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Transcript

Hello. Hello, hello.

Welcome to the Oxford and the Property podcast.

Welcome to the podcast channel of the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford. My name is Louise Aida and I'm an MSC student and social anthropology focusing on the anthropology of law. Today's episode will venture into the fascinating world of anthropology to the lens of one of its most influential figures, Philippe. Going beyond the traditional boundaries of nature and culture, Philippe Desolas work invites us to redefine our understanding of humanity's relationship with the world around us. Both animate and inanimate. In this talk, he reveals a critical philosophical lesson that he derived from his doctoral adviser. The legendary anthropologist Claude Levi stops. A simple yet profound advice. Let the field carry you. These words became the compass that guided his Descola's groundbreaking ethnographic research in the Ecuadorian Amazon. I hope you enjoy the epic.

During the last visit, I paid to my doctoral supervisor, Claude Levi Strauss, before leaving for field work in the Ecuadorian Amazon, I spoke to him at length. Probably too much so about the research strategies I was going to use and the methods I had prepared myself for in order to obtain the information necessary for the realisation of my thesis project, namely to describe and analyse the material and ideal techniques by means of which the Achuar, Amerindians, socialise nature.

So you listen to me patiently. And concluded our conversation with this advice. Let the field carry you or let you yourself be carried by the field.

What did they mean by this?

How was I to transcribe into my practises what I perceived as an invitation to let go?

It was only after a few months in the field that I understood the relevance of his remark, because in the end no one had prepared me for the job of ethnographer. Above all, no one had taught me how to move from the philosophical abstractions that I've been fed with. To the concrete task of participant observation as it was called at that time and from this again to the anthropological generalisations that I aspired to achieve.

So my lecture will be a reflection on Levis, Stross, elliptical remark.

Among other possible definitions of anthropology, one can say that it is a way of drawing philosophical lessons out of anecdotes. So this sense my talk will be fully anthropological.

So let us begin by returning to Lewis's advice. The question he calls for is roughly as follows. When anthropologists study practises, ways of thinking, institutions that are apparently very different from those in which they grew up. What correspondences exist? Between the information they gather, namely statements and actions often disconnected from each, the affinities they feel or sense between the discussion and behavioural style offered to their observation, and finally, the modes of conceptualization they are familiar with or have learned to appreciate. And finally, with the 4th element the greater or lesser degree of reflexivity that affects the proposition on which they rely. In short, by means of what bricolage is the anthropological discourse constructed from the parachuting of an individual into an environment, sometimes very far from his or her familiar universe to the general propositions that he or she believes to be entitled to draw on from an Ethnographic experience often combined with that of his or her colleagues. That they read, of course.

So the question becomes all the more acute in the French context as a large number of anthropologists since the beginning of the 20th century have been trade trained initially as philosophy professors. A situation that contrasts with that of other major anthropological nations. In a way philosophical parlance comes to us spontaneously, even when and this is the most common case, it was mine in particular, the choice given to an anthropological vocation has been partly triggered or fueled by a certain disenchantment with academic philosophy. that is, with a thought that is above all concerned with the exhevisness of its own, its own history, and therefore generally indifferent to questions that have been posed elsewhere in terms that for a long time it has not sought to understand.

Fortunately, the situation is changing and there are growing symptoms of the interest that philosophers are now showing for anthropology. At least it's a case in France.

I spoke of symmetrization, not symmetry. Indeed, this work of matching is condemned to remain unfinished since its final product is conditioned in its form by the audience for which it is intended, and namely,, in addition to the professionals of anthropology, the amateurs of reflective thought formed by 2 1/2 millennia of European philosophical tradition and to whom it is necessary to address oneself in a language that they are likely to understand. And this incomplete symmetrization can also take very different forms according to the types and modality of transfer between a local ideology or ideologies. And the analyst ideology.

I will distinguish 3 main types of process of symmetrization, the most common and the oldest 1 consists in developing the conceptual implications of a local institution. In such a way that its scope of application exceeds both that of the original institution and the particularities of the region of the world where it was initially described. In the early days of the discipline, this generalisation was achieved by expanding the meaning of an indigenous concept to encompass a host of disparate phenomena, which generally had nothing in common other than the fact that they did not fit into the Western understanding of the field of practises that the concept was deemed to describe. Totem, Mana, Tabu, Shaman. Were born this way. With positive effects moreover, since it amounted to transforming into philosophical problems or noetic categories worthy of being taken seriously, what was previously perceived as laughable, or condemnable superstitions.

