of the declining season. This is obviously the case with all the autumn rites intended to aid the coming of rain: not only the ritual games, which are played in every season when rain is needed, such as *kura* (a ball game in which two teams, east and west, equipped with wooden sticks, try to push a ball, the *kura*, into the opposing camp), but also *thimechret*, the sacrifice of an ox (chosen for the rain-cloud colour (*azegzaw*) of its coat and evoking thunder by its lowing) and the inauguration of the ploughing (*awdjeb*), which insofar as it ritually mimes the fearful union of contraries, is in itself an invocation of rain. It is also true of the composition and preparation of the food consumed on ordinary and extraordinary occasions, which, practically treated as a ritual of *participation*, manifests the significance conferred on the transition from one season to another. The diet of autumn, generated in accordance with the scheme of soaking the dry, is made up of dry foods (cereals, dry vegetables, dried meat) which are *boiled in water, without spices*, in the cooking-pot, or (which amounts to the same thing) steamed, or raised with yeast. But autumn is also the point where the course of the world turns round and everything is turned over to enter its opposite, the male into the female, the seed into the womb of the earth, men and beasts into the house, light (with the lamp) into darkness, until the return of spring, which will set back on its feet a world turned upside down, momentarily abandoned to the supremacy of the female principle, the womb, woman, the house, and the darkness of night.⁶⁵

Indeed, more so than autumn, which is dominated by the sharp break that ploughing marks, and by the logic of fecundation, interwoven with the ritual



work of moistening the dry, spring is an interminable transition, constantly suspended and threatened, between the wet and the dry, beginning immediately after *lyali*; or, better, a struggle between two principles with unceasing reversals and changes in fortune. The rôle of mankind in this struggle, which resembles the battle fought out every morning between darkness and light, can only be that of anxious onlookers: hence perhaps, among other signs, the multitude of calendar terms almost all describing the state of the weather or the crops. In this time of waiting, when the fate of the seedlings depends on a female, ambiguous nature, and man cannot intervene without danger, the virtual cessation of activity reflects his limited control over the processes of germination and gestation; it falls to woman to play the part of a midwife and to offer nature a sort of ritual and technical assistance (hoeing, for example) in its labour.⁶⁶

This time of rupture and separation has the same rôle in the cycle of the grain as that played in the cycle of life by the rites intended to ensure the progressive virilization of the growing boy (initially a female being), beginning at birth and always involving fire or instruments made with fire.⁶⁷ All the characteristic features of this difficult transition are in a sense concentrated in the series of *critical moments*, like *husum* and *natah*, times of crisis when all the evil powers of winter seem to revive and to endanger growth and life one last time, or *nisan*, which though regarded as benignant is not exempt from threats – ambiguous periods which, even at their worst, contain the hope of the best and, even at their best, the threat of the worst. Everything takes place as if each of them bore within it the conflict which overshadows the whole season – and also the uncertainty about the future which causes these inaugural periods (especially *husum* or the first day of spring) to be, like morning, times for the rites of prognostication and inaugural practices.

The ambiguity is in spring itself: springtime means growth and childhood, to be celebrated with *joy*, like the inaugural day of the season, but it also means the vulnerability and fragility of all beginnings. Spring is to summer as green and raw (*azegzaw*) and tender (*thalaqaqth*) things – the unripe corn or the baby, and green produce, the eating of which is seen as untimely destruction (*a'dham*) – are to full-grown, yellow (*iwraghen*), ripe, dry, hardened produce.⁶⁸ The women are logically charged with all the tasks involving the protection of things that grow and shoot, that are green and tender; it is the women's duty to watch over the growth of the young humans and animals, the morning of life. As well as hoeing, the women's work includes gathering herbs and vegetables in the garden, looking after the cow, milking it, and making butter, a female product which is opposed to oil as the inside and the wet to the outside and the dry.

The precise locus of the threshold, where the order of things turns upside



down (*aqlab*), "like a wheatcake in the pan", is explicitly marked by the "return of *azall*" (*tharurith wazal*), the point of division between the wet season and the dry season, where the year tips over: the rhythm of the working day – defined by the moment when the flock goes out – changes, and with it the group's whole existence. The *fire is brought out* and the *kanun* is set up in the courtyard. The flock with its shepherd, the housewife busy with the tasks of milking and treating the milk, bring into the rites new elements partaking more of the dry than of the wet. The flock ceases to be fed on tender green plants from the cultivated fields and goes and grazes instead on wild, dry plants. The herbs, flowers, and branches that the shepherd brings back with him on his first return at the hour of *azal*, which go to make up the bouquet, called *azal*, that is ritually placed above the threshold (fern, cytisis, bramble, thyme, lentisk, male fig-tree branches, asparagus, elm, thapsia, myrtle, tamarind, heather, broom – in short, "everything the wind shakes in the countryside") are the wild products of fallow land (and not the product, even parasitically, of cultivated land, like the plants gathered by the women while hoeing). The change in food is even clearer: the special dishes of *tharurith wazal* give a prominent place to milk, as in the previous period, but it is now eaten in cooked or boiled form.

Reunion of contraries and denial

The times of separation, when the opposing principles may be said to exist in their pure state, as in summer, or to threaten, in the case of winter, to return to it, and the times of reunion, when the dry returns to the wet, as in autumn, or the wet returns to the dry, as in spring, are moments opposed to one another; but they are also opposed in a different way, as moments in which reunion and separation are accomplished without any more than symbolic participation on the part of man, to the times when reunion and separation take on a critical form because it falls to man himself to bring them about. It is precisely here that the structure of ritual practice is articulated with the structure of farming activity: the opposition between the propitiatory rites of the transitional periods and the sanctioning rites which are obligatory for the whole group and above all for the men, during the periods of human intervention in nature, harvesting and ploughing, appears in fact as the retranslation into the specific logic of ritual of the opposition – structuring the agrarian year – between the time of work and the much longer time of production, during which the grain – like the pottery set out to dry – undergoes a purely natural process of transformation. The high moments in the agrarian year, those which Marx designates *working periods*, are marked by rites contrasting in their gravity, solemnity, and imperative character with



the rites of the *production periods*, whose sole function is to lend magical assistance to *nature in its labour* (see fig. 3).⁶⁹

The rites which accompany ploughing or marriage have the function of disguising and thereby sanctioning the inevitable collision of two contrary principles that the peasant brings about in forcing nature, doing it violence and violation, as he must, with ploughshare and knife, sickle and loom – instruments fearful in themselves, being the work of the smith, the master of fire. The aim is to transform into intentionally performed, and hence judiciously euphemized, ritual acts the objectively sacrilegious acts of separating, cutting, and dividing things which nature (i.e. the taxonomy) has united (when reaping, cutting the yarn after weaving, or cutting the throat of the sacrificial ox);⁷⁰ or to reunite – in tempering, marriage, or ploughing – things which nature (i.e. the taxonomy) has put asunder. When objectively sacrilegious acts cannot be delegated to an inferior being, a sacrificer and scapegoat whose rôle is to “take away ill fortune”⁷¹ (like the slaughter of the ox in the collective sacrifices, which is entrusted to the smith or a Negro, and tempering, the task of the smith, a man both feared and respected) but must be shouldered by those who undertake and benefit from them (like the defloration of the bride, turning the first furrow, cutting the last thread in weaving, harvesting the last sheaf), they are transfigured by a collective *mise en scène* intended to impose on them a collectively proclaimed symbolic value which is the exact opposite of their socially recognized, and hence no less objective, truth. The whole truth of magic and collective belief is contained in this game of twofold objective truth, a double game played with truth, through which the group, the source of all objectivity, in a sense lies to itself, producing a truth whose sole meaning and function are to deny a truth known and recognized by all, a lie which would deceive no one, were not everyone determined to deceive *himself*.

In the case of the harvest, the social truth to be collectively denied is an unambiguous one: the harvest (*thamegra*) is a murder (*thamgert*, the throat, violent death, revenge; *amgar*, sickle), in which the earth, fecundated by ploughing, is stripped of the produce it has brought to maturity.

