A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF
CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI'S
STONE SCULPTURE

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
Art History

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

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UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
October 1982

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ABSTRACT

It has long been recognized by Sidney Geist and others that Constantin Brancusi's stone work, after 1907, forms a coherent totality in which each component depends on its relationship to the whole for its significance; in short, the oeuvre comprises a rigorous sculptural language. Up to the present, however, formalist approaches have proven insufficient for decodifying the clear design which can be intuited in the language. The resultant confusion can be attributed to the fact that formalism takes only half of the work's significance into account. Yet Brancusi's careful selection of titles, and his insistence on content, indicate that the latter plays an equal part in establishing the relationships between his sculptures. A structuralist analysis which treats his work as a system composed of signs and which takes both form (signifier) and content (signified) into account, and relates each piece to the whole, seems imperative.

Various features of Brancusi's work, including his mythological themes (Prometheus, the Danaids) and transformations (Leda, Maiastra), as well as the presence of parallel yet opposing works (George, Princess X) and reconciled dualities (the Kiss), correspond to Lévi-Strauss' observations on the features of "mythic" thought or "concrete" logic. Thus Lévi-Strauss' structuralist methodology was chosen from those available for analyzing Brancusi's work. This choice is strengthened by Brancusi's primitive background in Romania, his techniques (la taille directe), and his affiliation with the French avant garde when it was
drawing inspiration from primitive art. It is the thesis of this study that Brancusi was a "primitive thinker" working in Paris, and that the structure of his sculptural language functions like a primitive mythology.

Language systems do not depend solely, however, on their internal relationships for their significance; they draw much of it from their social context. It is thus necessary to reconstruct the historical milieu from which Brancusi drew his ideas.

A structuralist and historical analysis of the Kiss, the cornerstone of Brancusi's stone work, indicates that the sculpture does, in fact, function linguistically like a mythic object, and that it has a highly complex, and densely packed significance. The latter arises from Brancusi's major sources of inspiration: the sculpture of Rodin and the philosophy of Henri Bergson. Although these have been noted before, there has never been any systematic study of the influence, particularly of the latter, on Brancusi's work. The structuralist analysis employed here indicates that Brancusi continued to employ Bergson's concepts of élan vitale, intuition, duration, creative evolution, and the oppositions between consciousness and unconsciousness, the continuous and discontinuous, material and spiritual, from the early Kiss to the last Birds in Space. On the other hand, Brancusi transformed Bergson's ideas into his sculptural language and inverted those which did not correspond to the requirements of the mythology.

A structuralist analysis of the sculpture after the Kiss confirms the accepted theory that Brancusi developed his works in series, but also supplements it by demonstrating that these series are as much linked by
content as by form, that is, they proceed both metaphorically and metonymically. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the four major series are, in turn, systematically linked to each other. It appears that Brancusi conceived his series in opposing parallel pairs which could be transformed, through mediating elements, into each other.

When the series are finally linked the conceptual infrastructure, or metalanguage, which establishes the relationships between the totality and the parts, becomes clear. Various other oppositions, such as those of male/female, sacred/profane, human/animal, can also be seen to relate opposing works and series to each other. The entire structure, however, rotates around the Bergsonian dualism of the material and the spiritual. Only when the final work has been placed in the structuralist matrix can the system be perceived as coherent.

Nonetheless, once the basic concepts of Brancusi's early works and their semantic relationships are clearly understood, his system of sculptures can be seen to proceed with such rigor that the existence of certain works can be predicted. This, in turn, validates the application of both the methodology and the analysis.
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PREFACE

This study and analysis of Constantin Brancusi's work owes much to several people. It was Dr. Ida Rigby who first encouraged me to pursue the topic and suggested the direction it could take. The staff at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, which houses the Brancusi archives and a replica of his studio, together with several of his works, were most helpful. In particular I would like to acknowledge the kind assistance of Marielle Tabart, Nadine Pouillon, Ophélie Stiffler and Camée de Lillers. The information obtained at the Centre, where I was able to examine Brancusi's personal library, photographs and drawings, was invaluable to my research. Finally I would like to thank Dr. Serge Guilbaut and Dr. David Solkin for overseeing the progress and completion of this study. Their comments, criticisms and insights were most helpful.

Depending on the source, quotes are either in French or English; I have done no translating. Titles of sculptures are generally given in their accepted anglicized version. Illustrations of the individual pieces have been omitted since they are well represented in Sidney Geist's works. Graphic illustrations have been included only when necessary to show relationships described in the text.
INTRODUCTION

Our understanding of the art of Brancusi up to the present has been based on impressionistic, biographically oriented criticism on the one hand, and a fragmentary knowledge of the sculpture on the other; it has been prey to metaphysical interpretation from without and all manner of doubt and imprecision from within. The disarray in which the oeuvre is customarily presented has tended, besides, to disturb its clear design and to dissolve the relations between the whole and its parts.

Sidney Geist's chronological examination of Brancusi's oeuvre did much to clarify thinking about both the sculpture and the sculptor. It was, however, as Geist subsequently pointed out, essentially limited to a formal analysis, although some valuable biographical material was also included. The present study attempts to take Geist's work one step forward. It, too, will explore the "clear design" and "the relations between the whole and its parts."

In order to accomplish this end, Brancusi's oeuvre of stone work will be subjected to a structuralist analysis—that is, the whole will be viewed as a complete language system, and the parts will be examined as logically related units within the whole. A special brand of structuralist theory, that developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, will be employed as it provides the most pertinent paradigm for analysing the relationships between the units and the totality. In order to understand these relations, the works themselves must be re-examined, not only in their biographical, but also their historical context. This, too, supplements Geist's work as much new information based on extensive
original research is introduced here for the first time. Indeed, it will provide an entirely new scope and range to Brancusi's work that has been previously alluded to only in passing or completely ignored.

This is not the first occasion of such an analysis. Jack Burnham, in *The Structure of Art*, used some of Lévi-Strauss' ideas in an examination of one of Brancusi's pieces, the *Leda*. As will be seen, Burnham's work was at once too broad and too limited to be of great value. It failed in several respects. Consequently it seems to have done more to discredit the application of structuralist principles to art history than to advance them.

One of the major limitations of Burnham's analysis was its use of only a fraction of Brancusi's oeuvre. The parameters shall be broadened here to include all of the stone work produced after the *Kiss* of 1907. Several reasons can be given for establishing these broader parameters. Brancusi's work can be and has been categorized according to the materials he employed: stone, metal and wood. There are only two instances where a concept expressed in stone also finds expression in wood. Otherwise the two areas do not overlap. Gregory Saltzman has demonstrated that Brancusi employed a set of forms exclusively reserved for wood. This set was limited and heterogeneous, but was combined and recombined in all pieces in this material. This vocabulary of forms was not used for works in stone in which, as shall be shown herein, a different set of repeated elements was employed. On the other hand, Brancusi regarded bronze as an intermediary material rather than a distinct category unto itself. Conceptions in both stone and wood were
also created in this material. It can, however, now be safely concluded that Brancusi's wood sculpture and his stone work consist of and constitute two separate syntaxes, grammars and vocabularies—in short, two distinct language systems.

This is not to say that the two sets are not related in some manner, or that a structuralist analysis cannot be employed with wood as with the stone work. It is hoped that, in the future, such will in fact appear. Before this can occur, however, the basic elements of the stone work must also be examined in depth.

The conclusions reached in this study will demonstrate that much of the subjective, impressionistic and even the metaphysical observations of Brancusi's oeuvre have a certain validity. Lacking a sufficiently scientific and rigorous methodology, however, these observations have tended to become, as Geist pointed out, confused and clouded. Geist's studies of the sculpture, although of landmark importance, and more objective in their analysis than those of his predecessors, are also not without limitations and confusions. It is hoped that this work will clarify his conclusions and give deeper insights into the meaning of Brancusi's individual works, the relationships between them, and the stone oeuvre as a totality. If successful, it should also give a more profound appreciation of Brancusi the thinker and philosopher as well as the sculptor.
Footnotes: Introduction


3. A "Study" in wood of 1916 was used as the formal basis for the larger "Portrait of Mrs. Meyer," 1930, marble. The two versions of the turtles in wood and marble share only their titles, they are neither formally nor contextually similar.

CHAPTER I

The value of any methodology may be measured by the degree to which it expands our awareness or vision of the subject to which it is applied. Conversely, its value is diminished if it does violence either to its own terms or to its subject. A structuralist analysis, no less than any other, is open to the danger of an excess of subjective interpretation and the selective manipulation of data to fulfil its own requirements. To avoid this danger, definite parameters of operation must be established which will ensure that the methodology is applied rigorously and that the interpretation of information is confined to definite limitations imposed by the subject. Controls are essential as the methodology is still in an experimental stage, especially in its application to the problems of art history, and has had its credibility undermined in this field by past misapplications.

As is to be expected in a sculptural oeuvre which is characterized by the abstraction of forms and the elimination of all non-essential detail, nothing is without significance. All pertinent aspects of each work must be accounted for. Fortunately, Sidney Geist has provided a detailed and reliable inventory of the parts that are not always visible or apparent in illustrations. Geist's first major study of the sculpture and his later catalogue raisonné will be referred to frequently.¹
Other aspects of Geist's analysis, however, must be subjected to a degree of critical scrutiny. Only on one or two rare but important occasions has he explored the broader historical significance or the content of Brancusi's work. As shall be demonstrated, Geist's formalist methodology separates his approach from that of structuralism. This is, however, not the only pertinent difference.

For the sake of argument, it will be assumed that the formalist paradigm operates on several principles. It is teleological and diachronic. It assumes an order to the evolution of modernist art. This development is exclusive: it does not reflect or include broader aspects of culture, society or history outside the artistic realm. The information it utilizes is generally drawn strictly from that offered by the forms of the work itself. The conclusions it reaches are based on the way this information corresponds to the general evolutionary theory. Content is seen as only of secondary importance, and is often discarded altogether.

Many forms of structuralist analysis differ from the teleological and diachronic principles of formalism in that they frequently disregard history altogether. They have been, in fact, criticized for being primarily synchronic rather than diachronic; that is, they view relationships between terms in language systems (sculpture being considered here as a language system) as they exist at one point in time, rather than as they evolved historically. The general justification for this predilection is that an individual using a language does not depend for his competence on a knowledge of the evolution of either the terms he uses
or of their relationships. He only needs to know the immediate meaning of the terms and the current syntax and grammar in order to use the language correctly. He does not recapitulate the historical evolution of the language each time he speaks, nor is he generally intent on changing it.

This is not the case, however, with sculptors of the Parisian avant garde during the first decades of this century. Artists such as Brancusi, who jointed the avant garde between 1907 and 1909, were very much aware of the historical evolution of their respective languages. They were, in fact, self-consciously engaged in creating new vocabularies, syntaxes and grammars of sculpture. As a consequence, the meaning of individual works is frequently derived from their historic relationships to preceding works, and to the manner in which they altered the sculptural language. Brancusi's *Kiss*, for example, gains much of its meaning from its direct relationship to an earlier work by Rodin of a similar title and theme but of a completely different form. Thus it is necessary to include, and even emphasize aspects of both the general evolution of sculpture, and of Brancusi's developing sculptural language in the present structuralist analysis. The diachronic must here be balanced with the synchronic.

It would seem, then, that the structuralist analysis to be employed here will have to overlap somewhat with the diachronic formalist format. The teleological principle of the latter distinguishes it, however, from structuralist premises. These do not generally employ predetermined evolutionary models. Rather the evolution of terms in
language systems and of the relationships between them is thought to be arbitrary, although their meaning is conditioned by the society in which they are employed.

The teleological and exclusive principles of formalist discourse also condition the information employed. The forms are seen as being of most significance, hence the concept of "significant form." This attitude towards form contains the primary difference which separates formalism and structuralism, as applied to art. A more extensive discussion of the structuralist paradigm and of the concept of art as a language system will clarify this distinction.

Structuralist studies are designed to examine language systems. They examine both the elements or terms within language systems and their relationships to each other and the whole.

The basic unit of any language system is the sign. Signs are composed of two related parts, the signifier and the signified. For example, the word "head" is a signifier, the object or concept to which it refers—head—is what it signifies, or the signified. It should be noted that the relationship between the form of the signifier and the signified in articulated language is arbitrary. The word "head" is in no way dependent on the thing it signifies; it may just as effectively be "tête" or even "glom."

Words are however not the only things which can signify relationships and thereby form language systems. Non-verbal language systems are now recognized. In fact, all aspects of culture signify, and have symbolic meaning. Clothes, for example, may signify social relation-
ships. Information may be codified in them. As such they constitute a language system. Lévi-Strauss indicates:

Le langage est la plus parfaite de toutes les manifestations d'ordre culturel qui forment, à un titre ou à l'autre, des systèmes, et si nous voulons comprendre ce que c'est que l'art, la religion, le droit, peut-être même la cuisine ou les règles de la politesse, il faut les concevoir comme des codes formés part l'articulation de signes, sur le modèle de la communication linguistique.3

As Lévi-Strauss points out, art is now considered to be a language system. The vocabulary of structuralism has been readily, if loosely applied to art history. Terms such as grammar, syntax, metonymic, metaphoric, and paradigmatic are now embedded in art historical and critical discourse.

Signs used in art are, however, of a different order than those of articulated words, as a different relationship occurs between the signifier and the signified. As Lévi-Strauss points out: "le langage articulé est un système de signes arbitraires, sans rapport sensible avec les object qu'il se propose de signifier, tandis que, dans l'art, une relation sensible continue d'exister entre le signe et l'object."4 This "relation sensible" occurs in the fact that the object which signifies, that is, the work of art, resembles the thing signified. Its form is not arbitrary. Lévi-Strauss recognizes this feature of representational art: "... le caractère particulier du langage de l'art, c'est qu'il existe toujours une homologie très profonde entre la structure due signifié et la structure du signifiant."5 In the general taxonomy of sign systems developed by Pierce, signs which look like what they signify are called icons.6
The degree of resemblance is of some importance in our analysis. In fact, the significance of Brancusi's work often depends on how closely it actually resembles the object to which it refers, or, conversely, the degree to which it is abstracted and approaches the arbitrary character of articulated language. Brancusi's work thus stands somewhere between words, which have a form that is totally arbitrary when compared with what they signify, and totally realistic sculpture which does its best to imitate precisely the forms of the object it represents.

This balance is, in fact, essential to understanding Brancusi's work as a system of signs. Lévi-Strauss has stated:

Si l'art était une imitation complète de l'objet, il n'aurait plus le caractère de signe. Si bien que nous pouvons concevoir, me semble-t-il, l'art comme un système significatif, ou un ensemble de systèmes significatifs, mais qui reste toujours à mi-chemin entre le langage et l'objet.7

On the other hand, another semantic problem arises if the work in question is non-objective, self-referential, or, in a word, formal. In this case the work is not an icon or a sign in the linguistic sense as the relationship between form and content and consequently between signifier and signified has been broken. Lévi-Strauss has repeatedly insisted that a purely abstract, formalist art does not constitute a language system since it has lost its power of signification.7a It is assumed that, for Lévi-Strauss, significant form is a contradiction in terms when taken in a linguistic sense.

It is this view of non-objective art that separates Lévi-Strauss' structuralism from formalist analysis. Lévi-Strauss claims that in formalism, "... les deux domaines doivent être absolument séparés, car
[in the latter] la forme seule est intelligible, et le contenu n'est qu'un résidu dépourvu de valeur signifiante. Pour le structuralisme, cette opposition n'existe pas." Marc-Lipiansky comments that, for structuralism, "forme et contenu étant de même nature, doivent être soumis à une même analyse."7b

Although the opposition between non-representative art and structuralism is not as simple as Lévi-Strauss states this problem does not occur here. All of Brancusi's stone works are representational and signify something directly through their resemblance to something other than themselves. Brancusi "'always started out from some recognizable image in nature'n8 although he also believed that "'art is not copying nature.'"8a Brancusi himself was to say: "'They are fools who call my work abstract. What they think to be abstract is the most realistic, because what is real is not the outer form, but the idea, the essence of things.'"8b

This and Brancusi's careful selection of titles is proof enough that both content and form are integral parts of his conceptions. Yet the analysis of content is the more difficult. The information is less immediately available, and often embedded in the social and historical context of the period in which Brancusi was operating. The problems which may be involved in reconstructing this context can be made evident by a brief reference to a single example: Leda. The title directly denotes a character in classical mythology. Aspects of this myth are essential to the conception of the work. Brancusi's recorded statements confirm this. Yet he recreated the myth in a peculiar and personal
fashion which must also be accounted for. On another level, _Leda_ connotes a human/God transformed into a swan. This transformation between a tame water-bird and a man (or, in this case, a woman) is highly important. Beyond that, however, swans had a particular meaning at the turn of the century in French popular and folk culture. Furthermore, the sculpture was also known as _Fecundity_. This title directly refers to a specific literary and cultural source current during the time Brancusi was first developing his oeuvre. All of these aspects and some others must be accounted for. Such is not only the case with _Leda_, but with each of the works in the oeuvre. As with the forms, continuity and variations in content will be explored in the development of the various series. Although this has not been previously noted, it will be demonstrated that the individual works are as much linked by content as by form.

It is, then, the form and the content combined which constitute the components of the 'text' of Brancusi's iconic signifiers. It is in turn in their broader social and historical setting, that is, their functional response to their environment, that the individual works gain their meaning. A structuralist analysis, unlike a formalist analysis, is able to recognize content as related to the broader social situation. Indeed, Brancusi's forms and titles have denotations and connotations which may involve references to mythology, philosophy, technology, music, literature and politics. The sources of his concerns almost always lie, however, within the larger totality of the "collective consciousness" of the avant garde. In order to guard against excessively impressionistic
misinterpretations, a concensus of critical opinion as it currently stands will serve as the basis for decodifying the works. Where this proves insufficient or can be demonstrated to be incorrect, new data, based on original research into primary sources, will be added to established ideas or to resolve any conflicts which may exist.

