Semiotic Theory in Romania

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FOREWORD

The book explores five directions in semiotic studies: the history of Romanian semiotics (requested by Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker for *The Semiotic Sphere/* New York–London–Washington, D.C.–Boston: Plenum, 1986 and innovatively distinguishing between natural *semiotics*, *pre-semiotics* and *semiotics proper*), the concept of *conversational history* (introduced by S. Golopentia and especially adopted in France, Portugal, Spain), *contrastive studies* (as pursued in the English–Romanian Project developed in the collaboration by researchers in Washington D.C. and in Romania), Matei Calinescu's concept of *rereading* and the *Romanian Love Charms Database* developed by S.G. at Brown University in 1988.

Xoan Paulo Rodriguez-Yanez, Editor-in-Chief of *Sociolinguistic Studies*, invited me to be Guest Editor of a Special Issue *Conversational History* and wrote an Editorial: *Lost in the context* (SOLS 12.1.2018, p. 1–4) in which he said:

„Twenty-nine years ago, I stumbled across an article, written in French, that addressed the notion of *conversational history*, a term coined by Professor Sanda Golopenția. Fascinated by its conceptual and analytical potential, ever since I first had a work of conversational analysis in my hands, interactional (socio)linguistics, pragmatics or discourse analysis, and regardless of the language in which it was written, I would feverishly scour for this notion in books. However, to my surprise, it was invariably absent from English works altogether, including – and here is where I am most astonished – works focused on the units of discourse. And such absence continues to persist. /.../ The notion of *conversational history* situates the abstract problem of *context* between the conversational or discursive units, making it analysable as the unit of superior rank. Thus, it is no longer the mere *hic et nunc* of *each* conversation (which is the discursive unit usually considered as superior in the hierarchy of units), but the succession of conversations that take place among the same participants throughout time, that is, *their conversational history* – which in fact constitutes the concrete *context* of the construction of relational mutual knowledge between these speakers. **And we believe that it is precisely now, through the concretion that the concept of *conversational history* proposes, that there can be the**

most investigative profitability for the other five acceptations of context".

Sanda Golopenția
Prof. Em., Brown University
November 11, 2024

SEMIOTICS IN ROMANIA

I. The History of Romanian Semiotics

The history of Romanian semiotics has not yet become an independent object of study in Romania. Overviews of Romanian semiotics appear, however, in Marcus (1979a) and Voigt (1979), and a general bibliography of the subject has been prepared by Mihai Nadin[1]. Information concerning Romanian linguistic semiotics or semiotics of folklore can be found in Miclău (1977a) and Marcus (1975e, 1978), respectively. For useful details one can also turn to the numerous syntheses dealing with the history of Romanian linguistics (Iordan, ed., 1978; Rosetti and Golopenţia-Eretescu, eds., 1978), stylistics and poetics (Aurel Nicolescu, 1975; Berca, ed., 1976; Roceric, 1978; S. Vultur, 1978a), mathematical and computational linguistics and poetics (Marcus, 1978), folklore studies (Bîrlea, 1974), rhetoric (Sasu, 1976), comparative literature (Dima and Papadima, 1972), and psychology (Herseni, 1980), as well as to the dictionaries of Romanian linguists (Balacciu and Chiriacescu, 1978) or Romanian folklorists (Datcu and Stroescu, 1979).

In the presentation that follows, I will distinguish between a pre-semiotic and a semiotic stage.

I will also briefly allude to a natural semiotics component that is coextensive with both.

II. Natural Semiotics

Romanian folk culture includes a great number of popular beliefs, lyrical songs, tales, legends, myths, proverbs, riddles, rituals, professional and moral rules, or simply words, that describe, explain or comment upon signs, their structure and their evolution. These have not yet been recognized as a distinct object of study. They are mentioned, though, in ethnographic, folkloric, and anthropological studies and could represent an important chapter in the history of semiotics. To study them would mean to accomplish for semiotics what Herseni (1980) and Noica (1973, 1978a)

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[1] Dr. Nadin has been kind enough to allow us to consult this bibliography.

accomplished for Romanian natural psychology and philosophy, respectively.

Note that natural semiotics is not to be confused with the semiotics of folklore. The first represents a store of metasemiotic folk wisdom, anonymous and atemporal, accompanying and from time to time permeating theoretical, descriptive, or applied (pre)semiotics. The second represents a descriptive (pre)semiotic endeavor using as its corpus folkloric signs, strongly individualized, subject to progressive or regressive change. To study natural semiotics is especially meaningful in those cultures, which, like Romanian culture, have a strong and highly significant folk component.

III. Pre-Semiotics

Marcus (1979a) and Voigt (1979) situate the beginning of Romanian semiotics in the 17th century with Dimitrie Cantemir's *Compendiolum.* Both insist, following in this Miclău (1977a), on the semiotic relevance of Paul Iorgovici's *Observaţii de limbă românească* (Observations on the Romanian Language [1799]). There are other early names that have similarly been advanced: Simion Ştefan, Titu Maiorescu, Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, etc. However, we shall not insist on tracing the connection this far back.

There is, on the other hand, a rich tradition of research devoted to signs and sign-systems, their functioning and their diversity, by Romanian philosophers, psychologists, literary critics, sociologists, folklorists, and linguists in the years between World War I and World War II. Owing in part to ideological circumstances, this semiotics *avant la lettre* still receives hardly any explicit discussion in Romania. For one thing, this tradition did not stem from Marxist philosophy and one was unable overtly to acknowledge it as such without at the same time criticizing, rejecting, or simply disregarding large areas of it. Furthermore, many of its representatives had either been repressed in the fifties or had left Romania and continued their activities abroad, thus becoming taboo as subjects of study for a long period of time – a period, in fact, that is by no means completely over. Thus, such pre-semiotic endeavors as those of philosopher and poet Lucian Blaga, psychologist Rădulescu-Motru, historian of religions Mircea Eliade, sociologists Mircea Vulcănescu and Ion Ionică, musicologist Constantin Brăiloiu, dadaist Tristan Tzara, linguists Eugenio Coseriu and until recently Sextil Puşcariu, to mention only a few, have been hardly, if at all, assimilated by contemporary Romanian semiotics, though they would have been major sources of

originality and creativity. There are, we should add, non-political reasons as well for this lack of explicit incorporation of previous achievements. Semiotics is still taken to represent a radically new approach, still isolated from many of the other humanistic disciplines, and in this we see not a specifically Romanian but rather a general feature of its contemporary development.

