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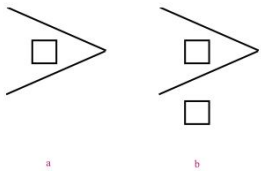
THE MEANINGS OF STRUCTURALISM. CONSIDERATIONS ON STRUCTURES AND *GESTALTEN*, WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE MASKS OF LÉVI-STRAUSS

by Göran Sonesson



In homage to Bertil Malmberg (1913-1994)[1]

Abstract

Structuralism was once the fashion in semiotics, and then it was abandoned without its advantages and disadvantages having been properly assessed. Poststructuralism, imperceptibly merging with postmodernism, perpetuated many of the latter, but spurned most of the former. In this sense, it never went beyond structuralism. In my book *Pictorial concepts* (1989), I have evaluated the contributions and the drawbacks of structuralism pertaining to the domain of pictorial semiotics. Here I want to make a more general point. Structure, as first defined in structural linguistics, and generalized by the Prague school, is a very particular kind of whole, which for instance is not simply identified with the whole as defined by *Gestalt* psychology. Therefore, structure has to be studied within a more complete mereological framework, that is, within the science of parts and their relation to the whole, first defined by Tardowski and Husserl. As a case in point, we will consider use of the notion of structure in the work of Lévi-Strauss, which was an exemplary work in the transition from linguistics to other semiotic domains, but which already constitutes a deviation with respect to its meaning in linguistics.

Le structuralisme, une fois à la mode dans la sémiotique, a été abandonné sans que ses avantages et ses inconvénients aient été sérieusement pondérés. Le

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poststructuralisme, fusionné indistinctement avec le postmodernisme, a perpétué les aspects négatifs, tout en a rejetant les aspects positifs. En ce sens, il n'est jamais allé au-delà du structuralisme. Dans mon livre *Pictorial concepts* (1989), j'ai évalué les apports et les inconvénients du structuralisme dans le domaine de la sémiotique de l'image. Ici, je voudrais présenter quelques considérations plus générales. La structure, telle qu'elle est définie dans la linguistique structurale et puis généralisée par l'École de Prague, est une manière tout à fait particulière de concevoir une totalité, qui ne peut pas, par exemple, être simplement identifiée avec la notion caractérisée par la psychologie de forme. La structure doit donc être étudiée dans un cadre méréologique plus complet, c'est-à-dire à l'intérieur de la science des parties et des totalités d'abord définie par Tardowski et Husserl. Comme un cas caractéristique, nous envisageons l'utilisation de la structure dans l'œuvre de Lévi-Strauss, qui a effectué, d'une façon exemplaire, le passage de ce concept de la linguistique à d'autres champs sémiotiques, mais déjà avec une déviation par rapport à son sens linguistique.

Lo strutturalismo, una volta di moda in semiotica, è stato poi abbandonato senza essere adeguatamente valutato circa i suoi vantaggi e svantaggi. Il poststrutturalismo, fondendosi indistintamente con il postmodernismo, ha perpetuato molti degli aspetti negativi, e invece ha rigettato gran parte di quelli positivi. In questo senso non è andato mai oltre lo strutturalismo. Nel mio libro *Pictorial concepts* (1989) ho valutato sia i contributi sia i limiti dello strutturalismo relativamente al campo della semiotica pittorica. Qui, invece, voglio fare delle considerazioni di ordine più generale. La struttura, come è stata definita in un primo momento dalla linguistica strutturale, e quindi generalizzata dalla scuola di Praga, è un concetto molto particolare di totalità, che, ad esempio, non è semplicemente identificabile con quello definito dalla psicologia della *Gestalt*. Questo cencetto deve quindi essere studiato in un più completo quadro mereologico, cioè all'interno di quella scienza delle parti e della relazione con l'intero, delineata per la prima volta da Tardowski e Husserl. Prenderemo in considerazione specificamente l'uso della nozione di struttura nell'opera di Lévi-Strauss, esemplare nella sua transizione dalla linguistica ad altri campi semiotici, ma che già in sé ne costituisce una deviazione rispetto sua accezione linguistica.