The purpose of this study is, then, to treat Brancusi's stone work as a language system and to examine the internal logical relationships but not in isolation from relevant external influences; primarily the development of the avant garde in Paris. Lévi-Strauss has developed a structuralist methodology for examining the relationships between units in non-verbal language systems, specifically as they apply to primitive cultures. The justification for the application of this paradigm to Brancusi will follow this outline of his methodology.

In order to initiate this exploration, two things must be clarified: Lévi-Strauss' general precepts on the non-verbal language systems and his theories on how the relationships between units in these systems work. His theories rest on the basic premise that all cultural phenomena operate as secondary codes or non-verbal language systems which contain and transmit information. As such, the various features of primitive cultures, be they artistic, mythological, social, ceremonial or economic, are ordered by rules of syntax and grammar within the total (language) system. The underlying structure (or syntax) of "primitive" thought, as expressed in the complex relationships between cultural features, can then best be studied by adopting a formal transposition of the methodology and discourse of modern structural linguistics.
Indeed, Lévi-Strauss acknowledges his debt to Fernand de Saussure, and borrowed many of his terms from the science of semiology.

Lévi-Strauss invokes the linguistic axiom which postulates that the meaning of any unit or sign in a language system can only be derived from an analysis of the place which it occupies in the system and its relationship to other units.\(^{11}\)

If we lack knowledge of the total system and the relationships between the terms or units, the particular signs, however graphic, will remain mute, and our knowledge fragmentary.\(^{12}\)

Conversely, if the relationships between the component parts are examined linguistically, one can achieve a clear understanding of the operation of the total system.\(^{12a}\) This has several implications.

It is immediately evident that each unit which serves as a variant on a common theme, (i.e., a mythological story or kinship term, or in this case, a sculpture) must be analyzed not only in terms of its own form and content, but also in relation to the other units in the system and to the entire set. It is, in fact, the relationships between units that is significant about them.

In Lévi-Strauss' analysis of mythological systems, the constituent "units" of each myth are arrived at by breaking down individual myths into related parts, called "mythemes." This is a problematic process. In Brancusi's sculpture, however, each unit, or sculpture, is clearly defined as an entity. The constituent "parts" are embedded in the form and content of each work.
Where various versions of mythological stories occur, the parts that arise most frequently in each are used as the significant units. Similarly, with Brancusi's sculpture, where more than one version of a single image occurs, the most significant aspects are not lost. As Brancusi refined certain works, such as the *Kiss* or *Mlle Pogany*, each successive version maintained common features which preserved its crucial signification.

Nonetheless, the interpretation of the elements which make up the complex fabric of meaning in any iconic sign is a difficult process. Fortunately, in this instance, Lévi-Strauss' model provides a paradigm for the system that governs their combination, that is, their syntax.

Lévi-Strauss' research has indicated that the relationships between parts of a cultural whole have a special nature in "primitive" thought. In fact, he postulates that the characteristic operations of "primitive" thought are binary and empirical. That is to say, "primitive" thinkers establish categories and classifications based on observed contrasts in the sensory qualities of concrete objects. These include, for example, the differences between the raw and the cooked, light and darkness, animality and humanity, male and female, the living and the dead, and nature and culture. The basic abstract, philosophical and psychological problem of "primitive" thought is to codify and categorize these oppositions, and where logical inconsistencies or contradictions exist between accepted beliefs or desires and observable data, to reconcile, overcome or conceal them if possible. Lévi-Strauss terms this operation "concrete logic," and separates it from modern
scientific logic, although he believes that, at times and in certain places, the two can co-exist.

The binary oppositions of "concrete logic" form conceptual tools with which to elaborate abstract ideas and combine them in propositions which are embedded in cultural phenomena, such as mythological systems. These relationships establish man's place in reality. Lévi-Strauss' analysis indicates that such a system has a logical form. In addition, when presented as a related totality, it can be seen to embody a codified system of ideas not necessarily inherent in any one unit. These codified messages frequently allow certain unpleasant truths about reality to become palatable, or certain internal cultural contradictions to be surmounted, or they simply serve to codify and organize information about the universe. As binary oppositions can be represented graphically, the underlying structure of the total system can be seen as a matrix which is generally grouped around a single or double axis, with a polar opposition at either end.

The relationships between the units are generally based on either oppositions, transformations or parallels between the units. The logical relationships between the units, being linguistic in nature, can be either metaphorical, that is related by a recognition of similarity, or metonymical, that is related by a recognition of contiguity, or cause and effect. When taken as a whole, the units form metaphorical or metonymical chains or series.

It remains to be seen how Lévi-Strauss' theories as described above, on 'primitive' thought or 'concrete logic' and their manifesta-
tions can be used to further our understanding and interpretations of Brancusi's individual works and his oeuvre as a whole. The features which Lévi-Strauss claims are fundamental to 'primitive' thought have been observed by various commentators as present in Brancusi's work, but outside of a structuralist analysis. In each case, a different terminology has been employed. The central feature of "concrete logic" as described by Lévi-Strauss, that is, the reconciliation of conflicting dualities observable in the empirical world, has long been recognized as an essential part of Brancusi's work and even of his life. On the most fundamental level, Jianou has pointed out the reconciliation between nature and art in Brancusi's work.15

David Lewis, in his monograph on Brancusi, noted of the sculpture in general that "Often . . . the idea was simultaneously, one of radiation and power, and of infinite cool tranquility; a blending of opposites into unity, of discipline and freedom, of soaring energy and timeless serenity."16 He elaborated on this theme in terms of Brancusi's peasant background and his position as the founder of modern sculpture. He also applied it to individual works. Of the Montparnasse Kiss, for example, he said:

Brancusi presents us with the dualism . . . of the lovers' own unique moment of selfless innocent intimacy and oneness, forehead and body: and yet also the reverse of this, its non-uniqueness, its generality . . . .

He continues:

Brancusi is presenting other dualisms too. He presents death and life as an inseparable duality—two opposites, man and woman, each defining the other: and death giving a sense of past and future, of the contribution of the past to the continuity of life, of the
triumph of life and love over death; for in his stone maquette for *The Kiss* . . . the woman within the embrace is pregnant.\textsuperscript{17}

Although disagreeing with the interpretation of the female as pregnant, Sidney Geist confirmed Lewis's observation on the *Kiss* when he stated that " . . . this image of two figures locked in an embrace is a permanent expression of the unity of love, which Plato called 'the desire and pursuit of the whole'."\textsuperscript{18}

Geist also observed the presence of purposely unified opposites in other works by Brancusi. In his analysis of the *Monuments* at Tirgo Jiu he interpreted the design on the uprights of the *Gate* as representing a conjunction of symbols for male and female genitalia.

The theme of the *Gate* is love and community, upheld by sexual energy. The circular motifs on the columns join the tall curved planes immediately below to make a magical image of merged male and female genitals . . . When the American sculptor Malvina Hoffman visited Brancusi in the fall of 1938, on the eve of his departure for Rumania to attend the inauguration of the monument at Tirgu Jiu, he asked her what she saw in the plaster models of the columns. "I see the forms of two cells that meet and create life," she said. "The beginning of life . . . [sic] through love. Am I right?" "Yes, you are," said Brancusi.\textsuperscript{19}

Elsewhere, Geist wrote of the *Gate*, "In its literal and symbolic imagery, it merges the female *Table* and phallic *Column*.\textsuperscript{20}

Beyond eroticism, and the opposition of the sexes, Brancusi's works have been observed to contain other dualities. Geist, for example, interpreted the *Endless Column* as a "sacral link between heaven and earth."\textsuperscript{21} Boime regards the *Bird in Flight* and the egg shaped *Sculpture for the Blind* as positing "transcendental states of embryonism and ascension. Escape from self-consciousness is identical with the unborn state; achieving oneness with the universe is like recovering the indivisible unity of
the egg.22

Geist also applied similar concepts to the formal qualities of the oeuvre as a whole, and to Brancusi's use of time:

This friction of different times—like the confrontation in his work of object and essence, of weight and lightness, of density and transparency, of order and accident, of the brand-new and the eternal—is another instance of Brancusi having it both ways.23

For both Geist and others, Brancusi's very existence as a primitive in Paris, represented an opposition which had to be overcome.

His peasant origins and eventual urbanism made Brancusi the natural arena of a struggle between traditional and rational modes of behavior. . . . For the most part it is resolved in the joining of opposed forces to each other in the sculpture itself.24

Lewis stated:

He did not turn his back on the present in his detachment but sought, within the swift changes, the uprootedness and fragmentariness of modern life, a constancy of values. His solution to the problem of opposites which were implicitly in his own life—Brancusi the man of the earth, born a peasant in Roumania, close to nature, and Brancusi the thoughtful artist of the twentieth century in search of spiritual stability—is not the least inspiring facet of his contribution.25

Later, in the same text, Lewis was to say, "for Brancusi, to combine opposing elements into unity had special significances."26

The study of these significances will form the major focus of this paper.

The presence of unified dualities is, however, only one part of Lévi-Strauss' theories. The other, as has been said, is that the whole function as a coherent, systematized language. Brancusi's oeuvre fulfills this requirement as well.
Almost all students of Brancusi have observed, either through intuitive or empirical evidence, that Brancusi's oeuvre constitutes a closed system of interrelated units with a coherent syntax similar to that of language. This is, in less precise art historical terms, usually referred to as an "universe of sculptural forms."

Ionel Jianou presented this idea in the first sentence of his study of Brancusi's work: "Brancusi's art forms a vast, coherent, unified whole." 27

Sidney Geist, who criticized many other aspects of Jianou's work, essentially agrees with Jianou's evaluation and hinted at it in his early studies of Brancusi, but did not at that point state it explicitly. In the introduction to his 1968 study, Geist stated that:

It [Geist's study] reveals an artist of imposing intellectuality—a fact which has been suspected, hinted at, but not demonstrated; it reveals a body of work whose inner relations make it appear a tightly reasoned essay in the problems and problematics of sculpture. 28

Geist also observed the link in Brancusi to language, comparing his to Gertrude Stein: "The concern over beginnings led Gertrude Stein to an examination of words, verbal relations, and the very parts of speech; it led Brancusi to find a clear and limited sculptural syntax." 29

Most important, Geist noted the relationships between the pieces and the necessity of viewing them together rather than singly:

Seen singly, most of Brancusi's sculptures are gentle, quiet and undeclamatory; they need one another, and numbers enhance their effectiveness. The concern for the relation between his pieces is mirrored by his concern for the relation between any single piece and the world: in this relation the pedestal is the mediating factor. 30
In the opening sentence to the Guggenheim catalogue for the Brancusi retrospective of 1979, Geist re-established the principle that Brancusi's work must be viewed as a totality, and that an understanding of the relationships between the parts is necessary to comprehend each unit. "It [the retrospective] should warn us of the error of taking any part for the whole; it may even make clear that there is a whole here that needs all the parts."31

In a section which is worth quoting extensively, Geist elaborated on the implications of such an oeuvre.

The conviction develops that the oeuvre is shaped and controlled as carefully as any of its parts. It is almost as difficult to consider in isolation a single work as it is to consider a part of any sculpture. The sense of an artistic universe is enforced by the scope and the gamut of formal concern. . . . The sense of a norm, of a pervasive evenness, is what one would expect of an effort to project a continuous field.

The creation of a unified oeuvre would be an achievement unique in the history of these matters. How, one wonders, would an artist go about planning it? There is no evidence to think that, in this sense, Brancusi began with a plan, nor is it easy to imagine how a life's work of the complexity of Brancusi's could be conceived in advance. But we may imagine the oeuvre slowly taking shape, at first without and then with the conscious direction of the sculptor.32

To show that Brancusi was conscious, at least later, of the direction of his oeuvre, Geist quotes a statement made by the artist to Ezra Pound: "Toutes mes sculptures datent de quinze ans."33

This study will be devoted to precisely these problems. It will demonstrate how Brancusi developed the oeuvre, and also indicate that much of it may have been, as Brancusi's quote indicates, planned at one crucial period of inspiration, from about 1908-1912. It will also show how early works necessitated the creation of later conceptions and how
the units of the whole were established through careful control of all the relationships within the entire oeuvre, so that no piece may be thought of separately and everything has its proper place.

Having observed, as others had done, that Brancusi's oeuvre represents a closely reasoned, coherent sculptural system or "universe," Geist advanced to an analysis of the categories, or series, operating within it. That is to say, he found what, in structuralist terminology, are the metonymical and metaphorical chains operating within the total language system. In a similar fashion, Spear analyses the Bird series running from the Maistra to the Birds in Space.34 Both studies were done outside of a structuralist analysis. Neither refers to the methodology of linguistic studies. As shall be seen, however, Spear's work is for various reasons more successful and complete than Geist's. It is Geist, however, who noted the important fact that the series exist in relationship to one another.

In the Guggenheim catalogue, Geist made several statements, which he later repeated in his major book on Brancusi on the existence and importance of the series.

Only rarely is Brancusi content with a unique expression: he has favored themes which he pursues in series... The series of the Birds makes its way from a stylized representation with mythological reference to an image of spiritual flight. Sleeping Muse, a virtual portrait, initiates a series that moves from a representation of personal sleep to a vision of universal sleep: Beginning of the World... Working in series frees Brancusi from the demands of constant invention and gives his work a unity and continuity not at all at odds with its diversity.

Geist elaborates:
It has been evident for some time that the sculpture of Brancusi is strung out in thematic series, and that these themes are both formal and iconic. It is also evident that these series cross and recross and that certain sculptures are then the nodes through which two or more themes pass.36

The last two statements are worth examining. Geist confirms that the basis of the series is both formal and iconic. His subsequent elaboration on the series in the Abrams text is, however, almost exclusively based on formal or metaphoric similarities. This formal bias, attributable to the period and tradition in which he is writing, has led him to overlook important thematic or metonymic relationships between Brancusi's pieces and to link others which are only marginally connected.

Starting with some children's heads and progressing through Sleeping Muse, Prometheus, Sculpture for the Blind and Cup, Brancusi made a number of ovoidal, quasi-spherical, and hemi-spherical sculptures . . .37

While these sculptures do form a category in certain respects, linking the hemispherical (except for the handle) Cup to a series of ovoidal heads seems dubious when aspects of the sculptures' content are taken into account. For example, a parallel situation on a verbal level would involve linking the words poppy, peony, pansy and puppy because they all begin with p and end with y. They seem to constitute a series when only the form of the signifiers is compared. Yet when what they signify is examined it is evident that puppy is the odd man out. So with the Cup.

Formal similarities also caused Geist to join the Maiastra, Chimera, Architectural Project, Exotic Plant, Adam and Eve, Portrait of Mrs. Eugene Meyer, Jr., and Boundary Marker in a series; they all involve "the superimposition of a number of objects."38 The link is enticing,
but again does not take into account the disparity in their themes, or what they signify.

This omission, in turn, has led Geist to see the various series as crossing and re-crossing randomly. Many of the categories Geist has proposed like those above are linked only by formal similarities and disrupted by unaccounted differences in their other aspects. This is not in harmony with his earlier assertion of internal order, clarity and coherence, but speaks rather of confusion. It seems that a strictly formal methodology is then inadequate to explain the series in Brancusi's work. Nonetheless, the recognition that rational categories do exist was a major contribution, and initiated the process of establishing an order where none had been seen before.

A structuralist analysis, based on an analysis of both form and content in order to establish the related works in each series, shows that Geist's original intuitive impression of coherency and rationality is more correct than he would realize, as is his observation that certain sculptures serve as the nodes through which various series pass, and that the series are coherently related.

Indeed, as has been pointed out, the categorization of Brancusi's work as units which occur in series or semantic chains that are coherently related to each other and in which information is codified, is fundamental to a structuralist analysis. The placement of these related units has always been problematic in Lévi-Strauss' work. To ensure that the process is carried out here in as objective a manner as possible, two criteria must be met. As closely as possible, those series
established by Geist, Spear and others which link formal and thematic principles will be employed. For example, David Lewis has pointed out the formation of a thematic and formal series running from the Muse to Prometheus to the Newborn to the Sculpture for the Blind which Geist has also confirmed. Spear's carefully documented series of Birds will be followed precisely; it works because of her scholarly exploration of various levels of signification, including mythological, formal and biographical content. Thus Leda and the Penguins, although bird or bird-like, will be placed in another category and grouped with the sculpture of animal subjects. Both Spear and Geist have recognized this latter series as existing separately. As a further safeguard against excesses of subjective interpretation, chronological sequence will be used throughout.

The presence in Brancusi's oeuvre of the fundamental elements used in a structuralist analysis indicate that a structuralist methodology would be useful in clarifying it in terms of the semantic relations between the individual works, the series and the system as a whole. This is not, however, sufficient to justify the application of Lévi-Strauss' concepts to the sculpture or the sculptor. Lévi-Strauss' methodology applied largely to the analysis of "primitive" thought and its structures, not those of modern man. Brancusi can be seen, however, to have much in common with the former. His early background was spent in what William Tucker has described as "... one of the most remote and backward corners of Europe." This area was not just provincial, it was primitive. Here, Brancusi would be immersed in folklore and
folk ways from his earliest years to late adolescence. It is often stated that one of the primary differences between folk culture and modern society is based on the latter's ability to write and record its history—its literateness. Brancusi, according to Tucker, "could neither read nor write until he entered the School of Arts and Crafts at Craiova in 1895," when he was eighteen. Brancusi was not subject to the primary education which differentiates modern man from "primitive" man. It would seem then, that Brancusi would have ample time for developing "primitive" thought patterns. Indeed, it would be surprising if he had not. In fact, it is Brancusi's primitive peasant background to which all writers refer when explaining his unique contribution to sculpture.

