



## About the Pueblo's cultural history:

*a fundamental dichotomy.*

### 1 - IN THE BASKET OF THE TWIN GIRLS

A myth, as a cultural history, has a semantic density which allows it to structure in a totality the diversity of the relationships with oneself, society, and the Cosmos. However it is obvious that the scientific approach to a primitive culture is necessarily a study detached from its natural and cultural environments. Because it is tributary to concepts which are heterogeneous to this culture, this scientific approach cannot hold this totality which constitutes the factors of coherence of the individual, as well as the society to which he belongs. **Lucien Sébag**, from whom we copy these thoughts, does not exclude another type of relation to texts, but he indicates that the structural method makes it possible to work further than the apparent heterogeneity of contents. This method reveals rules of constitution and reveals, under the sensitive screen, some permanent structures of any human experience. Across the contingency of the lexicon it isolates the data which defines connexions between thought and the world (independently from any secondary specification).

**Lucien Sébag** (died 1972) was a lacanian researcher working with the french ethnologist **Lévi-Strauss**. He gave us a brilliant analysis of the **Pueblo's** cultural

history. (*L'invention du monde chez les indiens Pueblo. Maspero edit. Paris 1972.*) Currently, this Indian people live in the States of New Mexico and Arizona. Being wary in respect to external influences, they offer today "*the unique example of a human society which has been maintained almost unchanged since the Spanish conquest*" and, says the author "*there is perhaps no other people of which researchers have such a plentiful documentation*". The version of the "myth of emergence" studied by **L. Sébag** was published by Mr. **Stirling** in 1942. "*This text forms a homogeneous unit whose beginning is the Creation of the Universe and is completed with the installation of Acoma in the center of the World*".

## Summarized presentation of the myth

While commenting some passages, we will set out the main elements of **Sébag's** analysis.

Right from the beginning of Creation, according to author, the contents of baskets reveal a **fundamental dichotomy** which generates human order. [To the twin sisters were given, by the Creator Father, a basket containing the seeds of all plants which were to grow on Earth, and figurines representing each animal which would exist.]

**L. Sébag** notices that the plant is given to the sisters in the form of a seed and the animal in the form of a small statuette which represents it. From one to the other is **a complete opposition**.

"The seed is the plant not yet developed but which, by itself, by its own impulse, will become a completed plant. From the seed, which is a real element of the vegetable world, to the plant, which is quite as real but different from the seed, exists **a relation of contiguity**. This relation can be defined as metonymical".

"On the other hand, the image, the figurine, looks like a completed animal, but it does not have the same reality; the change from the image to its model cannot occur by itself but implies the intervention of a medium term (the word). This relation can be defined as **metaphorical**".

These references to these figures of speech should not occult the fact that it is the whole distinct reality which is controlled by both the process of contiguity and similarity (respectively congruent with metonymy and metaphor).

The contiguous/similar distinction goes back to **Aristotle**. Yet in recent times **R. Jakobson** brings to light this **bipolarisation** which, according to him, holds a large place in the phenomena of language as well as in all human normal and pathological behaviors. **L Sébag**, opening a research strongly wished by the linguist, shows that this contiguous/similar bipolarisation, constitutes the

underlying antagonism which structures the human being in the totality of his individual, sociological and cosmological relations:

"Creation of plants and creation of animals will be opposed term to term. The first implies the combination of a real element, the seed, with a real action: the act of planting. For the second, there is no reality at the beginning, but only an image which becomes alive due to a **linguistic action**".

We selected three examples in **Sébag's** text. They illustrate the no reducible oppositions announced by the author, and also the means used to overcome these oppositions. The proceeding events are not without relationship to problems of crisis, whose very wide range will soon appear to the reader.

## **The snake Pishuni**

The **twin girls** were in a hurry to create. By inadvertency, they dropped on the ground the figurine of this snake. So the snake is brought alive by contact, as would be a plant, and not by the word, as for an animal. This inversion of relationships between metonymy and metaphor **gives birth to a subversive being**. His linguistic activity is deformed; he does not question, as do other animals, but he can answer, he can explain, and will be able to try one of the twin girls; he leads her to procreate in violation of the rule wished by the Creator Father.

## **Koshari**

For **Koshari** the anomaly is opposite. The twin sisters found an undistinguishable element at the bottom of the basket; as they were not informed of his real nature, they decided to give birth to him by the word. But this was wrong; so the heroins substituted metaphor for metonymy, for this element would not have to be born by the word (which was not adapted to its reality).