There have been many structuralisms, within psychology, sociology, mathematics, biology, literary studies, and so on, each with a different character. Here we will only be concerned with one of those, the one originating within linguistics and then spreading to semiotics, via anthropology and literary studies. When Saussure claimed that language was a structure, he clearly meant two things: language is a whole, and all elements of this whole are (entirely or partly) determined by being parts of this whole. Thus, two elements are involved: the whole and the relations

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holding within it. This is the kind of structuralism, which was generalized to the Prague school (cf. Galan 1984). Roman Jakobson, after his Prague period, added binarism to this conception. According to Jakobson, all relations within the whole are oppositions, and they are all made up of two terms or, to be more exact, a term and its absence. In actual practice, this also meant that the terms were entirely determined by these oppositions, in the sense in which Saussure, in one of his more speculative moments, muses that language is entirely made up of negative terms (though Jakobson 1976 himself explicitly claimed this applies only to phonological, not semantic, oppositions). Once everything is made up of private oppositions, meaning can be conceived as purely formal. Louis Hjelmslev (1943) was most explicit on this theme, but others, such as A.J. Greimas and Claude Lévi-Strauss, have claimed to follow suite. This is the kind of structuralism that was generalized (or was meant to be generalized) within French structuralism.

In the following, we will scrutinize these two ingredients of structure, the whole and its relations. This will involve exploring the difference between structure, stemming from the Saussurean tradition in linguistics, and configuration (i.e. *Gestalt*) originating in German psychology at the beginning of the 20th century. We will then analyse the notion of opposition, suggesting that identity statements should be put on the same level. There follows a study of the celebrated analysis accomplished by Lévi-Strauss, in order to show that it goes well beyond structure and posits meanings of another kind, more iconical, certainly, and, in particular, deriving from the Lifeworld, the world taken for granted. In fact, outside the domain of phonology and other possible purely formal domains, structure, in the strict sense, is *regulative*, rather than *constitutive*, of meanings.

1. *The theory of wholes and of relations*

It is characteristic of wholes to be made up of parts. At least this would seem to be the ordinary case. Thus, a human body is made up or a head, a trunk, two arms and two legs. Each one of them can be considered a new whole and further divided into parts, the head, for instance, into eyes, nose, mouth, ears, etc. The nose, in its turn, could be segmented into the tip of the nose, the root of the nose, the nasal cavities, etc., and we could go one with any of these parts being another whole, though we may not readily have terms for the new parts. The theory of parts and wholes, also termed *mereology*, was the subject of discussion among thinkers like Meinong, Tardowski and Husserl at the end of the 19th century, and was then given a logical formulation by Lesniewski (cf. Simons 1987; Cavallin 1990). Husserl's (1901) contribution consisted in making the distinction between independent

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and dependant parts (real parts and “moments”, respectively). Since dependence may be mutual or unilateral, the result is the same three-fold distinction made by Hjelmslev (1943) within his glossematic structuralism, as Stjernfelt (2007: 167ff) judiciously remarks. Starting out from such a whole as the human body, it may not be quite strait-forward to determine, which, if any, part, is not mutually dependant on the others. A wart, nevertheless, is dependent on the nose and not vice-versa.

1.1. *Two kinds of wholes: structure and configuration*

The notion of whole is itself ambiguous. Different notions of wholeness, viz. structure and configuration, as conceived by structural linguistics and Gestalt psychology respectively, are often confused. As early as 1947, Jan Mukařovský (1974:7ff; cf. 20ff) insisted on the importance of distinguishing “structure” from the kind of wholes conceived by “holism”, observing that while a structural whole results from the mutual relations between its components, including negative ones, a holistic whole is primarily a delimitation made in the field, a setting up of borders, from which an inner differentiation may later ensue. In both cases, to be more precise, the whole is really something more than its parts, as the Gestaltist saying goes, but in the structure it is the network of relations which is central, and the elements connected by the relations will thus appear to be more distinct from (though sometimes identical to) each other; in the configuration, however, the general idea of wholeness and of all the elements’ belonging together predominates, and the elements themselves are only secondarily apprehended as separate parts (cf. Sonesson 1989: 81ff). Thus, in the configuration, the parts tend to disappear in favour of the whole; in the structure, it is the whole that impresses its properties on the parts.