Unfortunately, this aspect of Brancusi's life has been romanticized by such people as Peter Neagoe in his biographical novel, The Saint of Montparnasse. Brancusi himself nostalgically altered many of the details of his peasant "primitive" background. Nonetheless, "primitive", in Lévi-Strauss' sense of the work, is the first characterization of Brancusi's thought. The emphasis on the intellectual is not out of place, since the reconciliation of idea and material expression has long been noted as fundamental to an understanding of Brancusi's work, something he himself frequently underlined. It will be shown that this observation is in fact correct, and that Brancusi's works are not only beautiful to observe but also, to cite Lévi-Strauss, "bonne à penser."

Assuming that Lévi-Strauss' theories on the nature of "primitive" thought are valid, and that the observations of Geist, Jianou, Spear et. al. on the internal coherence of Brancusi's system have a basis in
fact, then an application of structuralist principles is not only justi-
ified but obligatory. It has, in fact, already occurred, albeit in a
fragmentary and insufficient fashion.

Jack Burnham's seminal work, *The Structure of Art*, and his brief
analysis of some of the dualisms in Brancusi's *Leda* have already been
mentioned and criticized. But aside from his use of only one work,
it appears in retrospect that another of Burnham's basic premises may
have been in error.

Burnham's work, like the present study, included the "Structural
Anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss and semiological analysis." But,
on closer examination, it appears that Burnham has distorted if not
completely violated one of Lévi-Strauss' fundamental principles.
Burnham's study "assumes that the historical notion of art is based on
a mythic structure (consequently logical within the confines of the
structure), and that art functions as an evolving sign system with the
same flexibility in the usage of signs enjoyed by any language." Although the latter part of the proposition is correct, the first
assumption which equates the historical notion of art with a mythic
structure has no basis in Lévi-Strauss' theories. Lévi-Strauss has
continuously asserted that mythic systems are exclusive to so-called
"primitive" thinkers and societies. Furthermore, in Lévi-Strauss' view,
history and primitive mythic systems are antithetical. The presence
of either distinguishes between "primitive" and modern "scientific"
thought, although he admits that at times, and under certain exceptional
conditions, the two may overlap. Yet Burnham deliberately blurs the
distinction between what he sees as the contemporary "mythologies" of modern man, such as either art or art history, and the mythic structures of primitive thinkers. For example, he opens his discussion on Lévi-Strauss with the statement: "Central to Claude Lévi-Strauss' concept of Structural Anthropology is his premise that unconscious mental processes remain fixed for all culture, 'primitive' and literate alike." This does violence to Lévi-Strauss' ideas, which separate primitive and literate thinkers. Burnham, in fact, openly disputes "Lévi-Strauss' propensity for conceptually separating science and myth" and postulates that "... science is more probably a sophisticated mythic form." The premise that science is myth, foreign to Lévi-Strauss, leaves Burnham open to claim that art history is also a mythological structure. In fact, neither scientific thought nor art history are, nor function like, mythologies.

Burnham is, in fact, aware of this. In his chapter on "Art History as a Mythic Form" he states:

For Lévi-Strauss at least, it is questionable that a diachronic [i.e., modern] culture can sustain myth, since the longevity of myths depends upon social structures where events are repetitive and unchanging, thus psychically and intellectually the same. History-oriented societies appear to lack the foundation for a stable mythic structure."

Yet Burnham again distorts Lévi-Strauss' view by adding "However Lévi-Strauss is quite aware that myths do exist in literate societies, and suggests that we have just begun to detect the mechanisms by which they operate." The latter part of this statement is, however, unfounded. Indeed, in a later study, in which he abandoned almost all of Lévi-Strauss' methodologies, Burnham confirmed the incompatibility
of their respective approaches: "Diverging somewhat from Lévi-Strauss' theory, I have earlier suggested in The Structure of Art that the balance between the diachronic and the synchronic is the key to all conceptions of art." It would seem, however, that one must take the whole theory or leave it alone.

Yet despite the fact that art history, being irrevocably diachronic, is not subject to Lévi-Strauss' structuralist theories, that which it examines may be. As Lévi-Strauss states:

... there are still zones in which savage thought, like savage species, is relatively protected. This is the case of art, to which our civilization accords the status of a national park, with all the advantages and inconveniences attending so artificial a formula; and it is particularly the case of so many as yet "uncleared" sectors of social life, where, through indifference or inability, and most often without our knowing why, primitive thought continues to flourish.

Brancusi was in fact one such thinker. It remains the premise of this study that Brancusi's stone oeuvre, after 1908, was both a new personal sculptural language, and a personal 'mythological' system. Consequently, Lévi-Strauss' paradigm is the only methodology which will bring the underlying structure of this system to light.
Footnotes: Chapter I


2. Strictly speaking, Geist is not a "formalist," as the term is understood today. His recent study of the Kiss, Sidney Geist, Brancusi/The Kiss (New York: Harper and Row 1978), (hereafter cited as Geist, 1978), for example, indicates that he finds much of value beyond the forms of the work, including its ideological and semantic content. This study is, however, a radical departure from much of his earlier work.


4. Ibid., p. 133.

5. Ibid., p. 108.


7b. Ibid., p. 295.


8b. Brancusi, cited in ibid., p. 146.

8c. These two areas correspond to the division between Sens and Signification. As Shalvey explains, "Sens is an internal sense . . . and is identical to the function of the word within the language. Language is viewed as a system defined by internal differences, not by relations to external objects. Here it is the combination of the elements within the system that is the bearer of the internal meaning. Signification leads out of the system, to the mind of the hearer or the speaker." Thomas Shalvey, Claude Lévi-Strauss Social Psychotherapy and the Collective Unconscious (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), Note 7, p. 142.


12a. "In Brancusi the paucity of elements, their clarity and the clarity of their articulation, their repetition (when it occurs), and their differences create a tight system and a total image which inscribe themselves on the memory. The mnemonic is carried to an absolute point since it is possible to see all and remember all with a minimal expenditure of effort; memory is fixed by the ravishing surface and sustained by a parallel memory of the world." Geist, 1968, p. 174.

13. Steiner, p. 252.


17. Ibid., p. 12.


24. Ibid., p. 181.
26. Ibid., p. 20.
29. Ibid., p. 141.
32. Ibid., p. 23.
33. Brancusi, as said to Ezra Pound, cited in Geist, 1975, p. 29.
35. Geist, 1969, p. 15.
36. Ibid., p. 23.
37. Geist, 1975, p. 25.
38. Ibid., p. 26. "An important series—so small, so diverse in subject, so spread out in time as not to appear to be a series—is one comprised of the Sorceress (1916) [wood], Torso of a Young Man, the Turtle in wood and the Turtle in marble (1945). . . these works are concerned with formal complexity." Geist, 1969, p. 22. See also pp. 20-24 for other series that Geist proposes.
40. Lewis, p. 17.


42. Ibid. For a discussion of the importance of writing in the differentiation of modern and "primitive" thought, see Charbonnier, pp. 28-30. See also: "The way of thinking among people we call, usually wrongly, 'primitive'—let's describe them rather 'without writing,' because I think this is really the discriminating factor." Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 15.


44. Jack Burnham, p. 3.

45. Ibid., pp. 92-93.

46. Ibid., p. 3.

47. "... je ne veux pas dire qu'absolument, les sociétés primitives n'ont pas de passé, mais que les membres de ces sociétés n'ont pas le besoin d' invoquer la catégorie de l'histoire; pour eux, elle est vide de dens puisque, dans la mesure où quelque chose n'a pas toujours existé, ce quelque chose est illégitime à leurs yeux, tandis que pour nous, c'est le contraire." Lévi-Strauss in Charbonnier, pp. 61-62.


50. Ibid., p. 11.

51. Ibid., p. 39.

52. Ibid.


CHAPTER II

Brancusi arrived in Paris in 1904, having travelled, often by foot, from his native Romania. Geist postulates that "after an academic training based on the antique and a tradition of faithfulness to nature, he went to Paris to improve himself and to enlarge his vision. He expected, one may imagine, to see and learn from the sculpture of Rodin."¹ In Paris, he continued his academic training in sculpture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. For the next three years, he worked largely in clay, developing an almost facile ability for rapid realistic modelling. About 1907, however, his work began to change direction. Attempting to break with tradition, and it appears, with Rodin, Brancusi produced the Prayer.

The emphasis on the process of modelling, on the quality of materials and on simplified forms marked a turning point in his artistic development. It must, however, be regarded in retrospect as a transitional piece, as Brancusi was shortly thereafter to abandon clay altogether.² It was also in 1907 that Brancusi began to carve directly into the stone block, la taille directe. "This technique, unused by Rodin, would assure his liberation from the Master, and permit him to work in a new set of terms."³ Between 1907 and 1909, Brancusi produced several works, many lost, some dead ends, and some only tentative explorations.⁴ One work, however, stands out as embodying a dramatic new discovery. It marks the point of origin of Brancusi's personal sculptural language, his self-
conscious departure from the academic and his alignment with the avant garde.

In late 1907 and early 1908 Brancusi conceived and carved the *Kiss*. In both conception and execution, this work marked a radical departure from his previous production. Brancusi has at various times confirmed the seminal position of the *Kiss*. "Elle avait été, disait-il, son chemin de Damas. Pour la première fois, il y a exprimé son essentiel." The *Kiss*, in fact, forms the cornerstone of Brancusi's oeuvre. All of his subsequent stone carvings can be demonstrated to be systematically and rationally related to the ideas expressed in this work. In 1938 Brancusi himself gave an indication of the central role of the *Kiss* and of the remarkable conceptual continuity in his work. "First came this group of two interlaced, seated figures in stone . . . then the symbol of the egg, then the thought grew into this gateway to a beyond."6

The *Kiss* is regarded by most art historians as a milestone both in Brancusi's development, and in the course of modernist sculpture in general. Its importance in radically altering contemporary sculptural precepts and sensibilities has caused a great deal of attention to be focused on it. Geist has, in fact, chosen it from the oeuvre as a whole as the subject of a separate study. His opening comments summarize the position of the work, both in terms of Brancusi's career and in terms of its broader role in the evolution of modern sculpture.

With the carving of The *Kiss*, Brancusi, by a supreme effort of will, intelligence, and imagination, leaps out of his past. Nothing, or very little, in his earlier work prepares us for it, for its special poetry, its unobtrusive, densely packed invention. Placed against everything that precedes it, The *Kiss* gives the impression of issuing from a new hand; one writer has said that it "seemed to arrive 'from nowhere'." And efforts to account for it, to
situate it in time and within Brancusi's developing art, have been few enough in spite of the fact that it is the cornerstone of a great modern oeuvre.  

By filling in this gap, Geist supplies valuable information concerning the historic and personal significance of both the form and content of the sculpture. He begins his investigation by giving several possible sources which may have been available to Brancusi in Paris and which may have served as inspiration, model, reference, or precedent for the *Kiss*. These sources indicate that Brancusi was consciously moving away from Rodin and into alignment with the avant garde, particularly the painting avant garde which was, at that time, fascinated by primitive art.

Apart from the currency of the *Kiss* [theme] in contemporary art, the factors that seem most directly to have contributed to the creation of Brancusi's *The Kiss* are three: the exhibition of Derain's *Crouching Figure* at Kahnweiler's; the display of Matisse's paintings, notably *Music (Study)*, at the Salon d'Automne; and meetings between Charles Morice and Brancusi in the fall of 1907. Behind all of them stands the Gauguin Retrospective of 1906.

Geist traces the image and postures of the joined figures in the *Kiss* to Matisse's painting, which Brancusi would have seen in 1907. He presents Gauguin's symbolist sculpture and Derain's fauvist figure as precedents for Brancusi's adoption of direct carving and for his concern for the inherent qualities of the worked materials. But the common link between Gauguin, Matisse, Derain, the Fauves in general, and other artists of the avant garde like Picasso at this time was their interest in primitivism of all types. Indeed, the Gauguin retrospective was highly influential and provided the catalyst for a primitivist fantasy which was
widely adopted.

Since this homogeneous sympathy for primitive art in 1906/07 provides several clues for Brancusi's move toward the avant garde, it deserves further discussion. It is however, important to note that the avant garde's concept of the primitive was ethnocentric. Picasso provides a case in point, since his early sculpture was also influenced by the Gauguin retrospective and, like Brancusi, he moved from a period influenced by Rodin (and Symbolism) to an interest in primitive art.

Johnson, in *The Early Sculpture of Picasso*, explains that he was drawing on popular notions of primitive culture as

- Manifestations of concepts such as the exotic, the mysterious, and the earthly paradise [as] societies unspoilt by the "evils" of industrialization.

- Picasso supplemented these with Gauguin's writings, paintings, and sculptures [which primarily determined] the concept of what was primitive in artistic terms.8a

Johnson comments on the ethnocentric bias in this view:

- The best we can do without cultural understanding is to project our own prejudicial views of primitive peoples as simple, mysterious savages on to their creations. Picasso understandably went through the same kind of process and the result was necessarily a projection of the qualities he sought on primitive art onto the pieces he created, whether or not they were in fact intended qualities of the primitive carver.8b

As part of this expression, which reflected general trends found also in Derain's figure, Picasso created between 1907 and 1908 several remarkable, but little known works, notably two *Puppets*, a totemic *Standing Man* and a *Standing Woman*. These share with the *Kiss* the technique of direct carving, which was seen as a characteristic of primitive art. Picasso's works also adhere to the pre-established geometric form
of the block at the expense of anatomy, although they are cylindrical rather than cubic, and in wood rather than stone. It must be assumed that this too was seen as primitive. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that Picasso did not comprehend the significant cultural qualities of primitive art, but was responding largely to its perceived forms and techniques. His work was, then, as Johnson points out, 'primitivistic' rather than 'primitive'.

Nonetheless, Brancusi seems to have responded directly to this climate established by the works of Gauguin, Picasso and the Fauves. It would seem, in fact, that he found this concern for the primitive which saturated the avant garde in 1906/1907 sufficiently attractive that he abandoned his promising, and no doubt potentially lucrative, career as an academic artist, working in a realist vein. Instead, he altered his course and forged a new artistic alliance with a movement that he now found sympathetic to his own background. Although this does not totally explain his remarkable change in direction, it does go far in indicating the conditions under which it occurred and the forces to which he was responding throughout his career. It will be demonstrated herein that Brancusi's primitivism goes well beyond the borrowing of forms and techniques from primitive cultures. Unlike Picasso, Brancusi's primitive qualities were part of his very thought processes.

Geist sees a further possible influence for the *Kiss* in Charles Morice, the symbolist theoretician who also wrote on the Gauguin retrospective. Morice's influence was, however, more in a conceptual than a formal sense. Brancusi, it seems, could have met Morice at the salon of
Otilia Cosmutza, which both frequented. Comparing the ideas present in the Kiss with symbolist principles, Geist observes "Some striking parallels in the thought of Morice and Brancusi...". Geist comments on a section of a symbolist text by the former that he feels may have influenced Brancusi: "... with its vision of simplicity and unity, its emphasis on the eternal and essential, freed from contingency, it could serve as a program for the Kiss and the oeuvre that would follow. ..."

Geist also provides another possible inspiration for the Kiss: the Chapiteau des Baisers, sculpted by E. Derré in 1899, a version of which was erected in the Luxembourg Gardens in 1906. Derré's work bears a formal and thematic relationship to both Brancusi's Kiss and the columns for the Gate, in which the Kiss motif was later abstracted and refined. In addition Geist points out that an important affinity of a political nature also existed between the two sculptors.

The Gazette des Beaux Arts favored it [Derré's work] with a reproduction... which described it as an "oeuvre... rêvée pour une Maison du Peuple et où d'ailleurs la figure aimée de l'évangélique anarchiste (Louise Michel) [sic] joue avec celle de Blanqui un rôle essentiel...". Derré's political sympathies would have made him attractive to Brancusi who, in this period, himself had strong socialist leanings.

The undercurrent of active social protest embodied in Brancusi's "strong socialist leanings" and in Derré's model is in harmony with the symbolist antecedents of the Kiss as perceived by Geist. Robbins has pointed out in his discussion of the artists who formed the commune at the Abbaye of Creteil between 1906 and 1908 that
Many of the most influential writers and artists of the symbolist generation supported the most radical social philosophy of their epoch with the result that... there was a strong identification between the symbolist artists and literati on the one hand and the Socialist and Anarchist intellectuals on the other.14

In Robbins' analysis, however, this association caused the artists particular problem.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the identity between artist and social reformer, the Symbolist artist was confronted with a significant problem: the difficulty of adapting his artistic vocabulary to his new role.... By and large, these forms were remote from reality and the artists of the last fifteen years of the century knew it.... They were unable to forge the necessary new identity between the means of their art and the function they conceived for it in modern industrial society.15

As Robbins points out, the artists at the Abbaye "proposed to solve the same problem (namely, how to create a truly modern art based on the conditions of modern life), but they were determined not to escape into aestheticism, nor to rely on symbolism and allegory."16

Brancusi showed his sympathy with the artists of the Abbaye by exhibiting work there when the commune was having financial difficulties. In sharing their ideals, however, he also shared their problems, but with an added complexity. Brancusi's mythological system, by its very nature, aspired to the timeless rather than the contemporary, despite the fact that it was expressed in a modernist idiom, and in forms appropriate to his age. This tension between a commitment to a plastic expression of historical evolution, both social and artistic, and timelessness will become, in the final analysis, one of the most pertinent aspects of his work and his developing mythology. Indeed, it will be demonstrated that Brancusi's mythology forced him to move out of
alignment with his early political ideals and into spirituality, and the
eternal.

Geist also offers an interpretation of the possible personal signifi-
cance of the Kiss. Drawing upon the juxtaposition of two small studies
(neither the Kiss) present in an early photograph of Brancusi's studio,
he postulates a biographical episode involving love refused and then
consummated as its primary inspiration. The basis for such a theory,
however, is weak and as corroborating evidence is not provided, it can
only be viewed as speculative.