In a more recent period, it is rather by exploiting intention with a Ness the conceptual consequences of an institution, a process, a regime of relation, or an epistemic orientation isolated by ethnographic observation, that this process of generalisation has been achieved. And so instead of an excessive expansion of an initially impressive, imprecise meaning, it is, On the contrary, A deepening and an operationalization of a very precisely defined meaning that is sought. So Louis Dumont’s hierarchical encompassment, Marilyn Strathern’s back and forth between objectification and the deobjectification of relations, or Eduardo Viveiros de Castro perspectivism. Theoretical constructions initially intend to account for Dispositions specific to a particular cultural area are examples that have become classic.

In all cases the originality of these local models that have become paradigmatic. And the very principle of their Constitution results from the implicit contrast that they present in relations to Western ways of perceiving and conceptualising the field of phenomena that these models account for. So here the generalisation of a relative relativizes a general principle.

Let us now turn to the second form of symmetrization. It is that which consists in transforming and indigenous thought into a systematised corpus, analogous to a philosophical doctrine at least in its mode of presentation. This is also an ancient tendency, even older than the previous one, since it was initially characteristic of a certain missionary anthropology. The Historia General de Las Cosas de la Nueva Espana, compiled by the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagun, is probably the earliest example. And the letter, the machine, the most famous variant, especially in view of the important role that the letter documents played in the formation of the thought of Leibnitz.

A more general expression of this tendency is the famous Bantu philosophy of Father Placid temples which has given rise to wide-ranging debate among philosophers from sub-Saharan Africa. Some of whom, such as Alexis Kagame orMubabinge Bilolo, are willing to find in the traditional discourse of such and such an African civilization. The elements of a true philosophy. While by contrast, the Beninese philosopher Paulin J. Hountondji

 for example, sees little more in what he disdainfully calls ethno philosophies little more than classical ethnological studies of African representations of the world and the person.

Although the controversy over alternative metaphysics has raged mainly in Africa, it has also spread to Europe and North America, as evidenced by the debates that greeted the publication initially in French in. 2009 of Metaphysic Cannibal the essay in which Eduardo Viveiros de Castro questions from a philosophical reconstruction of American thought the forms of objectification of Western epistemology.

This kind of question is not absent either from ethnological works properly speaking. Usually it is in the form of clearly recognisable philosophical colours, let's say by means of which anthropologists depict the moral or epistemic dispositions of the society they study. Examples are bound in France because of the influence of philosophy, especially Husserlian phenomenology on the training of the first generation of field ethnologists. Whether this influence was direct, as is the case with Maurice Leonard, or indirect, as with Marcel Gruull, it had the effect of proposing an epistemic paradigm which, by going against the dominant cognitive realism seemed to reconnect with modes of knowledge and presence to the world that the ethnographers were discovering far from home. And this is one of the reasons for the more general flavour or favour, perhaps favour that phenomenology enjoyed among anthropologists who came from very different national intellectual traditions such as Ernesto De Martino in Italy, Marcello Bermuda in Argentina or Irving Hallowell in the United States.

This movement towards philosophy has taken a more decisive turn in recent years in English speaking countries, with the late discovery of Merleau-Ponty and even more recently, of the thought of Deleuze.

PICK UP

16.44That said and although the invocation of philosophical concepts and especially of the authority of certain philosophers has now become the norm in non French speaking anthropological production. In contrast to that of French speaking anthropology, where one notices an inversely proportional relationship between the degree of philosophical training and the rate of citation of philosophy. This tendency must be seen as a sort of ambiguous homage, since philosophical references usually remain superficial and serve in reality to cover, with an elegant conceptual veil, the robust empiricism that is the price of seriously conducted ethnographic investigation. In fact, attempts to broadcast alternative physics and to evaluate their subversive impact on our own way of philosophising.

Whether they are made by indigenous authors trained in Western philosophy or by Western anthropologists who draw lessons from indigenous thought according to the canons of Expositions of philosophical work, all suffer from the same drawback, namely that they remain, and excesses that disrupts the pragmatic conditions of enunciation and use of the propositions that form the source of the thought.