There are precursors for this view within German holistic psychology itself. As early as 1906, Krueger (as cited by Wellek in Weinhandl, ed. 1960:385) criticizes the all too general use of the term “Gestalt” to designates all kinds of wholes and proposes a distinction between wholes distinctly moulded to a particular shape and wholes in a more general sense (“Ganzheit”). Emotions, as well as the experiences of small children, are non-configurational wholes. All wholes are oversummative, Wellek suggests, but only configurations are transposable. It is not clear, however, that the wholeness itself, i.e. the atmosphere, could not be transposed. Other criteria are proposed by Volkelt (in Sander & Volkelt 1962:43ff): a typical configuration stands out from a background and is internally articulated (“gegliedert”), but other holistic properties may well be externally and internally diffuse (“aussen- und binnendiffus”).

Rudolf Arnheim (1969: 60ff) who, like many followers of the Gestalt school, sometimes uses “structure” in the sense given here to “configuration”,

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tells us the square in Fig. 1a will seem somewhat less straight because of the influence from the reclining V in which it has been inscribed; this, I submit, is a typical configurational effect. But when a second square is added, as in Fig. 1b, the relationship between the two squares will stand out, creating a structural effect. Another way of obtaining a structure that more decisively destroys the configuration would be to apply a ruler to the borders of the square, thus introducing a continuous series of relations between points on the ruler and points on the contours of the square. Indeed, from the interaction of the configuration and the structure, complex meanings may be derived. Groupe μ (1992:352f) tells us that the waves and Mount Fuji in Hokusai's "The Wave" are seen as different when they are interpreted as such, but on another "isotopy" they are identified because of the similarity of their triangular shape, both having the point turned upwards, and of their colour, which is blue stained with white spots. From our point of view, if might be added that the waves as well as the mountain immediately form configurations in perception, while the organization of the picture makes the structural relation between one of the waves and the mountain stand out. This should serve to make the difference between structure and configuration clear.

1.2. *Different kinds of oppositions*

The notion of opposition in closely wedded to the idea of structure in linguistics. Saussure famously claimed that in the language system, there are only differences without positive terms. Every element derives its identity from its distinction to other elements in the same system. The phonemes, in particular, Saussure said, are units that are purely oppositive, relative, and negative. This conception was brought to its extreme by the Copenhagen school, when Hjelmslev claimed that language could be analysed independently of its "substance", i.e. whether conveyed by speech, writing, or some kind of flags or manual signs.

The Prague school took a less radical stance on this issue. In his pioneering study of phonology, however, Trubetzkoy (1939:59ff) distinguished different types of oppositions from several points of view. These distinctions are based on his important insight, often forgotten in later semiotics, that an opposition between several terms must suppose some kind of similarity, a base of comparison, as well as properties which are different. Thus, an opposition is *one-dimensional*, if the base of comparison is only found in two items, but otherwise *multi-dimensional* (e.g. the common factor in the Latin letters "E" vs. "F" is not found elsewhere, but the one present in "P" vs. "R" also appears in "B"). On the other hand, an opposition is

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proportional if the distinction between the terms is found in other pairs of elements, or else *isolated* (some irregular plurals, like “goose/geese” and “tooth/teeth” are proportional, as are even more obviously the regular ones).

In *privative* oppositions, one of the terms simply consists in the absence of the trait found in the other term (in phonetics, unvoiced sounds as opposed to voiced ones, in semantics the plural “s” opposed to the lack of it). An *equipollent* opposition, on the other hand, means that both terms are something in themselves (irregular singular/plural modification like “foot” vs. “feet”, where the singular in not just the absence of plurality marking). In *gradual* oppositions, finally, some feature is present in different degrees in several terms (a example is the traditional phonetic description of the degree of aperture in vowels). This latter distinction would seem to correspond to the logical one between contradictory and contrary terms, adding the case in which some points between the extremes are singled out for consideration. In the final case, the opposition in not binary: it has more than two terms.

