

Syntagmatic structures: How the Maoris make sense of history

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Marshall Sahlins has recently argued that the structuralist dichotomy between structure and history is not really necessary. History has a structure and structures have their histories (Sahlins 1981). One purpose of this paper is to register resounding accord with Sahlins's position by attempting to unveil the structures that inform the New Zealand Maori view of history.

A second goal is to dispute, as oversimplified, any distinction between peoples without history and those with it. The contrast Lévi-Strauss proposed between 'hot' and 'cold' societies is a case in point. 'Hot' societies are those with institutional apparatus for recognizing historical change, accounting for it, and even transforming themselves in accordance with it. In 'cold' societies, on the other hand, the effects of change are minimized or denied in favor of a view of reality as immutable (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 307–310). The difficulty with a cold/hot dichotomy is that it pigeonholes whole societies in one camp or the other. I shall argue that the space from 'cold' to 'hot' may be divided into as many as five distinct degrees of dynamism or levels of historical consciousness, as I shall occasionally call them, and that it is possible to identify most or even all of them in single societies, depending on the sorts of experience being ordered. I do not wish to claim that all five levels are invariably to be found in every society. It may be that the highest level present in some societies does not attain the degree of dynamism found in others, a point that will be raised again at the end. It is also true, however, that some societies normally classed as 'hot' — such as our own — quite firmly deny historical change in certain contexts.

I will try to establish my position by means of a demonstration that all five dynamic levels may be identified in Maori culture. The analysis refers to the Maori culture of roughly the century following effective European contact in 1769 — a century that saw much change in many sectors of the society, although not, so far as I can ascertain, in its concepts of history.

'veracity' of Maori historical accounts — that is, how they fare with reference to *our* view of history. Our focus will be on the syntagmatic structures in which the Maori accounts may be articulated, and particularly on the degrees of dynamism or change that can be expressed by means of those structures.

Symmetry and complementarity

As I have said, five levels of dynamism can be identified in the Maori view of history. Except for the first, they are all realized by one or another variant of two syntagms, which may be termed symmetry and complementarity. Each of these will be developed more fully as the argument unfolds, but it will be helpful to have a preliminary understanding of them now.

Both the symmetrical and complementary syntagms concern the dynamics of relationships between pairs of entities. They are distinguished by the sort of behavior the *relata* adopt toward each other. In symmetrical relationships the interaction is equivalent: A treats B very much as B treats A. Symmetrical relationships in Maori culture tend to follow a certain career, to have a certain syntagmatic structure. An initial state of cordiality is interrupted by a misfortune of some sort. One of the parties feels insulted, slighted, or injured in some way by the other. It is scarcely relevant whether the misfortune is massive or trivial, inadvertent or intentional. In any case the setback still *happened*, and a Maori preoccupation with equivalent reciprocity demands that an appropriate return be made. Thus the cordiality of the relationship is replaced by hostility, the exchange of goods, gifts, and politenesses by insults and injuries.

Further developments may occur within the symmetrical syntagm, as will be delineated below. Meanwhile, the story of Karewa and Tara-ao instantiates those parts of the syntagm set out so far. These two chiefs of the Waikato region were related as brothers-in-law. Karewa lived on the coast and Tara-ao inland. One day, while Karewa was visiting his brother-in-law, they happened to debate whether seafood or inland food would cook more quickly. Resolving to put the matter to the test, Karewa placed a cockle in the fire. After a few moments went by and it had not opened, Tara-ao merely touched the feelers of a fresh-water crayfish to the flame, and they immediately turned red. This constituted an insult to Karewa, who went home in a morbid frame of mind. It was not long before he returned at the head of a war party, bent on avenging by force of arms the reverse he had suffered (White 1886-90, IV: 187-191 [English], 179-184 [Maori]).

In the preceding section I implied that discovery procedures for syntagmatic structures entail the comparison of several instantiations. We will not go through anything approaching the entire discovery process here, but I will review another example, paradigmatically related to the story of Karewa and Tara-ao, in order to show how a syntagm may be recognized by comparing two or more of its instantiations. A fable tells how a river cormorant and a sea cormorant went fishing together. First they tried the ocean, but found no food there. The river cormorant suggested that they go to his habitual fishing grounds, which were sure to yield a good catch. They flew to the river, where they found his boast to be amply justified. This demonstration of the superiority of the other's habitat constituted an insult to the sea cormorant. He flew back to the ocean, where he prepared his *utu* (equivalent response, act of reciprocity), a massive attack by the sea birds upon the land birds (Tregear 1904: 81-83). Clearly this fable and the story of Karewa and Tara-ao belong to the same paradigm, sharing the symmetrical syntagmatic structure outlined above: two entities enjoy a cordial relationship, an injury occurs, and this transforms the relationship to one of hostility.