So without going so far as saying as Paulin J. Hountondji does about African ethno-philosophies that they are, and I quote, ‘a simple pretext for scholarly disquisitions between Europeans.’ It must nevertheless be agreed that symmetrization in this case is still imperfect.

The third form of Symmetrization aims neither at generalising the scope of a local principle, nor at proposing a philosophical counter model inspired by indigenous thought, but at constructing A combinatorial system that accounts for all the states of a set of phenomena thanks to the highlighting of the systematic differences that oppose its elements, the elements of this set.

One would have recognised, of course, a basic principle of the structural analysis very well defined by Jean Pouillon. When he wrote, I quote ‘structuralism, proper or properly speaking begins when one admits that different sets can be conjugated Not in spite, but in virtue of their differences. That one seeks then to order’.

Why is this a symmetrization? Because in good structural logic totalization is never given a benicio as the point of view from which the series of anthropology could structure the world under his imperial gaze. But it results from the always unfinished operation by means of which cultural traits, norms, institutions, qualities are constituted as variants of each other within the whole that not only can be reconfigured differently if other elements are added, but that has no other reasons to exist than to subsume The variations of which it is the theatre.

This type of symmetrization is entirely dependent on the multiple properties that people detect here and there in the phenomena, and therefore requires only a little erudition on the diversity of the objects we deal with. Which seems normal in an enterprise of knowledge.

The fact remains, however, that the symmetrization undertaken by structural combinatorics is as unfinished as the other two ways of symmetrizing, but for different reasons. Namely, it requires a general knowledge of the institutions and uses of others that only the West has produced. And as a result, it remains dependent on the singular project of knowledge, not so much because of its universal ambition; For elsewhere in the world there have been many systems of knowledge that have claimed to account for everything; as because of the demand for global exhaustiveness of the empirical data on which it is based.

It seems that we are now very far from the advice given by Levi-Strauss on the way of doing field work with which I have introduced my remarks. But this is not the case. We have just reviewed three ways of Symmetrizing knowledge about the other. The generalisation of a local concept. The systematisation of a great diversity of an indigenous thought promoted as a philosophical counter model and the integration of a great diversity of local forms of thought, including Western, metaphysics within structural combinatorial systems in which they are treated as variants of each other.

Now, each of these efforts at symmetrization, pressure poses different types of bifurcation from the words ethnographers hear and the actions they witness. Sort of ‘droit de suite’ as we call them in French. I'm unable to find an English translation for that. It's an expression that Levi-Strauss used several times in his work. Droit de Suite will unfold in the direction of either an exaggerated deepening or a conceptual generalisation, or an integration into a transformational system.

These types of bifurcation from the data of experience are not philosophically innocent because they depend closely on the logical operations by means of which anthropologists produce generalisations.

The two most common of these logical operations can be called ethnographic generalisation and ethnological generalisation. Ethnographic generalisation is the operation on which all anthropologists agree. Whatever their theoretical differences. It's the field inquiry itself. It is comparative through and through, first of all, because of the more or less conscious comparison that ethnographers make between The way in which key elements of the society they are studying are approached in their investigations and those and those that other ethnographers have proposed of the same society or of similar phenomena in different societies. It is comparative also because of the sorting out that they make that the ethnographers make in their observations in order to retain those that seem to them, the most apt to represent an average state of the phenomena they aspire to qualify.

The second stage, the ethnological generalisation, can be defined as an extension to other societies of the same cultural area, and possibly to societies which elsewhere in the world present a family resemblance with them. Of a scheme initially devised by the analyst in order to account for the structure of a society which he or she has himself or herself studied in depth.

So these two forms of generalisation are the same ones, by means of which Evans Pritchard defined the comparative method in his 1950 Marrett lecture, and which he called respectively translation and abstraction. The question raised by this kind of generalisation can be formulated as follows. In a science that places ethnographic inquiry at the heart of its approach to knowledge and as its primary driving force should comparison be considered only as a sequence of inductive generalisations from the case initially studied. Or can comparatism take other forms than this type of generalisation by successive jumps from case to case. Forms that would be less dependent on the simple intuition that there are similarities between on the one hand, a family of societies or a kind of institution, and on the other hand principles case initially chosen in a completely contingent way. This question of course, has been widely debated. And it is not the place here to return to the criticisms, internal or external, to anthropology that have been addressed to inductive comparatism by successive generalisations, whose method Evans-Pritchard characterised. It will suffice to recall that these criticisms are of two kinds. On the one hand. Those that point to the inadequacy of the comparative categories used to describe very heterogeneous social and cultural situations, and on the other hand, those that concern the identifications of comparable. Or comparables in the plural. That is to say, of the elements that in units that are already difficult to define, these abstractions that we call societies. Could lend themselves to comparisons.