Roman Jakobson’s heritage is, in this domain, extremely ambiguous: he was the first one to show that, at least in phonology, all oppositions may be reduced to the binary, privative kind. This supposes the resolution of one non-binary, equipollent opposition into a set of binary, privative ones, itself based on a redefinition of the categories entering the opposition. In the case of phonological features, Jakobson, Fant, and Halle (1952) have shown that these categories may be justified from an acoustic point of view; whether they are also perceptually relevant is an open question. In any case, it does not follow that the reduction to binary, privative oppositions is adequate outside the domain of linguistic expression. Paradoxically, it was Jakobson (1976) himself who, in his 1942 lectures at the New School of Social Research in New York, countered Saussure’s idea that also semantic oppositions were purely negative: contrary to the Saussurean claim, not the whole meaning of the words “night” and “day” is derived from their opposition. Yet, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who listened to these lectures, later brought the idea of oppositions being purely negative, binary and privative to what would seem to be an even more saturated domain, myths, and also, in his mask analyses, to visual semiotics. Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss together heavily influenced what in known as French structuralism into conceiving all oppositions as being purely privative, and this idea still lingers on in the work of the Greimas school.

In fact, the kind of oppositions discovered by Structuralism in myths, literary works, pictures, and cultures, are, on many counts, very different from those present in the expression system of verbal language. Even Trubetzkoy’s classifications turns out to be of little help when trying to understand these differences. Oppositions may be *constitutive* of the identity

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of signs and/or their parts, as are the features of phonology, or they may be merely *regulative* in relation to an already constituted identity, which would seem to be true of many other cases, such as two pictures, or two objects in a picture, already identified as representing something. Thus, Lévi-Strauss (1975) is certainly wrong in arguing that the meaning of the Swaihwé and Dzonokwa masks derives entirely from their mutual opposition: this opposition, if opposition there is, is only secondary to our recognition of both as (aberrant) faces.

If binarity can be introduced as a limitation on oppositional kinds, there is no reason for not allowing other kinds of restrictions. Many of Trubetzkoy's opposition types are in fact organized by threes. Charles Sanders Peirce could be said, in this sense, to be a defender of trinary structuralism. In all its manifestations, Secondness is only what it is in relation to Firstness and Secondness, and vice-versa. It might however be better not to fix the possible number of terms in a structure, as was apparently Saussure's original intuition.

1.3. *Oppositions and identities*

Oppositions may be *in absentia,* or oppositions strictly speaking, or *in praesentia,* or contrasts. In pictures there is no obvious equivalent to the system of (constitutive) oppositions present in the phonological and semantic organisations of verbal language. Rather than deriving from the system, oppositions are created on the spot, i.e. in a given "text". Most oppositions found by Structuralists in poetry, visual art, advertisements, myths, and so on, are really of this kind. However, it should be noted that oppositions in absentia are not necessarily *systemic:* they may refer to another "text". An advertisement, or a "postmodern" artwork, can make use of the fact that there is a large stock of pictures which we, as members of Western culture, tend to recognise, and position itself as forming a set of oppositions and identities in relations to one such picture. Using a familiar but vague term, this kind of oppositions in absentia could be called *intertextual* (cf. Sonesson 1989:76ff).

Thus, for instance, the advertisement for a brand of socks called Kindy could at first be mistaken for the poster, or a still, from the well-known Marilyn Monroe movie "The seven year itch": in particular, it reminds us of the familiar scene in which Marilyn's skirt is lifted by the stream coming from the air-valve (reproduced and thoroughly analysed in Sonesson 1989 and 1992). But there are many, more or less notable, differences: thus, for instance, Marilyn's dress has a deep décolletage, is tight-fitting, displays naked shoulders, and is lifted by air stream in a circle shape (in the still) or in the shape of a scroll (on the poster). The dress of the Kindy girl, on the other

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hand, shows no décolletage, is rather loose, covers the shoulders, and hangs straight down. There are also differences between the positions of the man and the woman, some Marilyn-properties having been transferred to the Kindy man, as well as from the man with Marilyn to the Kindy woman.

It should be clear that what triggers the comparison which leads to the derivation of a series of opposition is an original near-identity, or perhaps rather, a series of partial identities. As compared to Trubetskoy's "base of comparison", the similarities are here much more foregrounded. It could even be said that, on the level of configurations, Marilyn and the Kindy girl, as well as their male counterparts, are seen as identities, but on the level of the ensuing structural comparison, they appear as being opposed on many respects.