After dealing with the various possible sources for the Kiss,
Geist continues his study with a detailed formal investigation of the
subsequent variations which Brancusi produced throughout his career.
Although details of the work altered in different versions, Brancusi
remained faithful to his original conception. "... The Kiss remains
constant in its humble matiere, its stability, and its recognizable
imagery, undergoing only slight change in proportion, in style and the
sentiment these release."¹⁷ This remarkable consistency in conception
between the 1907 version and its counterpart from 1945 is an important
feature of Brancusi's work. It indicates, above all, that Brancusi
remained true, throughout his career, to the ideas he first expressed
when he entered the avant garde.

The same cannot be said, however, of other members of the avant
garde. Picasso again provides a point of comparison. The parallel paths
of Brancusi's and Picasso's early work contrast with their later
developments. By 1908 Picasso was moving away from primitivized forms
into experiments in geometric cubism, which even if initially influenced
by primitive art, soon moved beyond it. Indeed, throughout the remainder of his career Picasso's sculpture became an expression of a plethora of interests. Consequently, his work from 1945 has little in common with his formative period of 1906/07, or of Brancusi's work of any period. Unlike Picasso, Brancusi remained faithful to his original inspiration throughout his career, from the first Kiss to the final version. Not insignificantly, the latter was the last stone work he created. The fact that this conception brackets Brancusi's work as a whole indicates its importance not only to the artist but also to the oeuvre.

When subjected to a structuralist analysis, the Kiss in all its expressions can be seen to contain the fundamental propositions and problems explored throughout Brancusi's subsequent work. As Geist and others have tentatively observed, these may be stated in a series of binary oppositions and categorizations of dualities observable in empirical reality, i.e., concrete logic, primitive or mythological thought. Indeed, in both conception and execution, the Kiss contains a complex system of opposing elements, which are, despite their diversity, interrelated through a series of mediating elements, parallels and transformations. The Kiss contains the basic propositions of what is a philosophic and mythic, as well as a sculptural, system.

The first opposition evident in Brancusi's the Kiss appears in its direct, and no doubt deliberate reference to the famous work of the same title by Rodin. Geist has observed this antithesis on more than one occasion. In 1978 he stated: "With The Kiss of 1907, on every score the antithesis of The Kiss of Rodin, he turns against the master of
Meudon." He reiterated this in 1978 when he stated: "The two works . . . constitute a paradigm of artistic polarity." The nature of this oppositional paradigm is important as it gives an insight into Brancusi's reaction to time, history and contemporary myths.

It has been noted in the discussion of Burnham's work that history and mythological systems contain inimicable concepts of time. The first is diachronic, the latter synchronic. It has also been noted that Brancusi was operating within an avant garde that was very conscious of its own history. Yet, Brancusi created an image that is a negation of history. As Geist stated in an earlier quote, the Kiss seems to spring from nowhere. It appears, in fact, outside of time and history. Both primitive and modern, the Kiss does not follow from Rodin's developments, or even from those of Rosso and Bourdelle, but is rather a denial of that history. It compresses all the time from the origin of sculpture to the present. Brancusi referred to this concept with the phrase "time's reverse pendulum." This synchronic attitude towards time in which historical progression is suppressed or inverted is one of the primary features of mythic or primitive thought, and as has been stated, separates it from modern, scientific and historically oriented thought. It seems then, fortuitous that Brancusi was able to enter the avant garde in Paris at a time when their attention was focused on primitive art. He could thus align himself with the avant garde in its conscious historical progression, and at the same time, deny this. The full implications of Brancusi's synchronic system and its relation to the avant garde can, however, only be analysed after the entire oeuvre has
been examined.

Some suggestion of Brancusi's response to Rodin and to the history of sculpture can be suggested at this point, however, by referring to Lévi-Strauss, who points out in *The Savage Mind*: "The characteristic feature of mythological thought . . . is that it sets up structured sets . . . by using the remains and debris of events: . . . (the) fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or society." Direct references to Rodin did not immediately disappear from Brancusi's stone sculpture following the *Kiss*, but remained present in a declining scale until about 1914. In each case, however, these references take on a very specific meaning and are, like those in the *Kiss*, undoubtedly deliberate, although the later ones have not been noted by past observers.

Like the historical reference to Rodin, the form and content of the *Kiss* are also composed of a series of mythic oppositions. The first of these concerns the opposition of the sexes, which, as has been stated, is a common concern of mythological systems. Through a brilliant formal and technical conception, Brancusi has been able to present the dual-ities of male and female in both conjunction and disjunction, as both distinct and unified. The *Kiss* both states the opposition and forms the resolution of it in terms of a mediation: the work itself contains both joined in generative sexual activity. Brancusi has stated this by little more than incising two embracing figures into a rectangular stone block. The pair of lovers are joined internally at the eye and mouth, and through their overlapping arms. Furthermore, all anatomical differences except for a slight definition of the female breast, have
been suppressed. The two figures are divided only by a single incised cleft running through them, a line which both divides and unifies.\textsuperscript{23} The sexes are thus presented as both differentiated and non-differentiated, or continuous. By totally rejecting the sculptural approaches of both Rodin and his own thorough academic training, and adopting that of the avant garde as expressed by Picasso, Derain and Gauguin, Brancusi realized his conception and stated simultaneously both the problem of and solution to the opposition of the sexes. Technical process thereby complemented conception, a mastery and balance which he retained throughout his career.\textsuperscript{24}

The dualistic conceptions incorporated in the image and execution of the \textit{Kiss} are not exclusively sexual. The respect which Brancusi has shown for the inherent form of the quarried block of stone has been interpreted as "a close communion with the nature of his materials."\textsuperscript{25} The idea of nature, although here in the sense of all that is not culture, is very important in Lévi-Strauss' theories.\textsuperscript{26} Burnham was correct in pointing out that the primary duality of primitive mythological systems is that of the opposition between culture and nature. In the \textit{Kiss}, nature, which is non-differentiated, can be seen as expressed in the non-defined raw material—the stone block before it was carved. Culture is expressed in the image imposed on the stone which gives it definition. The image transforms what was nature, i.e., non-differentiated rock, into culture, i.e., mythic art object. The balance and resolution of these oppositions is again contained in the combination of materials and carving, as was that of the sexes. Both oppositions have been solved
by a transformation, and both are part of the "densely packed invention" of the Kiss.

These oppositions are, moreover, related. Both involve the concept of creation, in the first instance sexual creation, in the latter, artistic. In the first a new life is created, in the other, a new work of art. One involves the joining of man and woman; the other, the union of the artist and his materials. In either instance, the dualism of nature and culture is evoked. What de Caso and Sanders state about Rodin's work holds true for Brancusi's. The nudes in Rodin's work "became a symbol of un tarnished, primal nature; the act of kissing was a prelude to mankind's participation in the generative forces of the universe." Two parallel (yet fundamentally related) notions of creation thus occur in the Kiss. As will be seen, Brancusi goes on in his later work to separate these conceptions and explore them individually, before resolving them through a mediating work.

As the context of a second version of the Kiss is added to that of the first, the coherent system of dualistic conceptions becomes more complex, but maintains its inherent rationality. A 1909 Kiss, slightly different from the original in that it contains full figures rather than fragments, was chosen by 1910 as the grave marker for an acquaintance of Brancusi. Having committed suicide, due to an unhappy love affair, she was buried in the annex to Montparnasse Cemetery. The use of the work as a headstone, although not part of its original conception, added to its significance and seems to have influenced subsequent developments. As Lévi-Strauss points out, position always plays an integral part in
the interpretation of "primitive" images. The use of the **Kiss** in this manner was not arbitrary. Brancusi had not yet publicly exhibited it and could easily have refused, rather than concurred in this choice. It must be assumed that he saw its use not as incongruous, but as complementary to his conception. As a tombstone, the Montparnasse **Kiss** is a sign of death and termination. The visual and contextual ambiguity created by using an image of life and rebirth, i.e., continuation of life, resolves another important and unpleasant opposition inherent in empirical existence. On another, but related level, after death the body decays and joins non-differentiated nature; the **Kiss**, as has been stated, reverses this process. The unpleasant reality of death and its consequences thus seems to have been overcome through both sexual and artistic creation.

Thus, as the formal link between the **Kiss** and primitive sculpture is obvious, the conceptual link between the former and the basic forms of "primitive" mythologies can again be understood by referring to Lévi-Strauss. He explains that primitive mythology commonly overcomes the question of immortality and mortality by giving culture (i.e., art) permanence while remaining pragmatic about individuals.

Indeed, if we think of the image of the **Kiss** as mythic, the conceptual role of the sculpture becomes clearer. As Lévi-Strauss points out in *Structural Anthropology*, "what gives . . . myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future." The purpose of a myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction.
The **Kiss** is such a model. It establishes a sequence of related opposites codified in a single but "densely packed" statement. The oppositions may best be stated graphically.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{nature} \\
\uparrow \\
\text{non-differentiation} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{non-distinguished} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{sexes} \\
\uparrow \\
\text{death} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{material matrix} \\
\text{and} \\
\text{dissolution} \\
\updownarrow \\
\text{male and female} = \\
\text{life} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{art object} \\
\text{sexual+creation→artistic} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{differentiation} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{culture}
\end{array}
\]

These linked pairs of oppositions, to be fully appreciated as units of "mythic" or "primitive" thought, must not be seen as simple themes, but as integrated philosophical propositions present in all aspects of the work—conception, execution, form and position. They only become coherent when the work is examined as a totality. Their presence indicates a highly intellectual mind, but one working within the framework of "primitive" thought, in which problems and propositions are
stated in a series of related equations, oppositions, and transformations between binary elements.

A final opposition observable in the *Kiss* may indicate another source for the philosophical infrastructure of Brancusi's sculptural system. Timeless stone lovers are frozen in a marble block in the act of conceiving a new life. This states the dualism of inert material and active life forces. Henri Bergson devoted some time to various aspects of the resolution of such concepts, including that of *élan vitale* and material existence. *Creative Evolution*, in which he explored aspects of this problem, was first published in 1907, the year before Brancusi's *Kiss* was being completed.

This book, as well as his study on *Matière et Memoire* (1898) are, in fact, both present in Brancusi's personal library and papers, now preserved in Paris in the archives of the Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou. Both books explore dualistic concepts. The opening lines of Bergson's introduction to the seventeenth edition of *Matière et Memoire* states: "Ce livre affirme la réalité de l'esprit, la réalité de la matière, et essaie de déterminer le rapport de l'un à l'autre sur un example précis, celui de la mémoire. Il est donc nettement dualiste." Many specific ideas found in these writings, such as the opposition between matter and spirit and matter and *élan vitale* are clearly evident in the *Kiss* and Brancusi's subsequent work.

Despite the affinity of ideas, the influence of Bergson's books on Brancusi's formative period is difficult to prove from available information. Each edition in his library was published in 1914.
Brancusi, in keeping with his illiterate background, read little. Many of the books in his library remain with pages uncut; Bergson's are no exception. *Matière et Memoire* has less than one hundred pages opened. *Creative Evolution* appears untouched. Still, their presence and the correspondence of ideas is significant as a possible influence and source of ideas. It remains possible that the works replaced earlier ones lost in a move or for other reasons, especially as little in the archives collection predates 1914. Brancusi also may, as a student, have attended Bergson's lectures at the College de France, which were both highly popular and open to the public. Perhaps significantly, these lectures ceased in the year Brancusi's editions were published.

Brancusi would certainly have encountered Bergson's widely distributed ideas in discussions, as Bergson was at the height of his popularity between 1900 and 1914. Indeed, many observers have pointed out his profound influence on avant garde sculpture and particularly Brancusi during this period. Referring to a quote from Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1903), Geist states, "This language and whole essay so exactly define the Brancusian area of expression that we are tempted to think that the sculptor found in them not only an inspiration but a kind of program." Albert Elsen also states in this vein: "Henri Bergson may have been for Brancusi what Baudelaire was to Rodin. Brancusi's art was responsive to the climate in Paris, influenced by Bergson, that saw life as lived in the irrational, expressed in vital urges, and which affirmed intuition as a reliable path to truth."
Brancusi's use of Bergson's ideas as a basis for developing his own sculptural language has special significance. Arnold Hauser has pointed out that:

The French critic Jean Paulhan differentiates between two distinct categories of writers, according to their relationship to language. He calls the language-destroyers, that is to say, the romantics, symbolists and surrealists who want to eliminate the commonplace, conventional forms and ready-made clichés from language completely and who take refuge from the dangers of language in pure, virginal, original inspiration, the "terrorists." They fight against all consolidation and coagulation of the living, fluid, intimate life of the mind, against all externalization and institutionalization, in other words, against all 'culture'. Paulhan links them up with Bergson and establishes the influence of intuitionism and the theory of the 'élan vital' in their attempt to preserve the directness and originality of the spiritual experience. The other camp, that is the writers who know perfectly well that commonplaces and clichés are the price of mutual understanding . . . he calls the 'rhetoricians'.

To what extent Brancusi's language constituted an act of cultural terrorism or rhetoric can also only be analysed after the entire oeuvre has been examined.
Footnotes: Chapter II


2. "The work is easily divisible into two clearly marked phases: the student and early works up to the Prayer, and the mature period beginning soon after." Geist, 1975, p. 14.


4. For example: Wisdom of the Earth, 1908; Head, 1908; Sleeping Child, 1908; Danaide, 1907-1908; Baroness R.F., 1909; Torso, 1909.


8. Ibid., pp. 40, 42.


8b. Ibid., p. 69.


10. Ibid., p. 40.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., pp. 27-30.

13. Ibid., pp. 29-30. Geist elaborates more extensively on Brancusi's socialist sympathies in 1975, and discusses them in terms of the Redskins, Portrait of M.S. Lupesco, as well as in the Penguins. Geist, 1975, p. 19.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p. 114.


20. Geist says "Rodin's protagonists . . . imply a past and a future. . . . [Brancusi's] Kiss is enacted in an eternal present, without memory or anticipation." Geist, 1968, p. 142. See also "The Kiss should turn us away from European traditions back towards more primitive origins." Lewis, p. 14.


21a. Perhaps the best description of this important distinction occurs in Robert Florida, "The Girl Who Married the Bear," in Religion and Culture in Canada, essays by members of the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion, 1979, pp. 82-83:
"In "The Structural Study of Myth"', Lévi-Strauss argues that myth operates on two scales: the diachronic and the synchronic. On the diachronic scale the narrative forges along from event to event in chronological sequence whilst on the synchronic scale time stands still or collapses upon itself, as it were. "On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future . . . Thus myth has a double structure, altogether historical and ahistorical." The equation between these two terms should not be thought of as equal, for as "the story line of the myth is diachronic, . . . the structure conveys the synchronous or timeless meaning."

For a further discussion of time in myth as opposed to history see Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, Chapter XI, "The Structural Study of Myth," pp. 206-231.


22. See Lewis, p. 12.

23. Such a line was also used in the uprights for the Gate of the Kiss and was interpreted as signifying "the form of two cells that meet and create life . . . The beginning of life . . . through love." Brancusi confirmed this interpretation. Malvina Hoffman, p. 53.

24. Krauss, Tucker and Geist have sufficiently demonstrated that Brancusi's work was never consistently about the inherent qualities of his materials. These were, rather, emphasised or repressed as the occasion and conception demanded. See, in particular, Geist, 1968, pp. 158-161.
25. Lewis, p. 27.

26. "... l'art constitue, au plus haut point, cette prise de possession de la nature par la culture." Lévi-Strauss in Charbonnier, p. 130.


27. "A native thinker makes the penetrating comment that "all sacred things must have their place." It could even be said that being in their place is what makes them sacred for if they were taken out of their place, even in thought, the entire order of the universe would be destroyed." Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 10. To what extent this explains Brancusi's propensity for keeping his work together in his studio both before and after his death can only be surmised.

28. Leach's comment on this aspect of mythological thought is worth citing at length.

"Another 'contradiction' of a comparable kind [to that of the origin of life and the problem of incest] is that the concept of life entails the concept of death; a living thing is that which is not dead, a dead thing is that which is not alive. But religion endeavours to separate these two intrinsically interdependent concepts so that we have myths which account for the origin [author's emphasis] of death or which represent death as 'the gateway to eternal life'. Lévi-Strauss has argued that when we are considering the universalist aspects of primitive mythology we shall repeatedly discover that the hidden message is concerned with the resolution of unwelcome contradictions of this sort. The repetitions and prevarications of mythology so fog the issue that irresolvable logical inconsistencies are lost sight of even when they are openly expressed." Edmund Leach, Lévi-Strauss (Glasgow: Fontana, 1970) Revised Edition, 1974, p. 58.

29. See Leach, pp. 58 and 65.


32. Ibid., p. i.

33. Much of this material was lost or stolen before the transfer of the studio to the Musée. Geist, 1978, note 27, p. 100.


36. Ibid.

37. Albert Elsen, Origins of Modern Sculpture, Pioneers and Premises (Oxford: Phaidon, 1974), p. 23. "Bergson's ideas were also at the core of the Abbaye de Cretiel group. . . . By 1911 the Bergsonian view—no doubt often blurred or simplified—was the common property of the avant-garde. . . . The publications of the Abbaye circle between 1908 and 1912 demonstrate beyond a doubt the importance to their entire approach of the Bergsonian view." Christopher Green, Leger and the Avant Garde (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 25.

CHAPTER III

After carving the first Kiss, Brancusi began to develop his oeuvre with two series of stone heads. The sequence of the first of these has been established by Geist, Tucker, et al. They have generally ordered this series by formal similarities, that is, by placing the works in metaphorical sequence. When both form and content are examined structurally, however, it can be demonstrated that a secondary code of meaning also joins the works. Indeed, this meaning can be formulated with such precision that the existence of certain key works can be predicted in advance. Lévi-Strauss has, at one point in the analysis of formal and contextual elements of primitive art, indicated that predictability is the proof of the efficacy of the methodology. At certain points, then, the concerns of the series will be assessed, and their inherent logical progressions used to project the qualities of following works. The success of the analysis can be measured by the degree to which all the details of these works can be foretold.