In classifying as pre-semiotic the works of the abovementioned authors I do not imply that theirs is a secondary, marginal research with respect to a core semiotics. I refer rather to the following features that I consider characteristic:

(a) presemiotics developed at a time when the consciousness of a general and independent problematic of the sign did not exist;
(b) therefore, it did not regroup the philosophers, linguists, sociologists, etc. that were approaching sign problems into a single movement of thought;
(c) presemiotics consisted in applying to an implicitly semiotic object of study theories that were borrowed from a larger variety of disciplines than is the case with semiotics proper (semiotics, at least in Romania, has limited the domain of its theoretical dependency to linguistics and logic). From this last point of view, pre-semiotics was often more daring and more diversified in its approach to signs than is orthodox contemporary semiotics.

In the following I shall present four of the many presemioticians that seem to me not only historically relevant for Romania, but also potentially significant for the international development of contemporary semiotics. These are: Lucian Blaga, Pius Servien, Constantin Brăiloiu, and Mircea Eliade.

A. Lucian Blaga's Philosophy of Style

Whether it be a work of art, of metaphysical or scientific thought, or a social institution, the set of creations pertaining to a single personality, the set of creations that define a cultural period of the culture of a specific country, area, etc., the main characteristic of a cultural fact is, for Lucian Blaga (1895–1961), the *style* or mixture of styles that it manifests.

A style is a complex deep structure determined by a whole set of unconscious elements. It is at this point that Blaga's philosophy of style[2] departs from the history of art, morphology of culture, and psychoanalysis that were its contemporaries.

For Alois Riegl, Leo Frobenius or Oswald Spengler, culture is an independent, suprapersonal organism that can be presented by means of a symbolic space. Such symbolic spaces are the infinite space, the space of the isolated body, the infinite tridimensional space, the vault space, the labyrinthine way, the path within nature, and the unlimited plane that in Spengler's view, Antiquity, Occidental, Arabian, Egyptian, Chinese and Russian cultures respectively symbolize. This symbolic space is conceived of as a conscious dimension that is conditioned by the physical surroundings, as a kind of schematic sublimation, a diagram of the landscape. In Blaga's view, (a) a culture and its deep-structure style are phenomena too complex to be accounted for in terms of one single parameter; (b) to explain a style one has to abandon the conscious level and to resort to the level of the unconscious; (c) culture is not above man; it is built up by the spatial, temporal, axiological, orientational, and formative categories of the human unconscious; (d) one has to distinguish between the surface, *physical landscape*, and the deep, unconscious *spatial perspective,* for (d1) in one and the same landscape frequently coexist cultures with distinct spatial perspectives; (d2) in different landscapes, one often finds the same spatial perspective; (d3) there frequently appear incongruities between the physical landscape and the spatial perspective of a single culture.

While he uses the concept of the unconscious, Blaga defines it in a way that is very different from the psychoanalytic conception of Freud or Jung. First, and most important, the unconscious is conceived of in a positive sense, as a *sui generis* substance (reality) and not, as is the case in orthodox psychoanalysis, in a negative way, by relating it to a central consciousness. While psychoanalysis assimilates the relation conscious/ unconscious to the mythological relation cosmos/chaos, Blaga maintains that the unconscious is more of a cosmos than consciousness itself. The unconscious consists not only of psychological but also of spiritual structures. It is a magma of horizons, attitudes, reactions, interpretations, internal rhythms, primary urges for forms. Second, the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious is not exhausted by the

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[2] See Blaga (1935, 1936, 1937[1969], 1941, 1976). About Blaga, see also Borcilă (1969), Eliade (1938c), Indrieş (1975), L. Ionescu (1968), Ivan (1975), Miclău (1976a), Stahl (1938a, b), Todoran (1967a, 1972), Turbăceanu (1970), S. Vultur (1972, 1974, 1975), Zamfir (1970).

sublimation process (in which the unconscious contents are disguised in order to be accepted at the conscious level). There is – asserts Blaga – a second process by which the unconscious penetrates directly, without a mask, into consciousness. He proposed to call this process "personance" *(personanţă)* – a pun expressing a resonance of the deepest levels of the person. Personance is most notably manifest in artistic creation.

Blaga has devoted a large portion of his work to a detailed presentation of the unconscious categories of style in the most different cultures of the world. Since any culture's *stylistic matrix* necessarily combines (1) a spatial perspective, (2) a temporal perspective, (3) an "axiological accent", (4) a basic orientation, and (5) a "formative aspiration", the differences between styles are accounted for in terms of different options at the level of each of these major categories. Thus, Blaga's definition of culture in a sense recalls the distinctive-feature approach in phonology and, more generally, in structural linguistics.

Let us now briefly look at some of the possible choices for each of the basic unconscious categories above.

To the types of spatial perspectives already enumerated by Riegl, Frobenius, and Spengler, Blaga adds "geminated" (twinned) space (which appears, for example, in Babylonian culture), alveolar (honeycombed) space (which he considers definitory for Chinese culture), the curtained space that permeates Arabian culture, the undulating space that characterizes Romanian culture.

With regard to the unconscious category of time, Blaga distinguishes between three basic temporal configurations: (1) an ascending time that he metaphorically calls "fountain time" (Rom. *timp havuz*), (2) a descending time that he calls "waterfall time" (Rom. *timp cascadă*), and (3) a time, neither ascending nor descending, that he calls "stream time" (Rom. *timp fluviu*). Ascending time puts an accent on the future. It is the unconscious time of Hebrew Messianic religion and of European metaphysics (with Hegel, 19th-century evolutionism, the idea of progress). Descending time confers supreme value on the past. It is, most characteristically, the unconscious time of Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, but also of the Babylonian myth of Genesis, of part of Plato's metaphysics, of the Romantic doctrines of Dacqué, Klages, Evola, Bachofen. Stream time values a permanent present allowing equal achievements. It is the temporal configuration that Blaga sees as defining most of the modern historical conceptions that try to account for the immanent structure of every period of time. There are also possible mixtures of these basic configurations, which can generate the cyclical vision of time (Cuvier's, for example) and

the spiral vision of time (Goethe's, for example). Nietzsche's vision of time would consist of combining cyclical time with stream time.