The other Maori syntagmatic form that I want to examine is complementarity. If symmetrical *relata* treat each other in the same way, complementary *relata* adopt different behaviors, such as those between active and passive or male and female.⁴ The story of Tini-rau and Hine-te-iwaiwa is a good example. Tini-rau was a chief widely famed for his comely appearance. Hine-te-iwaiwa, a maiden from a distant tribe and of uncommon beauty herself, fell in love with Tini-rau on the basis of his reputation and determined to have him for her own. She adopted the form of a mermaid and swam to his abode. Tini-rau was narcissistic as well as handsome, and he kept a number of limpid pools as looking glasses. Hine-te-iwaiwa resolved to make a striking entrance, so the first thing she did after resuming human form was to jump into these pools, muddying them badly. The owl in whose care Tini-rau had placed the pools flew horrified to his master with the news of the interloper. Tini-rau rushed to the scene, but his anger quickly evaporated when he saw Hine-te-iwaiwa. He fell in love with her, they married, and had a child. By the time Hine-te-iwaiwa was pregnant with their second child, however, Tini-rau's attention began to wander. Eventually he found Hine-te-iwaiwa's presence so irksome that he literally imprisoned her in the hut where she was awaiting the birth of their child by building a fence of briars and nettles around it. Desolated by this callous treatment, after the child was born Hine-te-iwaiwa called upon her brother Rupe for assistance. In the form of a pigeon, he rescued her from her cruel and inattentive husband (Taylor 1855: 107-110).

When this story is compared with other members of its paradigm (some of which will be recounted below), a clear syntagmatic structure emerges. Two complementary entities, dwelling apart, are in one way or another unfulfilled, incomplete. They are mutually attracted and they unite. Their union is productive of something new (in this case, the children which Hine-te-iwaiwa bears to Tini-rau). Eventually, however, some party to the relationship finds it confining. (The present story is especially rich at this point: Tini-rau felt restricted by his wife and so put her away, while she was literally confined by the fence that he erected.) This leads the relata to separate, terminating their relationship. Synoptically stated, the stages of the complementary syntagm are: attraction–union–creation–confinement–separation.⁵

With this preliminary statement of the symmetrical and complementary syntagmatic forms, we may turn to the five levels of historical consciousness and the ways in which they are realized in Maori culture.

Level I: The eternal now

At the 'coldest' or least dynamic end of the spectrum is the view that utterly negates the existence of historical change by releasing events from fixed points in time. The same event, that is, may occur many different times. Or, perhaps better, events are like buildings that may be entered again and again. They exist outside time, suspended in an eternal present, available to the experience of people from any time. Normally this view of events is found in religious contexts, where people with proper ritual preparation may leave the mundane world where time reigns and so participate in the timeless event. Australian aboriginal ideas about the activities of the creator-heroes in the Dreaming, and the participation of contemporary people in them via myth and ritual, are well-known examples (see Elkin 1964: 208–211).

This level of historical consciousness may also be found in our own culture. Jesus located himself outside of time when he said, 'Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8: 58). The title of this section is taken from a sermon by Paul Tillich that explores the significance of that biblical passage (Tillich 1963). Roman Catholic and high church Anglican doctrine regarding the Eucharist is another case in point. It is not a present remembrance of an event that happened two millennia ago. Instead, communicants leave whatever time they may inhabit in the mundane world in order to participate in a sacramental event that exists eternally, outside of time.

The identification of the first level of historical consciousness in Maori

culture stems not from my own research but from that of the Danish scholar J. Prytz Johansen. He claims that history for the Maoris consists of a number of 'archetypical situations'. When these are recalled in ritual, or when the link between one of them and a mundane event is noted by reciting a proverb, the Maori view of the matter is not that two events are in play: the present event and the archetypical situation that it resembles. Instead there is only one event — the archetypical situation — that, not fixed in the past, is present again (Johansen 1954: 152–172, 1958: 7–8):

We cannot underline the literal meaning too much when we say that the Maori relives history. We are so apt to insert in thought a 'like' and in this way make all of it very simple, according to our presuppositions. We find it quite obvious that when an event has happened, it never returns; but this is exactly what happens. (1954: 161)

An event Johansen analyzes as archetypical is the vengeance accomplished by Whakatau. One of his relatives had been killed as a human sacrifice at the consecration of a large new house. Whakatau waited until the people who had killed his kinsman were crowded inside the house, and then he set fire to it, destroying both the house and its occupants (1954: 155–158). Maoris seeking vengeance, in order to speed their purpose, would often recite the incantation Whakatau used when he burned the house. Therefore, Johansen reasons, 'it is really the archetype of vengeance itself which unfolds itself in every act of vengeance' (1954: 159). He holds further that persons as well as events transcend time. People do not simply resemble their ancestors; by a literal communion of kinship they *are* their ancestors, they share the same life (1954: 162–172, 177–179). The transmigration of personality is also present in the avatars of archetypical events such as vengeance:

Whenever vengeance is wreaked on somebody again, Whakatau again does his deed in the shape of the avenger ... he who wants to avenge himself, puts on Whakatau, so to speak, and so the accomplished vengeance is latently present, assured by the archetype of vengeance. (1954: 159)

The idea that events and personalities are not fixed in time is radically antihistorical. Any period in history is characterized by who lived in it and what they did. If the same persons can do precisely the same things at widely separated intervals, it becomes impossible to identify any particular difference between one historical period and another. Therefore this view of history (better, this denial of history) has no provision for change and development in the conditions of life. Hence it is not surprising that it

tends to be found in religion, the abode of those propositions and conditions that are most zealously protected and deemed to be of permanent verity and value. It is unlikely, however, that any society could order the full range of its affairs according to so homeostatic a world view. The course of history, even the round of daily events, requires more dynamic models.

Level II: Time without change

The major difference between the first and second levels of dynamism is that on the second level time is recognized as a dynamic process or continuum within which events are fixed at definite points. This introduces the potential for conceptualizing historical change on the basis of differences among events that belong to different times. That potential, however, is not realized on this level because differences are not recognized among events.