A human being was born who appeared **insane**, more subverted than subversive. He presented disturbances of language: his sentences were deprived of significance and his **speech was inverted**. He was sent to live near the Sun, because he could not live among human beings.

Metaphor and metonymy (in other words similarity and contiguity) are antagonistic. They cannot be substituted for one another, and, **because of the risk of subversion and language disorders, they must not be applied to any element of reality outside of the prescribed rule.**

By the fact that imitation is congruent with metaphor; each one can understand that:

- on the one hand, to **imitate the upper term** (the parent or civilizing hero, given by the underlying myth) is necessary to acquire forms and identification standards in a culture;

- on the other hand, this access to metaphor occurs and develops itself **inside the area of social or familial contiguity**, which is a universal context of the development of beings.

We recognize here **the omnipresent contradiction of contiguity/metaphor** and we will see that it is not obvious to be at once "with the image and with the resemblance".

## **The war of Katchina**

This event shows us how the imitative act, so necessary to the human being to appropriate knowledge, is always **a critical act**.

Katchina were created **similarly to humans**, and with the purpose of helping them; they lived in their proximity, they shared and exchanged their food. This way of life contradicts any metaphorical relation with human beings, therefore any resemblance. So **they wore masks** which modified their appearance. Men were not allowed to represent these masks: the proximity between men and Katchina requires them **to be different** from one another. To represent these masks means to cancel the difference.

It occurs that some young men imitated Katchina; this is a metaphorisation. A war followed this act, and for the first time, the men had to see corpses. As soon as the war was over, Katchina withdrew themselves definitively, but this required that a certain amount of young men were sacrificed. On leaving, Katchinas made possible the **human faculty to shape masks**. And so, with masks, men were enabled to adapt the capacity and power which is attached to them. The relations, initially under the sign of contiguity, excluded the capacity of Katchina, i.e. to be like them; the interiorization of this capability became possible only when **death and distance** had caused the irreversible abandonment of the pre-existent proximity.

The processes of the language are closely related to the dichotomy which we are studying. One will notice, with L Sébag, that in both preceding cases (Pishuni and Koshari) a linguistic deformation is accompanied by the subversion of the beings. An **anomaly of language** is still in question with Katchina. The conflict being started again by a misleading messenger who does not announce the event for which he was elected.

Crises are always the consequence of a confusion of orders, more precisely of their competition on the same being or object. **The management of resemblance with**

contiguity - or contiguity with resemblance - is thus a fundamental problem for human beings. It should be observed that the original dichotomy is wished for the Creator God. The clot of blood with which he made the Earth - according to the myth - is in metonymic connection with his being. On the other hand, the twin sisters, created "*in accordance with their own Creator's image*", are in metaphorical relation with him. In such a way, proximity with Utchsiti would be a contact of same with same; this is prohibited by the mutual exclusion of the contiguous from the similar. For this reason, four Skies separate Creator and creatures, and they don't communicate directly but only by the means of an intermediary spirit (Tsichtinako).

## 2 - THE ANALYSIS SHOWS THAT:

- similar beings **must not be contiguous**, or form part of a same relevant unit: this is the case of the twin girls and their Creator, as we have just seen;
- when beings become similar, one of them must move away and they must **break their contiguity**.

This necessity occurs regularly in the myth at **decisive moments**: when the war with Katchina is ended, they leave the humans, who, from now, can imitate them. In an other part of the myth, and in a similar circumstance, one of the twin girls, Iatiku, who is the primitive mother of mankind, moves away: young men laugh at her and imitate her. But at that time she leaves for men a symbolization of herself which is a cultural element: the corn ear (Honani).

In agreement with what has just been shown, **proximity requires a difference** between beings or requires distinct psychological predicates. For this reason Katchina carry masks when they are among the men.

Succeeding the twin girls, the twins boys (the "Sons of the Sun") are assigned to complete the organization of the society. The myth tells us that, at one point, they confused war and hunting (while hunting they killed human beings). By the way, they treat human like animals. However the men are plants; by treating them as animals they struck the entire vegetable order. From this, there followed a drought on Earth. Human beings "are plants", i.e. belong to the vegetable ontological class. The only reason is that metonymy enters into the constitution of the human order (otherwise metaphorisation would not pose a problem).

**Lucien Sébag** brings the proof of this metonymic rooting of mankind when analysing the **fault of Nautsiti**. She is the twin sister who gives birth to a child in transgression of the established order. According to the regulations of Uchtsiti, the Creative Father, she would have had children in metaphorical relation to herself, therefore similar to their mother. Not having waited a long time in order to bring

her descendants into the world, the twin girl had "contracted the time", **brought closer what was to be normally distant** and, in doing so, substituted metonymy for metaphor.