What Blaga calls the "axiological accent" consists of the positive or negative valuation of one's unconscious space. Thus, for example, though both European and Indian cultures are characterized by an infinite unconscious space, European culture gives it an affirmative, positive, expansive interpretation while Indian culture gives it a negative, involutive interpretation. In order to show this, Blaga examines in detail European and Indian metaphysics respectively.

Now, one's *orientation* with respect to the spatial and temporal unconscious horizons can be one of advancing towards them, receding from them, or neither advancing towards nor receding from them. Blaga calls these the *anabatic attitude, katabatic attitude*, and *neutral attitude* respectively. European culture is anabatic, Indian and Egyptian cultures are katabatic. Chinese culture is neutral. These orientation categories are not to be confused with the axiological categories. To show this, Blaga uses arguments that remind one of the commutation test in structural linguistics. Can one have a negative axiological accent occurring together with an anabatic orientation? Since the answer is yes, it appears that the two sets of categories are independent and can function as distinctive features.

There are, according to Blaga, three major modes of the unconscious stylistic formative urge: the *individualizing* mode, the *typifying* mode, and the *elementalizing* mode. German culture, artistic personalities like Rembrandt or Shakespeare, the metaphysics of Leibniz, and the Protestant religion all exemplify the individualizing mode. Ancient Greek culture (i.e., Sophocles, Plato, Praxiteles), Renaissance culture, and European classicism exemplify the typifying mode. The third mode, characterized by the reduction of things to elemental universal aspects, is exemplified by Egyptian art, Byzantine painting, Van Gogh's painting, Eastern Orthodox religion. It is interesting that Blaga conceives of the Catholic religion as a fluid structure alternating between the elemental, the individualizing, and the typifying modes.

Besides these main stylistic categories, Blaga introduces some *secondary stylistic elements* into the characterization of a culture. Such elements are, for example, what he calls the unconscious "adoptive age" or "adoptive sex" of a culture. The opposition between "minor" (ethnographic) cultures and "major" (monumental) cultures is not to be conceived, shows Blaga, in terms of dimensional criteria (there are vast creations, such as the folk epic, that appear in minor cultures.) Nor should it be seen – as cultural morphology does – as successive childhood and

maturity stages of the "cultural organism". Blaga retains, however, the metaphorical opposition between childhood and maturity. In it he sees not an opposition between stages situated on an ascendent line but an opposition between autonomous structures, which is not to be conceived as a value distinction. A major culture is one rooted in the gifts and qualities of adult age; a minor culture is rooted in the gifts and qualities of childhood. As an autonomous structure, "childhood" presupposes a strong imaginative component, passivity, spontaneity, a naive cosmocentrism improvisation, no sense for the perennial. "Maturity," on the other hand, is volitional, methodically active, prudent, specialized, constructive, hierarchical, oriented towards perenniality. In a minor culture, every individual is conceived of as a generalist, an undifferentiated universality improvising according to simple techniques but with great virtuosity. Collective creations accumulate organically, space is the visible space, time corresponds to the organic duration of individual life. In a major culture, the individual is conceived of as a specialized, unilateral organ of the collective body, and creation is planned over generations; space overflows the visible, time overflows the span of individual life. Minor cultures are ahistoric. Major cultures are historic cultures that function by positively expanding space and time. On the other hand, minor cultures are more resistant because closer to nature. Major cultures seem to be more exposed to catastrophe, further away from nature. There are cases in which a minor culture transforms itself into a major one. A minor Egyptian culture preceded the major one. But there are other minor cultures, which have never shown this tendency.

Two stylistic matrices can differ, according to Blaga, on the level of one, more than one, or all the stylistic categories; on the level of one or more secondary stylistic elements; on both the primary and secondary stylistic levels. There are cases – insists Blaga – in which two cultures are identical on the level of stylistic categories, but different on the level of secondary stylistic features. Thus, Blaga's philosophy of style allows us to build as its normal continuation a theory concerning the typology not only of cultures, but also of distances between cultures.

Blaga's approach paves the way for a possible genetic semiotics (Blaga spoke of a genetic stylistics). It may represent an invaluable point of departure for work defining the semiotic family resemblance (Blaga called it "parallelism") between creations pertaining to the same semiotic macro-system (culture). More specifically, the rich analyses devoted by Blaga to the most varied semiotic domains – from architecture to textiles and ceramics, from painting and sculpture to religion, metaphysics, or literature, from Chinese culture to Indian, American, German, Italian,

French, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, Czechoslovakian, Bulgarian, Greek, Belgian, Russian, Hungarian and other cultures – are full of implications for *comparative semiotics,* a branch of present-day world semiotics that is especially rich in undeveloped possibilities.

Before closing this inevitably short presentation, let us briefly outline the way in which Blaga defines the stylistic matrix of Romanian culture, using the above criteria. The unconscious space of the Romanian culture is, for Blaga, an infinite undulating space. The axiological accent is positive, but muted. Romanian culture is neither anabatic, nor katabatic, but rather a combination of the two: its main orientation can be approximated as an ascending-and-descending cycle. The formal aspiration is towards elementalization. There are some secondary stylistic aspects that are important. Such is what Blaga calls the Sophianic perspective, which, together with the valuation of the organic (of life) is the most important stylistic dimension of Eastern Orthodox religion. In the Sophianic perspective, man is the natural and ultimate target of a descending transcendence. The Sophianic perspective is exemplified by the architectural structure of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, by Byzantine art and, in Romania, by such central folk ballads as *Mioriţa* (The Little Sheep) or *Meşterul Manole* (Master Manole). Other secondary aspects of the Romanian culture are the preference for the picturesque, for detail, for ornament (which is a stylistic preference spread all over the Balkan area), geometrism, the predilection for muted colors and for nuance (nuances of color, but also psychological shades, the subtle psychological states such as *dor* "longing", *jale* "gloom", and the untranslatable *urât*, which are the main areas explored by the Romanian lyrical folk song), the atemporal, minor folk culture as a most characteristic achievement, etc. Blaga has given fascinating analyses for the organic definition of "nation" (predicated on Romania's Latin blood and speech), and of linguistic unity in Romanian culture; of the ballads *Mioriţa* and *Meşterul Manole*; of Romanian architecture; of Romania's ubiquitous decorative arts; of the poetry of Eminescu, Coşbuc, and others.

