ing" a claim or an accusation, Hart has paved the way for a general theory of validation in which juridical reasoning would be the fundamental link between validation in literary criticism and validation in the social sciences. The intermediary function of juridical reasoning clearly shows that the procedures of validation have a polemical character. In front of the court, the plurivocity common to texts and to actions is exhibited in the form of a conflict of interpretations, and the final interpretation appears as a verdict to which it is possible to make appeal. Like legal utterances, all interpretations in the field of literary criticism and in the social sciences may be challenged, and the question, what can defeat a claim? is common to all argumentative situations. Only in the tribunal is there a moment when the procedures of appeal are exhausted. But it is because the decision of the judge is implemented by the force of public power. Neither in literary criticism, nor in the social sciences, is there such a last word. Or if there is any, we call that violence.

2. From Explanation to Understanding

The same dialectic between comprehension and explanation may receive a new meaning if taken in the reverse way, from explanation to understanding. This new gestalt of the dialectic proceeds from the nature of the referential function of the text. This referential function, as we said, exceeds the mere ostensive designation of the situation common to both speaker and hearer in the dialogical situation. This abstraction from the surrounding world gives rise to two opposite attitudes. As readers, either we may remain in a kind of state of suspense as regards any kind of referred-to world, or we may actualize the potential nonostensive references of the text in a new situation, that of the reader. In the first case, we treat the text as a worldless entity; in the second, we create a new ostensive reference through the kind of "execution" that the art of reading implies. These two possibilities are equally entailed by the act of reading, conceived as their dialectical interplay.

The first way of reading is exemplified today by the different *structural* schools of literary criticism. Their approach is not only possible but legitimate. It proceeds from the suspension, the *epochē*, of the ostensive reference. To read in this way means to prolong this suspension of the ostensive reference to the world and to transfer oneself into the "place" where the text stands, within the "enclosure" of this worldless place. According to this choice, the text no longer has an outside, it has only an inside. Once more, the very constitution of the text as text and of the

system of texts as literature justifies this conversion of the literary thing into a closed system of signs, analogous to the kind of closed system that phonology discovered at the root of all discourse and that de Saussure called la *langue*. Literature, according to this working hypothesis, becomes an *analogue* of *la langue*.

On the basis of this abstraction, a new kind of explanatory attitude may be extended to the literary object, which, contrary to the expectation of Dilthey, is no longer borrowed from the natural sciences, that is, from an area of knowledge alien to language itself. The opposition between *Natur* and *Geist* is no longer operative here. If some model is borrowed, it comes from the same field, from the semiological field. It is henceforth possible to treat texts according to the elementary rules linguistics successfully applied to the elementary systems of signs that underlie the use of language. We have learned from the Geneva school, the Prague school, and the Danish school that it is always possible to abstract *systems* from *processes* and to relate these systems-whether phonological, lexical, or syntactical-to units that are merely defined by their opposition to other units of the same system. This interplay of merely distinctive entities within finite sets of such units defines the notion of structure in linguistics.

It is this structural model that is now applied to *texts*, that is, to sequences of signs longer than the sentence, which is the last kind of unit that linguistics takes into account. In his *Structural Anthropology*, Claude Levi-Strauss formulates this working hypothesis in regard to one category of texts, that of myths.

By means of this working hypothesis, the large units that are at least the same size as the sentence and that, put together, form the narrative proper to the myth will be able to be treated according to the same rules as the smallest units known to linguistics. In this way, we can indeed say that we have explained a myth, but not that we have interpreted it. We can, by means of structural analysis, bring out the logic of it, the operations that relate the "bundles of relations" among themselves. This logic constitutes "the structural law of the myth under consideration."[10] This law is preeminently an object of reading and not at all of speaking, in the sense of recitation in which the power of the myth would be reenacted in a particular situation. Here the text is only a text, thanks to the suspension of its meaning for us, to the postponement of all actualization by present speech.