The ritual of the last sheaf, of which we have countless descriptions – no doubt because attention was drawn to it by Frazer’s analyses⁷² – and hence almost as many variants, always consists essentially in symbolically denying the inevitable murder of the field, or of the source of its fecundity, the “spirit of the corn” of “spirit of the field”, by transforming it into a sacrifice conducive to resurrection. From the names given to the last sheaf, it seems that the “spirit of the field” whose perpetuation is to be affirmed is practically identified, depending on the variant, either with an *animal* (informants speak of “the mane of the field” and “the tail of the field”) or with a bride, *thislith*, destined to die after having borne her fruit (informants speak of “the curl of the field” and “the plait of the field”). To these different representations



correspond different rituals: in some villages it is held to be a sin to reap the last sheaf, which is left standing in the middle of the field for the poor, the oxen, or the birds; in other villages, it is mown (or uprooted by hand to avoid contact with the sickle), but always in accordance with a special ritual. The ritual murder of the field may be enacted in the sacrifice of an animal which is both its embodiment and its substitute.⁷³ It may also be performed on the last sheaf itself, treated like a sacrificial animal: in one tradition (observed in central Kabylia by Jean Servier), the master of the field turns to face the east, lays the last sheaf on the ground with its "head" towards the east, as if it were an ox, and simulates cutting its throat, letting a handful of soil trickle from his left hand in the middle of the wound to represent bleeding. Finally, in the Soummam region, the last sheaf may be treated as if it were a dead man and be buried in an eastward-facing grave to the accompaniment of prayers (*chahada*) and chants announcing its resurrection (e.g. "Die, die, O field, our master can bring you back to life!"). Even when what seems to be the original form of the ritual has disappeared (as it has in Great Kabylia), it is still the master of the field who reaps the last sheaf and brings it back to the house, where it is hung from the main beam. Resurrection can come only through repetition of the primal marriage of sky and earth: and for this reason the harvest rites reapply the logic of the rain-making rites at a time when rain is not required for its specifically technical function (which is never autonomized) and can only serve the purpose of revivifying the sacred strength of the corn or the field. Thus the whole apparatus of the rain-making rites reappears, with the characters (Anzar and his wife Ghonja, he representing rain and the sky, and she the young virgin soil, the bride, etc.) and the objects (dolls, banners) which figure in it. Sometimes one even finds the marriage by abduction of the hoeing games.

The ploughing ceremony, another ritual intended to sanction the union of contraries, cannot be fully understood unless one knows that the period following the harvest, with its rites to ensure the perpetuation of the fecundating principle, is a *time of separation*, devoted to the manly virtues, the point of honour and combats.⁷⁴ *Lakhrif*, an *extra-ordinary* period of plenty and rest, which cannot be defined either as a labour period, like ploughing and harvesting, or as a production period, like winter and spring, is the male time par excellence, when the group opens up to the outside world and must confront *outsiders*, in feasts and in war, so as to knit alliances which, like extra-ordinary marriages, are far from excluding challenge. Like the grain set aside as seed corn, which will be kept in a state of separation, the young boy is symbolically torn from the female world by circumcision, a ceremony from which women are rigorously excluded, the function of which is to co-opt the boy into the world of men by means of an operation regarded as a second birth, a purely male event this time, one which, as the saying goes, "makes men". In one variant of the ritual, the newly circumcised boys are surrounded by two or three concentric circles of men seated on ploughshares with their rifles in their hands.⁷⁵ The land itself is divested of every trace of life as the trees are stripped, the last fruit picked, and any remaining vegetation uprooted from the fields and gardens. The state of separation ends, for the natural world, with *awdjeb*, the solemn inauguration of the ploughing, which cele-



brates the marriage of the sky and the earth, the ploughshare and the furrow, by the collective enactment of a whole range of mimetic practices, including human marriage.

The return to the ordinary order is also marked by the reassertion of the primacy of the strengthening of kin-group unity over the pursuit of distant alliances, with *thimechret*, the sacrifice of an ox at the door of the year; its throat is cut, its blood is sprinkled on the ground, calling down rain, and the consecrated meat is shared out among all members of the community. This sacrifice, intended to sanction the imposition of the human order on fecund but wild nature (symbolized by the jackal, "who has no house" and feeds on raw flesh – *azegzaw* – and blood), is a meal of alliance. In solemnly reaffirming the bonds of real or official blood kinship which unite all living members of the *adhrum* (*thaymats*) in and through the original community (*thadjadith*), that is, the relation to common ancestors, the source of all fecundity, this act of sacred commensality proclaims the specifically human (i.e. male) order of the oath of loyalty, against nostalgia for the struggle of all against all, again embodied in the jackal (or woman, the source of division) and his sacrilegious cunning (*thahraymith*). Like the natural world, within whose domesticated fertility lie the only half-tamed forces of a wild nature (those embodied and exploited by the old witch), the social order sprung from the oath which tears the assembly of men from the disorder of individual interests remains haunted by consciously repressed nostalgia for the state of nature.

This philosophy of history, implicit in the whole ritual calendar, is expressed in a tale: "The animals once met together in an *assembly* and *swore* not to prey on one another any longer, and to live on earth in peace. They chose the lion to be their king... devised laws, and defined sanctions... The animals lived in peace... Life would have been fine if Jackal, the lion's counsellor, had not ruined everything. He was an old hand at every sort of *treachery*... and he regretted the former state of affairs; the smell of *fresh meat and warm blood*, which were now forbidden, used to send him into a frenzy... He decided to resort to *guile* (*thahraymith*) and secretly to incite the courtiers to disobey, one after another – the work of a demon."⁷⁶ In the same tale, the jackal eats the animals he is supposed to bury. He has the task of fetching water. Another feature he shares with woman is that he is *twisted*: "they put a jackal's tail down a rifle barrel for forty days, and when they took it out again, it was just as before." Moreover, like woman, he *divides*, and does so by his cunning.

Rite must resolve by means of an operation socially approved and collectively assumed – that is, in accordance with the logic of the taxonomy that gives rise to it – the specific contradiction which the primal dichotomy makes inevitable in constituting as separate and antagonistic principles that must be reunited in order to ensure the reproduction of the group. By a practical denial, not an individual, asocial one like that described by Freud, but a collective,



public denial (as in all belief), rite neutralizes the dangerous forces contained in the wild, untamed, natural nature of woman or the earth, as well as those that may be unleashed by violation of its *haram*, transgression of the sacred limit.⁷⁷ Enacted in this way, collectively and publicly, through the intermediary of an authorized delegate, in accordance with the arbitrarily prescribed rules of a ritual, sacrilege is symbolically denied in the very act in which it is performed. Acting as a delegated representative of the group, and also as a scapegoat designated to confront the curse of the earth, the man to whom it falls to open the ploughing, "the man of the wedding"⁷⁸ as he is sometimes known, solemnly reproduces, with his ploughshare born of a thunderbolt, the marriage of sky and earth, the archetypal fecundation which is the condition of the success of all human acts of fecundation.⁷⁹ Male and female, wet and dry, are in a sense separated only so as to be reunited, since only their union – in ploughing or marriage – can free them from the negative properties (negative only in the respect in question, that of fecundity) that are associated with them so long as they remain in the *odd-numbered, imperfect* state of separateness.⁸⁰ The ploughshare, an instrument which is forged in another reunion of contraries, the *tempering* of iron, and has the same name as the thunderbolt, *thagursa*, is in itself dry and sterile, like the seed it introduces into the earth: it is a source of fertility only through the violence it inflicts. As for the earth, left to itself it returns to sterility or the wild fecundity of fallow land, which, twisted and malignant like the maiden, cannot produce all its benefits unless it is forced and violated, and also raised and straightened.

The rites of ploughing owe their complexity to the fact that they must not only sanction the union of opposites but also facilitate that state of the union of contraries in which *supremacy* temporarily passes to the female principle: the seed temporarily condemned to dryness and sterility returns to life only through immersion in female wetness;⁸¹ but the future of the grain (for the earth, like the ewe, may fail to bring forth – *thamazgults*, from *zgel*, to misfire) depends on female powers which the act of fecundation has had to force. The "door of the year" is not the moment when the year begins (it has no beginning, being an everlasting beginning anew); it is the moment when, like the house, which must remain open to the fecundating light of the sun, the year opens up to the male principle which fecundates and fills it. Ploughing and sowing mark the culmination of the movement of the outside into the inside, the empty into the full, the dry into the wet, sunlight into earthly shadows, the fecundating male into the fertile female.