Brancusi initiated the first series with the Sleeper of 1908. A veiled and withdrawn visage, represented naturalistically, is half embedded and half emerging from a roughly hewn marble block. The contrast between image and material, as opposed to their conjunction in the Kiss, is significant. Employing technical and representational means precisely inverting those of the Kiss, Brancusi again refers to the
process of raw material taking shape and definition through the artist's touch—or, in other terms, the emergence of culture (i.e., art object) from nature (i.e., non-differentiated material matrix) through the mediation of the image creating artist. Thus, while inverting the abstraction of the *Kiss*, Brancusi still restates the central problem and proposition common to both otherwise dissimilar sculptures. In linguistic terms, the code has been altered, but the message remains the same.

That is, however, not the only correspondence between the *Kiss* and the *Sleeper*. The latter also bears a formal similarity to works by Rodin: the *Aurora* of 1885, and the *Muse* of c. 1900. By creating two works, both related to Rodin, but using opposing modes of representation, Brancusi states his opposition to historical sculptural evolution. He again compresses and brackets time by bringing together the styles of the earliest and most distant cultures and one from contemporary experience. In so doing, he again announces his intention to be timeless, outside of time, synchronic rather than diachronic. This tension between the temporal and the eternal, with the emphasis on the latter, can be observed throughout his work.

But the *Sleeper* does more than just restate old themes. It also introduces new philosophical ideas to those expressed in the *Kiss*. The *Sleeper*'s head, embedded in a material matrix, and only half formed, is imprisoned, unable to move. The title and the forms thus denote unconsciousness and immobility. If the assumptions of the methodology are correct, a direct inference to consciousness and mobility must also be
present, although not necessarily explicit at this point. They must, however, be present in the oeuvre as a whole, and, in fact, occur in the next work. As with the elements of the Kiss, we must again turn to Bergson for a contemporary discussion and source of these ideas. Indeed Bergson analysed the dualistic opposition and relations between consciousness, as expressed through sensory awareness, and unconsciousness, as expressed in sleep. Moreover, he discussed these ideas in terms of mobility and immobility, and ultimately in terms of the opposition between matter and spirit. This discussion occupies much of both Matière et Memoire and Creative Evolution. Bergson's hypothesis explains both the nature of the Sleeper and establishes the premises of the following work.

Bergson opens his first chapter of Matière et Memoire, "De la selection des images pour le representation—le role du: corps" with a statement about states of perception.

Nous allons feindre pour un instant que nous de connaissions rien des theories de la matiére et des theories de l'esprit, rien des discussions sur la réalité ou l'idéalité du monde extérieur. Me voici donc en presence d'images, au sens le plus vague ou l'on puisse prendre ce mot, images perçues quand j'ouvre mes sens, imperçues quand je les ferme.3

But more to the point, in the second chapter of Creative Evolution, Bergson discusses at length the opposition between consciousness and mobility and sleep and immobility in terms of the evolutionary process. In Bergson's philosophy, these concepts appear at either end of the polar axis of creative evolution. He postulates that they are in fact the defining characteristics which separate animal from plant life. Furthermore, human and animal life are separated in that humans have a
conscious intelligence above mere animal instinct. This intelligence, which allows for the power of motion and control of the material world, is unique to the species and resides in the brain, medulla and nervous system of the human physiognomy.

We have already said that the animals and vegetables must have separated soon from their common stock, the vegetable falling asleep in immobility, the animal, on the contrary, becoming more and more awake and marching on to the conquest of the nervous system.4

... the whole evolution of the animal kingdom, apart from retrogressions towards vegetative life, has taken place in two divergent paths, one of which led to instinct and the other to intelligence.

... intelligence is likely to point towards consciousness, and instinct towards nonconsciousness.

... the human species ... represents the culminating point of the evolution of the vertebrates. (p. 141)

But as Bergson says, humans may degenerate down the scale of evolution by becoming, like plants, asleep. This statement in the content of the Sleeper would lead us to expect a simultaneous and corresponding statement in the form. This is, in fact, the case. It will be recalled that evolutions occurs over time. In Bergson's view, "The more we study the nature of time, the more we shall comprehend that duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continuous elaboration of the absolutely new."4b The Sleeper is, however, unlike the Kiss, not so. It is rather, in Bergson's terms, parasitic like a human that degenerates down the evolutionary ladder, in that its form retrogresses by being borrowed directly from Rodin. This, both the form and the content of the Sleeper, signify two aspects of Bergson's concept of evolutionary retrogression; its form flows against the evolution of time, its content
flows against the evolution of consciousness.

The importance of the foregoing to the present discussion is that it establishes deeper links between the *Sleeper* and the *Kiss* in terms of élan vitale and creative evolution. While the *Kiss* seems to demonstrate the active part of this principle, the *Sleeper* contains the negative side. Furthermore, it would appear that if the correspondence between the subject of the *Sleeper* and the contemporary concerns of Bergson's philosophy are correct, then Brancusi has repeated the process evident in the *Kiss* of drawing an image from his environment, specifically a work by Rodin, and, by isolating it in the context of his personal oeuvre, endowing it with a new philosophical significance, corresponding to Bergson's ideas. Brancusi's series of heads is beginning to emerge as a philosophical as well as a sculptural discourse.

The formal (or metaphorical) and thematic (or metonymical) relations between sculptural units placed in a coded, semantic series become operative with the head following the *Sleeper*: the *Muse* of 1909. The complex relationships between sculptures, as expressed in the transformations, parallels and oppositions inherent in the forms and contents of each, now come into play.

As with the *Kiss* and the *Sleeper*, Brancusi again draws on Rodin for inspiration for the *Muse*. The connection is however, more contemporary and of a diminishing nature. It seems to come from two sources: The *Muse* of about 1900, previously mentioned, and a bronze group, *Le Sculpteur et sa Muse*, which Rodin exhibited in 1908 at the Société Nouvelle de Peintures et Sculptures. Brancusi could not have been
unaware of these works. The latter was described in the Studio. As this constitutes an objective description and contains several important points, it will be cited here. It is assumed that Studio's vision was shared across the Channel.

A sculptor is here presented to us seated, the elbow resting on his knee and the hand supporting the bent head, his face wearing an expression of sadness or even anguish, betraying a state of great mental tension—a longing for emancipation. The female figure is symbolical of youth, of inspiration—it is Iris the messenger of the gods, who seems to be guarding something imponderable, something celestial.5

Both the idea of a "messenger from the gods" and the idea of "guarding something imponderable, something celestial" are conveyed by Brancusi's Muse of the following year. As will be seen, the element of suffering, particularly as it applies to artistic creation is also isolated and explored in other works, as is ultimately that of emancipation and liberation. But the significance of Rodin's group goes much further than this. Le Sculpteur et sa Muse was a statement of Rodin's beliefs on the correlation between sexual and artistic creation. De Caso and Sanders point out that,

It remained for Rodin to make this erotic relationship between muse and artist explicit. He wrote to his good friend, Helene von Nostitz: "A gentle woman is the mighty intermediary between God and us artists..." He saw sexual love as a way to artistic achievement: "I have heard the bellowing of my spirit in battle for woman. I have spied on myself in my moments of passions, of the intoxication of love, and I have studied them for my art...." In The Sculptor and His Muse, this association is clearly expressed; the muse, who stimulates the sculptor sexually while she whispers in his ear, has both erotic and intellectual powers.5a

As we shall see, Brancusi's Muse also states the relation between sexual and artistic creation in terms of a mediation between man and the gods.
But while Brancusi draws on Rodin for his inspiration and his ideas, he also states them in a highly personal form, that is in many ways the reversal of Rodin, and adds several other layers of meaning drawn primarily from Bergson.

In opposition to the \textit{Sleeper}, the \textit{Muse} again breaks with Rodin's sculptural concerns. Brancusi returns to an abstracted conception, that of a stylized head lying on its side. Although recognizably female by the delicately delineated features, and the texturing representing hair, the surface of the work is almost undisturbed. Brancusi has emphasised the underlying ovoidal, egg-like form by reducing figurative articulation. The head can thus not be thought of as a Rodinesque anatomical or sculptural fragment. Conversely, the \textit{Muse} has been observed as a singular form, complete in itself.\footnote{This is not to say that the \textit{Muse} is self-referential. Like all the works in Brancusi's oeuvre, it takes its significance from its relationship to the others in the sculptural system. Indeed, it can be demonstrated that the \textit{Muse} is a precise, yet complex, inversion and opposition to the \textit{Sleeper} on every level.}

For example, the \textit{Muse} again refers to Bergson's dualistic conception of perception as expressed in consciousness and unconsciousness. Indeed, this reference here becomes far more explicit. The eyes of the \textit{Muse}, open in the original marble version, were polished in subsequent bronze casts to appear closed. The reference to the "opening and closing of the senses" cited from Bergson in reference to the \textit{Sleeper}, is now complete. In opposition to the \textit{Sleeper}, then, the original \textit{Muse} is conscious.
The correspondence and opposition of conception between the two works exists, however, on both the contextual and formal level. The Muse, being conscious, is, if Bergson's ideas apply, theoretically mobile and able to act on its environment. As an expression of this state, Brancusi has freed the head from the material matrix, the quarried rock, which enmeshed and immobilized the Sleeper. The Muse, with eyes and senses either open or closed, is never unconscious. Rather it is "guarding something imponderable," and pregnant with a creative mystery. Its vision is turned inwards, not extinguished as in the Sleeper. Nonetheless, the relationship between the eyes must be seen as linking the two sculptures. In this case, the ambiguity of vision, rather than the visual ambiguity, allows the dual nature of the Muse to mediate between the opposing states of light and dark and by extension, between those of sleep and consciousness. This is confirmed by Brancusi's use of an alternative image of the Muse which was upright and aware. This work will be discussed in more depth in a different context as it is not generally associated with this series.

Another set of complex oppositions indicate that the treatment of the reverse side of the Muse has an importance equal to that of the face. It will be recalled that the balance between figure and ground (or in this case rock) from which the visage emerges was essential to the interpretation of the Sleeper. There, the rough hewn marble behind the face was read not only as signifying non-differentiated material (nature) but also as immobility. If the two works can be related in sequence, and similar units compared, then it can be seen that the non-defined rock
behind the head of the \textit{Sleeper} has been transformed in the \textit{Muse} into an ordered series of striations representing hair and a circular motif at the base of the skull—a chignon. This, in itself, is not clearly significant, although it implies the complete imposition of order (i.e., culture) on non-differentiated nature.\textsuperscript{7} The treatment of the hair can, however, also be read as the image of a human brain with the chignon appearing as the medulla: a visual pun playing on a similarity of image or sign.\textsuperscript{7a} It has already been established that in Bergson's philosophy, the medulla and brain order non-differentiated nature as they are the centre of sensory perception (consciousness) and of mobility.\textsuperscript{8} The senses perceive divisions in an otherwise continuous material world, of which they are part, and put it in order by inspiring action on it. Thus the double reading of the hair as also brain/medulla is rationally and philosophically related to the open eyes and the freedom from the imprisoning material matrix which separate the \textit{Muse} from the \textit{Sleeper}. Graphically, one can see that as

\begin{align*}
\text{material matrix (nature)} &= \text{unconsciousness, immobility} \\
\text{so conversely} & \\
\text{hair, chignon (medulla)} &= \text{culture, consciousness, mobility}.
\end{align*}

The oppositions evident in the front of the sculpture have been restated and provided with an ambiguous mediating element in the form of a visual pun which allows for a conceptual transformation between them. The treatment of the front and back of the \textit{Muse} are thus coherently and conceptually integrated and represent solutions to problems of a nature well beyond that of the purely formal or sculptural.
Some further explanation of this interpretation is necessary, however, to understand the process by which these important transformations are effected. Puns are based on ambiguities or double meanings in signs, or in similarities between them which disguise their difference and allow them to be interchanged in a play on words. The success of this operation often depends on the context. Thus the treatment of the textured hair is sufficiently ambiguous as a visual sign to be interpreted also as representing a brain/medulla. A double reading is possible, as both hair and brain lie back of the face, that is they are related by context. Similarly, the same ambiguity in the textured surface is related to the texture of the rock in the Sleeper, which also lies behind the head, and thereby shares in the same context. The internal coherence of this system leads to the expectation of a direct relationship, both contextually and conceptually, between quarry stone and brain/medulla. This has been shown to exist by referring to Bergson, in which they have a common context in that they refer, in the sculptures, to the problem of mobility/immobility and consciousness/unconsciousness. Such a triple layered visual pun, depending as it does on the overlay of an outside philosophical system, would seem excessively subjective, if it were not corroborated by a corresponding verbal pun of which Brancusi, as a sculptor would have undoubtedly been aware. In French, medulla is moelle. Quarry stone, or rubble rock, is moellon. Both visual and verbal signifiers are close enough to be almost interchangeable when the context warrants it, despite the difference in meaning. This double correspondence between the visual and the verbal places the interpretation
outside the realm of the fortuitous, the accidental or the subjective. But Brancusi's use of this pun is of a special nature; it is not simply humor, a play on words, although in this sense the _Muse_ does in fact amuse. The elaborate pun allows dualistic concepts diametrically opposed to be transformed into each other through ambiguous mediating semantic units. The _Sleeper_ is unconsciousness and immobility expressed in terms of non-differentiated materiality. Conversely, the _Muse_ is consciousness and mobility expressed in terms of ordered and differentiated material. The ambiguities in the units signifying these states allow one to be transformed into the other, the contradiction is overcome.

The significance of this relationship to that between the unique form of the _Muse_ and the copied form of the _Sleeper_ is clarified by returning it to Brancusi's relation with Rodin and Bergson. It has been indicated that the _Sleeper_ descends Bergson's evolutionary scale towards the unconsciousness and immobility of plant life. Conversely, the _Muse_ ascends the scale towards consciousness and mobility. But Bergson's concept of creative evolution goes beyond that, it also involves a continued quest for new forms, for absolute originality on the part of the spirit directing evolution. Thus the _Sleeper_ again descends the scale as it is a copy of what was before. It regresses. The _Muse_, although based on a theme by Rodin, is, like the _Kiss_, an absolutely unique conception. No precedent is known for its form. The "absolute originality" of its form thus progresses even further up Bergson's scale. From this point onwards, Brancusi never again directly copies a form from Rodin. Thus all the units of the two works, taken from their source,
form and content are coherently related, if the influences of Rodin and Bergson are taken into account. The works maintain the conceptual relationship expressed in their constituent units and in their whole as diametric opposites, or a contradiction, reconciled through ambiguous mediating elements. This may be expressed graphically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Sleeper</th>
<th>Ambiguous Elements</th>
<th>The Muse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sleep</td>
<td>eyes open and closed in</td>
<td>consciousness sensory perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-sensory perception</td>
<td>darkness</td>
<td>light</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Formal Similarities:
both heads lie on their sides

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>immobility</th>
<th>verbal pun on</th>
<th>mobility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>non-differentiated material</td>
<td>moelle/moellon</td>
<td>differentiated, ordered material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visual pun on quarry stone, hair, brain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rodin copy of the past reference to Rodin in the Muse Brancusi absolute originality

All of these oppositions operate to form a larger opposition:

descent on the scale of creative evolution (all of the above) ascent on the scale of creative evolution (high)
The underlying ovoid of the Muse may however have added meaning. Unlike faceted geometric forms, ovoids have continuous, non-differentiated surfaces. Brancusi has interrupted the conceptual continuity of the ovoid by subtle surface articulation representing a face. The image is thus an opposition in which the discontinuous (i.e., the defined visage of the Muse) is emerging from the continuity beneath it. It is precisely this opposition with which Bergson opens Creative Evolution and the chapter on "Duration," and to which he devotes much of his study. Here, he discusses the opposition between the real continuity of perception and the apparent discontinuity of separate experience. This is explored both in terms of duration in time, and experience, and in material or space.12

Brancusi, too, will occupy much of his time with similar ideas, although his conclusions will be diametrically opposed to those of Bergson.

One of the metaphors Bergson uses for describing the apparent discontinuity of experience in the continuous duration and flow of time is the image of separate beads on a necklace, held together by a continuous thread.13 This may also apply to Brancusi's series of heads, which also appear as beads, strung together on a conceptual infrastructure.

These Bergsonian oppositions do not, however, constitute the entire significance of the Muse. Both the Kiss and Rodin's precedent lead to the expectation of a personal statement on the relationship between artistic and sexual powers. Furthermore, we expect a mediating element between these opposites. All of this is present in Brancusi's
Muse. The underlying egg form is an image of sexual creation. The superimposed, more specific, image of the Muse clearly represents artistic inspiration. The two opposing forms of creation are thus made metaphoric equivalents. They can be transformed into each other through their similarities. Indeed, it would seem that in the Muse they depend on each other for their existence. Brancusi has thus skillfully obscured the differences between them.

But he also chose to state this reconciled opposition by enclosing it within another; that of the sacred and the profane. The egg is profane and material, the muse is sacred and belongs to the 'other world' of the gods. Consequently, the muse does not alone seem to be the mediating link between these oppositions. Rather, it is again the artist which performs this function. The artist is at once in touch with the gods through his inspiration and at the same time, to the extent that his inspiration lies in his sexuality, he dwells in the profane realm. Thus in empirical reality, it is the artist which joins the sacred and the profane, and the sexual and the artistic. As shall be seen, Brancusi later makes this view, which he shares with Rodin, more explicit.