The second level is well suited for structuring those circumstances that maintain the same form over indefinitely long periods of time. In Maori culture conditions of this sort are encoded in the symmetrical syntagm, or a part of it. As it has been described so far, the symmetrical syntagm begins with a state of cordiality between two *relata* that, upon the occurrence of an insult or injury of some sort, transforms to a state of hostility. The second level of historical consciousness results when the symmetrical syntagm 'gets stuck' at the stage of either cordiality or hostility.

Trading relationships are the best example of symmetrical relationships being arrested at the stage of cordiality. A good deal of commerce exists in New Zealand, in which tribes exchange their specialized products for natural or manufactured goods that they lack. Coastal dwellers trade fish, shellfish, shark oil, and edible seaweed for the potted birds and rats, red ochre, and other products of partners who live inland. Tribes along the Whanganui River produce a surplus of eels for trade; tribes of Taranaki, Kawhia, and Poverty Bay export various sorts of garments; those of Hawkes Bay manufacture large canoes for trade; and greenstone, which is found only in a relatively small area on the west coast of the South Island, is exchanged throughout New Zealand (Firth 1959: 219, 403–409). In principle, at least, the exchange of specialized products between trading partners could persist indefinitely. Therefore the Maori symmetrical syntagm, when frozen at the stage of cordial exchange, realizes the second level of historical consciousness. Events of the same sort recur repeatedly, in a process that lacks both development and a fixed terminal point.

Although fewer instantiations exist, these conditions may also be achieved in the hostile stage of symmetrical relationships. The best example is mythological. Although fish and reptiles are both offspring of Tangaroa, god of the sea, the reptiles decided to leave their primordial habitat in order to take up residence on land. This constituted an insult to Tangaroa, and he responded by launching an attack on his brother Tāne, who represents the land in this story. Tāne fought back, and interminable war has raged between these two brothers ever since. Maoris imagine the relations between land and sea as episodes in this war. Tāne's victories are the terrestrial products that are used to cross the sea or to capture its inhabitants: canoes, spears, nets, hooks, and line. Tangaroa retaliates with successes of his own: storms that swamp canoes and drown their occupants, and the ceaseless erosion of the shore by the waves (Grey 1956: 6–7, 1971: 2–3).

Level III: Recycling

With the third level of historical consciousness we enter the realm of cycles. Events are no longer stuck at one stage of a syntagm but move entirely through it. Dynamism at this level is limited, however, by the larger consideration that the general state of affairs at the completion of a syntagm is very much as it was at the start. That is, change occurs *within* passages through syntagmatic structures, but not *between* them. Because the *relata* end up in the same position as they began, it is possible for the same *relata* to pass through the same syntagm more than once. To the extent that this actually happens, a system at the third level manifests a distinctly cyclical character. This aspect of the matter seems somewhat less pronounced for the Maoris than, say, the Ainu or the Maya (Ohnuki-Tierney 1973, Leon-Portilla 1973). Still, the third level is of great importance in the Maori view of history, and it is represented by both the symmetrical and complementary syntagms.

If the distinctive feature of the third level is that circumstances after a passage through a syntagm are much as they were before, this would be realized in the symmetrical syntagm if a relationship, having been transformed from cordiality to hostility by the occurrence of a setback, were subsequently returned to a state of cordiality. Most instantiations of this variant of the symmetrical syntagm are incidents in contemporary social relations (some of them observed by early European visitors to New Zealand) or in traditional history. One example from the latter category concerns the relations between coastal and inland dwellers. Tamatea-rehe was a chief who lived near the sea at Whakatane. He

developed a craving for inland delicacies such as preserved birds and rats, so he sent messengers with a request for them to his kinsman Rakai-paka. That inland chief, observing that the emissaries came empty-handed, sent them back in the same condition, bearing only the message *he kai, he kai* (some food [for] some food). At this point the relationship could easily have shifted to overt hostilities. Rakai-paka took the arrival of the messengers with nothing but a request for foodstuffs as an affront, an insult. His *utu* or response was to send them back with only a cryptic message. Tamatea-rehe for his part could easily have been insulted by that communication, made some further retaliation of his own, and the affair could have escalated into a feud. Instead, tacitly acknowledging that he had erred the first time, he sent the messengers back to Rakai-paka, now bearing a generous gift of seafood. This time they were received graciously and returned to Tamatea-rehe laden down with the inland produce he desired (Graham 1948). Hence their symmetrical relationship, having skirted near the edge of hostility, returned to a cordial mode.

Another important means of restoring cordiality to a symmetrical relationship threatened by a setback is the institution of *murū*. Should someone suffer an inadvertent or intentional injury at the hands of a member of his kin or local group, the injured party retaliates by plundering the author of the affront. This might be as mild as the appropriation of one or two objects or as severe as a raiding party that takes everything it can lay hands on and burns down the victim's house. The target of the *murū* provides a feast for the raiders, and the affair is closed. The one who suffered the original injury has his retaliation in the form of the raid, the other party is rehabilitated into the good graces of the group by having submitted to the raid, and cordial relations are restored.⁶

The third level of historical consciousness is also represented in Maori culture by the complementary syntagm, and in an extremely important way. In fact, a large segment of Maori religion and ritual may be analyzed in these terms. The core assumption informing Maori religion is that the successful outcome of nearly all activities and processes in this world depends upon the influence of the gods (*atūas*). Crops cannot grow, nor beaches produce cockles, nor artists create, nor warriors prevail without divine animation, termed *tapu*. However, *tapu* entails a number of severe restrictions. Although sweet potatoes must be *tapu* if they are to grow, they cannot be eaten while in the *tapu* state. *Tapu* is necessary for the construction of a fine house, but that same *tapu* prevents it, once completed, from being put to normal use. Therefore if one part of Maori ritual is concerned with directing *tapu* to those human endeavors where its creative animation is needed, another set of rituals, called *whakanoa*, is

designed to remove *tapu* from things and people when it is no longer desired.