B. Pius Servien's Scientific Aesthetics

The Romanian name of Pius Servien was Pius Şerban Coculescu. Though he began his activity in Romania, where he published numerous

studies foreshadowing his later work, the most important part of his professional life took place in France (especially between 1925 and 1950)[3].

The basic idea advanced by Pius Servien is the following: human language (*le langage total*) is not homogenous. It contains two entirely distinct domains, two extreme, irreducible poles. These poles are the language of science *(le langage des sciences*, LS) and lyrical language (*le langage lyrique*, LL).

The main property of the language of science is that for any phrase in LS it is possible to formulate one or a set of absolutely equivalent phrases in LS. This results from the severely restricted character of LS: (a) it does not include certain words, like *plaire* "to like, to please", *beau* "beautiful", etc.; (b) it does not include all the meanings of words like *montagne* "mountain", *étoile*, "star", *mer* "sea", etc., but only some of them: (c) it admits of perfect synonymy between words (like, for example, between *est* "east", and *orient* "orient"), and thus regroups even the LS words into a smaller number of classes corresponding to clearly distinct meanings: (d) it forms its terminology by replacing the words that signify certain properties *(les mots-jugements)* with "the set of operations by means of which these properties can be recognized"[4]; (e) it does not tolerate certain grammatical structures, such as vocatives, exclamatives, optatives, and so forth; (f) there is one and only one meaning that corresponds, for all its users, to every LS word and to every LS phrase; (g) the meaning of an LS phrase is perfectly independent from its rhythm or, more generally, from its sound structure; (h) the number of possible LS meanings (the system of reference for LS) is the smallest conceivable infinite – there are as many LS meanings as there are integers or, in other words, the number of LS meanings is countable *(dénombrable)*; (i) every LS meaning is (or can be) the object of common agreement; (j) the LS propositions can be systematically submitted to operations such as negation, paraphrasing, translation, summarizing, the results of which will continue to pertain to LS.

Lyrical language is defined in a negative way with respect to LS. The main property of the lyrical language is that it is naturally inseparable from rhythm, that it is a rhythm-language *(langage-rythme)*. No lyrical phrase admits of an equivalent (neither in LL, nor in LS) and no lyrical word admits of a synonym. LL includes in its vocabulary lyrical words (such as Fr. *plaire, beau, esprit, causerie,* Lat. *decet, decorum,* etc., that Servien

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[3] See especially Servien (1925, 1928, 1930a, 1930b, 1931, 1935, 1942, 1947, 1948, 1953, 1957); about Servien, see also Densusianu (1931)[1968], Marcus (1965, 1968a, 1970c, d, 1974b).

[4] Cf. Servien (1935), pp. 144, 146.

calls *mots lyriques par nature*), lyrical meanings (e.g., the idiosyncratic components of the meanings of such words as Fr. *montagne, étoile, mer*; Servien calls them *mots lyriques par position*), lyrical grammatical structures (such as vocatives, optatives, imperatives, etc.). Every lyrical word (phrase) is polysemous and there is no possible agreement as to a particular meaning, which must be preferred to all others when interpreting a lyrical text. The meaning of lyrical phrases (words) is inseparable from their sound or rhythm structure. Possible LL meanings – the referential system of LL – are in the domain of the continuous *(le continu lyrique),* non-countable. The LL phrases cannot be negated, paraphrased, translated, or summarized. They can only be submitted to an operation of citation. LL maintains its solidarity with the non-verbal semiotic systems, with "this mist of signs which are not words", with "this mist of silent signs": "Language has, therefore, a pole contiguous with everything we do not say in words. There it contains almost as much individuality as the current of [non-verbal] signs which is refracted on it; it is the pole of lyrical language"[5].

In Servien's view, the fundamental opposition LL/LS replaces the traditional, and for him secondary opposition between verse and prose. Both LL and LS can be expressed either in verse or in prose. LL refers not only to poetry and to poetic prose, but also to statues, natural and synthetic perfumes, dance, etc.[6] – to whatever is "real" art, real lyricism, and, as such, irreducible and rhythmic. LS does not refer to prose as such, but to that prose that is scientific prose such as mathematics, physics, etc.

Among proposition-producing activities *(activités qui aboutissent à des propositions)*, one can distinguish between: (1) those that use a non-mixed language *(language non-mêlé)* and (2) those that use a mixed language. Servien emphatically rejects the second type: "Thus our effort originates entirely in our abhorrence of the mixed zones of language and of those works which correspond to an unanalyzed, global, vague conception of language"[7]. He is against what he calls an "unfathered promenade through the total language"[8]. He includes in the first group physics and its affiliated disciplines (where material things are the object

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[5] Ibid., pp. 49, 50.
[6] Ibid., p. 42: "Si l'on remplace, dans cet ensemble, les statues par les textes lyriques qui sont de même nature; et d'autre part les produits de la plante ou de l'animal par les produits synthétiques, on voit poèmes, statues, parfums naturels, parfums industriels, former une même chaîne, admettre une même méthode générale d'étude".
[7] Ibid., p. 222.
[8] Ibid., p. 67.

of study and the instrument of study is LS), mathematics (where LS is both the object and the instrument of study), aesthetics and its group of sciences (where LL is the object of study and the instrument of study is LS), and poetry (where the only language that is used is LL)[9]. He includes in the second group philosophy, history, traditional aesthetics, literary criticism, and so on.
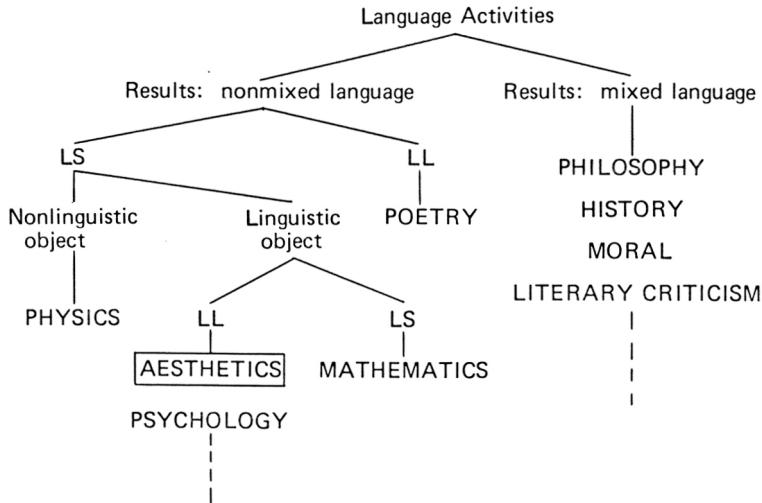

Figure 1

We can schematize the position of Servien's scientific aesthetics among the other language activities in Figure 1.