Not only oppositions may be absent or present in the given text: it is possible to take the difference between oppositions, properly speaking, and contrasts a step further. In the visual rhetoric conceived by Groupe µ (1992), all figures consist of two units which may be cross-classified as being in absentia or in praesentia, and conjoint or disjoint.[2] The similarities, which were the base of comparison in the oppositions, have here been foregrounded.

In the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1939, 174ff; 1950, 238ff) both oppositions and entities form *paired associations*, or couplings (in a more general sense, thus, when in the work of Groupe µ), when both items are directly present (*in praesentia*); they are an *appresented pairing*, or simply an appresentation, when one of the items is present and the other is not (*in absentia*); and an appresentation becomes a *sign* when it is the absent item which is the theme (cf. Luckman 1980; 205ff.).[3] In semiotics, we are familiar with couplings and appresented pairings, in the form of iconic relations or iconicities, indexical relations or indexicalities, and symbolic relations or symbolicities.

2. *Structuralism on a lifeworld foundation*

By inventing structural anthropology, Claude Lévi-Strauss was certainly instrumental in introducing Structuralism into semiotics. And yet, one may wonder whether Lévi-Strauss really grasped the concept of structure, as used in linguistics (and defined above in 1.1.). It is of course impossible to check all the numerous analyses realised by Lévi-Strauss, to find out if they really involve structures in this sense, which is clearly what Lévi-Strauss himself believes. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that, whatever Lévi-Strauss himself claims, the terms that he employs are never purely formal.

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2.1. *The logic of qualities*

In comparing the two "great structuralists" Piaget and Lévi–Strauss, the soon to be pioneer of cognitive science Howard Gardner (1973: 194f) affirms that, within the "logic of qualities", Piaget is dedicated to the logic, but Lévi-Strauss to the qualities. In Piagetean terms, the former pertains to operativity, and the latter to figurativity. In fact, according to Lévi-Strauss' own interpretation, it is not the qualities but the logic that is important. Not that this logic is so peculiar: Lévi-Strauss (1962:24ff) claims that the kinds of "structure" encountered in the sciences on one hand, and in mythology and magic on the other, are identical or similar, while qualities accounted for are different, science being limited to the "primary qualities" and mythology including also the "secondary" ones, which are directly perceivable. Actually, what distinguishes Lévi-Strauss from earlier theorists on mythology and ritual is the emphasis given to the systematic character in "primitive thinking".

And yet there are also many other passages in which Lévi-Strauss announces that his object of study is "la logique des qualités sensibles" or "la science du concret" (cf. Lévi–Strauss 1962; interview in Bellour & Clement 1979:157–210). Again, when Lévi-Strauss (1978:13) defines the logic of the concrete as "the respect for and the use of the data of the senses", as well as when he (in Bellour & Clément 1979:186f) mentions "la prégnance du détail" as something typical of the myth, he certainly goes in the sense of figurativity. The fact that certain particular qualities tend to return in the myths over and over again, certainly seems to mean that these qualities, at least, count as such: nature and culture, for instance, the raw and the cooked, and the different problems of communication expressed in the Grail type and the Oedipus type of myths. As against this, again, Lévi-Strauss is quite explicit in his argument for the arbitrariness in the choice of qualities figuring in the myths: they have only positional or differential value, like the phonemes, he tells us; just as the phonemes in the word "sun" are meaningless separately and may be used in other words with quite different meanings, so, according to Lévi-Strauss, the content "sun" in its turn is meaningless relative to mythology, outside a particular "mytheme" (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1958:320f; 1983:174ff, 198ff; 1984:104, 249, 257).[4] Lévi-Strauss (1958:320) even censors Jung for attributing a meaning to the "symbols" themselves, taking exception to the theories of Lévy-Bruhl, which, at least in a general sense, lend themselves more readily to an interpretation in terms of figurativity (1962:299, 319).