These religious ideas and practices instantiate the stages of the complementary syntagm as these were summarized above: attraction–union–creation–confinement–separation. If things of this world require the animation of *atūas*, the *atūas* also need physical objects for the actualization of their energy. Hence these complementary principles are mutually attracted, and the state of *tapu* is their union. It is a creative union, resulting in the construction of houses, growth of crops, and so on. But that state of union also has certain confining effects: crops may not be eaten, nor houses entered, nor warriors engage in mundane activities while in the *tapu* state. Therefore *whakanoa* rituals are used to separate the complementary relata by sending the *tapu* back to the godly realm of its origin.⁷

These religious and ritual forms belong to the third level of historical consciousness because circumstances following the stage of separation are very much as they were before the *tapu* was instituted. Therefore the same relata may go through the syntagm several times. Year after year the same *atūas* lend their animation to the same gardens in order to produce a succession of crops. The same artisans or warriors are made *tapu*, carry out their work of construction or destruction, and then are removed from the *tapu* state again and again. Some changes occur, to be sure. A warrior may be killed in battle, an artisan may palpably increase in skill and fame as his accomplishments accumulate. These changes, however, fall within the parameters of normal existence. They do not signal major developments in the conditions of life. For those it is necessary to move on to the fourth and fifth levels of historical consciousness.

Level IV: Rearrangement

A simple adjustment marks the shift from the third to the fourth level. Whereas on the third level conditions after passage through a syntagm are very much as they were before, on the fourth level they are quite different. This difference marks a new level of dynamism because it releases the course of events from the reiteration of cycles. It now becomes possible to imagine permanent shifts and nonrepetitive patterns in history.

Accounts at the fourth level of historical consciousness are common in Maori culture. Mainly they are instantiations of the symmetrical syntagm. This is the dominant structure used for accounts of two developments that Maoris consider to be of supreme historical importance: the coming of their ancestors to New Zealand, and the dispersal of tribes within New Zealand.

Maoris hold that their ancestors migrated to New Zealand in a number of canoes from a homeland called Hawaiki. The stories of the circumstances leading up to the departure of the various canoes from Hawaiki form a most interesting paradigm. One day, in Hawaiki, a boy who was delivering a message to a man named Uenuku had the misfortune to trip over the threshold of Uenuku's house. This so incensed Uenuku, probably because it was an ill omen, that he killed the lad and ate him on the spot, without even bothering to cook him. Turi, a relative of the unlucky boy, avenged the deed by killing Uenuku's son. He then included the cooked heart in a basket of food that was being sent to Uenuku. As he ate, Uenuku sighed to think that his son had not come home to share this delicious meal with him. When he learned the truth, Uenuku showed no emotion, but he laid his plans for revenge. One evening Turi's wife overheard Uenuku reviewing, in a song, the tribes who were sending warriors to assist in the destruction of his enemy. Turi quickly divined that these plans were meant for him. He escaped by securing a canoe, named Ao-tea, from his father-in-law, and he migrated with his people to New Zealand (Grey 1956: 158-165, 1971: 90-93).

Manaia, another resident of Hawaiki, had a similar problem. He invited his neighbors to help fashion new spears. They came on the appointed day, and Manaia himself went fishing in order to secure food for his worker-guests. He returned full of suspicion, however, because he caught only one fish all day, and that one was hooked through the tail — a sure sign that something was amiss with his wife. It proved to be so, for she informed Manaia that their guests had assaulted her while he was away. Manaia gathered his warriors and fell upon the visitors, killing them all. This touched off a feud between Manaia's group and the relatives of those he had killed, a feud that led to the death of many on Manaia's side. In order to save the rest of his people, and himself, Manaia secured a canoe named Tokomaru from his brother-in-law and led a migration to New Zealand (Grey 1956: 173-176, 1971: 99-101).

Dissensions at Hawaiki resulted in the migration of other canoes as well. The Taki-tumu left for New Zealand as a result of a dispute over some gardens in Hawaiki (White 1886-90: II: 193 [English], 177 [Maori]). The cause of the migration of the Tainui canoe was a great war in Hawaiki. No peace was achieved between the contending parties, so finally they separated. One side remained in Hawaiki, while the other built the Tainui and sailed to New Zealand (White 1886-90: IV: 28-29 [English], 21 [Maori]).

The stories in this paradigm clearly share the symmetrical syntagmatic structure. A cordial relationship, marred by some insult (Uenuku's murder of the boy, the rape of Manaia's wife), becomes hostile. Next, however,

something happens that we have not yet encountered: with no reconciliation in sight, the relationship is terminated by separation. Precisely this step gives the symmetrical syntagm a cycle-breaking dynamism, because the separation places the relata in a new set of circumstances. In the stories just reviewed, the symmetrical relationship is ended and one of the parties turns a new page in history by migrating to New Zealand.