Indeed, temporal distance is equivalent to space distance, and proximity in time is equivalent to proximity in space. So this confusion in the orders, which is still a fault, has a double consequence which raises an inherent contradiction in mankind:

a - mother and child will be assigned with contiguity by biological and psychological connections;

b - but children, when growing, are assigned to become more and more similar to their parents and that brings either the necessity of a difference (may be homosexuality: for a boy, not to resemble his father) or an inevitable crisis (for instance the teenager crisis, oedipian crisis).

One could not better underline the impossibility for human beings to "metaphorise" the mother, in other words, the impossibility to cancel vestiges of the pre-existent contiguous relations with her (This is the root of the main psychic disorders).

## **"How to become similar when living in contiguity?"**

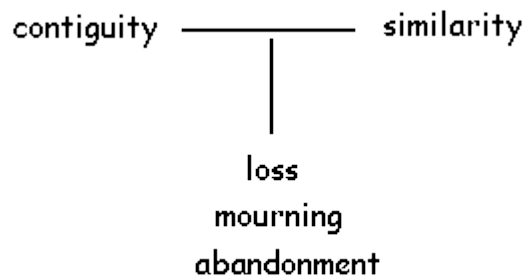
That is the main human problem. **Removal** constitutes certainly the simplest process which shows clearly the loss of a first close relation (Such as the universal rule of exogamy which compels children to become married - therefore parents - in a place removed from their own parents).

In the myth, the Creative Father withdraws himself and allows the twin sisters to possess the capacity to continue the Creation instead of him. Katchina leave men who enter into possession of the capacity of the masks. In every case the general progression is made with a succession of ruptures whose common characteristics are **to cancel a pre-existent contiguity and to generate a loss, an abandonment, a mourning**, the price of the acquisition of a new statute and increasingly more comparable to the statute of the creator.

## **3 - THE CONCEPT OF FAULT**

It is extremely important. This concept implies a reversibility which may be formulated as follows: a transformation doesn't exist without a crisis, marked by a subversive guilt, while, in return, a crisis allows a transformation. It will be noticed that it is at the time of major crises that: - death is named for the first time (leaving of Iatiku) - people see dead persons for the first time (war and leaving of Katchina). These mournings are in correlation with the acquisition of a new capacity, taken on

the civilizing term: mythical father or mother, or intermediate being (as with Katchinas). We propose the following schematizing form to represent the general process.



"The search of humanity", says the author, is characterized by an "**interiorization and a progressive metaphorisation of all of the beings with which men are in relation**". This progressive metaphorisation is the result of a series of ruptures relating to pre-existent metonymic relations. It is thanks to these subversive crises, that similarity relations replace the contiguous relations which previously linked the involved terms (The oedipian crisis, the freudian and famous "murder of the father" ranks among these events).

This clarification does not exhaust the heuristic fertility of **L Sébag's** theses. Death, mourning, and loss, are not the exclusive conditions for the legalization of beings and things.

The twin unfolding of beings (groups of equal), plays a capital part. Simply let us notice that twins are, at the same time, **completely contiguous and completely similar** beings. Their couple, from the splitting into two hypostases, permits the capacity to allow transformations while avoiding crisis. As for other subversive characters, they resemble twins because they are ambivalent like them. They are held with the junction of fields which must be distinct. That is why they can transform the contents of the relations, and work the symbolic mediation system.

The human being **must synthesize the diversity of reality** and " the true human power lies in symbolization " says L Sébag. It is by preterition that the author indicates **difference** as a fundamental factor of coexistence between beings. Admittedly this essential point is not quoted in the course of Sébag's work. Yet, the need to not resemble, the impossibility to imitate or to be given to imitate, the danger of equalizing on the same relevant space, or of holding the same psychological predicates, emerge with an insistant clearness, entirely governed by the opposition metonymy / metaphor.

One understands why freudian (symbolic) **castration**, by impairing similarity, allows subordination in the parental group. Thus it is possible to reabsorb the oedipian tension when, at a moment of the biographical (and biological) history, a resemblance appears between beings. Yet we notice that, thanks to **Sébag's** analysis, sexual explanation is not at all necessary in this "blind point" of psychoanalytic theories.



***Bibliographie: Lucien Sébag. L'invention du monde par les indiens pueblo. Ed. Maspéro. PARIS.***

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