Marriage rites and ploughing rites owe their numerous similarities to the fact that their *objective intention* is to sanction the union of contraries which is the condition of the resurrection of the grain and the reproduction of the



group. This dialectic of death and resurrection is expressed in the saying (often used nowadays in another sense when speaking of generation conflicts): "From life they draw death, from death they draw life" (a scheme which reappears in the riddle: "Something dead out of something living" – an egg. "Something living out of something dead" – a chick). The sacrifice and collective eating of the ox is a mimetic representation of the cycle of the grain, which must die so as to feed the whole community, and whose resurrection is symbolized by the solemn meal bringing together the whole community in a recalling of the dead. As is shown by the status of the outsider, the man who cannot "cite" any ascendant and will not be "cited" by any descendant (*asker*, to cite and also to resurrect) the group membership that is affirmed by gathering together in commensality implies the power to recall ascendants and the certainty of being recalled by descendants. The return of the dead, that is, resurrection, is called for by every aspect of symbolism, particularly that of cooking: thus the broad bean, the male, dry seed par excellence, akin to the bones, the refuge of the soul waiting for resurrection, is served in the couscous offered to the dead at the start the ploughing (and also on the eve of feast days, especially the eve of *Achura*); it is one of the articles thrown into the first furrow; it is used in the boiled dishes always served on such occasions: an almost transparent symbol of the dead ("I put a bean in the ground", runs a riddle, "and it didn't come up" – a dead man), whose food it is ("I saw the dead nibbling beans" – I almost died), it is predisposed to carry the symbolism of death and resurrection as a desiccated seed which, after ritual burial in the damp womb of nature, swells and comes up again, more numerous, in spring (when it is the first sign of plant life to appear).⁸²

As acts of procreation, that is, of re-creation, marriage and ploughing are both conceived of as male acts of opening and sowing destined to produce a female action of swelling, and it is logical that ritual enactment should mobilize on the one hand everything that opens (keys, nails), everything that is open (untied hair and girdles, trailing garments), everything that is sweet, soft, and white (sugar, honey, dates, milk), and on the other hand everything that swells and rises (pancakes, fritters, seeds which swell while cooking – *ufthyen*), everything that is multiple and tightly packed (grains of *seksu*, couscous, or *berkukes*, coarse couscous, pomegranate seeds, fig seeds), everything that is full (eggs, nuts, almonds, pomegranates, figs), the most effective objects and actions being those which compound the various properties.⁸³ Such are the egg, the symbol par excellence of that which is full and pregnant with life, or the pomegranate, which is at once full, swollen, and multiple, and of which one riddle says, "Granary upon granary, the corn inside is red", and another: "No bigger than a pounding-stone, and its children are more



than a hundred." And a whole aspect of the multi-functional action performed in ploughing and marriage is summed up in the ploughman's gesture of breaking (*felleq*, to burst, split, deflower) a pomegranate or an egg on his ploughshare.

The first time the yoke of oxen, the plough, and the seed corn set out for the fields and the moment of the bride's arrival in her new house are marked by the same rites. The girl is welcomed on the threshold by the "old woman" who holds the "sieve of the traditions", containing fritters, eggs, wheat, beans, dates, nuts, dried figs, pomegranates, etc. The bride breaks the eggs on the head of the mule that bears her, wipes her hands on its mane, and throws the sieve behind her, and the children who have followed her scramble (number = abundance) to pick up the titbits it contained. Similarly, the "ploughing sieve" which, depending on the local traditions, may be carried by various persons (the ploughman, his wife) at various times (in the morning, when the ploughman leaves the house, or on his arrival in the fields, when he yokes the oxen, or at the time of the midday meal), always contains pancakes, dried beans, wheat, and a pomegranate, which the ploughman throws into the furrows over the oxen and the plough, and which the children scramble for (with countless variants, such as these: the ploughman breaks two pomegranates, a few wheatcakes, and some fritters on the ploughshare, and distributes the rest among those present; the offerings are buried in the first furrow). Endless examples could be given of features common to the two rituals: the bride (and her procession) are sprinkled with milk and she herself often sprinkles water and milk as she enters her new house, just as the mistress of the house sprinkles the plough with water or milk as it leaves for the fields. The bride is presented with a key with which she strikes the lintel of the door (elsewhere a key is put under her clothes as she is being dressed); a key is put in the bag of seed corn and sometimes thrown into the furrow. The bridal procession is preceded by a woman bearing a lamp (*mesbah*) which represents sexual union, with the clay, the oil and the flame of which it is composed symbolizing the constituent parts of the human being – the body, the damp, female, vegetative soul, *nefs* (a word sometimes used as a euphemism for the genitals, the seat of the "bad instincts" – *thinefsith*) and the dry, male, subtle soul, *ruh* (a euphemism for the penis);⁸⁴ and on the first day of ploughing, a lamp is taken to the fields and kept alight until the first delimited plot of land (*thamtirth*) has been sown. The bride must not wear a girdle for seven days, and on the seventh day her girdle must be tied by the mother of many sons; the woman who carries the seed corn must avoid tying her girdle too tight and she must also wear a long dress which trails behind in a lucky *train* (*abru'*). The bride's hair must remain untied for the first seven days; the woman who carries the seed corn always lets her hair hang loose. Also common to both rituals are: rifle shots (in even numbers), stone-throwing, and target-shooting, all of which frequently figure in the rain-making rites as symbols of male sprinkling which have the power of *untying* that which is tied.⁸⁵ The bride's life continues in this way under the sign of fertility: on the seventh day, when she comes out of the house to go to the fountain for the first time, before drawing water she throws into the spring the grains of corn and the beans which had been placed under her bed; the first work she does is to sift the wheat, the noble task par excellence.



Making use of indeterminacy

The propitiatory *mise-en-scène* through which ritual action aims at creating the conditions favourable to the success of the miracle of the resurrection of the grain by reproducing it symbolically presents a certain number of ambiguities which appear, for example, when one considers the ritual of the last sheaf. In some places the last sheaf is "treated practically" as a female personification of the field ("the strength of the earth", "the bride"), on whom male rain, sometimes personified as Anzar,⁸⁷ is called down; in others it is a male (phallic) symbol of "the spirit of the corn", destined to return for a while to dryness and sterility before inaugurating a new cycle of life by pouring down in rain onto the parched earth. The same ambiguities reappear in the ploughing ritual, although at first sight the acts tending to favour the world's return to wetness (and in particular the rites specifically intended to provoke rain, which are performed in identical form in spring) can be combined quite logically with the actions intended to favour the act of fecundation, ploughing or marriage, as the immersion of the dry in the wet, celestial seed in the fertile earth. In the presence of rain, dry water, which through its heavenly origin partakes of solar maleness, while on the other hand it partakes of wet, terrestrial femininity, the system of classification hesitates. The same is true of tears, urine, and blood, much used in the homoeopathic strategies of the rain-making rites, and also semen, which gives new life to woman as rain does to the earth, and of which it may be said indifferently either that it swells or that it makes swell, like beans or wheat in the cooking pot.⁸⁸ Hence the hesitations of magical practice, which, far from being troubled by these ambiguities, takes advantage of them.⁸⁹ After systematically cataloguing the multiple variants of the rain-making rites, Laoust (the only anthropologist to have seen the contradiction clearly) infers the female nature of *thislith*, the betrothed (or *thlonja*, the ladle), a doll made out of a ladle dressed like a bride, which is taken round in a procession while rain is called down. The meticulousness and rigour of his inventory provide us with the means of grasping the properties which make of the "doll" of the rain-making rites, hoeing rites (it is "Mata" whose abduction is simulated), and harvest rites a being which is unclassifiable from the point of view of the very system of classification of which its properties are the product. First, there is a name, *thislith*, which may well be no more than a euphemism to denote a phallic symbol, and which, by encouraging the "female" reading, orients the ritual actions, since being male it sprinkles and being female it is sprinkled. Then there is a shape, an ambiguous one for the taxonomy itself, since the ladle can be treated as a hollow, liquid-filled object which sprinkles, or as a hollow,



empty object asking to be sprinkled. Finally, there is a function, that of the ladle itself, an implement made to sprinkle or to serve from the (female) cooking-pot.