Accounts of the dispersal of the migrants within New Zealand belong to the same paradigm. A number of canoes are said to have left Hawaiki and arrived in New Zealand at the same time, forming a 'Great Fleet'. Each canoe strove to make the first landfall and, according to one account, this distinction was achieved by the Tainui. It arrived in New Zealand at Whanga-Paraoa, in the Bay of Plenty, where its occupants found a whale stranded on the beach. They secured the whale to a tree by means of a flaxen rope they made, and then left to explore the territory. While they were gone the Arawa canoe arrived and discovered the whale with Tainui's rope attached. The Arawa captain, Tama-te-kapua, hatched a scheme to secure both the whale and the honor of first arrival. He had his men make a rope, which they scorched over a fire to make it appear old, and then they tied it to the whale, taking care to place it under the Tainui's rope. When the people of the Tainui returned they disputed with the Arawa's passengers as to who arrived first. Tama-te-kapua suggested they compare the ropes securing the whale, and the Arawa's dried rope obviously appeared older than the green one of the Tainui. The demonstration was a setback, a loss of face, for the Tainui people. This led them to separate from the Arawa, relinquishing the whale, the territory, and the distinction of first arrival, and sailing away to settle another part of New Zealand (Smith 1915: 44). When the tale is told by the descendants of the Tainui the roles are reversed: Hotunui, captain of the Tainui, is credited with charring the rope and thereby duping the people of the Arawa (White 1886-90, IV: 33-34 [English], 25-26 [Maori]). A nearly identical episode explains why, having been tricked out of the stranded whale, the gardens they had cleared, and the houses they had built by the occupants of an unnamed canoe that had arrived later, Manaia and the crew of the Tokomaru left the point of their first arrival for another location in New Zealand (Grey 1956: 178-181, 1971: 102-104).

Another account of movements within New Zealand concerns Hotunui, the Tainui captain. He settled with the other Tainui migrants at Kawhia, on the west coast. The sweet potato store of his father-in-law was robbed one night and Hotunui's distinctive footprints, with a crooked big toe, were discovered just outside. Some accounts label Hotunui as the thief and others claim he had been in the vicinity by accident, but in any event his father-in-law accused him of the crime. This so mortified

A semiotic approach

As with any analysis, this one sets out with certain theoretical assumptions and allied methodological procedures. Crucial here is the assumption that concepts of history — the typical patterns that people expect temporal sequences of events to manifest — are conditioned by culture just as much as notions about the proper form of social relations or the nature of the divine. The historical consciousness, that is to say, is culturally structured.

Consisting of sequences of conditions and events in time, history has the sort of structure that semioticians term 'syntagmatic' (Barthes 1968: 58–59, 62–71). That term may be applied to any sort of sequential order, such as phonemes in morphs or morphemes in phrases. More generally, church services, sermons, telephone conversations, games, symphonies, and sexual relations all have syntagmatic structures, together with just about everything else people do, although of course their rigidity and explicitness may vary. One quite rigid and explicit example is the four-step syntagmatic structure of a journal article in the 'hard' sciences. It begins with an introduction, which identifies the problem under investigation. Next comes a description of the experiment, its apparatus and procedures. Third is a section presenting the results of the experiment. The paper then concludes with a discussion of the relevance of the experimental results to the problem and its solution. This structure recurs again and again in scientific periodicals; a colleague in pharmaceutical chemistry once told me that writing up the results is the easiest part of a research project because the format is so cut-and-dried.¹

Of course, it would not be possible to identify a syntagm (that is, a particular syntagmatic structure) unless it were instantiated by a number of cases. The four-step syntagm just delineated, for example, can be detected only because it informs a great many scientific papers. I will use the term 'paradigm' to refer to the set of all concrete instantiations of a given syntagm.² It will be seen that syntagm and paradigm are interdependent concepts. As noted already, a syntagm may be identified only on the basis of the paradigm of its instantiations. Conversely, those instantiations can be said to form a paradigm only because they are structured according to the same syntagm.

Occasionally it is thought that the paradigm/syntagm distinction is congruent with another one semioticians are in the habit of making: that between metaphor and metonymy. As Schofer and Rice (1977) and Merrell (1980) have recognized, however, this is not the case. Metaphor and metonymy are both kinds of *tropes* — 'a semantic transposition from a sign *in praesentia* to a sign *in absentia*' (Schofer and Rice 1977:133). In

each case it is possible to speak of a signifier (the sign that is present) and a signified (the sign that is absent). In metaphor the relationship between the signifier and signified is one of similarity ('vixen' for a woman of certain temperament). In metonymy the link is contiguity of some sort, such as referring to something by its function ('the law' for the police) or, by synecdoche, using a part to refer to a whole ('the crown' for the monarch or the monarchy).³ Tropes may even be simultaneously metaphorical and metonymic. An example is the title of Paul Zindel's play 'The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds'. It is a synecdoche that names the whole play for one of its parts: a science project done by one of the characters. It is also a metaphor, in that the varying effects of gamma rays on the marigolds, as determined in the science project, resemble the influence of the mother on her two daughters.

Unlike metaphor and metonymy, paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships are not tropes. They do not connect present signifiers with absent signifieds. In a scientific paper, for example, the section describing the experimental procedure is related syntagmatically to the section that presents the results. Note that *both* parts of the relationship are present. Moreover, the one section of the paper *leads to* the other; it does not *stand for* it. In paradigmatic relationships, on the other hand, it is true that one member is present and another absent. So we may say that the discussion of experimental results in a paper now before us is related paradigmatically to the discussion of results in another scientific paper. Or, at a more general level, a scientific paper now before us, taken as a whole, is related paradigmatically to a large number of other scientific papers. This still does not qualify a paradigmatic relationship as a trope, however, because it is not a relationship of signification. A present scientific paper does not stand for some other scientific paper that is absent. The paradigmatic relationship is grounded rather in a common syntagmatic structure.