A new form of generalisation and more generally, a new way of treating social facts thus emerged from the 1960s onwards in reaction to the aporias of inductive generalisation. The comparative operation as Evans-Pritchard defined it in the Marrett Lecture, which most anthropologists throughout the world continue to practise without always being aware of. It amounts to a rise in generality, starting from particular cases, which is carried out in 3 stages. The field inquiry, conceived as a necessarily empirical, a translation exercise leading in a second stage to the highlighting by abstraction of the structure of the society decribed. In order to allow in a third stage the comparison of this structure with other structures, identical or different obtained by the same method.

In such a perspective the second step, consisting making an empirical substance, a society, a culture, coincide with an underlying form, and I borrow here this expression from Evans Pritchard that the ethnographer isolates by abstraction. Now, as it is foreseeable for an inductive approach this form, which one will have isolated from the 30 of a society, will be particular to the case of which it is abstracted. It will express in the condensed formula its presumed structure. In such a way that the third stage of the comparison, that which consists in confronting the structures of the forms of civil societies in the typological perspective will imply 2 consequences. Either to select forms so idiosyncratic that any comparison will prove infinitely impossible, or to decrease that one of the particular structures is the optimal form in relation to which the others must be compared. This is why the structuralist wave of the 1960s, Levi Strauss and Dumont in France, Leach and Needham in the United Kingdom, was first and foremost a reaction against the method of generalisation. Theorised by the British functionalists. But widely practised elsewhere.

A method vitiated by the ambition to establish generalities by empirically extracting from these jointed observations general characters based on superficial similarities. The structuralists were at the Liberty to show that such an attitude rests on a naive realism which sees social and cultural facts as so many spontaneously given objects. Or and this is a correlate which sees societies as composed of naturally discrete elements. For the structuralists, on the other hand. And according to Leach's famous formula I quote him, ‘a society is not an ensemble age of things it is an assemblage of variables.’ What they compare are not pieces of societies, institutions or practises, but variations within a set of phenomena, of which the analysts will have defined the nature, will have designed the limits and will have systematised the morphological discontinuities. So this difference in the conception of the object implies a difference in the conception of the comparative method, of course. While the initial phases of the comparison are similar for the functionlists and for the structuralists, what Evans Pritchard calls translation and abstraction is called by Levi Strauss, Ethnography and Ethnology. The last stage, nevertheless, generalisation for Evans Pritchard, anthropology for Levi-Strauss they differ completely. For Evans Pritchard, this last stage is only the culminating moment of a rise in inductive generality, that will allow to compare in a wide range of societies the social structures that the previous generalisation have revealed. For structuralist anthropology on the other hand, the ultimate face is entirely divorced from the previous ones, in that it is deductive and no longer inductive. To use the vocabulary and concepts of John Stuart Milll whose system of logic exerted a considerable influence on French and British social sciences until the 1960s.

In the latter case in fact, the construction of anthropological results develops in three stages. Induction of laws, rinciples or hypothesis, Application of these laws, principle or hypothesis to phenomena and verification of the legitimacy of the deduction by means of comparison.

To do this structuralist anthropology clearly dissociates on the one hand the induction of abstract hypothesis by generalisation from ethnographic data and on the other hand, the construction of deductive models allowing this hypothesis to be tested by means of comparison. And the fruitfulness of the structural approach does not consist therefore in confirming the existence of universals deemed to explain similarities between cultural phenomena. This is an approach which is characteristic of cognitive anthropology. But in its capacity to highlight invariants that account for a systematics of differences.