Things as different as the sheep's horns, the eagle's claw, and certain parts of different kinds of mollusc, may occupy the same place in a myth, according to Lévi-Strauss (1983:185), because they have in common the property of being "des organes qu'on retranche de l'animal avant de le

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consommer, ou dont on retranche une partie avant de les consommer". If that is the case, these features are certainly not put together arbitrarily. The topological concept of separation seems important here, but something more is a stake, since what is separated is a part of a whole, but not just any part, but a part that is in some sense supplementary to the core, an appendage, which is often a protuberant part.

More obscure, because of its very abstractness, is the opposition between the Oedipus type of myth, characterized by excessive communication, and the Grail type of myth, where there is too little communication (Lévi-Strauss 1984:135ff). Instances of the former are the resolution of the riddle, the explosion of the natural cycles, as exemplified by the plague, and incest (cf. Lévi–Strauss 1983:314f). Instances of the latter, more numerous, are answers offered to questions never asked, which is the opposite of the riddle, reduced capacity to move, self-imposed mutism, an earth without fertility, the virgin who never smiles, the beheaded body, and a broken sword, the latter two objects said to signify failure to communicate with oneself and with others, respectively. If we consider the Grail instances, we will find two classes, one in which the nature of things is invoked and a deviation registered, and one in which a well-known part fails to lead on to the expected whole continuously. Perhaps we may generalize by stating that there is some regularity of the Lifeworld that is expected to obtain, and a deviation from this regularity, which is different, according to whether the regularity concerns ordinary things, such as a sword or a body, or fundamental categories like humanity, femininity, and Nature. In both cases, the elementary global property of continuity fails to obtain as expected, either spatially, in the simple objects, or temporally, in relation to a single preceding event, as in the case of the answer or to a string of recurrent behaviours, as in all other cases.[5]

These are not properties that have a name in any known language. But they could certainly be configurational properties in the sense of the Leipzig school (see 1.1) – or what was later called "physiognomic properties" (Werner & Kaplan 1963). As hinted above, they are often topological in character, corresponding to the pre-Euclidean space of children's experience, according to Piaget (et al. 1948). We may grant Lévi-Strauss that there is some kind of opposition playing a part here, but so do a number of identity relations. Once we realise that some of these things, when brought together, may, in the first case, be seen as appendages being separate from a main body part, it is easier to realise that some other things may be perceived as the result of the opposite operation. There is a certain arbitrariness to this interplay of oppositions and identities, but not in the linguistic sense of lack of meaning. The common meaning of one of the assorted group of objects must

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be perceived, more or less provisionally, before the opposition can have its course. But the arbitrariness is not complete. Whether this organization is found in the universal human mind or in only that of Lévi-Strauss must be left open (as it is by Lévi-Strauss himself). But as long as we can reconstruct the thinking of this mind, it cannot be completely arbitrary. In this sense, the logic of qualities is abductive, rather than structural.

2.2. *Lévi-Strauss on the Northwest Coast masks*

Not being a specialist in mythology, I prefer to scrutinize more closely an analysis by Lévi-Strauss in which he is concerned with visual semiotics. It involves a couple of ritual masks stemming from the American Northwest Coast (reproduced in Lévi-Strauss 1975 and Sonesson 1989; 1992). In this analysis, Lévi-Strauss is very careful to spell out the analytical operations that he goes through to derive the opposition between the two masks. I have two problems with this. First of all, I do not think Lévi-Strauss uses the proper procedure to demonstrate the presence of a structure, in the linguistic sense of the term. In fact he does exactly the opposite. In the second place, I think a purely structural analysis would be abusive in this context. We must start much closer to home. The masks are immediately perceived as a kind of faces – and more or less at the same time as deviant faces. The analysis must therefore start out from the face prototype.

From the observation of the properties of the first mask, the Swaihwé mask, Lévi-Strauss claims to derive not only the existence, but also the relevant properties, of another one, the so-called Dzonokwa mask. But in linguistic structuralism, one item is not derived from another one, but the properties of several items, known to exist within the system, are re-described from the point of view of their mutual opposition.

According to Lévi-Strauss' (1975, I: 32ff) description, the Swaihwé mask has a wide-open mouth, its lower jaw is dropping with an enormous tongue lolling out, the eyes are protuberant, the predominant colour is white, and its decoration consists in bird feathers. This mask only acquires meaning in relation to another one, Lévi-Strauss assures us, and the properties of the missing mask can be deduced from those of the one observed: it will be black, and instead of feathers it will have hair; its eyes should be sunken, and the mouth must have a shape which does not permit the tongue to show (p. 102f). It so happens that this mask can be found among the members of a neighbouring tribe: it is the Dzonokwa mask.