The difference between paradigm/syntagm and metaphor/metonymy has important methodological implications. A study focused on the latter concepts has for a major goal the discovery of meaning — the identification of the absent signifieds to which the present signifiers metaphorically or metonymically refer. The investigation of paradigms and syntagms is more on the order of the study of grammar. The concern is not with the meaning of particular messages, but with the forms in which meaningful messages may be encoded. In our study of Maori history, then, we will not be tempted to speculate on what various myths, fables, and accounts of ancestral doings might stand for. They probably mean very much what they say: how the world took on its present form, how various groups of people came to occupy the positions they now hold, and so on. Nor, I hope it is scarcely necessary to say, will we be concerned with the

Hotunui that he left Kawhia with a group of followers and migrated across the North Island to Hauraki (White 1886-90, IV: 39-40, 194-195 [English], 29-30, 187-188 [Maori]).

As is evident from the histories we have reviewed, that variant of the symmetrical syntagm that ends in separation is particularly suited as an explanation for movements from one place to another. Nowhere is this more clear than in a set of fables that relate how nature, in many of its aspects, took on its present form. The god of the winds, Tawhiri, became angry with the other gods, his brothers, and unleashed tremendous tempests. The ancestors of the fish and the reptiles, both offspring of Tangaroa, god of the sea, debated where they might hide from Tawhiri's wrath. 'Ho, ho, let us all escape to the sea!' cried the ancestor of the fish. 'Nay, nay', retorted the ancestor of the reptiles, 'let us rather fly inland!' Neither could convince the other, so they finally separated with insults. 'Fly inland, then', bristled the ancestor of the fish, 'and the fate of you and your race will be, that when they catch you, before you are cooked, they will singe off your scales over a lighted wisp of dry fern.' The ancestor of the reptiles spat back, 'Seek safety, then, in the sea, and the future of your race will be, that when they serve out little baskets of cooked vegetable food to each person, you will be laid upon the top of the food to give a relish to it.' So they separated. And that is why fish are found in the sea and reptiles on land (Grey 1956: 6-7; 1971: 2-3).⁸

Like the accounts of migrations to and within New Zealand, this fable is structured by the symmetrical syntagm. The two parties begin cordially, as brothers who wish to remain together. The hallmark of a symmetrical relationship is equivalence, and each party thinks that to give in to the wishes of the other would be to terminate their equivalence by allowing him to adopt a dominant role. Therefore each takes the urgings of the other as a potential threat to his own standing. Minor at first, in its cumulative effects the difference of opinion between them is enough to transform the overall mood of their relationship from cordiality to hostility. Finally they separate, which accounts for the present distribution of their descendants.

This fable is just one of a large paradigm. The sun and the moon desired to live together, but could not agree upon when. The sun urged the day while the moon championed the night. The debate became increasingly heated until they too separated with curses, each going to its preferred period (Smith 1913: 48). The mosquito and the sandfly engaged in a tactical debate over the merits of nocturnal versus daylight assaults against their common enemy, mankind. The mosquito championed a night operation, but the sandfly warned that they would be suffocated by smoke. 'What do I care if I be overcome by smoke', bravely declared the

mosquito, 'so long as I can buzz in his ears!' These two also separated, for the sandfly would not be swayed from his resolve to attack by day. Massive losses were quite acceptable, he claimed, if only he could shed human blood (Best 1925: 991-993).

Maoris even used the symmetrical syntagm to account for certain peculiarities of geography. The Waikato and Whanga-ehu Rivers both have their sources near Mt. Tongariro, in the Lake Taupo region. Whanga-ehu wanted them to flow together to the sea, but they could not agree upon the direction. After the inevitable dispute they separated, the Waikato flowing northward and the Whanga-ehu toward the south (Best 1925: 986-988).

All of our examples in this section have concerned only a single passage through the symmetrical syntagm. Some Maori accounts, however, include an ordered series of several transits through the syntagm. This realizes the potential at the fourth level of historical consciousness, having escaped a cyclical view, to structure relatively long, unidirectional patterns in history. The connection from one passage through the syntagm to the next is made by following the career of a focal individual or group through several successive symmetrical relationships. One such sequence involves Tama-te-kapua, captain of the Arawa canoe. Just prior to sailing from Hawaiki, he asked Ruao to go back to the village to collect an axe that had been forgotten. Ruao obligingly did so, but when he returned he found that the canoe had sailed without him. Tama-te-kapua had duped Ruao in order to abduct his wife, who was on the Arawa when it sailed. To avenge this insult, Ruao set off in pursuit in another canoe. He finally caught the Arawa in New Zealand, at Maketu, in the Bay of Plenty. There Ruao challenged Tama-te-kapua to single combat, threw him down, and humiliated him by rubbing lice or other vermin into his ears. Although normally it is the vanquished who leave when adversaries part on unequal terms, in this case the separation phase of the syntagm was accomplished by Ruao's leaving Maketu with his followers to find new homes in the Rotorua area. The narrative continues by detailing Tama-te-kapua's subsequent symmetrical relationship with his son Kahu-mata-momoe. They disputed the ownership of a garden, and again the relationship ended in separation. This time Tama-te-kapua was the one to leave, moving to Moehau at the Coromandel Peninsula (Grey 1956: 110, 117-121; 1971: 60-61, 65-67).