With the Muse, then, Brancusi seems to be maintaining and extending the concerns expressed in the Kiss. The Kiss sublimates artistic creation in an image of sexual creation. The Muse, conversely, sublimates sexual creation in the image of artistic creation. In both, the artist serves as mediator; in the first between nature and culture, in the second between the sacred and the profane. This parallel role leads
to the expectation of a direct correlation linking the two oppositions. Lévi-Strauss points out that such an equation between the two dualities does in fact exist in mythological systems. In his extended analysis of two Greek myths of Zeus and Europa and of Minos and the Minotaur, he reaches the conclusion that the underlying structure of each states that a logical equation between nature and culture parallels that between gods and man.  

Thus three things become evident. A direct relationship exists between the Muse and the Kiss that is not evident from any formal similarity between the two. The position of the latter as the conceptual cornerstone of the oeuvre is thus confirmed. Secondly, these correlations are to be found expressed in terms of oppositions, parallels, and transformations, that is, concrete logic. It becomes clear then, that although Brancusi is drawing on the contemporary sources of Rodin and Bergson, he is translating them into terms of primitive thought. Thirdly, an exalted role of the artist as joining the sexual with the artistic and the sacred with the profane is beginning to emerge. The Kiss lacks only the element of suffering, also stated in Rodin's Le Sculpteur et sa Muse, to make the correspondence complete. As will be seen this too emerges, and becomes explicit as the oeuvre develops.

The themes expressed in the Kiss, the Sleeper and the Muse thus allow, in a small way, a limited prediction of the next work in the series. Several expectations arise. All three works have had to do, in some way, with the duality of consciousness and unconsciousness. This has been expressed largely in terms of the eyes, that is the
perception of light. A similar theme should also occupy the next work. Similarly, the concept of movement, or the ability to shape the environment through consciousness has also been prevalent. This too, should occur. The idea of sexual creation must occur and be expressed in opposition to artistic creation. If the relevance of Rodin is correct, the latter should involve an element of suffering. There must also be an opposition expressed in terms of the sacred and the profane, and ultimately, in terms of nature and culture. Finally, the Bergsonian dualism of élan vitale, or of spirit and matter must be present. Without these continued themes, the following work could not be thought of as a continued discussion of the ideas expressed so far. New ideas may, however, still be introduced.

Brancusi produced two more heads following the Muse in 1911. Both have titles drawn from Greek mythology: Prometheus and the Danaide. Although the two are also formally similar, only the former is usually placed in series with the Muse. The established precedent will be followed here.

The Prometheus is directly related to the Muse in both form and content. Brancusi has transformed the unitary ovoid of the Muse into the spherical shape of Prometheus. This sphere is disturbed on the lower side by the addition of a shoulder. The head of the titan falls on the shoulder in a gesture of torment which had preoccupied Brancusi for some time. It will also be recalled that the male figure in Rodin's Artist and his Muse was also depicted as suffering. Brancusi has avoided, however, all the expressionistic possibilities depicted in Prometheus'
suffering, except the posture of the head. The facial features, rather than being contorted, are even more refined than those of the Muse. Indeed, the lips, nose and eyes are barely visible. Like the Muse, Prometheus presents a visage that hovers between continuous and discontinuous surface articulation. This will be seen to carry the same message as in the Muse.

In both subject and execution, the Muse and Prometheus have identical relationships to the work of Rodin. But again, Brancusi has gone to greater lengths to emphasize the polar opposition between himself and Rodin. This is visible in the expression or rather the expressionless visage of Prometheus with its tight lipped mouth, which suffers in silence. On the other hand, the "open mouth [was] a favorite device of Rodin's for expressing anguish." 15a

The formal similarities and the common point of origin between the Muse and Prometheus would seem to indicate that the two should be seen as apposites rather than opposites. This would indicate, in turn, that they express parallel concepts rather than contradictions. As the form of one is transformed into the form of the other, so should the concepts of one become those of the other. This is found to be precisely the case when the content of the Prometheus is examined and compared with that of the Muse.

As has been pointed out in the earlier discussion of the Muse, the mythological reference of the title of Prometheus is fundamental to the conception of the piece and its relationships with the other units in the system. The rationality of the relationships appears when the
myths are broken down, through a process outlined by Lévi-Strauss, into their constituent units. As Leach points out, "Lévi-Strauss assumes that myth (any myth) can readily be broken up into segments or incidents, and that everyone familiar with the story will agree as to what these incidents are." Or, as Lévi-Strauss states, "Myth like the rest of language, is made up of constituent units." He calls these gross constituent units of meaning mythemes. The object of mythological analysis, as has previously been demonstrated in the Kiss, is to find and isolate the mythemes in order to establish their relationships in the underlying synchronic structure of the myth. It is generally agreed that these reveal diametric opposites which are resolved through mediating elements. These resolutions are frequently effected through logical inversions or transformations in states. It is not, however, possible to analyse the Prometheus myth completely according to this methodology. Constraints of space make it necessary to proceed directly to the conclusion.

The units which constitute the Prometheus story, as it would have have been known to Brancusi, are well known. The primary incident involves Prométheus stealing the sacred fire of the gods from heaven and bringing it to the darkened, chaotic world of precivilized man. An opposition between the sacred and the profane worlds lies: clearly at the heart of this incident. Prométheus and the fire (light) are the mediating elements between the realms. By violating the taboo of the gods, Prométheus endowed humanity with the power over nature which allowed for the creation of culture. A second opposition, between nature and
culture, thus emerges in this transformation. A series of three parallel and equivalent opposites emerges, nature is to culture as the gods are to man and as dark is to light. These oppositions, it will be recalled, are present in the Muse as well. In this case, however, it is Prometheus rather than the inspiring Muse which mediates between them. As will be shown, however, the Muse and the titan are also equivalents, or at least so close to being such as to obscure their differences.

The next incident in the myth has Prometheus teaching humanity civilization and the arts. This confirms the link between artistic creation and the sacred expressed in the Muse. The artist, although part of humanity, is again seen as in touch with the gods, and mediates between the two realms. Simultaneously, the artist transforms material (nature) into culture (art) and thus mediates between them as well. Both Prometheus and the Muse are operators in the transformation of art from the divine realm to the profane. They are equivalents.

The correspondence between the two myths and sculptures can, however, be carried further, by re-introducing the problems of sexual creation (the opposite of divine creation) and of élan vitale which contains the opposition between material and life force or spirit. The latter relationship is found in another incident of the Prometheus myth. According to several versions, Prometheus not only created culture but also humanity. "Prometheus took some . . . earth, and kneading it up with water, made man in the image of the gods."18 Thus the titan creates life in a similar fashion to the manner in which a sculptor creates form. The correspondence between the (suffering) artist and the (suffering) god
is reinforced. This segment also restates and resolves the Bergsonian paradox—that of the origin for duality of life and inert material—by offering a mythological solution. Unlike Bergson's evolutionary concept, which is historically and scientifically oriented, i.e., diachronic, Brancusi's occurs in mythic time and space. It is, therefore, synchronic, outside of time, and anti-scientific.

It has been stated that the Muse contains a reference to sexual procreation in its underlying form. So does Prometheus. As the mythical Muse is based on the ovoid of an egg, so the titan Prometheus is based on the head of an infant. Indeed, as the Muse is the origin of artistic inspiration, and artistic inspiration is linked to sexual creation (Rodin's Sculpture and his Muse has the Muse with her hand placed on the artist's genitals), so Prometheus is the origin of sexual creation. It will be recalled that in the latter part of the myth, Zeus gives Pandora, the first woman, to the man created by Prometheus. The opposition between artistic creation and sexual creation is thus being obscured so thoroughly as to be indistinguishable. As will be seen, however, these are not the only problems of sexuality that it is necessary to solve in terms of obscured differences.

Brancusi gives the Prometheus myth new significance by isolating it from the context of classical mythology and placing it in a semantic system comprised of his own emerging oeuvre. One would not, for example in an analysis of Greek mythology, associate the mythological figures and stories associated with the Muse and Prometheus. Yet Brancusi has
placed them together and emphasised their similarity by making the units representing them almost interchangeable. The relationships of the units of each, although in an unusual context, still operate on a level common to that of mythology, although they express Brancusi's own philosophic and artistic concerns.

It has become evident that the correspondence between the Muse and Prometheus is, beyond the superficial resemblances, highly complex, but perfectly rational. As in the case between the Muse and the Sleeper, the relationship between the Muse and Prometheus operates on all levels. As terms in a semantic system the two works are virtually interchangeable. They utilize similar forms, similar content and identical problems. Their relationship with the Kiss is also identical. They signify the same concepts. In addition, as will be seen, subtle alterations, such as the progression from the ovoid of an egg to the spheroid of a child's head, produce a subtle shift in meaning which is necessary to preserve the logical continuity of the developing system and to assist in the movement to the next work in the series.

The semantic chain composed of linked sculptural units, of which Prometheus is part, continues with a portrait of a child called George, also from 1911. Because of formal and technical disparities, George is not always included in this series. As a commissioned portrait, its existence would appear contingent, rather than based on the persistent logical necessity inherent in the works examined so far. It must be kept in mind, however, that Brancusi has been shown to use and choose his style and technique according to what he wishes to express. It also
seems that Brancusi by this time, had narrowed his production to two or three new works a year, rather than the endless studies executed prior to 1907. He was accepting only those commissions which complemented his integrated conceptions. George is, in fact, not only a portrait, but also the culmination of a long series of children's heads on which Brancusi had been working for many years. It must, then, despite apparent disparities, be included as an important and integral part of the oeuvre under consideration.

George is male by title rather than form. The eyes are closed. The arms, with abstracted fingerless hands, are drawn up under the child's right cheek. The head is in repose, at peace. It will be recalled that in Rodin's Sculpture and his Muse, this gesture was associated with pain. Brancusi thus has departed entirely from his former mentor by withdrawing from and inverting his ideas. This will, in fact, be the last direct reference to Rodin to be found in his work, in terms of either style or content.

The causal or metonymical relationship expressed by the series of the Muse, Prometheus, and George is at the same time intricate and simple:

From the Muse comes sculpture and life
From Prometheus comes sculpture and life
From the artists comes sculpture and life.

Therefore, Muse = Prometheus = Sculptor

or

God = Artist

Yet, at the same time, Brancusi has also equated children and gods by using one to represent the other, so that both a semantic and
conceptual transformation between the two is possible. It would seem to follow, then, that artist also equals children. As we shall see, this is precisely the conclusion Brancusi reaches.

If George is to establish this relationship and fit into these equations, then it must be seen as more than just a portrait of a distinct person. Rather, George must also be an "everychild." The semi-representational style of the work facilitates this mediation between the specific and the non-defined. This is, however, insufficient evidence. The state of infancy must also be seen as conceptually capable of containing both specific identity and generality simultaneously. Bergson clarifies this paradoxical nature of childhood, which Lévi-Strauss also observes, following his discourse on élan vitale. "Each of us, glancing back over his history, will find that his child-personality, though indivisible, united in itself divers persons, which could remain blended just because they were in their nascent state . . ." Brancusi apparently shared this conception of children as ambiguous and unifying, yet possessing distinct identity.

The nascent state, i.e, that immediately following birth, is significantly that which Brancusi explores in his next work. Given the problems raised thus far, and the tendency of the logical progression to move from the polar extremes of the mythological to the mundane, from artistic creation to sexual creation, and from the defined and adult to the non-defined and the childlike, the next work should further resolve the contradiction between these oppositions with a statement about human procreativity, in a non-differentiated form.
This proves to be the case. The marble *Newborn* of 1915 is generally acknowledged to follow *George*, or, if *George* is not included, *Prometheus*, in the first series. The relationships between the three, which are either formally or contextually directly connected, clarify Brancusi's progressive transformations.

The form of the *Newborn* is severely economical, and almost abstract. The sculpture is composed of little more than an ovoid which has been incised and truncated. Three elements are, although highly simplified, clearly visible as head, eye and mouth. The resulting image is that of a newly created life which, emerging from the unity of the pre-natal darkness, is experiencing for the first time both its own separate existence and the differentiating light of the empirical world. It is emitting a cry in response to the separation.\(^\text{21}\) The elements of the form and the implications of the title operate together to establish several oppositions. The basic form of the ovoid on which the *Newborn* is based is, as has been stated with the *Muse*, continuous, non-differentiated and unified. Brancusi has again interrupted this continuity by a minimal surface articulation. Again, the opposition between the continuous, or non-defined, and the discontinuous and identifiable is present in terms of form and content. The *Newborn*, upon emerging from the womb into the world, is becoming a distinct, single entity, conscious of the difference between itself and the world around. This is represented by Brancusi by the articulation of both the mouth and the eye. The *Newborn's* cry has been interpreted as that of the "shock of birth" which accompanies the creation of discontinuity from continuity.
It has been stated that nature is continuous, culture discontinuous. The emergence of language signifies the shift from nature to culture. The cry of the Newborn is its first attempt at language and self-consciousness. As Leach says, "After all, although the human infant is not born with any innate language, it is born with an innate capacity both to learn how to make meaningful utterances and also how to decode the meaningful utterances into sound."

The shift from continuity to discontinuity, and from nature to culture is also stated in the incision depicting the eyes. The Newborn, emerging from darkness and discontinuity of sensory perception, is first experiencing light or visual perception. As Bergson points out, the function of vision and consciousness is to create differentiation from the continuous environment. The senses perceive individual objects in what is otherwise a continuous field. Thus the emergence of discontinuity from continuity is stated in both form and content, and expressed metaphorically in terms of the articulation of a continuous surface and in terms of the birth of a being and the birth of a consciousness. Again, form and content correspond precisely.

These complexities are increased in other associations. The Newborn, before it was born, would be in the dark inner womb, unconscious and indistinguishable from its mother, a paradoxical two in one, i.e., Geist's cell division. The inner dark womb and the outer light-filled empirical world emerge, in this context, as polarities on the axis between the continuous and non-differentiated, and the discontinuous or differentiated. The oppositions are both unified and obscured by the
Newborn which partakes of and mediates between both realms and states of being. The Newborn, both formally and conceptually, stands on the threshold between the two.

The internal oppositions of the Newborn can now be examined in relationship to the other works in the series. The content and form of George with its quasi-representational style, its proper name, and its distinct identity seems to move towards the identifiable and the discontinuous. The Newborn, being closer to the unity of the womb, extends or distils only those elements of George which are ambiguous. In the process, the Newborn has lost George's proper name, its distinct personal and sexual identity and its surface articulation. The relationship between the two is one of transformation in a temporal sense rather than one of opposition. George, in title, form and its relationship to Prometheus, implies a developing adult identity, i.e., growth and increased differentiation. The Newborn, conversely, moves in the other direction, it implies the pre-natal embryo, and non-differentiation. In particular, as a newborn, it is polymorphous, i.e., without distinct sexual identity. In all cases, the Newborn extends the distinct features of George into the universal, the ambiguous and the continuous.

This concept comes very close to Lévi-Strauss' view of children and the mental state of infants. In an extended discussion of these subjects in The Elements of Kinship he distinguishes between primitive (adult) thought and the thought of children, which are of two entirely different orders. Nonetheless, he feels that the thought of infants, because they are the most non-cultured of individuals, could correspond
to the most universal aspects of thought in general. He states:

Every newborn child provides in embryonic form the sum total of possibilities, but each culture and period of history will retain and develop only a chosen few of them. Every newborn child comes equipped, in the form of adumbrated mental structures, with all the means ever available to mankind to define its relations to the world in general and its relations to others. But these structures are exclusive. Each of them can integrate only certain elements out of all those that are offered. . . . In comparison with adult thought, which has chosen and rejected as the group has required, child thought is a sort of universal substratum the crystallizations of which have not yet occurred, and in which communication is still possible between incompletely solidified forms.23a

Thus, for Lévi-Strauss, as for Brancusi (and for Bergson) newborns border on the division between the continuous and the discontinuous, the differentiated and the non-differentiated, the universal and the particular. As Lévi-Strauss says later, "infantile thought represents a sort of common denominator for all thoughts and all cultures."23b By extension, one might postulate that if Brancusi remained a child, then it is conceivable that he could exist in both the modern culture of the avant garde in Paris, and in the primitive culture of his origins. Brancusi seems to allude to this conditions when he stated in one of his most famous axions, "Quand nous ne sommes plus enfants, nous sommes déjà morts."24

The conception of the child-state plays a fundamental role in Brancusi's system as developed thus far. It performs a role similar to that of the artist who also mediates between the opposing realms. The artist and child become interchangeable as operators in the transformation from one end of the axis to the other.
This becomes more clear when the relationship between the **Newborn** and **Prometheus** is examined. A formal similarity exists between the sacred **Prometheus** and the profane **Newborn**. Similarities exist on other levels. They share aspects of the same emotion: anguish, although **Prometheus** suffers in tight lipped silence while the **Newborn** wails. The introduction of sound always carries meaning in mythological systems. Its additional reference to the oppositions between the sacred and profane implied here, will be clarified in the next chapter. The two sculptures are not, however, interchangeable despite the ease with which the form and content of each is transformed into the other, and the fact that both contain a shift from nature to culture.

Conceptually, **Prometheus** and the **Newborn** are diametrically opposed. When interpreted in terms of content, the relationship between them can be seen as a logical inversion. The **Newborn** is brought from darkness to the world of light and culture. Conversely, **Prometheus** brings light and culture to a dark world. The **Newborn** comes from the inner profane womb, **Prometheus** from the higher sacred realm of the gods. **Prometheus** creates life, the **Newborn** is created life. **Prometheus** produces artistic creation, the **Newborn** is the product of sexual creation. The two works occupy opposing ends of the polar axis that extends between the sacred and the profane, light and dark, nature and culture, and artistic and sexual creation. In keeping with the purpose of primitive thought, which is to categorize polarities and then reconcile them, mediating elements have been shown to be present. These allow one work to be progressively (and conceptually) transformed into the other. This is effected through
the ambiguous nature of children, and through the similarities of form and style.

On a larger level, the overall series *Prometheus - George - Newborn* forms a temporal sequence based on the process of aging, i.e., adult - child - newborn. This theme, as has been pointed out by de Case and Sanders, is present in both Gauguin and Rodin. In *Youth and Old Age* Rodin related the cycle of aging to sexuality. Brancusi, however, has given it a unique treatment which corresponds more to Bergson than Rodin.