Here is a series of scattered, contradictory observations, which were collected in the hope of removing the ambiguity of the ladle but only serve to confirm it. (1) On her wedding day the bride plunges the ladle into the pot: she will bear as many sons as she brings up pieces of meat. (2) A proverb: "Whatever there is in the cooking-pot, the ladle will bring it up." (3) The ladle is hung on a piece of string so that it balances evenly, in front of a piece of wheatcake; if it dips towards the wheatcake, the hoped-for event will occur. (4) Of a man who cannot do anything with his hands: "He's like the ladle." (5) You must never hit anyone with a ladle: either the implement would break (there is only one in the house) or the person struck would break. (6) A man must never eat out of the ladle (to taste the soup, as the women do): the consequence would be storms and rain when he marries. (7) If a man scrapes the bottom of the pot with the ladle, it is bound to rain on his wedding day. (8) To someone using a tool clumsily: "Would you have eaten with the ladle?" – if one eats with the ladle one is liable to be cheated. This sort of taxonomic hesitation is not uncommon: it can be found in relation to moonlight (*tiziri*), the unlooked-for light, or embers (*times*, a word which is taboo in the presence of men and is replaced by euphemisms), a female fire which consumes and is consumed, like passion (*thinefsith*, a diminutive of *nefs* which we have already encountered), under the ashes, a crafty, treacherous fire which suggests female sexuality (as opposed to the flame, *ahajuju*, which purifies and sets alight); or even in relation to clearly attributed objects like the egg, the symbol par excellence of female fertility, which also partakes of the male through its colour (white) and its name (*thamellalts*, plural *thimellalin*, egg; *vmellalen*, the white (masculine plural), the testicles of the adult; *thimellalin*, the white (feminine plural), eggs, the child's testicles). But, because the fundamental schemes are roughly congruent, the divergences never run, as they do here, into contradiction.

The uncertainty of usage duplicates the uncertainty of significance: because the ritual use that can be made of an object depends on the meanings it is given by the taxonomy, it is not surprising that when agents are dealing, as they are here, with objects whose properties are a challenge to the system of classification, they should put them to uses quite incompatible with some of the meanings that they could have outside that relationship (especially in situations like drought, when the urgency of practical necessity requires agents to relax the demands of logic even further and to make use of anything that will serve). And because the meaning of a symbol is only ever fully determined in and through the actions it effects or undergoes (the raven, for example, being less ominous when it flies from west to east), the uncertainties of the interpretation simply reflect the uncertainties of the use that the agents themselves may make of a symbol so overdetermined as to be indeterminate even from the point of view of the schemes which determine it (the error in this case lying in wanting to impose decision on the undecidable, in decreeing male or female a symbol which different practices treat indifferently as dry or wet, fecundating or fecundable). The cultural artefact, *thislith* thought and fashioned for the specifically cultural needs of rite, is thus endowed with the *plurality of aspects* (different or even contradictory ones) which the objects of the world possess until the cultural system of classifications frees them from it through the arbitrary selection which it effects.

With this example we draw near the principle of practical logic, which functions



practically only by taking all sorts of liberties with the most elementary principles of logical logic: thus the same symbol can relate to realities that are opposed even from the standpoint of the axiomatics of the system – or rather, we must include in that axiomatics the fact that the system does not exclude contradiction. If being able to write out the algebra of practical logics is not *a priori* unthinkable, it can be seen that the precondition of doing so would be the knowledge that logical logic, which only ever speaks of them *negatively* in the very operations through which it constitutes itself by denying them, is not prepared to describe them without destroying them. It would simply be a question of constructing the model of this *partially integrated* system of generative schemes which, *partially mobilized* to deal with each particular situation, in each case produces, without acceding to discourse and the logical verifiability which it makes possible, a practical “definition” of the situation and of the functions of the action – almost always multiple and overlapping – and, in accordance with a combinatoric logic at once complex and inexhaustible, generates the appropriate actions to fulfil these functions given the means available. More precisely, one only has to compare the diagrams corresponding to the different domains of practice – the agrarian year, cooking, the women’s work, the day – to see that these different series spring from different schemes: the oppositions between the wet and the dry, the cold and the hot, and the full and the empty, in the case of the agrarian year; between the wet and the dry (in the form of the boiled and the roast, two forms of the cooked), the bland and the spiced, in the case of cooking; between the dark and the light, the cold and the hot, the inside (or the closed) and the outside in the case of the day; between the female and the male, the tender (green) and the hard (dry), in the case of the cycle of life. Then one would only have to add other structured universes, such as the space inside the house or the parts of body, to see other principles at work: above and below, east and west, etc. These different schemes are at once partially independent and more or less closely interconnected: thus the opposition dry/wet (or drying/soaking) can be used to generate practices or symbols that cannot be produced directly from the opposition inside/outside or darkness/light, and vice versa; on the other hand, there is a direct passage from hot/cold to dry/wet, whereas hot/cold is connected with inside/outside only through the intermediary of light/darkness, and the path to oppositions like standing up/lying down, empty/full, or above/below is even longer. In other words, each of the oppositions constituting the system can be linked with all the others, but along paths of varying length (which may or may not be reversible), i.e. at the end of a series of equivalences which progressively empty the relationship of its content (e.g. waking/sleeping ~ outside/inside ~ standing up/lying down ~ east/west ~ light/darkness ~ hot/cold ~ spiced/bland); moreover, each opposition can be linked with several others in different respects by relations of differing intensity and meaning (e.g. spiced/bland can be directly related to male/female and less directly to strong/weak or empty/full, through the intermediary, in the latter case, of male/female and dry/wet, themselves interconnected). It follows that all the oppositions do not have the same rôle in the system; it is possible to distinguish secondary oppositions which specify the principal oppositions in a particular respect and have a low yield on account of this (yellow/green, a simple specification of dry/wet), and central oppositions (such as male/female or dry/wet) strongly interconnected with all the others by logically very diverse relations which constitute arbitrary cultural necessity (e.g. the relations between female/male and inside/outside or left/right, twisted/straight, below/above). Given that, in practice, no more than one particular sector of the system of schemes is mobilized at any one time (without all the connections with the other oppositions ever being entirely severed) and that the



different schemes mobilized in different situations are partially autonomous and partially linked with all the others, it is natural that all the products of the application of these schemes, both individual rites and series of ritual actions such as the rites of passage, should be partially congruent and should appear as roughly, that is, practically, equivalent to anyone possessing practical mastery of the system of schemes.⁹⁰

The habitus and homologies

The presence of symbolically identical objects or acts in the rituals associated with such different events in the existence of man and the land as funerals, ploughing, harvesting, circumcision, or marriage cannot and need not be explained in any other way. The partial coincidence of the significations which the practical taxonomies confer on these events is matched by the partial coincidence of the ritual acts and symbols, whose polysemy is perfectly appropriate to the requirements of essentially "multi-functional" practices. An agent does not need symbolic mastery of the concepts of *swelling* (or *durable swelling*) and *resurrection* to associate the dish called *ufthyen*, a mixture of wheat and beans which swells when boiled, with the ceremonies of marriage, ploughing, or burial, through the intermediary of what is there subordinate to the "resurrection" function; or to rule out eating this dish ("because the gum would stay swollen") when teeth are being cut (in favour of *thibu'jajin*, a sort of pancake which as it cooks forms bubbles which burst at once) and on the occasion of circumcision, which as a rite of purification and virilization, that is to say, of breaking with the female world, is seen syncretically as associated with the dry, fire, and violence, gives a prominent place to target-shooting, and is accompanied by roast meat. But this does not prevent the dish being associated with target-shooting in at least one variant of the ritual of a multi-functional ceremony like marriage, in which "intentions" of virilization (opening) and fertilization (swelling) are combined.

Application of the same schemes in fields as different as the "calendars" of cooking or of the women's tasks, the series of moments in the day or the cycle of life, is the principle underlying the homologies which analysis discovers in practices and works. Thus, to explain the essential features of the series of ordinary and extraordinary dishes which, on account of the participation-rite function conferred on eating,⁹¹ are associated with the different periods of the agrarian year (see fig. 4) one only has to go to the opposition between two classes of food and two classes of operations: on one side there are the dry foods (cereals (wheat and barley), dried vegetables (beans, peas, chick peas, lentils, etc.), dried meat) which are *boiled in water*, *unspiced*, in the *cooking-pot*, indoors, or (which amounts to the same thing)



steamed, or raised with leaven (fritters), operations which all make the food *well*; and on the other side there are the raw, green, or fresh foods (three meanings of the word *azegzaw*, associated with spring and unripe corn) which are eaten *raw* (as tends to be the case in spring) and/or *boiled* or *grilled* (on the griddle, *bufrah*) and heavily spiced (as in summer).⁹² And the variations observed are fully accounted for when one has noted that the first combination is characteristic of late autumn and winter, the period when the dry is moistened and the fertilized earth and woman are expected to swell, whereas the second is associated with spring, a transitional season, and summer, the period of desiccation of the wet and separation from the female, when everything that has developed inwardly, like grains of wheat and beans (*ufthyen*) must open out and ripen in the light of day.⁹³