Scientific aesthetics is, for Servien, "l'observation scientifique des choix lyriques". It is based on the cooperation between an Elector *(Électeur)* and an Observer *(Observateur).* Though one and the same researcher could combine in oneself the two roles, it is important that he

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[9] Ibid., p. 223: "D'une part, il y a ces efforts d'organisation du Langage lyrique et du Langage des sciences que sont, respectivement, la poésie et les mathématiques; efforts analogues d'organisation et de purification, aux deux pôles opposés du langage; et la beauté la plus intense que permettent les mots ne se trouve que là. D'autre part, il y a les efforts pour obtenir des conclusions en langage des sciences, concernant les objet extérieurs à ce langage, choses matérielles, ou langage lyrique: c'est-à-dire respectivement la physique et le groupe des sciences du même type, l'esthétique et le groupe des sciences du même type".

adopt them at different stages of the inquiry and keep them distinct in his mind.

The Elector is confined to LL. He is active in the first stage of the aesthetic approach. He can choose, among the objects that are presented to him, those that he considers beautiful, non-beautiful, most lyrical, etc. As for the Observer, he functions as some kind of experimental subject (Fr. *cobaye,* literally "laboratory animal"), as a chemically reacting agent (Fr. *réactif sensible),* as "a sort of litmus paper dipped into living matter," he is "the one who chooses lyric things for reasons that cannot be expressed in scientific terms[10].

The Observer is confined to LS. He is active in the second stage of the aesthetic approach. Taking for granted the lyrical choices of the Elector, the Observer tries to isolate a property in LS that can account for them (and for the collection of objects in which they resulted). His basic problem is therefore the following: given a set of n objects that has been divided by the Elector into two subsets, can he predict, by LS means (by an LS characterization) the subset to which the Elector will assign the $(n + 1)$-th object?

Let us take some examples.

Listening to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal,* an Elector El isolates the passages that gave him the impression of representing a lyrical theme. An Elector E2 isolates in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* the passages that gave him the impression of special harmony. An Elector E3 picks out the "sommets lyriques" in Chateaubriand's *Atala.* When faced with these choices, the Observers O1, O2, and O3 respectively come to the conclusion that the collections of objects chosen by the Electors correspond to regular structures that can be expressed in numbers distributed according to some simple law. This is the substance of what Servien called the first general law in aesthetics: "If we transcribe any rhythmic object by means of a numerical notation, the numbers we get will obey some simple law" and, further on: "When lyricism crystallizes freely, it crystallizes in regular sound structures"[11].

Servien distinguished among five basic rhythms: of duration *(rythme des durées)*, of intensity *(rythme des intensités)*, of timbre *(rythme des timbres)*, of pitch *(rythme des hauteurs),* and of number *(rythmes numériques).* The first four are defined according to the basic qualities of

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[10] Ibid., pp. 9, 10.
[11] See Servien (1947), pp. 51, 52. Servien is not indulging in a mixture of LS and LL in the citation above. He seriously contends that analysis of these chosen passages will yield structures as precise as those of any crystal.

the sound, the last one according to the number of "syllables" occurring in a rhythmic unit.

He developed several ways for transcribing LL rhythmic structures numerically. One is the "representative number" *(le nombre représentatif)*, that is the number composed of the number we can obtain by counting in an LL passage from one accented syllable to the next (but not including the next accented syllable). Another is the "expanded number" *(le nombre développé)*, that is, the number corresponding to an LL passage in which 1 marks an unaccented and 2 marks an accented syllable.

C. Constantin Brăiloiu's Structural Ethnomusicology

Gilbert Rouget (1973) has described in a most pertinent way Brăiloiu's[12] essential contribution to ethnomusicology. He wrote: "If we were obliged to sum up its scientific spirit in a single word, it would have to be "structuralism'". But we would need to specify that, being a structuralist well before the term gained a wide currency and, so to speak, without knowing it – certainly without intending it – Brăiloiu did not much care to hear the word applied to himself. Making allowance for the unequal development of the two sciences, one might say that what Troubetzkoy was to linguistics, Brăiloiu will prove to have been to musicology: it is owing to the first that we know what a phonological system is; it is owing to the second that we know what certain rhythmic and tonal systems are"[13].

Viewed from a semiotic perspective, Brăiloiu's structural approach to folk music appears to manifest two basic directions that I shall call respectively *pragmatic* and *syntactic.* Both were represented during each of the two main periods in his activity: the Romanian period (1924–1943) and the Swiss-and-French period (1943–1958). Both can be traced in his general, descriptive, and applied studies as well. Though not perceived under this label, the syntactic direction has been explored in detail by most of Brăiloiu's interpreters when dealing with what they called his *systématique* or his *structuralism.* The pragmatic direction, however, has not emerged due to the fact that, in labelling some of its characteristics

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[12] Those interested in Brăiloiu's work may also consult Baud-Bovy (1955), Comişel (1966), Habenicht (1966), T. Alexandru (1978), N. Rădulescu (1968), H. H. Stahl (1970), Golopenţia-Eretescu (1979b), Kahane (1966, 1979), Mihai Pop (1979). Good bibliographies are to be found in Schaeffner (1959) and Ulpiu Vlad (1979). Volume 2 of the *Cercetări de muzicologie* (1970) and number 1 of *REF* 24 (1979) have been dedicated to Constantin Brăiloiu.

[13] Cf. Rouget (1973). p. XIII.

folkloric or *sociological* and ignoring the others, Brăiloiu's interpreters have failed to perceive: (a) that it was an important, central component of his ethnomusicology and not just an external influence sentimentally preserved; (b) that it was no less structural than the *systématique*; (c) that it was organically linked with the search for musical systems.