For example, Brancusi's series at first appear as a set of distinct states signifying the various ages of man. As such they would seem to correspond to Bergson's metaphor for reason's perception of experience in time, that is, like separate beads strung on a necklace. This is not the case however, for each of the sculptures in some way incorporates aspects of the other, they are consequently not discontiguous but overlap. *Prometheus*, an adult, is based on the image of a child; *George*, a child, contains the *Newborn*. Similarly, the *Newborn* will be demonstrated to contain both the form and the content of the next work in the series. Thus it appears that Brancusi is appealing not to reason, which separates, but rather to intuition which can grasp the continuity which underlies distinct forms.

The link between Brancusi's discourse on the aging process of adult - child - infant - embryo and Bergson's theories goes beyond the opposition between intuition and reason. A more precise correspondence exists which accounts for Brancusi's overlapping series of states. Bergson observes in *Creative Evolution*:
Like the universe as a whole, like each conscious being taken separately, the organism which lives is a thing that endures. Its past, in its entirety, is prolonged into its present, and abides there actual and acting. How otherwise could be understood that it passes through distinct and well-marked phases, that it changes its age—in short, that it has a history? If I consider my body in particular, I find that, like my consciousness, it matures little by little from infancy to old age...24b

In short, what is properly vital in growing old is the insensible, infinitely graduated continuance of form... Does the state of a living body find its complete explanation in the state immediately before... [no] all the past of the organism must be added to that moment. Continuity of change, preservation of the past in the present, real duration—the living being seems, then, to share these attributes with consciousness.24c

Thus Brancusi seems to draw on an idea from Rodin, but transforms it by translating it through Bergson. He also, however, gives it his own slant, in that this series, like the Kiss, denies the unpleasant reality of death. Unlike Rodin's work, which is "a modern momento mori, reminding man of the inevitability of death... the unremitting passage of time,"24d Brancusi's Prometheus does not age, nor does he continue the process of individuation and differentiation from the Newborn. Rather, his form returns to that of the Newborn, just as in his mythic form, he is caught in the continual process of regeneration. Both the form which Brancusi gave to Prometheus and his immortality avert the problem of death by turning the aging process back on itself. Time is once again defeated. Nonetheless, this process gives expectations of the next step in the series. Adult - infant - newborn, as has been said, implies the presence of an embryo. Indeed, Bergson's entire discussion of aging is related to the growth of the embryo, the subject of reproduction and the emergence of the differentiated out of the non-differentiated.
The expectation of an embryo is confirmed by a parallel movement in the series through progressive transformation from artistic creation and the sacred to sexual creation and the profane. The series began with the sacred sublimited in the form of the sexual (the Muse). By this means Brancusi obscured the differences between them. Now, however, the element of sexual creation is becoming distinct and separate. By reversing the series, however, we can see how the terms designating each are in turn becoming increasingly indistinguishable, so that as the two concepts become more explicit and distinct, the opposition remains disguised and one is still transformable into the form of the other.

In addition to this expectation, it must also be remembered that the philosophical paradoxes and dualities present in the key works of the Kiss and the Muse have not yet been totally resolved. The basic problem of élan vitale, i.e., the duality between life and matter, has not yet been overcome in sexual terms, although it has been resolved in mythological terms. In addition, the duality between the continuous and the discontinuous has only been stated in incomplete form, never by itself.

The transformations of the first series terminate in the Sculpture for the Blind of 1916. A second version of this conception, from 1920, is titled Beginning of the World. Although slightly different in dimensions, proportions and nuance of surface, each version consists of a purified ovoid, devoid of defining surface articulation. The form is whole, self-enclosed, non-differentiated, and ambiguous. It has been read variously as an egg, an embryo, a head and a pebble. As will be seen, its visual as opposed to its structural ambiguity, is of
fundamental importance to its significance in the series.

The relationship between the Newborn and Sculpture for the Blind operates on both a metaphorical and metonymical level. The latter's non-differentiated unity logically follows the formal progression towards abstraction which saw the representational George transformed in the simplified Newborn. Sculpture for the Blind appears as the Newborn with the minimal surface articulation obliterated. If the Newborn's eye and mouth motifs imply first contact with the outer empirical world and differentiated light and sound, the Sculpture for the Blind implies the non-sensory perception of the non-empirical world and the unity of the inner dark and silent womb. Its title contains the idea of darkness not otherwise expressed in the form. Reading it as an embryo would thus be logically consistent as well as visually evident. Sculpture for the Blind is the Newborn before it was born.

Content and form must, however, be complementary. The embryonic image must be conceptually non-differentiated in Brancusi's system as well as formally non-differentiated. This again appears to be the case if Bergson's conception of the embryo as expressed in Creative Evolution is taken into account. Bergson spends some time on the problem and indicates that observation

... shows that up to a certain period in its development the embryo of the bird is hardly distinguishable from that of the reptile, and that the individual develops, throughout the embryonic life in general, a series of transformations comparable to those through which, according to the theory of evolution, one species passes into another. A single cell, the result of a combination of two cells, male and female, accomplishes this work by dividing. Every day, before our eyes, the highest forms of life are springing from a very elementary form."
Although Bergson's theories on the evolution of the embryo may no longer be valid, at the time they were widely accepted and indicate that Brancusi would have thought along similar lines, that is, he would have conceived of the embryo as a non-differentiated cell splitting and transforming itself into a differentiated individual.

The logic of the present interpretation is supported by the formal transformations from differentiation to non-differentiation which correspond to a regression from adult to child to infant to embryo, and when taken in a larger context which includes the Muse, from the sacred to the profane and from artistic to sexual creation. The ovoid of Sculpture for the Blind terminates the temporal transformation with another timeless, eternal image. The synchronic is again given precedence over the diachronic.

The key elements of inner darkness, womb, and embryo inferred from the form were explicitly present when the work was shown in New York, about 1917. H.P. Roché states that it was kept in a leather bag with sleeves through which to put the arms. The darkness of the enclosed sack implies a womb—i.e., female sexual creative potential. Similarly, the sculpture in the bag might be read as a statement on male sexual generative power, i.e., a testicle. The conjunction of both egg and testicle create embryo in womb; the image is thus both formally and causally self-contained. It becomes its own "first cause" on both a metonymical and metaphorical level. This principle has been grasped by Geist who referred to the work as a "metaphorical egg of creation." This view is insufficient, however, and these interpretations are easily
dismissed as subjective or poetic. Nonetheless, they are substantiated when the ambiguities of the image and its place in the series are systematically analysed. In fact, Bergson again supplies us with a model for viewing the embryo as both male and female, or sexually non-differentiated.

... it is only in exceptional cases that there are any signs of sexual glands at the time of segmentation of the fertilized egg. But though the cells that engender the sexual elements do not generally appear at the beginning of the embryonic life, it is none the less true that they are always formed out of those tissues of the embryo which have not undergone any particular functional differentiation, and whose cells are made up of unmodified protoplasm. In other words, the genetic power of the fertilized ovum weakens, the more it is spread over the growing mass of the tissues of the embryo; but while it is being thus dilated, it is concentrating anew, something of itself in a certain special point, to wit, the cells from which the ova or spermatozoa will develop.32

Further along he states, "Not only is fecundation itself the same in higher plants and in animals, since it consists in both in the union of two nucelli that differ in their properties and structure before their union and immediately after become equivalent to each other..."33

To the extent that this interpretation of Sculpture for the Blind holds true, the relationships between it and the key works—the Muse and the Kiss—also become clear. A formal resemblance based on the common ovoids establishes a relationship between the first two. The formal similarity obscures their thematic opposition. The egg/brain of the Muse is the basis of artistic creation, Sculpture for the Blind is the ultimate image of sexual creation. The one operates in the higher sacred realm of mythology, the other in the inner, profane world of the womb. Given the placement of each, one before Prometheus, one after the Newborn, each should (and does) logically occupy a position at each end
of the two major axes between the sacred and profane, and artistic and sexual creation. As has been illustrated, however, these oppositions have been resolved, or at least obscured, through mediating elements which operate through a series of visual and conceptual transformations.

The sexual content of Sculpture for the Blind also implies a direct relationship to the Kiss. This is not, however, evident from any immediately discernible formal similarity. Nevertheless, Sculpture for the Blind is the resolution to the Bergsonian paradox of élan vitale contained in the Kiss. The problem is solved in terms of first causes: an egg/embryo/testicle, both creator and created, invests material, or stone (i.e., its form as a pebble?) with life. Stone lovers, male and female, produce a fertile stone egg which combines the essential features of both sexes. Lévi-Strauss has indicated that precisely this problem and this solution are to be found in other mythological systems. He indicates that the Oedipus myth solves the problem of

> how to find a satisfactory transition between this theory [of the autochthonous origin of man] and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman. Although the problem obviously cannot be solved, the Oedipus myth provides a kind of logical tool which relates the original problem—born from one or born from two?—to the derivative problem: born from different or born from same?"34

Indeed, both the Kiss and the Sculpture for the Blind state and solve this same problem of the paradox of a single being coming from the union of two others. In this case life infuses material through both sexual action and the creative forces of the artist. Thus the sacred and the profane, the material and life force, artistic and sexual creation are unified in the ambiguous imagery of the egg-shape.
Materiality is not the only opposite to life—death or the return of the living body to inert material, is another. Its presence was recorded in the Montparnasse Kiss. Brancusi confirmed a reference to mortality when he said of Sculpture for the Blind "'I put my curiosity of the unknowable into it—an egg where little cubes seethe, a human skull.'"35 The ovoid resolves all the oppositions of the Kiss.

Taking into account the work we have seen thus far, there should then exist a formal conjunction between the two. Despite the fact that it seems highly unlikely, one does, in fact, exist. Brancusi established a connection in a humorous little piece in which he painted the image of the Kiss four times directly onto an egg.36

Thus the series seems to have completed itself. It has returned to its origins. The years taken to create it have been bracketed, time has been suppressed. Yet despite the apparent termination of the series, loose ends appear in aspects of individual works which are not resolved in terms of binary oppositions or logical equations. This results from the fact that the series seen so far is only a part of the totality, and forms only one category of works. Despite the resolution of certain problems, the information it offers through its internal relationships is fragmentary. Immediately noticeable as unresolved are the conjunction of consciousness and suffering, in the absence of joy, and the maleness of George and Prometheus, in the absence of females. As well, the scream of the profane Newborn has no correspondence on the sacred level. Logical inconsistencies in a philosophical system invalidate its conclusions. If Brancusi's system is to maintain its coherency and integrity, the first series must be related to others in such a manner that these problems are overcome.
Figure 1
Footnotes: Chapter III


2. Bergson, *Matière and Creative Evolution* (London: Macmillan, 1913) (translation by A. Mitchell). Note that Brancusi had the 1914 French edition in his library, but the above authorized translation will be used here.


4. --------, *Creative*, p. 136.

4a. Ibid., p. 141.

4b. Ibid., p. 11.


7a. This visual pun is explicit in the *Danaide* of 1907, a work outside the series, but nonetheless prototypical.


9. Cf. Bergson, *Matière*, pp. 15-16. Furthermore, to cast, as in statues or busts, is *mouler*, or, in the first person singular, *je moule*.

10. Geist has frequently noted the humor underlying much of Brancusi's work. See Geist, 1975, p. 19, for example.

11. In the final analysis this opposition may be carried further. Rodin was associated with materiality and ultimately *The Descent into Hell*. In keeping with the vision of himself as the opposite of Rodin (and following Bergson), Brancusi ultimately aspires to the sky and the spiritual.
12. Leach, pp. 70-75.
15. Compare, for example, his earlier Torment in which the handling of the clay seems to convey much of the anguish of the subject.
16. Leach, p. 62.
17a. See ibid., pp. 211-230.
19. For a further discussion of this aspect of avant garde sculpture in France, particularly as expressed in Maillol's monument to Blanqui, Action in Chains, see Ruth Butler, Western Sculpture, Definitions of Man (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), pp. 229-233.
21. According to Geist, "The work releases a certain humor, and then, by a reversal typical of Brancusi, turns serious as it suggests cell division and the shock of birth." Geist, 1968, p. 48.
22. Leach, p. 38.
23b. Ibid., p. 94.
24a. de Caso and Sanders, p. 55.
24b. Bergson, op. cit., p. 16.
24c. Ibid., pp. 20-21.
24d. de Caso and Sanders, p. 55.
25. See Krauss, p. 86.
26. See Geist, 1969, p. 56.
27. This should not be thought of as a drive towards abstraction pure and simple and thus as a paradigm for later developments by other artists, as this would not only disregard the complexities of the entire oeuvre, but also be denied by all of Brancusi's later work and his own statements.
30. This idea of egg/testicle was suggested indirectly by a passage in Lévi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked, p. 44.
31. Geist, 1975, p. 27.
32. Bergson, Creative, p. 28.
33. Ibid., p. 62.
34. Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, p. 216.
CHAPTER IV

Brancusi created a second series of works which parallels the first, both logically and chronologically. This second series also arises from the problems posed by the Kiss and the Muse of 1908/1909 and terminates in Sculpture for the Blind. It broaches the same philosophical questions posed in the first, only it responds to them in a different fashion which place the two in direct logical opposition as well as in correspondence to each other. The pairing of parallel, corresponding yet opposing units that are formal transformations of each other completes the non-resolved loose ends. It also gives added significance to the terms of the first series by establishing additional semantic relationships. Most important, it gives new insights into Brancusi's working methods and his thought processes.

This second series has not frequently been analyzed in other studies. It consists of those heads created between 1908 and 1916 and not included in the first series. They have, aside from this negative categorization, several features which link them metaphorically and establish them as a series: they are all female, and all erect rather than lying on their side. A closer structuralist analysis again reveals, however, that their semantic relationships to each other are more complex than their formal similarity implies.
Brancusi initiated the second series of heads by offering an alternative conception of the Muse. Although the facial features are similar in each, the head of the second Muse is upright and supported by the addition of a neck, shoulder and hands. An immediate contrast between the horizontal and the verticle composition of each is unmistakeable. The opposition in composition implies a further opposition in the state of consciousness and movement. Although the eyes are again effaced and the figure seemingly in repose, the upright Muse is potentially alert and ready for action. It has been noted that, in Bergson's philosophical system, the conscious mind works on the environment through the nervous system which is, in turn, centred in the spinal column and the body. The upright Muse, unlike the first, has the torso and limbs necessary to effect this movement. The additional elements conceptually complement the implication of the composition, and serve a greater purpose than merely to hold the figure up.

It becomes apparent that the two Muses are both semantic opposites and apposites in terms of both form and content. Their parallel themes and formal similarity are close enough to effectively obscur their differences and allow an easy conceptual passage between the oppositions. This is enhanced by their common point of origin, the Sleeper. As will be demonstrated, the relationship between these works begins to establish a paradigm that will hold true for each of the works in the remainder of the series and will supply a model for the resolution to Brancusi's sculptural and philosophical problems.
For example, if the second Muse is both parallel and oppositional to the first, then it would follow that the work which springs from the second Muse must also be parallel and oppositional to the work which follows the first, i.e. Prometheus. These relationships may be expressed diagramatically.

![Diagram]

The expectations established by these relationships are, in fact, fulfilled by the Danaide of 1910. Brancusi's first version of the Danaide was in marble. It was followed by a series of casts in bronze. The original marble was reworked about 1925, when the facial features were removed. The original form was preserved, however, in the bronze casts. Two stylized curves transverse the front of the orb of the head. They form the suggestion of large eyes. A small nose emerges from the juncture of the shallow planes on which the eyes are situated. The execution of these features is character-
istically economical, and follows very closely the features of the Muses. The chignon of the latter has also been included in a transformed state that is again more stylized and abstracted. The neck and shoulders of the upright Muse have been reduced to a minimal form, suggestive rather than indicative, of their presence.

The transformations which characterize the formal relationships between the upright Muse and the Danaide lead to the expectation of similar correspondences on the conceptual level. These exist.

The Muse mediates between man and the gods, the sacred and the profane. The Danaides, as priestesses perform a similar function. The Muse also mediates between the world of light and that of darkness. Similarly the Danaides, as will be shown, mediate between this world and the world of shadows—the underworld. The Muses contain a referent to sexual creation in their ovoid shape. The Danaides also refer to sexual activity, only in its denial rather than its fulfillment.

The conceptual transformations, oppositions and parallels only become clear, however, when the myth itself is examined. It is here also, that the relationships between the Danaide and Prometheus can be found.

The Danaide myth is less well known in English culture than Prometheus. This is not the case in France where it has entered the popular vocabulary. Henri-Paul Jacques, who has studied the psychological implications of the Danaid story states:

Le myth des Danaides est, avec celui de Pandore, parmi les mythes grecs les plus connus dans le monde occidental. La langue française possède "la boîte Pandore," elle a aussi "le tonneau des Danaides."
It will be recalled that Pandora was the first woman, the gods' gift to the men created by Prometheus and that it was from her box that the torments that inflict the world emerged.

Citing the *Nouveau Petit Larousse Illustre* (1952) Jacques continues.

On compare au tonneau des Danaides un coeur dont rien ne remplit les désirs, un prodigue qui dissipe à mesure qu'il reçoit, etc.²

The historical evolution of the Danaid myth as perceived by scholars is complex, and in many cases contradictory. The essential elements of the myth on which everyone seems to agree have, however, been isolated by Jacques.