Without entering into a description – strictly speaking, an interminable one, owing to the innumerable variants – of the feast-day dishes which in a sense concentrate the characteristic properties of the cooking associated with the various periods, it is nonetheless possible briefly to indicate their pertinent features, bearing in mind that the dishes differ not so much in their ingredients as in the processes applied to them, which strictly define cooking (so that certain “polysemous” items reappear at different times of the year and in very different rites: for example wheat, of course, but also broad beans, which figure in the meals of ploughing time, the first day of January, harvest time, funerals, etc.). On ploughing days, the meal eaten outside in the fields is, as always, more male, i.e. “drier”, than the food of autumn and winter as a whole, which is *boiled* or steamed, like the food eaten at the time of weddings or burials; but the meal taken in the evening after the first day’s ploughing always consists of boiled cereals, with numerous variants, or a coarse-grained, unspiced couscous, a dish explicitly excluded from the meal of the first day of spring (“because the ants would multiply like the grains of semolina”) or *ufthyen*, made from grains of wheat and beans cooked in water or steam, or *abisar*, a sort of thick bean purée, the food of the dead and of resurrection (these dishes are always associated with many-seeded fruit, pomegranates, figs, grapes, nuts, or sweet foods, honey, dates, etc., symbols of “easiness”). Wheatcake, the dry, male food par excellence, must not be cooked during the first three days of ploughing; it is even said that if roast meat were eaten (the meat of the *thimechret* ox is eaten boiled), the oxen would before long be injured in the neck. The couscous (*berkukes*) eaten on the first day of *ennayer* contains poultry, typically female (among other reasons because the fowl are the women’s personal property). But it is no doubt on the eve of this day (sometimes called the “old women” of *ennayer*) that the scheme generating winter food, that of moistening the dry, shows through most clearly: on that day, people must eat nothing but boiled, dry grains (sometimes with fritters), and must eat their fill; they must not eat meat (“so as not to break the bones”) or dates (“so as not to expose the stones”). The meal eaten on the first day of *ennayer* (*Achura*) is very similar to that of the first day of ploughing: it is always substantial (being an inaugural rite) and consists of *abisar* or *berkukes* and fritters, or boiled cereal. From the first day of spring, as well as the traditional elements of fertility-giving food (couscous cooked in the steam of *adhri*, thapsia, which causes swelling, hard-boiled eggs, which must be eaten to satiety), the diet includes grilled cereals (which the children eat *outdoors*), raw, green produce (beans and other



vegetables) and milk (warmed or cooked). With the return of *azal*, dry pancakes dipped in hot milk, and semolina with butter, announce the dry, male food of summer. The combination characterizing the feast-day meals of the dry season is wheatcake and grilled meat with or without couscous (depending mainly on whether it is eaten in the fields or in the house); more ordinary meals consist of wheatcake dipped in oil (a dry, male food contrasting with wet, female butter) and dried figs and also, for indoor meals, grilled fresh vegetables.

The same structure reappears in the "calendar" of the women's work, which complements the farming "calendar" to which it is directly subordinated (see fig. 5). The action homologous with marriage and ploughing, the assembly of the loom, whose two uprights and two beams – called the "sky beam" and the "earth beam", or the east beam and west beam – delimit the weaving just as the furrow delimits the field, takes place in autumn ("the figs and blackberries are ripe, and we have no blankets"): passers-by are offered figs, dates, and almonds, and a meal of moist, swelling food (*tighrifin*, fritters) is eaten.⁹⁴ Like ploughing, weaving is a marriage of sky and earth, and the cloth is the product of a birth: *thanslith*, the triangular motif with which weaving starts, is a symbol of fecundity (from the root *NSL*, to begin, to engender); unmarried girls must not sit astride the thread, married women may; the crossing of the thread is called *ruh*, the soul.⁹⁵ Weaving is the winter activity, which ends with the wet season, in May. Just as the last sheaf is often cut by hand, by the master of the field, so it falls to the mistress of the house to unfasten the woven cloth, without the use of iron and after sprinkling it with water, as is done to the dead. Care is taken not to perform this dangerous operation in the presence of a man: every birth being a rebirth, the law of the equivalence of lives, a "soul" for a "soul", is capable of exacting the death of a human being as the price of the birth of the cloth.⁹⁶ When the cloth has been removed, the loom is dismantled and put away for the duration of "the death of the field".

Wool and pottery, natural products, have much the same cycle. Pottery, being derived from the earth, partakes of the life of the field; the clay is collected in autumn. but it is never worked in that season, nor in winter, when the earth is pregnant, but in spring. The unfired (*azegzaw*) pottery dries slowly in the sun (wet-dry) while the ears of corn are ripening (the wet-dry period). So long as the earth bears the ears, it cannot be baked; it is only after the harvest, when the earth is bare and no longer producing, and fire is no longer liable to dry up the ears (the dry-dry period) that baking can be carried out, in the open air (dry-dry).

The wool, which is sheared at the end of the cold period, is washed with soap and water, at the moment when everything is opening and swelling (*thafsuth*) and boiled in a pot into which some wheat and beans (*ufthyen*) have been thrown, so that the flocks of wool will swell like the ears of corn in the

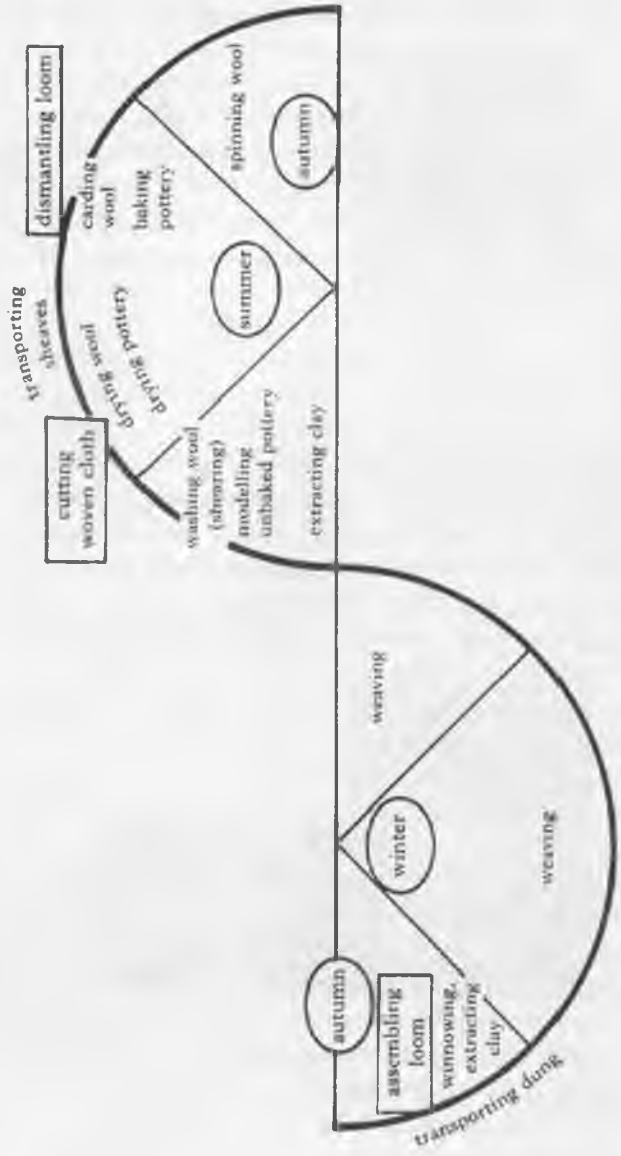


Fig. 5. The cycle of the women's activities



fields. It dries at the same time as the pottery, in the wet-dry period. It is carded with instruments as typically "sharp" and male as the carding-comb, the symbol of separation and male roughness, a product of the work of the smith which is used in the virilization rites and in the prophylactic rites intended to ward off the diseases associated with evening and the wet.⁹⁷

The structure of the day (which integrates the five Moslem prayers very naturally) constitutes another, particularly legible, product of the application of the same structuring principles. The wet-season day is nocturnal even in its diurnal part: because the flock goes out and returns only once in the course of this day, it appears as an incomplete form of the dry-season day (see fig. 6).⁹⁸ On the day called "the return of *azal*", the threshold of the dry season, when the mistress of the house brings the fire out into the courtyard and lights the *kanun* in *thimetbakh*, there is an abrupt changeover to a more complex rhythm, defined by the double departure and return of the flocks:⁹⁹ they go out for the first time at dawn and come back as soon as the heat becomes burdensome, that is, around *eddoha*; the second departure coincides with the midday prayer, *eddohor*, and they return at nightfall.