Brăiloiu's pragmatic reflections on ethnomusicology were not, and could not have been, framed by semiotics. He had rather in his mind, especially at the beginning of his scholarly activity, what he described as "a new Philosophy in the classical sense, a new science of sciences, which embraces the totality of sciences within its framework: sociology"[14]. Sociology was at that time one of the most innovative and widespread disciplines in Romania. This was mainly due to Dimitrie Gusti's celebrated *campanii monografice* (monographic campaigns) in which comprehensive multidisciplinary teams staffed by the best specialists in the country went forth to examine, by means of collective research, the economic, social, political, cultural, and religious realities in the Romanian rural communities. Brăiloiu participated in the campaigns organized at Fundu Moldovei (1928), Drăguș (1929), and Runcu (1930). Between 1928 and 1943, he surveyed 289 Romanian villages. As a result, he accumulated a most solid corpus of ritual songs (especially funeral and wedding songs)[15], which was to be presented and analyzed in many of Brăiloiu's initial studies.

There are two main ways in which we can understand folk music, says Brăiloiu (1931). If we choose to define it as that music which is not only *used* by the peasants but also *created* by them, we will try to uncover the *styles musicaux ruraux authentiques* (authentic rural musical styles) and the object of our quest can be called *la musique paysanne* (peasant music). If, on the other hand, we define it as all music that is used by peasants, regardless of its origin, we will aim at establishing the totality of melodies that are alive at a given moment in a rural society, and the object of our quest can be called *la vie musicale paysanne* (peasant musical life). Brăiloiu's first category I shall describe as a *restricted,* the second as an *extended* pragmatic approach. In the restricted approach, *style* and especially *variation* appear to be the main concern. In the extended approach, the important issue is that of *repertory.*

Style is conceived by Brăiloiu as a sub-problem of the general problem of primitive (rural, peasant) *creativity.* Rural musical creativity, essentially collective, manifests itself through *variation.* Variation results from the

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[14] Cf. Brăiloiu (1931), p. I, reproduced in Brăiloiu (1973), p. 5.
[15] Brăiloiu recorded 7,760 melodies (cf. Ulpiu Vlad. 19791.

continual meeting, in the mind of similar, equal agents (the peasant music-makers) of *authorless systems* that are accepted as given and *collective predilections* that govern their instantiation (the form these systems will assume in any one musical production). Style is then a variation pattern.

Emerging through variation, peasant songs are not to be understood as autonomous objects. They are never completely separated from their performer. They never survive the occasion of their performance. One could rather conceive them as glimpses of an abstract melodic pattern, of "a sort of original melody, preserved only through the faithfulness of memory, irreducible to the norms of our learned papers and perpetuating, one might say, the primordial soul of humankind"[16].

Variants are equal. They do not presuppose or follow an "initial version". The quest for a "basic" variant, the efforts at "reconstructing" it, are not only empirically doomed to failure, but essentially wrong. Like systems, variants cannot be imputed to an author. To refer to the "author of a variant" is – like speaking of an "original variant" – an error in terms. For what is meant by *author,* in Occidental culture, is roughly the following: a distinct individual (with a special personality) who creates and culturally owns a separate original object and who determines that, in recognition of his cultural property rights, his creation shall be maintained unchanged by means of such conservative devices as correct reading, translation, transposition, interpretation, etc. And none of these conditions is met by musical variants. Says Brailoiu (1959a):

> Without the help of writing, what is created could not last except through the universal agreement of those who keep it alive, an agreement which is itself a consequence of the uniformity of their tastes. The oral work itself exists only in the memory of the person who adopts it and does not emerge in the concrete but through his/her will: their lives are intermixed with each other. With no writing system to stabilize, once and for all, its production, this work is not a "made thing" but a thing one makes and re-makes perpetually. This means that all the individual realizations of a melodic pattern are equally true and weigh the same poise on the scales of judgment. This also means that the 'instinct of variation' is not a simple rage for variation but a necessary consequence of the lack of an absolute model. If creation is involved at all, half of it will be ephemeral. Besides, it is divided between, [that is to say, stands midpoint between] a hypothetical creation and its translators [that is, those who will take up the new version] without whom it would return to nothingness[17].

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[16] Cf. Brăiloiu (1958), p. 17, reproduced in Brăiloiu (1973), p. 121.
[17] Cf. Brăiloiu (1959a), p. 88 reproduced in Brăiloiu (1973), p. 142.

In banning reconstruction and diachronic ethnomusicology, Brăiloiu (1959a) parallels in a most striking way – Rouget (1973a) was the first to notice it – Lévi-Strauss's simultaneous contention[18] that myths are equal and author-less. What is interesting is that, for Brăiloiu, this is not only the result of theoretical reflection. He has tried, repeatedly, to experiment and report on the automatic failure of any attempt at locating or dating a folk production. Says Brailoiu (1959a):

> Limited, to begin with, to a small number of possible inventors, the research would extend, little by little, to an ever-widening circle, where people neither lied nor spoke the truth for certain. It all came to look as though the work, as soon as it appeared, hastened to take refuge in anonymity and to recede into timelessness. However new it might be, through one feature or another, it returned in any case to the impersonal and the already known[19].

If Brailoiu's point of view on variation is carried to its logical conclusion, it boils down to something which, though he never expressed it as such, seems to me nevertheless to be strongly suggested. I would summarize it as follows:

1. Primitive artistic activity is not an activity of creation in which action results in something that did not exist before. It is one of variation, in which action results in *maintaining* an object in the same or in a similar state to the state that preceded the action. Insofar as it basically aims at maintaining a pre-existing object: (a) primitive art is not projective, future-oriented, but rather "retrojective", past-oriented; (b) it is informed by passive, unavoidable recollection, stimulated by an "imperative" situation, rather than by active intentional oblivion aimed at clearing the ground for new creation; (c) it is to be understood as interpretation and reproduction rather than as initiation and innovation; (d) it does not presuppose an author (definite or indefinite), a date or place of birth, all of which are relevant specifications only in the case of an activity of creation.
2. The "object" that is maintained through variation is not the melody or the song as such but the system(s) that make(s) it possible.
3. Primitive musical systems are *innate.*
4. Primitive musical systems are *universal.*

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[18] Brăiloiu died in 1958 and Lévi-Strauss' affirmation appeared, in the same year, in *Anthropologie structurale.*
[19] Cf. Brăiloiu (1959a), p. 90, reproduced in Brăiloiu (1973), p. 144.