Mythology provides an example of an ordered series of symmetrical relationships that produced basic changes in the conditions of existence. Here the focal figure is Tu, one of six godly brothers. We have already learned how Tawhiri, god of the winds, waged war against the rest of existence. Everything flew before his great tempests, including all his

brothers except Tu, who represents humankind in this myth. Those two fought to a stalemate. Tu took it as a serious affront, that his other brothers had failed to stand with him against Tawhiri. In retaliation, he attacked them one by one. This myth introduces us to a new variant of the symmetrical syntagm, in which the hostile phase ends not by separation but by the utter subjugation of one party by the other. In a connected series of symmetrical relationships, then, Tu set upon his brothers in turn, defeated them and, in good Maori fashion, ate them. This myth deals with an important development in the establishment of the world as we know it, because Tu's victories secured the human food supply. Fish and other seafood came from his defeat of his brother Tangaroa, god of the sea. From his conquest of Tāne, god of forests, came birds and rats. Fernroot, berries, and other gathered foods stem from the defeat of Haumia, god of uncultivated plants, while the overcoming of Rongo, god of cultivated plants, provided mankind with sweet potatoes and other crops (Grey 1956: 7–10, 1971: 3–5).

Level V: Novelty

As with the fourth level, the fifth level of historical consciousness avoids repetitive cycles because conditions at the end of a passage through the syntagm are different than at the beginning. The main difference between the fourth and fifth levels is that on the fourth existing entities are rearranged (in location, status, and so on) while on the fifth completely new entities are brought into being. This makes the fifth level of historical consciousness the 'hottest' or most dynamic to be considered here.

In Maori culture the dynamism of the fifth level is realized by the complementary syntagm — specifically, the capacity of complementary relata to produce offspring. In tribal histories this often appears in the form of love stories involving illustrious ancestors. The most famous of these is the romance of Hine-moa and Tutanekai. She lived on the shore of Lake Rotorua and he on Mokoia, an island in the lake. They fell in love but her family was not likely to approve of the match because she was of high rank and he was illegitimate. They arranged an elopement, whereby Hine-moa would come to him in the middle of the night when she heard the sound of his flute from across the waters. He gave the signal and she stole to the beach, but found to her dismay that her tribesmen, perhaps suspecting something, had pulled all the canoes high on land so that she was unable to launch one. So she tied a number of gourds around her waist as floats and began to swim. She was guided through the dark night by the sound of Tutanekai's flute, and finally she reached the island.

There the lovers met and married (which is to say that, the next morning, the people of Tutanekai's village saw four feet extending from his sleeping place rather than two). They had many descendants, who still live at Rotorua (Grey 1956: 183–191; 1971: 106–113).

Notice that this story does not instantiate the entire complementary syntagm. The relata are mutually attracted, they unite, and their union is creative (of a long line of descendants, in this case). But the succeeding phases of confinement and separation are absent. Such a story, and a number of others like it exist in Maori lore, stands alone rather than belonging to an ordered series of complementary relationships. This is because, as in the connected symmetrical relationships that we examined on the fourth level, it is the phase of separation that terminates one relationship and thus positions one or both of the relata to engage in a new one. It should also be noticed that while love stories like that of Hine-moa and Tutanekai do utilize the capacity of the complementary syntagm to generate something new, it is not a high order of novelty, being only a line of human descendants started by a pair of human ancestors.

The full dynamic capacity of the complementary syntagmatic form is realized in Maori mythology. The creation myth, for example, consists of a connected series of transits through the complementary syntagm. The power of complementarity to structure change is clear from the fact that this myth, or series of myths, gives an ordered account of developments from nothing but earth and sky to a world furnished with gods, plants, animals, and human beings.⁹

The beginning is a pair of complementary entities: the male sky, named Rangi, and the female earth, Papa. The first transit through the syntagm is theirs. They are mutually attracted and they unite, literally pressing close together in a lovers' embrace. Papa conceives and bears a number of offspring. In this case the sense of confinement is not experienced by Rangi or Papa but by their children, who find existence unbearable in the dark, cramped space they inhabit between their parents. They resolve to separate them and, after numerous failures, the task is accomplished by Tāne, who props the sky far above the earth, where it has remained ever since.

Next Tāne is fired with the urge to create, but discovers that he is impotent to do so without an appropriate *uha*, or female partner. Here we are at the junction between two linked complementary relationships: Tāne, an offspring of the union between Rangi and Papa, is about to establish a new relationship of his own. He does so with Apunga, a female being who, impregnated by Tāne, bears shrubs and small birds. Tāne's aim, however, is to engender humanity. Seeing that this is not working with Apunga, he leaves her for a new spouse. Now comes an extended

series of transits through the complementary syntagm. These are all connected by the participation of Tāne, who is drawn, one after another, to new mates. He impregnates each one, she bears offspring, Tāne is frustrated that it is not human (this marks the 'confinement' phase of the syntagm), he leaves her (the separation phase) and seeks another. A large part of existence can therefore be put down to Tāne's unsuccessful efforts to engender humankind. After Apunga his next seven mates bear only trees, twelve or more species in all. The following partner, Punga, does somewhat better. In addition to two more tree species, she produces all the insects. Tāne keeps looking, mating next with Tutoro-whenua. Her offspring is fernroot, a Maori staple food. Then comes Hine-tu-maunga, who presents Tāne with flood waters.