Thus, the result of Lévi-Strauss analysis is precisely the kind of description that would have been censored by the linguistic structuralist: one that is not true to the internal workings of the sign system. Applying Lévi-Strauss' reasoning to language, we would be able to demonstrate, much to the surprise of all Japanese, that there is a distinction between the sounds "r"

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and “l” in their language, or that there exists an opposition between “r” and “rr” in English, just as in Spanish. In a structure, the categories are derived from the relation obtaining between them. At first, the elements may be interpreted according to common world-knowledge; but once they are placed together, their common and opposed features are extracted; and these features serve to redefine the elements according to a new principle of relevance. This is how one gets from sounds to phonemes in linguistics.

Lévi-Strauss’ analysis of the Northwest Coast masks does not follow these procedures. Instead, Lévi-Strauss really applies the rule Peirce calls *abduction:* from one case, the Swaihwé mask, he draws conclusions about another case, the Dzonokwa mask, based on a regularity taken for granted. More strictly, it could be said that the terms are deduced from the full list of properties more or less implicitly present in the elements *and* their co-presence in some system. Not so in Lévi-Strauss’ analysis: the first element is used to predict the second in virtue of regularities which are not justified, and which have no source in the relations between the masks. The masks are first of all seen iconically, as faces. Faces, however, are not just any odd objects: they are particularly important to human beings. Infants recognize faces at a very early stage, even when the features are scrambled. Indeed, while is has been suggested that infants react to certain shapes, common to real faces and scrambled one, Easterbrook (et al. 1999) showed than even new-born could discriminate the categories. There is even speculation that a special area of the brain may be responsible for face recognition. Even to adults, only a few lines are needed to suggest a face, whereas much more determination, or a “key”, must be provided to make any other meaning recognizable (cf. Sonesson 1996).

Nevertheless, the masks are also directly perceived as *deviant* faces. The mask is seen as a face but a face which is located far away from the prototypical case: in fact, it is seen to exaggerate some of the traits of faces idea-typically. This implicit relationship to the facial prototype explains the units into which Lévi-Strauss segments the masks: they are simply the units of real faces. Between the facial prototype and the idealtype encountered by Lévi-Strauss, the Swaihwé mask, there is really a structural opposition: however, because of the well-known prototypicality of the first, the second is seen to be deviant on a number of dimensions.[6] All that Lévi-Strauss now has to do is to extract the features which are different from a real face in the mask, to place them on a dimensional scale, on which the values of the facial prototype constitute the middle term and those of the mask one of the extremes, and then derive the other mask by exaggerating all the values in the opposite direction from the facial prototype. The only remaining task is then to find the mask somewhere in the real world. This

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reasoning, however, is really an abduction from two cases to a third. Thus, it must be based on Lifeworld regularities.

Not all of these depend on the facial prototype. Since white is the colour which predominates in the Swaihwé mask, Lévi-Strauss tells us the other mask must be black. There is a real regularity of human perception underlying this, though Lévi-Strauss does not pause to tell us so: languages having only two colour terms will distinguish black and white, which is thus the primary opposition, not only of language but of human colour experience, as shown by Berlin & Kay (cf. Miller & Johnson-Laird 1976:346ff). To talk about the whiteness of the mask, however, is to use a *dominance concept:* but how do we know that the white parts of the mask dominate the black ones, if it is not a question of relative space occupation?

Next we are told that the opposite term of feathers must be hair, if it is something originating in the animal realm (p. 103). Again, it should be evident that the presupposed common basis of the opposition between feathers and hair must include many more features than that of animality, for many objects besides hair have an animal origin and are different from feathers. If the relevant additional feature were just the property of covering the surface of the body, scale and lack of hair would be other possibilities.