Perhaps it's not useless to recall why anthropological invariants are not universals. In variants are rules of combination based on elementary characteristics of the world and of the ways in which humans develop their existence in this world. Rules that give rise to a finite number of possibilities only some of which are realised in social life. Whereas universals can be seen as cognitive and biophysical properties that do not suffer exceptions. Which makes them unproductive on the anthropological level for explaining variations.

Invariants and the models within which they are played out do not serve to describe empirical situations and their transformations. They allow to highlight formal properties of social life by pushing to its ultimate consequences, the necessary distance that exists between concrete situations observed by the ethnographer and the conceptual vocabulary used to describe them.

In the art of anthropology, Alfred Gel notes that anthropologists navigate between two types of relations. On the one hand, the internal relations of which the formal terminologies in use in the profession are made-up and which express the links between terms defined by their use in a conceptual system and, on the other hand the relations that equals external, those that ethnographers witness in the field, and which link elements according to all sorts of modalities, genetic historical, causal, Accidental, institutional, effective, etcetera, etc. External relations maybe of Similarity or difference, but in contrast to relations internal to a theoretical system, they connect objects that are independent of each other. Because there are no necessary links between them.

So borrowing from Alfred Gel this distinction between two kinds of relation. We can thus say that the inductive approach. Generalises external relations to internal relations, while the deductive method keeps them separate.

Indeed, the inductive generalisation of Evans Pritchard abstracts more and more refined categories, from similarities observed in the widest possible variety of ethnographic cases. Which makes it impossible to constitute an analytically coherent formal system, since it is not possible to convert empirical and contingent relations of similarity into theoretical and structural relations of difference.

Structural deduction Approaches comparison in a completely different way. Instead of going up in generality from observable similarities towards more and more abstract categories, eventually leading to supposed universals, it consists in detecting, in the particular cases themselves, the indexes of a closed system of differences. Whose modelling is deemed to offer a way of access. To the intelligence of the formal properties of the whole of the phenomena that one takes as object.

So it is no longer a question of moving from a chaotic set of external relations to A system of internal relations by means of successive abstractions, but of discerning under the external relations that one presumes to form a system, for instance, the bonds of kingship and marriage alliance, the systems of internal relations that offers the best possible model for accounting for the external relations.

It is this movement that is reflected in Levi-Strauss’s famous remark. I quote him. ‘It is not the comparison that found the generalisation, but the opposite.’ In other words, comparison is not the means of a discovery. It is the concrete development of an original intuition based on the knowledge in a way dormant of a great number of cases first apprehended for the ethnographic flavour.

In such a process, the study of variations of what Levi-Strauss called caused transformations becomes primordial. And even constitutes the heart of the comparative work. Levi-Strauss himself points out on several occasions that the notion of transformation is the keystone of the type of structural analysis it practises. If he borrows from linguistics, the structure understood as a system of contrasting oppositions, it gives it an analytical dynamism which results from its capacity to organise the regulated transformations between models of the same group, that is to say that apply to the same set of phenomena. Though the structure cannot be reduced to the system. In other words, to a simple set composed of elements and relations which unite them. For one to be able to speak of structure, he specifies, I quote him. ‘ It is necessary that between the elements and the relations of several sets appear in variant relations, such as one can pass from a set to the other by means of a transformation.’ End of quote.

However, Levi-Strauss conceives this transformation in two very different ways in his work. As he states in his book of interviews with Didier Eribon, the notion of transformation came from his reading in the United States during the war the master work of the biologist D'arcy Wentworth Thompson on growth and form. From which he particularly retained the analysis of the differences between related animal forms by means of geometric transformations. And yet The illustration that Levi-Strauss gives to the fruitfulness of this approach is the study of kinship systems.

A surprising choice in that the use of transformation he makes in this field as a variation deriving from an original relationship is very different from the notion of group of transformation that he will later employ in the analysis of myths.

In the elementary structures of kinship. Lewiston's chooses as an invariant relation the exchange of women's expression of the principle of reciprocity, itself a positive form of the prohibition of incest. All the forms of marriage That he considers in the book are so many transformations of this original principle. Forms that he introduces, according to the increasing degree of complexity that they present in relation to the simplest sociological expression of the principle of reciprocity, namely the dualist organisation.