Just as the year runs from autumn towards summer, moving from west to east, so the day (*as*) runs from the evening towards midday: although the whole system is organized in accordance with the perfect cycle of an eternal recurrence – evening and autumn, old age and death, being also the locus of procreation and sowing – time is nonetheless oriented towards the culminating point represented by midday, summer, or mature age (see fig. 7). Night, in its darkest part, the "shadows" of "the middle of the night", which brings men, women, and children together in the most secret part of the house, close to the animals, in the closed, damp, cold place of sexual relations, a place associated with death and the grave, is opposed to the day, and more precisely to its summit, *azal*, the moment when the light and heat of the sun at its zenith are at their strongest. The link between night and death, which is underscored by nocturnal sounds like the howling of dogs and the grating of the sleepers' teeth, similar to that of the dying, is marked in all the taboos of the evening: the practices forbidden – bathing, or even wandering round stretches of water, especially stagnant, black, muddy, stinking water, looking in mirrors, anointing the hair, touching ashes – would have the effect of in a sense doubling the malignancy of the nocturnal darkness through contact with substances which are all endowed with the same properties (and are in some cases interchangeable – the hair, mirrors, black waters).

The morning is a moment of *transition* and *rupture*, a *threshold*. Dawn is a struggle between day and night: it is during the hours before daybreak, as the reign of night comes to an end, that the rites of expulsion and purification

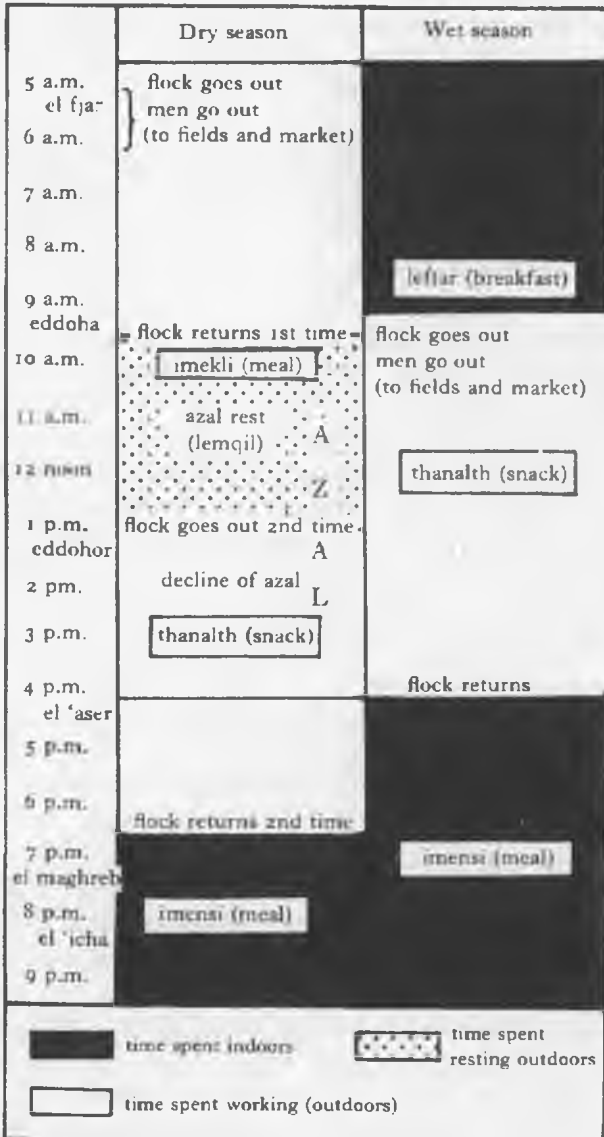


Fig. 6. Daily rhythms in summer and winter

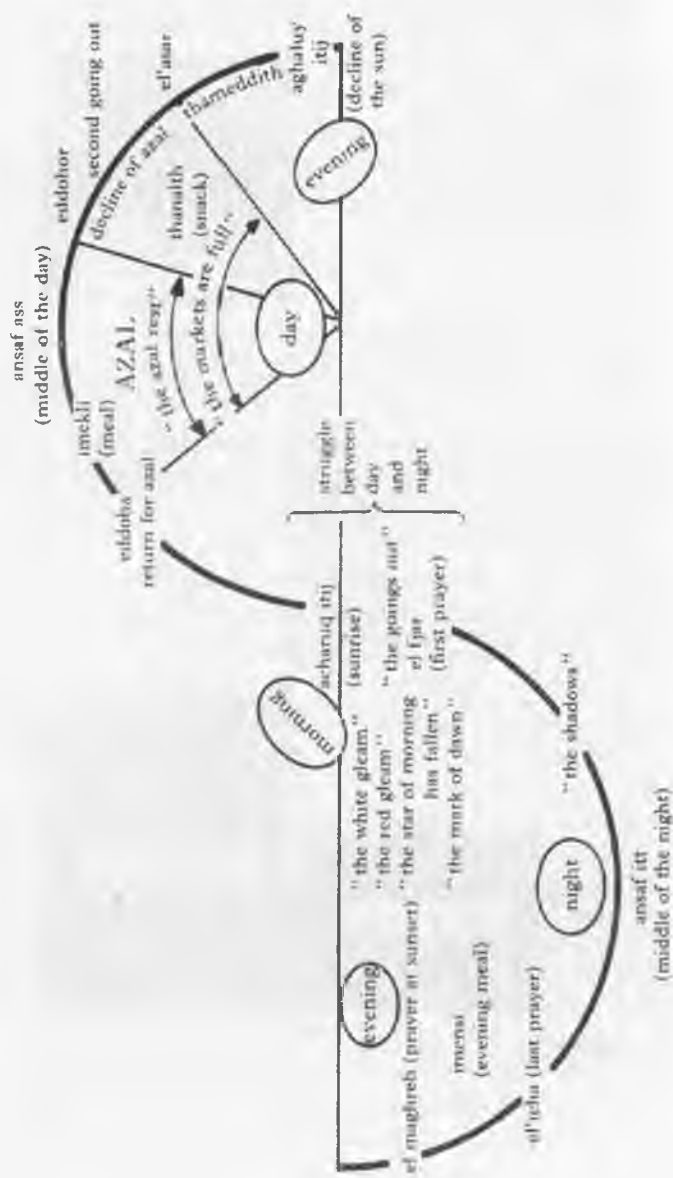


Fig. 7. Structure of the dry-season day



are performed, and the break is made with darkness, evil, and death, so that one may "be in the morning", i.e. open to the light, the good, and the luck that are associated with it (this is, for example, the moment when the semolina left overnight near the head of a jealous baby, or one afflicted by transferred evil – *aqlab* – is poured over him). Every morning is a *birth*. Morning is the time for going out, the *opening* of the day and an opening up to light (*fatah*, to open, blossom, is synonymous with *sebah*, to be in the morning). It is an opening first in the sense that this is the moment when the day is born (*thallalith wass*, the birth of the day), when "the eye of the light" (*thit antafath*) opens and the house and the village, which had closed in upon themselves for the night, pour out their men and their flocks into the fields. An opening too in the sense of "beginning": morning is an inaugural moment which men worthy of the name feel it right to be present at and take part in (*eşbah*, to be present, to be alive in the morning). "Morning", it is said, "means facility." To get up early is to place oneself under favourable auspices (*leftah*, opening, good augury). The early riser is safe from the encounters which bring misfortune; whereas the man who is last to set out on the road can have no other companion than the one-eyed man (associated, like the blind, with night) who waits for broad daylight before setting out, or the lame man who lags behind. To rise at cockcrow is to put one's days in the protection of the angels of the morning and to do them honour; it is, so to speak, to put oneself in a state of grace, to act in such a way that "the angels decide in one's stead". In fact the morning, an inaugural time blessed by the return of light and life, is the best moment for making decisions and undertaking action: the inauguration rites which mark the days of transition are performed at daybreak, whether it be the waking of the cattle at the winter solstice, the renewal rites on the first day of the year (*ennayer*), the shepherds' departure to gather plants on the first day of spring, the flock's going out on the return of *azal*, etc.