Since the eyes of the Swaihwé mask are protuberant, those of the Dzonokwa mask should have the opposite property. What Lévi-Strauss (p. 105f, 119) actually predicts is that the elementary geometrical properties of concavity and convexity will oppose each other in the eyes of the two masks. But if we look at the Dzonokwa mask we will find that gaps, rather than concavities, serve as eyes. This equivalence of holes and concavities would seem to necessitate an elaborate explanation in that “logic of qualities” which is simply presupposed by Lévi-Strauss (cf. 2.1.).

Again, since the Swaihwé mask supposedly has a wide-open mouth with the lower jaw drooping in a manner that exposes an enormous tongue, the other mask will present a mouth so shaped that no tongue could be extended through it. Apparently the extended tongue is here taken to be the relevant feature, while the wide-open mouth and the hanging jaw are interpreted as redundant traits, mechanically following from the position of the tongue. There are many other possible opposite terms to an extended tongue, for instance a tongue that is wound up, which could then very well be seen inside the mouth. But if we now look at the two masks it seems too much of an overstatement to suggest that the Swaihwé mask has its mouth wide-open; on the other hand, we will find that the Dzonokwa mask, though pouting its lips, really has a wide-open mouth — and it is not clear why no tongue could be extended through it.

In all these cases, it will be noted, structure is not enough to explain

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the relationships postulated by Lévi-Strauss, and further justifications are necessary. Only in the case of the opposition black vs. white did it turn out to be relatively easy to find the Lifeworld regularity justifying the abduction.[7]

It may be easier to find a structural opposition on the global level, i.e. among the non-configurational holistic properties (cf. 1.1). In fact, Lévi-Strauss (p. 105ff, 119) suggests that the masks are opposed as concavity to convexity. It should be noted that these categories, if valid, can only be *dominance concepts:* the nose, for instance, is convex in both masks, as well as in real faces, and the mouth of the Dzonokawa is as convex on the outside as it is "concave" inside. Another opposition at the global level is the one between order and disorder mentioned above.

So far, we have tried to spell out the regularities that would justify the Lévi-Straussian abductions, and we have found them to be presupposed rather than proved to exist. This does not mean that some of them could not be justified, either by further studies in the relevant culture, or in the "logic of qualities" characteristic of the workings of the "human mind" (cf. 2.2). But they are certainly not derivable from the "structures" presented by Lévi-Strauss.

3. *Conclusions*

In the present essay, I have tried to show that structures exist, but they are never enough. Putative structuralists, I have suggested, actually take a lot of the world outside the structure for granted. Often, there are only regularities of the Lifeworld, discovered by abductions, and no structure in the formal sense of the term. In spite of his aspirations, Lévi-Strauss really seems to be dealing in physiognomic properties, although he has certainly advanced our understanding of these properties beyond the conception of Levy-Bruhl, adding to the latter's "primitive mentality" a certain streak of regularity, grasped by abduction. And even when there is a real structure, it can only exist from the point of view outside the structure. The context is another text. But the world is irreducibly contextual (Sonesson 1978). Once you make something into a text, another context is created outside it. But however far you go into textualisation, there is always the subject and his/her Lifeworld lurking outside.

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[1] Bertil Malmberg, the director of my doctoral thesis in linguistics, was an expert on the structuralist tradition, which I understood when I went to France in the 70s, where his introductory books were obligatory reading, and in Mexico, in the 80s, where they still played an important part. His own position was somewhere between the extremism of Louis Hjelmslev and the rather common sense point of view of André Martinet. More exactly, he thought both stands were valid for different purposes.
[2] For a critical review of this model, see Sonesson 1996, 2010.
[3] For details on this approach, now see Sonesson 2011
[4] It goes without saying that this parallel is unacceptable, no matter what else we conclude. See Sonesson 1989 on the confusion concerning the first and the second articulation in the linguistic sense.
[5] Nevertheless, it would be easy to point out numerous instances of what would seem to be lack of communication in the Oedipus myth, and vice-versa.
[6] The term "prototype" is used as before in the sense of Rosch. Following our analysis of Max Weber's use of the term in Sonesson 1989:71ff, we use "idealtype" to stand for an exaggerated rending of characteristic properties, which may include contradictions.
[7] There are a number of interesting differences between the masks that are simply ignored by Lévi-Strauss, for no obvious reason: those of ears and nose, for example.

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