5. Primitive variation is not a strict but rather a loose, empirical form of system-preservation. It does not make use of writing, of explicit rules, of what we call a formal method or a technique. It does not presuppose a formal knowledge of the system to be maintained but rather an approximate, vague, partly unconscious internalization of it. One could say that primitive variation is an *improvisational form of conservation.*

6. Since the system is part of the individual's memory – and deeply, ineradicably so – what is in fact preserved is not the system *per se* but rather the *system-as-an-internal-state of the individual.* Therefore, primitive variation is not centrifugal with respect to its agent, concentrated on an object that it aims at preserving, but rather centripetal, directed towards an agent-and-object at the same time. One could say that variation is an activity of *self-preservation.*

7. This explains why variation is so widespread in primitive societies. If systems are so profound a part of the primitive self (from which they have not yet been separated by specialized scientific reflection) and if variation maintains them, then variation is a vital, organic activity for survival and spiritual health. As such it is not optional, gratuitous, but *obligatory,* essential.

It seems to me that points 1–7 above apply equally well to another form of semiotic activity, which may also be conceived as primitive, namely linguistic activity. Like variation, linguistic activity is an obligatory activity of innate, universal system(s) conservation and self-preservation. It would be, therefore, most interesting and fruitful to integrate Brăiloiu's view on variation with Chomsky's conception of linguistic creativity.

Brăiloiu's concept of variation could also be usefully integrated with the Peircean trichotomy *type–token–tone.* What I think is most relevant in this respect is the fact that Brăiloiu approaches the opposition type–variant not in a syntactic context, as we usually tend to do, but in a markedly pragmatic one.

For reasons of space, I will not deal here with Brăiloiu's definition of *repertory.* Let us turn, rather, to the syntactic aspect of his ethnomusicology.

Brăiloiu integrates the two directions of his work that I have called pragmatic and syntactic by treating the syntactical musical systems as universal innate objects of variation.

Which are the syntactic properties of a musical system that we can significantly connect with its pragmatic innateness and universality? Like Chomsky in the case of language systems, Brăiloiu answers: *syntactic*

simplicity. And which are the pragmatic properties of variation that we can significantly connect with its having as an object extremely simple systems? This is a question that has never been asked before Brăiloiu. And the answer he gave was: the intensive, exhaustive exploitation of all the syntactic resources of the system.

If we rephrase Brăiloiu's assertions about musical systems, what he says comes down to the fact that they are composed of a very limited "lexicon" that is associated with an even more restricted "grammar". Says Brăiloiu (1959a):

> What analysis brings to light is less the way the elements are arranged within a work than those elements themselves and their changelessness; it is less the permanence of the patterns into which they are assembled than that of the units that compose them. Whether one deals with scales, rhythms or structures, these building blocks, when looked at closely, reveal themselves to be determined by an intelligble principle, from which a more or less extensive set of procedures derives – or, if one prefers, a system. The systems can be recognized by the "natural" character of their principles and by the use that is made of them, by the methodical exploitation of their resources. Generation by a succession of fifths is sufficient to explain certain scales; a simple arithmetic relationship between durations explains a certain rhythmic category; articulation by what one might call syntactic cells rather than by equal series explains certain forms[20].

The lexicon consists in a number of "musical words", of "sounds of power". Brăiloiu describes them as follows:

> These locutions and elocutions, stereotyped and knowing no homeland, derived from the elementary facts of physics, seem to be the first half of a predestined path – preliminary victories in acoustics, so to speak. The foundations of the materially richer systems to follow, they will remain perceptible until the day when the infiltrations of a sophisticated art will submerge them[21].

It is by the combination of these immemorial musical words that "new" songs are produced[22].

This is by no means a specifically musical feature. Any primitive creation is, in a sense, atemporal, because, close to the almost "natural" system that generates it, it is always both relatively immemorial and

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[20] Cf. Brăiloiu (1959a), pp. 90–91, reproduced in Brăiloiu (1973), pp. 144–145.
[21] Cf. Brăiloiu (1919). p. 326, reproduced in Brăiloiu (1973), p. 112.
[22] Ibid.

absolutely new. Says Brăiloiu (in a passage that is also highly illuminating for the type–token–tone approach to variation already mentioned):

> Built the day before on a traditional design, a house or a hut is only new in its material reality, but the precise time of its completion scarcely matters: in its spiritual reality it is ageless. It is a variation on an architectonic type in the same way that a song is a variation on a melodic type[23].

The relatively limited number of "musical words," together with the rudimentary character of their combinations, explains the convergences and coincidences in primitive music all over the world, the universal, supranational character of its structures, the ubiquity of certain formulas. Brăiloiu found the *début celtique* in India, in China, in Korea, in Russia, and in American jazz music. He discovered the Chinese five-tone scale in Scotland, Ireland, Tibet, Japan, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Germany, ancient Italy, Sardinia. He was able to show that what Beethoven has called *Schweizerlied* (Swiss melody) could be traced in French and German music and was known in Poland under the name of *"Polish March"*. He pointed out that the so-called *Bulgarian rhythm*, also exists in Turkey (where it is called *aksak* rhythm), Albania, Romania, Yugoslavia, Turkmenia, Switzerland, India, among the Basques and the Berbers, Tuaregs, Beduins, and black Africans. And he proved that what Bartók had called *cântec lung* (long song) and considered specifically Romanian also existed in Persian, Arabian, Spanish, and Mongolian music.

D. Mircea Eliade's History of Religions

Mircea Eliade's[24] decisive contribution to the history of religions appears to us semiotically relevant at more than one level.

1. It is devoted to the study of phenomena that are clearly semiotic in nature and thus potentially relevant for what may be called *descriptive syntagmatics* or *semiotic morphology.*
2. It is basically concerned with the *meaning* of religious phenomena and thus potentially relevant for both theoretical and descriptive semantics.

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[23] Cf. Brăiloiu (1959a), p. 89, reproduced in Brăiloiu (1973), p. 143.
[24] Those interested in Eliade's work should consult especially Dudley (1977), Kitagawa and Long, eds. (1969), Wendell and Doty, eds. (1976).