The morning, like the homologous period in the agrarian year or human life, spring or childhood, would be entirely favourable – since it marks the victory of light, life, and the future over night, death, and the past – did not its position confer on it the fearful power to determine the future to which it belongs and which it governs as the inaugural term of the series:¹⁰⁰ though intrinsically beneficent, it is fraught with the danger of misfortune, inasmuch as it can decide, for good or for ill, the fate of the day. We must take a closer look at this logic, that of magic, which has perhaps never been fully understood, because it is all too easily half understood on the basis of the quasi-magical experience of the world which, under the effect of emotion, for example, imposes itself even on those whose material conditions of existence,



and an institutional environment tending to discourage it, best protect them against this "regression". When the world is seen as "a fatal system"¹⁰¹ whose starting-point is its cause, what happens in the world and what people do govern what will happen and what will be done. The future is already inscribed in the present in the form of omens.¹⁰² Men must decipher these warnings, not in order to submit to them as a destiny (like the emotion which accepts the future announced in the present) but in order to be able, if necessary, to change them: this is only an apparent contradiction, since it is in the name of the hypothesis of the fatal system that a man will try to *remake* the future announced in the present by making a new present. Magic is fought with magic: the magical potency of the omen-present is fought with conduct aiming to change the starting-point, in the name of the belief, which was the whole strength of the omen, that the system's starting-point is its cause.

Morning is the time when everything becomes a sign announcing good or ill to come. A man who meets someone carrying milk sees a good omen in the encounter; a man who hears the shouts of a quarrel while he is still in bed draws a bad omen from them. Men anxiously watch for the signs (*esbuh*, the first encounter of the morning, portending good or ill) through which evil forces may announce their imminence, and an effort is made to exorcize their effect: a man who meets at dawn a blacksmith, a lame man, a one-eyed man, a woman with an empty goatskin bottle, or a black cat must "remake his morning", return to the night by crossing the threshold in the opposite direction, sleep again, and remake his "going out". The whole day (and sometimes the whole year or a man's whole life, when it is the morning of an inaugural day) hangs on his knowing how to defeat the malignant tricks of chance. The magical potency of words and things works with particular intensity here, and it is more than ever necessary to use the euphemisms which replace baleful words: of all the words tabooed, the most dreadful are those expressing terminal acts or operations – shutting, extinguishing, leaving, spreading – which might invoke an interruption, an untimely destruction, emptiness (e.g. "There are no dried figs left in the store", or the mere word "nothing") or sterility.¹⁰³

Azal, and in particular *thalmasth uzal*, the middle of *azal*, the moment when the sun is at its zenith, noon, the moment when "azal is at its hottest" (*ihma uzal*), broad daylight, is opposed both to night and to morning, first light, the nocturnal part of the day.¹⁰⁴ Homologous with the hottest, driest, brightest time of the year, it is the day of the daytime, the dry of the dry, in a sense bringing the characteristic properties of the dry season to their fullest expression. It is the male time par excellence, the moment when the markets, paths, and/or fields are full (of men), when the men are outdoors at their men's tasks.¹⁰⁵ Even the sleep of *azal* (*lamqil*) is the ideal limit of male rest, just as the fields are the limit of the habitual places for sleep, such as the threshing floor, the driest and most masculine spot in the space close to the house, where the men often sleep; one can see why *azal*, which in itself partakes of the



dry and the sterile, should be strongly associated with the desert (*lakhla*) of the harvested field.

Eddohor, the second prayer, roughly coincides with the end of the *azal* rest: this is the start of "the decline of *azal*", the end of the fiercest heat (*azghal*), when for the second time the flocks set out for the fields and the men go off to work. With the third prayer, *el'asar*, *azal* ends and *thameddith* (or *thadugwath*) begins: now "the markets have emptied" and now too the taboos of the evening take effect. The decline of the sun (*aghaluy itij*), which "slopes to the west", is in a sense the paradigm of all forms of decline, in particular old age and all kinds of political decadence (*yeghli itij-is*, his sun has fallen) or physical decay (*yeghli lwerq-is*): to go westward, towards the setting sun (*ghereb*, as opposed to *cherraq*, to go towards the rising sun), is to go towards darkness, night, death, like a house whose westward-facing door can only receive shadows.

Pursuing the analysis of the different fields of application of the system of generative schemes, we could build up a sort of synoptic diagram of the cycle of life as structured by the rites of passage: birth (with the practices associated with the cutting of the umbilical cord by the *qabla* and the rites intended to protect the child against evil spells); name-giving on the third or seventh day; the first time the mother and child come out of the house, on the fortieth day (with, in the meantime, all the rites of "the breaking of the link with the month", *thuksa an-tsucherka wayur*, on the third, seventh, fourteenth, thirtieth, and fortieth days, to "break the association with the month" – to drive out evil and also to separate the child progressively from the female world); the "first ventures" (into the courtyard, away from the family); the first haircut, a purificatory ritual often associated with the first visit to the market; circumcision, marriage, and burial. The cycle of the rites of passage is in fact subordinated to the agrarian calendar which, as we have seen, is itself nothing other than a succession of rites of passage.

This is primarily because in a number of cases the rites of passage are more or less explicitly associated with particular moments in the year, by virtue of the homology between them and the moment in question; thus, for example, a birth is auspicious if it comes at *lahlal* (or in the morning), ill omened if it comes at *husum* or *in sla* (or in the afternoon between *el'asar* and *el maghreb*); early afternoon is the best time for circumcision, but not winter, and *el'azla gennayer* is the propitious moment for the first haircut; autumn and spring (after *el'azla*) are the right times for marriage, which is ruled out on the last day of the year, at *husum* and *nisan*, and in May and June. The springtime rites (and in particular those of the first day of spring and the return of *azal*) set to work a symbolism which applies as much to the unripe corn, still "bound, fettered, knotted" (*igan*), as to the limbs of the baby which cannot yet walk (*aqnan ifadnis*) and remains in a sense attached to the earth.¹⁰⁶ Those rites of passage that are not linked to a particular period of the year always owe some of their properties



to the ritual characteristics of the period in which they are performed, a fact which explains the essential features of the variants observed. For example, the beneficent water of *nisan*, a necessary component in the rites specific to that period (like the first milk in spring, the ears of the last sheaf in summer, etc.), also appears as a supplementary element in the rites of passage which happen to take place at that time.

But, at a deeper level, it is the whole of human existence that, being the product of the same system of schemes, is organized in a manner homologous to that of the agrarian year and the other great temporal "series". Thus procreation (*akhlaq*, creation) is very clearly associated with evening, autumn, and the damp, nocturnal part of the house. Similarly, gestation corresponds to the underground life of the grain, i.e. the "nights" (*lyali*): the taboos of pregnancy (of fecundity) are the taboos of evening and death (looking in a mirror at nightfall, etc.); the pregnant woman, like the earth swollen in spring, partakes of the world of the dead (*juf*, which denotes the belly of the pregnant woman, also means north, the homologue of night and winter). Gestation, like germination, is identified with cooking in the pot: after childbirth the woman is served the boiled food of winter, of the dead, and of ploughing, in particular *abisar* (the food of the dead and of funerals) which, except on this occasion, is never eaten by women, coarse-grained couscous boiled in water (*abazin*), pancakes, fritters, and eggs. Childbirth is associated with the "opening" of the end of winter, and all the taboos on closing that are observed at that time reappear here (crossing the legs, folding the arms, clasping the hands together, wearing bracelets or rings). The homology between spring, childhood, and morning, inaugural periods of uncertainty and expectation, manifests itself in, among other things, the abundance of prognostication rites which are practised then. Although described as an untimely destruction (*an'adam*), the harvest is not a death without issue (*ma'dum*, the bachelor, who dies childless), and magic, which allows the profits of contradictory actions to be compounded without contradiction, is expected to bring about resurrection in and through a new act of fecundation. Similarly, old age, which faces the west, the setting sun, night and death, the dark direction par excellence, is at the same time turned towards the east of resurrection in a new birth. The cycle ends in death, that is, the west, only for the outsider (*aghrib*), the man of the west (*el gharb*) and of exile (*el ghorba*), hence without issue (*anger*). His grave is often used – as an exemplary realization of utter oblivion and annihilation – in the rites for the expulsion of evil: in a universe in which a man's social existence requires that he be linked to his ancestors through his ascendants and be "cited" and "resurrected" (*asker*) by his descendants, the death of the outsider is the only absolute form of death.¹⁰⁷



The different generations occupy different positions in this cycle, diametrically opposed for successive generations, those of father and son (since one conceives when the other is conceived, and enters old age when the other is in childhood), and identical for alternate generations, those of grandfather and grandson (see fig. 8). Such is the logic which, making of birth a rebirth, leads the father whenever possible to give his first-born son the name of his own father (*asker*: to name and to resurrect). And the fields go through a perfectly analogous cycle, that of *two-year rotation*: just as the cycle of generation is closed by A's death and resurrection, i.e. when B conceives C, so the cycle of the field is closed when field A, which has lain fallow, awaiting its resurrection, for the duration of the life of the fecundated field B, is "raised from the dead" by ploughing and sowing, i.e. when field B is laid fallow.