I want now to show in what way "explanation" (*Erklären*) requires "understanding" (*Verstehen*) and brings forth in a new way the inner dialectic that constitutes "interpretation" as a whole.

As a matter of fact, nobody stops with a conception of myths and of narratives as formal as this algebra of constitutive units. This can be shown in different ways. First, even in the most formalized presentation of myths by Levi-Strauss, the units that he calls "mythemes" are still expressed as sentences that bear meaning and reference. Can anyone say that their meaning as such is neutralized when they enter into the "bundle of relations" that alone is taken into account by the "logic" of the myth? Even this bundle of relations, in its turn, must be written in the form of a sentence. Finally, the kind of language game that the whole system of oppositions and combinations embodies would lack any kind of significance if the oppositions themselves, which, according to Lévi-Strauss, the myth tends to mediate, were not meaningful oppositions concerning birth and death, blindness and lucidity, sexuality and truth. Besides these existential conflicts there would be no contradictions to overcome, no logical function of the myth as an attempt to solve these contradictions. Structural analysis does not exclude but presupposes the opposite hypothesis concerning the myth, that is, that it has a meaning as a narrative of origins. Structural analysis merely represses this function. But it cannot suppress it. The myth would not even function as a logical operator if the propositions it combines did not point toward boundary situations. Structural analysis, far from getting rid of this radical questioning, restores it at a level of higher radicality.

If this is true, could we not say that the function of structural analysis is to lead from a surface semantics, that of the narrated myth, to a depth semantics, that of the boundary situations that constitute the ultimate "referent" of the myth?

I really believe that if such were not the function of structural analysis, it would be reduced to a sterile game, a divisive algebra, and even the myth would be bereaved of the function that Levi-Strauss himself assigns to it, that of making men aware of certain oppositions and of tending toward their progressive mediation. To eliminate this reference to the aporias of existence around which mythic thought gravitates would be to reduce the theory of myth to the necrology of the meaningless discourses of mankind. If, on the contrary, we consider structural analysis as a stage-and a necessary one-between a naive interpretation and a critical interpretation, between a surface interpretation and a depth interpretation, then it would be possible to locate explanation and understanding at two different stages of a unique *hermeneutical arc*. It is this depth semantics that constitutes the genuine object of understanding and that requires a specific affinity between the reader and the kind of things the text is *about*.

But we must not be misled by this notion of personal affinity. The depth semantics of the text is not what the author intended to say, but what the text is about, that is, the nonostensive reference of the text. And the nonostensive reference of the text is the kind of world opened up by the depth semantics of the text. Therefore what we want to understand is not something hidden behind the text, but something disclosed in front of it. What has to be understood is not the initial situation of discourse but what points toward a possible world. Understanding has less than ever to do with the author and his or her situation. It wants to grasp the proposed worlds opened up by the references of the text. To understand a text is to follow its movement from sense to reference, from what it says to what it talks about. In this process the *mediating* role played by structural analysis constitutes both the justification of this objective approach and the rectification of the subjective approach. We are definitely prevented from identifying understanding with some kind of intuitive grasping of the intention underlying the text. What we have said about the depth semantics that structural analysis yields invites us rather to think of the sense of the text as an injunction starting from the text, as a new way of looking at things, as an injunction to think in a certain manner.

This second figure or gestalt of the dialectic between explanation and comprehension has a strong paradigmatic character that holds for the whole field of the human sciences. I want to emphasize three points.

First, the structural model, taken as a paradigm for explanation, may be extended beyond textual entities to all social phenomena because it is not limited in its application to linguistic signs but applies to all kinds of signs that are analogous to linguistic signs. The intermediary link between the model of the text and social phenomena is constituted by the notion of semiological systems. A linguistic system, from the point of view of semiology, is only a species within the semiotic genre, although this species has the privilege of being a paradigm for the other species of the genre. We can say therefore that a structural model of explanation can be generalized as far as can all social phenomena that may be said to have a semiological character, that is, as far as it is possible to define the typical relations of a semiological system at their level: the general relation between code and message, relations among the specific units of the code, the relation between signifier and signified, the typical relation within and among social messages, the structure of communication as an exchange of messages, and so on. Inasmuch as the semiological model holds, the semiotic or symbolic function, that is, the function of substituting signs for things and of representing things by means of signs, ap-

pears to be more than a mere effect in social life. It is its very foundation. We should have to say, according to this generalized function of the semiotic, not only that the symbolic function is social but that social reality is fundamentally symbolic.