It is obvious that the transformation thus understood differs in many respects from the transformation as developed by D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson. For this arborescence of forms of marriage resembles rather the methodical variations of an Oak form in Geothe sense. In this case, the exchange of women governed by the principle of reciprocity of which Levi-Strauss deploys all the logical consequences in so many morphological types of marriage alliance. Just as Goethe entertained the dream of discovering the oak plants the original plant, the prototype from which can be derived by transformation, all the characteristics of the plant species. Not only actual, but also logically possible. So Levi Strauss sees in the principle of reciprocity the original form of all the possible marriage alliances with law of development in he proposes. And just as Goethe opposed Lineus. In botany, because he rejected the idea of a static table of attributes. However, exhaustive in favour of the deduction of a principle of transformation of biological forms. From a complex from a complex origin or combination in the same way Levis Strauss distances himself from Radcliffe Brown in the field of social morphology when he considers as original the structure which develops to the fullest. The logical possibilities of the principle of reciprocity, rather than retaining as a starting point, the simplest forms of marriage from which the complex forms would be derived.

Now and in contrast to the Goethian conception of variation as the development of a complex prototype. A model of transformations such as Levi-Strauss implements in his studies of social morphology without ever moreover, making any different direct reference to Goethe. Variation, as Darcy Thompson conceives. Conceives it, emphasises the geometrical simplicity of the transformation grid, which allows one to pass from 1 biological form to another without considering any original form from which the other biological forms would be derivable.

And it is, although this last position that Levi-Strauss adopts. But in a distinct morphological model, that of myths. The other reference that Levistus makes to Darcy Thompson in the finale of Romney comes indeed to explain the quite thomsonian way according to which he uses the notion of group of transformation. In his analysis of myth. In this context, indeed. Group of transformation is the set of variants of the myth which keep the same structure even by reversing it.

One can also say that Transformation Group is formed by the set of myths which are shown to transform each other by mutually borrowing myth themes. Whose motives They will invert. Permute the functions or modify the relation between form and content. So that it is the set of myths between whichthese operations are detectable, which in principle will constitute the Group of transformation, and this set may be formed by myth of neighbouring societies, which, because of inter knowledge, deliberately play. On the permutation. But it can also be formed of the myth of a much vaster set provided That a transformation between them remains possible.

So these remarks point to two sets of questions that the notion of transformation raises when it is used in the human and social sciences. The first type of question is of a conceptual nature and concerns the distinction to be made between the two procedures that the term transformation covers. Indeed, whether it concerns organisms, images, social types, or semantic units in certain classes of utterances, the transformation of one form into another can be considered either in a Geothian regime. Or in a Thomsonian version.

In the first case, following the method defined by gutter in his metamorphosis of plants, the transformation is the development into different forms of a kind of initial plan Itself built by comparing empirical objects belonging to the same set.

In the second case. The transformation is a deformation by continuous variation in the space of coordinates applied to already given forms.

This latter method is the one that leviston's applies in the analysis of myths. While the first method. Is the one he follows in the elementary structures of kinship.

This later method that inspired my approach when I undertook to organise the various forms of continuity and discontinuity between humans and non humans. Out of an original relationship between interiority and physicality. I will briefly recall here. The guidelines of this reasoning, in which four ontological types are deduced from the variations that an initial contrast allows.

The starting point of this exercise of structural ontology Is the thought experiment of a transcendental subject inspired as much by the userin idea of the pre predicative conditions of the knowledge of the world as by recent works in the developmental psychology. I can only detect qualities in an allude. That is to say, in an as yet undetermined alter. On the condition that I can recognise in it those qualities by means of which I apprehend myself, which belong both to interiority - Mental states, intentionality, reflexivity and to physicality, physical States and processes, sensory motor patterns, proprioception, etcetera.

It is thus A hypothetical invariant which is neither more nor less Plausible as a foundation than the requirement of the exchange of women in which Leviston's sees the necessary and sufficient principle enabling him to deduce the different types of systems of marriage.

Instead of being constructed by a progressive complexification of the logical conditions of deployment of the invariants, as is the case in the elementary structure of kinship, the transformation is here based on making use of the combinations that the original relationship makes possible.

There are four such combinations. Either the non humans have an interiority of the same type as mine, but differ from me and from each other in their physical capacities, or, On the contrary, they undergo the same kind of physical determinations as those I experience. But they have no interiority. Or again humans and non humans share the same group of physical and moral qualities, while being thus distinguished by packets from other sets of humans and non humans with other physical and moral qualities in common. Or finally. Each existent is distinguished from others by the proper combinations of its physical and moral quality. Which is then necessary to be able to link to those of the others by relations of correspondence.