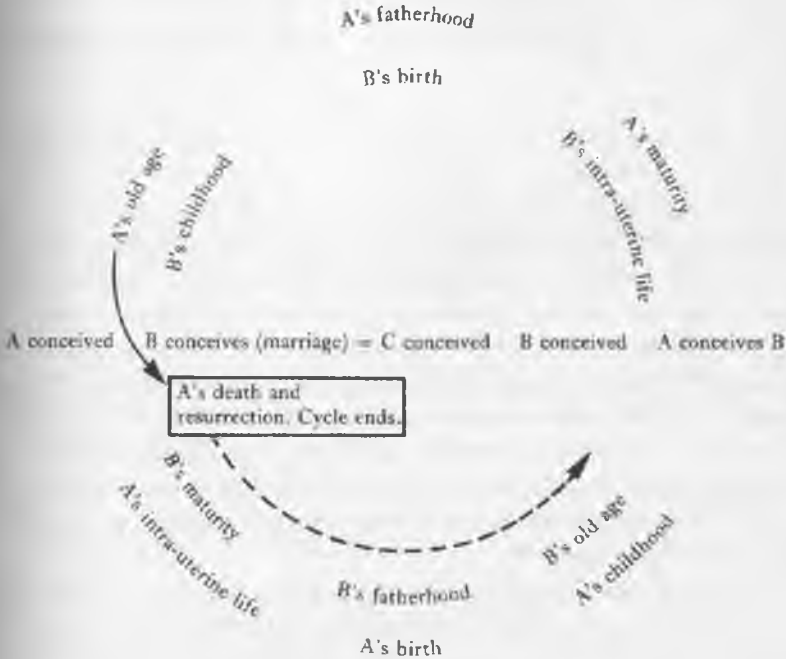


Fig. 8. The cycle of reproduction

It is no accident that the difficulties of the Greek and Chinese exegetes begin when they try to construct and superimpose *series* (in the sense of asymmetrical, transitive, "connected" relationships which Russell gives the word in his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*):¹⁰⁸ when one tries to push the superimposition of the various series beyond a certain degree of refinement, behind the fundamental homologies (brought together in fig. 9), difficulties begin to multiply systematically, demonstrating that true rigour does not lie in an analysis which tries to push the system beyond its limits, by abusing the powers of the discourse which gives voice to the silences of



practice and by exploiting the magic of the writing which tears practice and discourse out of the flow of time.¹⁰⁹ It is only when practical metaphor, scheme-transfer effected on the hither side of discourse, becomes *metaphor* or *analogy* that it is possible, for example, to wonder like Plato whether "it was the earth that imitated woman in becoming pregnant and bringing a being into the world, or woman that imitated the earth" (*Menexenus*, 238a).

Ignorance of the objective truth of practice as learned ignorance is the source of innumerable theoretical errors, not least the error from which Western philosophy originated (and which anthropological science endlessly reproduces).¹¹⁰ Rites and myths which were "acted out" in the mode of belief and fulfilled a practical function as collective instruments of symbolic action on the natural world and above all on the group, receive from learned reflection a function which is not their own but that which they have for scholars. The slow evolution "from religion to philosophy", as Cornford and the Cambridge school put it, i.e. from analogy as a practical scheme of ritual action to analogy as an object of reflection and a rational method of thought, is correlative with a transformation of the function which the groups concerned confer on myth and rite in their practice.¹¹¹ Myth tends to cease to have any function other than the one it receives in the relations of competition between the literate scholars who question and interpret its letter by reference to the questions and readings of past and contemporary interpreters: only then does it become explicitly what it always was, but only implicitly or practically so, i.e. a system of solutions to cosmological or anthropological problems which scholarly reflection thinks it finds in them but which it in fact creates *ex nihilo* by a *mistaken reading* that is implied in any *reading* ignorant of its objective truth as a literary reading.¹¹²

The problems which nascent philosophy thinks it raises in fact arise of their own accord from its unanalysed relationship to an object which never raised them as such. And this is no less true of its most specific modes of thought: the pre-Socratic thinkers would not hold such fascination for certain philosophers (who practically never possess the means of really understanding them) were it not that they supply its most accomplished models to the tradition (most "eminently" represented by Heidegger) of the play on words of common origin which establishes a *doubly determined* relationship between the linguistic root and the mythic root, or the (Hegelian) tradition of etymology seen as a means of reappropriating the treasures accumulated by the historical work of reason.¹¹³ It is indeed the essence of learned reflection that it situates the principle of relations confusedly sensed in the order of meaning (*sens*), in relations which manifest themselves at the level of the *letter* (homophony, homography, paronymy, etymological kinship, etc.). The inanity of meta-

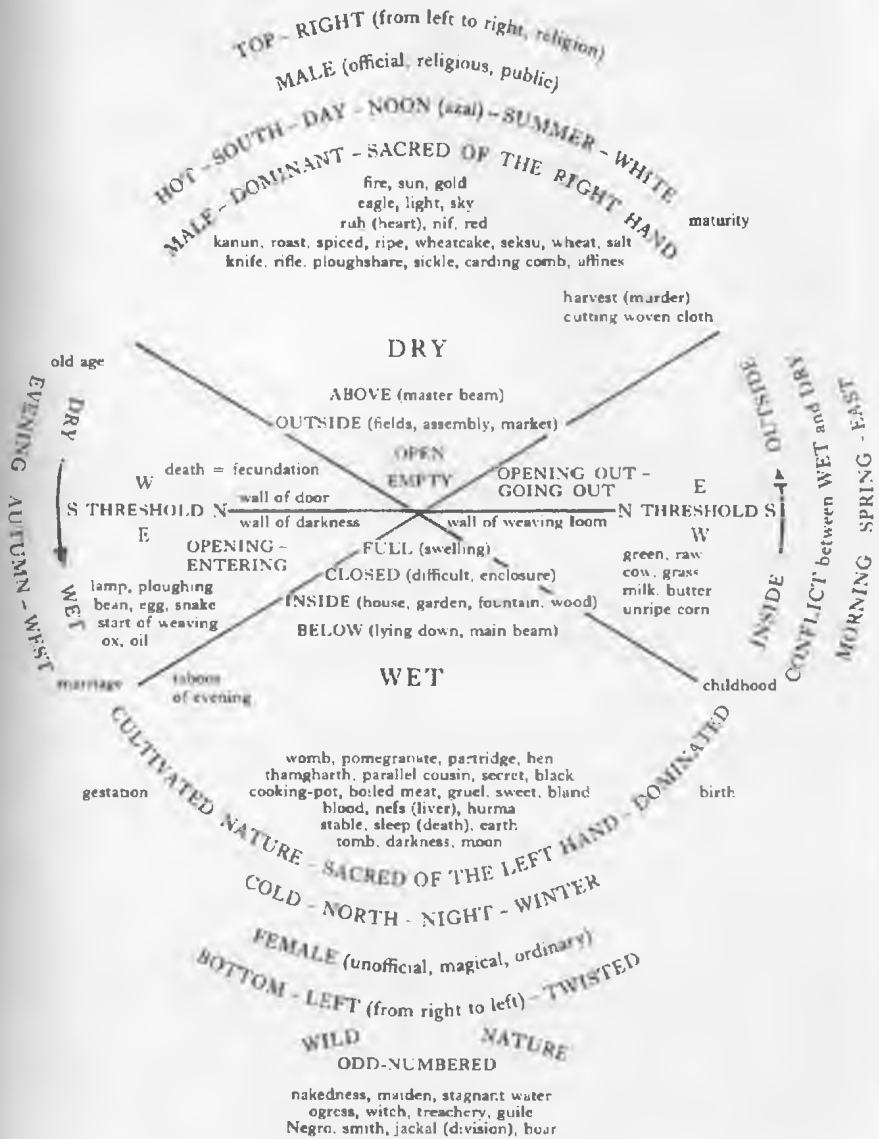


Fig. 9. Synoptic diagram of pertinent oppositions



physics would escape no one if, as Carnap thinks, its "pseudo-propositions" were only "an inadequate means of expressing the feeling of life".¹¹⁴ Plato's remark must be taken literally: "The philosopher is a mythologist." Logical criticism inevitably misses its target: because it can only challenge the relationships consciously established between words, it cannot bring out the incoherent coherence of a discourse which, springing from underlying mythic or ideological schemes, has the capacity to survive every *reductio ad absurdum*.