If we follow this suggestion, then the kind of explanation implied by the structural model appears to be quite different from the classical causal model, especially if causation is interpreted in Humean terms as a regular sequence of antecedents and consequents with no inner logical connection between them. Structural systems imply relations of a quite different kind, correlative rather than sequential or consecutive. If this is true, the classical debate about motives and causes that has plagued the theory of action these last decades loses its importance. If the search for correlations within semiotic systems is the main task of explanation, then we have to reformulate the problem of motivation in social groups in new terms. But it is not the aim of this essay to develop this implication.

Second, the second paradigmatic factor in our previous concept of text interpretation proceeds from the role we assigned to depth semantics *between* structural analysis and appropriation. This mediating function of depth semantics must not be overlooked, since the appropriation's losing its psychological and subjective character and receiving a genuine epistemological function depends on it.

Is there something similar to the depth semantics of a text in social phenomena? I should tend to say that the search for correlations within and between social phenomena treated as semiotic entities would lose importance and interest if it did not yield *something like* a depth semantics. In the same way as language games are forms of life, according to the famous aphorism of Wittgenstein, social structures are also attempts to cope with existential perplexities, human predicaments, and deep-rooted conflicts. In this sense, these structures, too, have a referential dimension. They point toward the aporias of social existence, the same aporias around which mythical thought gravitates. And this analogical function of reference develops traits very similar to what we called the nonostensive reference of a text, that is, the display of a *Welt* that is no longer an *Umwelt*, the projection of a world that is more than a situation. May we not say that in social science, too, we proceed from naive interpretations to critical interpretations, from surface interpretations to depth interpretations ***through*** structural analysis? But it is depth interpretation that gives meaning to the whole process.

This last remark leads us to our third and last point. If we follow the paradigm of the dialectic between explanation and understanding to its end, we must say that the meaningful patterns that a depth interpreta-

tion wants to grasp cannot be understood without a kind of personal commitment similar to that of the reader who grasps the depth semantics of the text and makes it his or her "own." Everybody knows the objection that an extension of the concept of appropriation to the social sciences is exposed to. Does it not legitimate the intrusion of personal prejudices, of subjective bias into the field of scientific inquiry? Does it not introduce all the paradoxes of the hermeneutical circle into the human sciences? In other words, does not the paradigm of disclosure *plus* appropriation destroy the very concept of a human science? The way in which we introduced this pair of terms within the framework of text interpretation provides us not only with a paradigmatic problem but with a paradigmatic solution. This solution is not to deny the role of personal commitment in understanding human phenomena but to qualify it.

As the model of text interpretation shows, understanding has nothing to do with an *immediate* grasping of a foreign psychic life or with an *emotional* identification with a mental intention. Understanding is entirely *mediated* by the whole of explanatory procedures that precede it and accompany it. The counterpart of this personal appropriation is not something that can be *felt*, it is the dynamic meaning released by the explanation which we identified earlier with the reference of the text, that is, its power of disclosing a world.

The paradigmatic character of text interpretation must be applied down to this ultimate implication. This means that the conditions of an authentic appropriation, as they were displayed in relation to texts, are themselves paradigmatic. Therefore we are not allowed to exclude the final act of personal commitment from the whole of objective and explanatory procedures that mediate it.

This qualification of the notion of personal commitment does not eliminate the "hermeneutical circle." This circle remains an insuperable structure of knowledge when it is applied to human things, but this qualification prevents it from becoming a vicious circle.

Ultimately, the correlation between explanation and understanding, between understanding and explanation, is the "hermeneutical circle."