In short, in this case, as in the case of kinship systems, the transformation is the hypothetical deductive expression of. All the possible. Consequences of a core posited as invariant. In other words, it is a Goethian transformation.

The definition of the starting point. Becomes crucial here, since from it flows the series of transformation that constitute the development of its implications in a network of contrasts. Once posed the invariant. Relation, that is the relation of identity and difference between interiority and physicality. It must account for all the possible combinations in the relations between humans and non humans, and it is even its only justification apostate.

The arbitrariness here does not reside in the itinerary and the modalities that the analysts adopt in order to jump from miss to miss. From the first mid selected in a contingent way as it is. In the Thomsonian transformation employed by Levi-Strauss in the analysis of myth. It resides in the choice of the initial formula. Since this one conditions, the course of the deduction, how can we reduce this arbitrariness. When the mechanical models. That anthropology is reduced to tinkering with turn out to be, for lack of an appropriate formal language of a distressing rusticity.

First, by ensuring. That the logical and experimental foundations on which the original hypothesis is based are solidly established. As far as the matrix of the modes of identification is concerned, we have seen that the starting point. Is the combination of a philosophical thought experiment. And the observations made by developmental psychologists that the detection of physical qualities and mental states in objects perceived by humans is a disposition that is probably innate to them.

Of course this. Initial hypothesis is based on the aptitudes of an abstract human subject. Not on the social rule. As the Durkheimiam tradition. Would have it. Thus exposing it to an accusation of incoherence, even duplicity, because of what could be seen as an attempt to bring the wolf of methodological individualism into the structural sheepfold. I think it is nothing of the sort. For one, cannot ignore that social relation. Either that social relations do not float in the empirian sky of ideas, nor in the interstices of institutions, that they can be detected in the interactions between humans. Who do not arrive in the world. Like virgin waxes waiting to receive their properties from the contingent events which affect them, which was the view of Durkheim. It therefore seems reasonable to base an anthropological invariant on presumed universal characteristics of Homo Sapiens which are necessarily rooted in the consciousness in the body, in the brain, in the biophysical capacities. Of the ordinary human.

And This is why I have found it necessary to route the initial invariant in the disposition of a physically and cognitively plausible transcendental subject. But perhaps this is depicting afterwards under a rather too systematic Aspect and operation of knowledge that was more haphazard. Besides the fact that the hypothesis proposed as its source is the product of an act of imagination. Consisting in placing oneself in a situation which, although not false, is nevertheless fictitious. Transcendental subject. An experiment of imaginative thought, relying on real life experiences. The deductions that these hypothesis allows to realise are not untouched by the preliminary procedures that imposed its evidence and that the economy of the exposition led me to render invisible.

For it is obviously through a series of inductive generalisations based on ethnographic material. Mine and that of others, that the transformation model of beyond nature and culture has gradually evolved. What I have done here is most common. For it is indeed from the constantly enriched depository of ethnological publications that anthropologists extract the elements that allow them to choose This or that bifurcation in relation to the empirical data on which they rely. Data That they appropriate, as it were, from within having experienced themselves elsewhere and in other circumstances, situations comparable to those recounted.

And this bifurcation, that is to say, the ability constitutive of the comparison to detach oneself from the phenomena or object to which one pays attention, either in the field or as a reader of ethnography, in order to make it exist. In the language of the internal relations of our conceptual system. This bifurcation is made possible by a know how that is all the more difficult to formalise as it relies on the shared mastery of another know how that of fieldwork. Which immediately renders familiar. To the anthropologist, the rarely made explicit procedures of the movement of objectification by means of which other anthropologists have collected, filtered, and presented their data.

So this constant back and forth between abstraction and description, induction and deduction, direct knowledge and mediated knowledge, local concept and concept with the general claim. Explicit comparison and implicit comparison is probably what makes anthropology a special science. And not of discovery. Whose perfume of adventure emanates not only from the populations among which one chooses to reside. And this is perhaps the philosophical lesson to be drawn from Levi-Strauss’ remark that one must let oneself be carried by the field.

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