3. It includes interesting developments of the concepts of *creativity*
and *creative hermeneutics* that could be fruitfully incorporated into
semiotic pragmatics.

Let us approach in turn points 1–3 above.

1. Relevance to Descriptive Syntagmatics,
or Semiotic Morphology

The object of study addressed by the historian of religions is, from
Mircea Eliade's point of view, the *experience of the sacred.* The ways in
which the sacred is conceived of may vary: it can be imagined as power,
wholly other, ultimate reality, absolute reality, being, eternity, the source
of life and fecundity, the divine, transhuman or transmundane, the
metacultural and transhistorical, etc. What is essential, for Eliade, is the
fact that the sacred is to be understood as an element in the structure of
consciousness and not as a stage in the history of consciousness. The
manifestations of the sacred – the so-called *hierophanies* (with such
variants as *kratophanies* or manifestations of power, and *theophanies* or
manifestations of the divine) – are, together with the *myths* that evoke
them, the *rituals* that re-enact them periodically, and the *symbols* that
prolong and somehow "solidify" them, the basic phenomena that the
historian of religion has to collect, describe, and classify. They are deeply
interconnected.

The basic manifestation of the sacred, included in the deep structure of
any myth, ritual, or religious symbol is, from Eliade's point of view, the
hierophany.

The separation between hierophanies, kratophanies, and theophanies is
highly subjective; it varies with groups and individuals. Eliade defines
hierophanies as follows: (a) they are historic manifestations of the sacred;
(b) they have been established in the consciousness of a group, tribe, or
nation for a certain period of time, thus enjoying a relative permanence;
and (c) they are characterized by systematicity, that is, by the fact that they
presuppose a system of meanings; (d) one can distinguish between
universal and *local* hierophanies. By contrast with hierophanies,
kratophanies are (a) manifestations of a power that may or may not be
sacred, are (b) characterized by transience and are (c) not necessarily
defined by systematicity. As far as theophanies are concerned, Eliade
defined them as manifestations of a god as supreme being (and not as
simply the sacred); he did not comment upon their permanent/transient and

systematic/unsystematic character. There are cases in which hierophanies are re-evaluated as theophanies.

Hierophanies are preserved in the form of myths. The characteristic features of a myth are, according to Eliade, the following:

1. Myth is a special type of narrative, to be distinguished from other related types such as sagas, tales, fairy tales, dream-stories, etc.

2. It reports a hierophany by narrating – in what I am tempted to call an *etymological* modality of the narrative – the beginning of something (the origin of the world, of a mountain, of an island, of a vegetable or animal species, of man, of a human activity, of a social institution, etc.) due to the *creative* work, the performance of an action for the first time by a *supernatural* being at a *primordial* time *(illud tempus).* In this, myth is similar to the saga and opposed to tales (including fairy tales) or to dream-stories, which do not attribute to what they narrate a hierophanic character and do not present a "world of the beginnings" but simply "another world" (an alternative world).

3. In contrast to (fairy) tales, which narrate events that have not modified the human condition, and to sagas or dream-stories, which narrate particular human events, myth narrates events that are highly and universally relevant for humanity. It tells about the ways in which humankind became mortal, divided into the sexes, and organized itself into societies.

4. The meaning of a myth is publicly shared. This is not the case with the saga (in which an aristocratic content is aimed at a collective aristocratic audience). Nor is it true of the tale (in which a popular content is aimed at a collective popular audience) or of the dream-story (in which a private content is privately understood).

5. Myth is neither pessimistically nor optimistically oriented. (In speech-act terms, one could say that myths are neutral from the point of view of their perlocutionary effect). This distinguishes myth from sagas (characterized by pessimistic themes) and from tales and fairy stories, which are, or at least tend to be, optimistic.

6. While it may be perceived as *fabula, fiction,* or *invention* among societies in which it is no longer alive, a living myth, a myth in operation, represents a consciously assumed way of thinking. This is not the case for tales, fairy tales or dreams, which are intelligible only at an unconscious level.

7. Myth is a *true* story. To the members of an archaic traditional society, the world as such constitutes proof for the truth of the

myth. If myth *a* narrates the origin of mountain X, then the simple existence of mountain X' can be invoked as proof for the veracity of *a*. In archaic societies, myths as true stories are carefully kept apart from the "false" stories (tales, fairy tales, dream-stories, etc.). Note that the truth or falsehood of a story is always relative to a given society. What appears as a true story (as a myth) for archaic society *A* may be perceived as a false story (as a tale) by archaic society *B* or by modern society *C*. However, while archaic society *B* will tend to counter society *A's* false stories with some true stories (myths) of its own, modern society *C* may simply deny the truth of any kind of mythical story by automatically interpreting it as fictional.

8. Myth is a *sacred* story. In this, it resembles sagas, folktales, and fairy tales, and differs from dreams. But while the sacred character of the myth is evident and explicit, the sacred character of the saga, tale, or fairy tale tends to be camouflaged and implicit. This is why myth, unlike these other three genres, must be narrated in special ways, within special situations. It has to be recited, celebrated, interpreted, and reenacted by an elder "specialist" or instructor, as part of certain initiation rites, at a time conceived of as sacred (by night, in the autumn, in the winter, etc.). Myths may not be recounted in the presence of those who are not prepared through initiation to understand them – of women and children, for example. The initiatic scenario is common to myths and tales; Eliade does not speak about it in connection with sagas, and denies it to fairy tales or dream-stories.

9. Myth is an *exemplary* story. It offers exemplary models as well as justification for all rituals and all significant human activities, be they sacred or profane: for eating, procreating, education, spiritual or physical healing, navigation, fishing, agriculture, hunting, artistic activity, etc. Tales, fairy tales and dreams, by contrast, do not have an exemplary character.

Myth has degenerated into legend, epic, or novel. It survives nevertheless in superstitions, customs, even in detective novels. It can also survive as a *nostalgia,* giving rise to autonomous artistic, scientific, mystic, or social values. An example of the workings of this "mythical nostalgia" is the myth of the Edenic Country, which provoked the geographical discoveries of the Phoenicians and Portuguese. Another would be Kierkegaard's existentialist decision to avoid marriage in order to maintain his self; Eliade interprets this as a continuation of the myth of