Finally Tāne and his brothers make a figure in the form of a woman from the earth. Life is breathed into her, but Tāne is uncertain as to his next move. In what can be understood as yet another series of passages through the complementary syntagm, he copulates in turn with most of the orifices and crevices of her body. He remains frustrated in his desire for human offspring, but from each point of contact is born the sort of excreta that is thenceforth appropriate to it: tears, mucus, saliva, earwax, perspiration (from the armpits), and feces. Finally he hits upon the vagina, and his mate bears a daughter. Yet one more passage through the complementary syntagm is necessary: Tāne deserts his wife in favor of an incestuous connection with his daughter, and from *that* union humanity is born.

This cycle of myths demonstrates the capacity of the complementary syntagm to provide an order or structure for the conceptualization of change and even unprecedented novelty. This is the highest level of dynamism that I have found in the Maori idea of history.

Conclusion

I will close with two final remarks, not altogether unrelated to each other. First, although this essay has been about the historical consciousness, it will have been noted that the discussion has been concerned with more than images of the past. The pattern of present events (ethnographic present, that is) has also been relevant, such as intertribal trade and the beliefs and ritual practices that constitute Maori religion. Present processes are relevant to a discussion of ideas of history because those ideas are not restricted to the past. What I have been calling the historical consciousness refers to the set of ideas entertained in a society about the ways in which the course of events is structured. Sequences of events

occur in the present period as well as the past and, since the past is nothing other than a former present, it is not at all surprising that the same structures are thought to inform both. Therefore, when we study the historical consciousness the proper subject matter consists of ideas about the course of events, whenever they occur.

Second, I have argued that more than one level of historical consciousness may be found in any society. This underlies my objection at the outset to classing some societies as 'cold' or without a sense of history and others as 'hot' or with it. Any society must order the course of events, and provide answers to questions about the course of events, at different levels of dynamism. There exists in every society some sort of routine, in which those events that make up the stuff of daily life recur regularly in the same basic form. Because these events change so little from day to day or from year to year, I would anticipate that they are conceptualized in any society in changeless or cyclical terms such as those discussed above on the second and third levels of historical consciousness. But it is also true that, in every society, questions arise as to how things came to be as they are. Moreover, people at some times and places find the events occurring around them too momentous and variable to be encompassed by any sort of routine. More dynamic notions about the course of events, such as those found on the fourth and fifth levels of historical consciousness, are useful in making sense of questions and situations such as these. That is why syntagmatic structures at the higher levels tend to be found in creation myths, accounts of pivotal moments in history, or are used as models for current events by those who, like participants in the French or Russian Revolutions, consider themselves to be living in times of total social transformation.

Distinctions between societies on these grounds may not, however, be entirely out of place. It is possible that some of them simply have no syntagmatic structures available at the higher levels. They may lack a means, that is, of accounting for major changes in the parameters of existence in an ordered manner. One wonders if this is not the case for those views of history that may be called cataclysmic. One possible example is the ancient Mexican idea of history as a series of ages or 'Suns'. Each of these is the protectorate of a particular god, and it succumbs to violent destruction and replacement by another age when its dominant god is overcome by one of his rivals (Leon-Portilla 1963: 35-36). Another example is the biblical view of history, now often termed 'creationism' to distinguish it from evolutionary views. This holds that the basic parameters of existence were set by the Divinity in a relatively brief period of creation, and that history is the story of events within those parameters (but with no change in the basic conditions of existence) up to an abrupt

end of the world. Unlike the theory of evolution, creationism has no capacity to explain developments during the course of history as major as the emergence of new species. Perhaps the debate between creationism and evolutionary theory is ultimately grounded in the different abilities of these competing views of history to give an ordered account of radical change.

Notes

1. As many anthropologists to whom writer's block is an all too familiar malady can warmly testify, the syntagmatic structure of essays in our branch of science is far less pronounced.
2. This usage of syntagm and paradigm derives largely from Ducrot and Todorov (1972: 140–146). Please note that by 'paradigm' I do not mean a classic or 'type' case, such that one member of the set of instantiations is the true paradigm (the Israelites' migration from Egypt to the Promised Land) while other members of the set (such as the Mormon trek to Utah) somehow recapitulate it. Nor do I use 'paradigm' in the sense of a general framework or structured set of assumptions, as Kuhn (1962) often does.
3. Some authors, like Schofer and Rice (1977) consider synecdoche to be a third sort of trope, on the same level as metaphor and metonymy. Others, like Merrill (1980), classify synecdoche as a sort of metonymy. I follow the latter taxonomy here.
4. This distinction between symmetrical and complementary syntagms has a good deal in common with that made by Bateson between symmetrical and complementary schismogenesis (1958: 176–177, 1972: 68, 109).
5. As they have been presented so far, the complementary syntagm appears to be a good deal more elaborate than the symmetrical syntagm. This is true, but not to the extent that it appears now, because certain parts of the symmetrical syntagm have yet to be presented.
6. See Hanson and Hanson (1983), Chapter 7 for a much more complete treatment of *muru* and other means of reconciling hostile symmetrical relationships.
7. A more complete discussion may be found in Hanson and Hanson (1983), Chapters 3 and 4.
8. The quotations given here, from the English version, are a good deal more colorful than in the Maori text. The decision of the reptiles to adopt a terrestrial habitat, incidentally, was the insult that led to the eternal war between land and sea, described above.
9. The myth recounted in the following paragraphs is from Smith 1913: 19–22, 34–38, 117–122, 138–144 and Best 1925: 765.

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