Les Danaïdes étaient les cinquante filles de Danaos. Persuadées, ou obligées, de prendre pour époux les cinquante fils d'Egyptos, leur oncle paternel, elles se libèrent en assassinant leur mari la nuit même de leurs noces. Elles décapitèrent les cadavres des jeunes gens et jetèrent les têtes dans le marais de Lerne, en Argolide. Hypermestre avait été la seule à s'abstenir du crime et à épargner son mari, Lyncée. Toutes les autres, sauf elle, furent condamnées aux enfers, en expiation de leur acte impie, à remplir sans arrêt avec l'eau une jarre percée.³

The myth, as it was being discussed in France during the first years of this century, and would have probably have been known to Brancusi, had some additional and significant embellishments. In this version, the Danaïdes remained virgins.⁴ This has, as will be seen, added to Jacque's interpretation of the jar and the flowing liquids which seem to be their classical iconographic reference as found in Greek pottery and Italian funerary monuments. It will also be important to this analysis and gives an insight into Brancusi's treatment of the subject.⁵
As Jacques points out, the Danaide myth falls easily into two segments—the double crime and the punishment. Structurally, the myth parallels that of Prometheus which follows a similar pattern of offense against the gods through the breaking of a taboo, followed by eternal and cyclic punishment. This is, of course, only the most overt example of the parallels between them and their symmetrical structure. Both myths, like the Muse, contain references to sexual fulfilment. In fact, this will be found to characterize every mythological reference Brancusi makes. In this respect, both Prometheus and the Danaide myths have been treated by Freudian analysis.

Abrahams study on Prometheus Rêve et Mythe appeared in 1909. Certain conceptual correspondences indicate that it may have had some impact on Brancusi, although this remains undocumented and will not be explored here. The study is important for other reasons. The Danaide myth has more recently been examined by means of a Freudian methodology in the study by Jacques, cited above.

Abraham indicates that the fire of Prometheus may represent the power of sexual generation. "The oldest form of the Prometheus saga is an apotheosis of the human power of generation." He points out "... the rod boring in the wooden disc, is the nucleus of the oldest form of the Prometheus saga." The stick is seen as a symbol of male sexual power, the disc for female. "As fire is produced by the boring of a stick in a disc of wood so is human life created in the mother's womb." Although neither his methodology, nor his history may be precise, Abraham's observations coincide with Jacques' interpretation
of the Danaide's symbolic associations.

Using a similar methodology, Jacques sees the virgin Danaide's vases as symbols for wombs. That they are punctured, represents the symbolic consummation of the marriage rites. The water flowing from the vases is interpreted as masculine, a metaphor for semen. They thus symbolically reenact for all time the sexual encounter they resisted.

It is impossible, at this point, to prove Brancusi's awareness of the first analysis and we can be positive that he did not know of the second. The purpose in summarizing them here was not to postulate a possible source of inspiration or to give Brancusi's work a Freudian twist, but rather to point out an underlying similarity in the two myths that is not necessarily evident in the narrative themselves. Both stories are thematically related: they concern sexual procreation. Furthermore, both myths are structurally parallel if examined from the point of their relation within French culture, i.e. starting with Pandora and the Danaides, which are joined as has been shown, by their parallel and popular symbols of the box and the barrel. In classical mythology Pandora was the gift in marriage to man from the gods. The Danaides, as priestesses (i.e. also partly sacred) were a gift in marriage to the nephews of Egyptos. The two stories have a symmetrical origin. The sexual referent found in their associated symbols is made explicit in the story. With Pandora, i.e. the first woman, sexual activity begins and hence profane procreation (as opposed to Prometheus' divine creation of man). Life
as a cycle of birth and death is started. On the other hand, with the Danaides, sexual activity and profane procreation are denied and the death and destruction of man is the result. The first myth creates the role of marriage and the gift of woman in the institution, the second denies the role of marriage and withholds the gift. The first, through Prometheus, symbolized the creative power of men, the second, through ritual and symbolic castration, i.e. the beheading of the grooms, denies the creative power of men. Pandora, as wife, is fecund, the Danaides, as virgins, are barren and die that way. Their symbols are often found on the graves of unmarried women. The two myths are thus inversely symmetrical. They are direct opposite or mirror images in their expositions. Each episode, however, returns to the symmetry of its openings by terminating in punishment that involves a ritual, cyclic and perennial reenactment of regeneration and procreation. Other aspects could also be analyzed which would enhance this simplified structuralist outline. These include, for example, a parallel move from light to darkness or from this world to a world of punishment, an underworld. The brief analysis given here, will however, suffice to point out the underlying relationship between the myths and their place and operation in Brancusi's sculptural system.

The dual relationship of the respective myths, at once parallel and oppositional, leads to the expectation of a similar relationship in Brancusi's formal representation of the Danaide and the Prometheus. This, in fact, occurs and has been recorded by most observers. Both
works are based on an orb, rather than an ovoid, and are, hence, equally distinguishable from the form of the Muses. Both orb shapes have a minimal amount of surface articulation signifying faces. In each case, the orb is enhanced with the addition of a neck. As has been pointed out, however, the Danaide is upright and female, and thus in opposition to the Prometheus. The conceptual and formal relationships between the two confirm the observation, first made evident by a similar relationship between the two Muses, that Brancusi created two series of heads in which each unit has a parallel yet opposing conception. He seems to have conceived these heads in pairs.

Brancusi synthesized the formal elements of the upright Muse and Danaide and transformed them into a portrait of Mile Pogany in 1912. The stylized facial features and chignon of the Danaide were wedded to the shoulders and arms of the Muse. The form of Mile Pogany's head lies somewhere between an orb and an ovoid. Although synthetic in conception, the latter is a unique and unified image.

A pattern of development can now be perceived. It is becoming apparent that Brancusi was conceiving his works in two parallel, symmetrical yet opposing series. An underlying logical progression has been seen to be at work. If the analysis is correct, then a coherent relationship must occur between the Mile Pogany and the corresponding work in the opposing yet parallel series. Mile Pogany follows the Danaide. The Danaide corresponds to Prometheus, George follows Prometheus. Therefore Mile Pogany must correspond to George in both form and content if the axis of symmetrical development is to hold true.
The first evidence of correspondence between the Mlle Pogany and George lies in their titles—they are both proper names of humans, designating that each work, despite its stylization or simplification of forms, is a portrait. They are unique in this category so far.

The use of proper names has, however, an additional importance in "primitive" systems of classification. Proper names, like portraits, designate maximized differentiation in any system. They form a category beyond which it is impossible to proceed to finer divisions. It has been shown in the first series that the sculpture following George—the Newborn—moved to a stage of generalized non-differentiation, both in its form and its title. A similar and parallel development will be seen to occur following Mlle Pogany.

In addition to signifying specific individuals, the titles of both Mlle Pogany and George also indicate a parallel and symmetrical progression in both series from the sacred and the mythological realm of the works preceding them to the profane. The names are of humans, not of gods. The ambiguous dual nature of Prometheus as child/god, combined with the equally ambiguous nature of children served as an operator in the conceptual transformation between the males. Similarly, the dual nature of the Danaides as woman/priestesses and the ambiguous nature of woman as conceived in the early part of the century allow for a similar transformation in the female series. In discussing the female figure in Rodin's L'Eternelle Idole, de Caso and Sanders point out "the title... reflects an attitude towards woman expressed in nineteenth-century poetry, where women are frequently described as
idols." In support of this they cited Baudelaire's "Chanson d'apres-midi." "Je t'adore, o ma frivole,/Ma terrible passion./Avec la devotion/Du pretre pour son idole." Thus, the female inspiration for art partakes of the sacred and serves as a transition from that realm to the profane in a manner that parallels that of George. This correspondence may be carried further. It was indicated that children, in their uncultured state, are close to nature, the universal and the continuous. Women also were seen in the second half of the nineteenth century as close to the wildness of nature. As de Caso and Sanders also state in discussing Rodin's Three Faunesses, "... a conception of woman as primitive, instinctual and animal-like was a product of Romantic literature, but it became prominent in art only in the second half of the century.... His primitive ... fauns are symbols of primal emotions which long ago linked man more closely with nature." Thus, although both works are of specific people, their subjects move into a transformative ambiguous realm.

The conceptual correspondence in the serial progression in which Mlle-Pogany and George participate must also be confirmed by a similarity of forms if the system is to maintain the coherence seen thus far. This too, may be found by a comparison of the two portraits. This comparison has been largely overlooked, possibly due to the stylistic and sexual difference between the two works which were, however, created within a year of each other. Each work is composed of identical anatomical elements—head, neck, shoulders, arms and hands. Furthermore the configuration of these elements is
in each identical. The arms are joined so that the hands are clasped under the cheek, covering one ear, while the other remains exposed. The arms are separated from the head by a demarcating incision. The bottom edges under the arms and shoulders in both are roughly textured. The shoulders and neck are, by contrast, smooth planes. The facial features are simplified, albeit more stylized in the Mlle Pogany. Allowing for the differences in the subject's ages and sex, it seems the two works could not be closer in composition and still maintain their distinct identities.

Like the relationship between the myths of the Danaide and Prometheus, however, George and Mlle Pogany are both symmetrical and inverted. Brancusi has arranged the forms of each as mirror images, rather than duplicates of the other. While George's hands rest under his right cheek, Mlle Pogany's are clasped under her left. The works are both apposites and opposites. The formal similarities allow for a conceptual transformation between their contradictory elements.

This opposition is confirmed by the other aspects of the sculpture. Mlle Pogany is female, George is male. Mlle Pogany is upright, rather than recumbent, her eyes are open, not closed and she is, probably, like the Danaides, the object of sexual desire rather than the product of it. All of these elements form a precise opposition between the two sculptures, and could all equally be applied to the relationship between Prometheus and the Danaides.
The relationships along the vertical axis are as symmetrical as those on the horizontal—the transformations between the Danaids and Mlle Pogany is similar to that between Prometheus and George. Both series progress in a symmetrical arrangement, and are coherent and parallel in development. As has been indicated, both pairs move from the sacred and mythological realm involving aspects of eternity to the profane and the temporal. In so doing, human sexuality becomes more explicit, rather than implicit. Rather than viewing either the creation or the eternal symbolic re-enactment of sexuality or regeneration in a mythological timeless realm, we are confronted with it in a specific and immediate and temporal sense. It will be assumed that Brancusi's attraction to Mlle Pogany was not purely Platonic. However, the title Mlle Pogany indicates her unmarried state. She thus stands at the threshold between the sexual and the nonsexual, as well as standing between the sacred and the profane.

The logic of the system and the terms with which it operates and Brancusi's method of expression through a series of symmetrical developments, and transformations allows a prediction about both the form and the content of the next work in the series.
The next work in the series following Mlle Pogany must correspond to the Newborn, which follows George. The Newborn and this work must therefore possess several parallel thematic and formal features. It has been observed that the classification of person corresponds in each series, i.e. god: god, proper name: proper name. The Newborn is a non-differentiated individual. To correspond, the work following Mlle Pogany must also be a non-differentiated individual. Sexuality is also important. The Newborn is sexually non-differentiated. The corresponding work must share this quality. Both works must also make explicit the transformation from the sacred realm and artistic creation to the profane level and sexual creation.

The new work, however, must not only contain these ideas, but also state them in terms of an opposition as well as an apposition
to the Newborn. It was demonstrated, however, that the Newborn was formally similar, yet conceptually the opposite to the Prometheus, and that at this point the system began to turn back on itself. This must also occur with the work following Mlle Pogany. It must be formally similar yet conceptually opposite to the Danaides.

This formal correspondence can be carried further. The work must be stylized rather than abstracted or representational and must also be an elaboration of an ovoid. To continue the format seen thus far in the second series, which distinguishes and directly opposes it to the first, the new work must be vertical rather than horizontal and express joy and pleasure rather than suffering. As chronological sequence has so far supported logical progression, it should have been executed about 1915. Without such a complex of qualities, the work could not be properly said to occupy the next place in this series of female heads. On the other hand, the chances against them occurring coincidentally or randomly are mathematically overwhelming.

Although the qualities of the work following Mlle Pogany can be predicted in words, the final form cannot. Brancusi answered the logical imperatives in his philosophical and sculptural system with a brilliant conception—Princess X of 1916. Geist reports that this sculpture is, like Mlle Pogany, a portrait of a specific person. By suppressing the proper name Brancusi has significantly made the title nonspecific, thereby fulfilling the necessary classification of being, like the Newborn, nonidentifiable as an individual. The necessary formal qualities are also present in Princess X: the
work is stylized, but not abstract, it is erect and is based, in profile, on a configuration of ovoids. The title directs our perception to read the image as composed of an ovoidal head, elongated neck, arm, and/or shoulder/breast—in short, a sensuous and almost voluptuous female shape. When seen in profile, however, the form appears as the exact reverse: a phallic image. This visual and sexual ambiguity, based again on a remarkable visual pun, must, despite Geist's protest to the contrary, be seen as deliberate. The unmistakeable recognition led to the rejection of the work from the 1920 Salon des Indépendents. From a different perspective, it becomes apparent that the sexual ambiguity present in Princess X corresponds to the sexually nondifferentiated Newborn. Neither are either male or female—although they approach genderlessness from opposite directions, the Newborn is potentially both, the other is explicitly and emphatically both. Thus, in terms of sexual and personal identity, as well as form, Princess X is in opposition and apposition to the Newborn. The necessary symmetrical aspects are present.

The correspondence also functions in terms of metonymical sequence. The joined phallus and sensuous female are the cause, the Newborn: the effect, of sexual procreation. But this relationship is also oppositional. The reference in the Princess X is to the pleasure of two joined individuals rather than the suffering and the separation of one. As the Newborn is experiencing the first hint of differentiation, Princess X sinks into ambiguity—both, however, hover on the edge of non-differentiation.
This celebration of sexual fulfillment places the Princess X in direct opposition to the Danaide, just as the Newborn was in direct conceptual opposition to the Prometheus. The parallels between the two series are thus complete. They are undeniably isomorphic.

The Princess X also hovers between the synchronic and the diachronic. It brackets time as well as sexuality. It is expressed in forms that are almost mechanical in their precision, and are thus embedded in Brancusi's temporal era. On the other hand, the theme of a joined female/phallus pun goes back to the Auregnacian period of pre-history.  

The next logical, chronological and formal transformation in the series of female heads following Princess X must possess several characteristics if the logic of the system is to be preserved. In particular, it must be more abstract, more ambiguous and more non-differentiated. Only the Sculpture for the Blind contains the necessary formal and conceptual qualities. It has already been demonstrated to form the termination of the series of male heads. If it serves a similar function with the female series, then it must not only be able to resolve the problems of both, but also operate as a transition between the two parallel and symmetrical yet opposing series. Its conceptual ambiguity must overcome the antagonisms of the two groups. This can be demonstrated to be the case.

In fact, when Sculpture for the Blind is placed between the two semantic chains which each become increasingly abstract with the Newborn in one case and Princess X in the other, its meaning is not only
enhanced, but clarified. Simultaneously, this semantic arrangement reinforces the conceptual symmetry between the Newborn and Princess X observed earlier.

It has been stated that the non-differentiated ovoid of Sculpture for the Blind may be interpreted as the sculptural equivalent, or metaphorical sign, for an egg, a testicle or an embryo in a womb. The ambiguity of the form is precise semantically in that it distills and combines the essential yet opposing sexual elements of the two series. It can be used as a terminating term in either semantic chain. Simultaneously, as embryo, it is also sexually non-differentiated and independent of them. The relationship between these works can therefore be seen as both a metaphorical and metonymical transformation.

Princess X is a combination of a phallic and female form. At the point of juncture of these two elements, that is, coitus and sexual conception, an embryo is produced: Sculpture for the Blind. As we follow the equation along the transformative axis, we come to the last work in the previous series: The Newborn which is the manifestation of the embryo after birth. The Sculpture for the Blind thus mediates between these two works. Consequently, it combines elements of both and is independently, cause (as ovary/testical), potential (egg) and effect, (embryo). The mediation occurs on both a causal and temporal sequence. Thus, in mediating between the Princess X and the Newborn, Sculpture for the Blind also mediates between and joins the two opposing yet parallel series. The existence of this link forms the solution to the problem stated in the Kiss. Indeed, in retro-
Sculpture for the Blind

Figure 2
spect the joining of the two groups seems logically unavoidable, as
does the existence of the small work cited earlier in which the image
of the Kiss was painted directly on an egg, thus linking Sculpture
for the Blind, and the first key work, and joining the two pure geo-
metric opposites: block and ovoid.

But while logically inevitable, it is historically unusual.
Such a detached, explicit and philosophical view of sexuality is highly
uncommon in this pre-war era. Such expressions would not emerge as
a popular sculptural theme until the late 1920's with Lipchitz's
The Couple, or the Surrealist objects.\textsuperscript{16} Brancusi thus emerges as
somewhat of a pioneer in the field. Albert Elsen has noticed this in
a quotation cited earlier in a different context, but worth repeating
and enlarging.

Primordial form was appropriate for a primal act. Henri Bergson
may have been to Brancusi what Baudelaire was to Rodin. Bran-
cusi's art was responsive to the climate in Paris, influenced
by Bergson, that saw life as lived in the irrational, expressed
in vital urges, and which affirmed intuition as a reliable
path to truth. His (Brancusi's) sincerity and simplicity of
nature gave integrity and conviction to his erotic Birds in
Space, Torso of a Young Man, and Princess X. Eroticism was not
a sub-style intended for a certain private clientele, but the
sincere and direct manifestation of the artist. Early modern
sculptors passed on to generations after the first war a new
candor and sophistication in treating human sexual life.\textsuperscript{17}

While Elsen's comments may over simplify both Brancusi and
Bergson, joining the two on the subject of reproduction gives an
insight into both the source of Brancusi's conceptions and the formal
treatment of it. Bergson, in \textit{Creative Evolution}, is quite explicit
on the subject. In fact, he employs a set of images which parallel
Brancusi's sequence of sculptures precisely. Speaking of the "vital
Figure 3
principle" and attempting to undermine any concept of absolute individualism, Bergson states:

An organism such as a higher vertebrate is the most individuated of all organisms; yet, if we take into account that it is only the development of an ovum forming part of the body of the mother and of a spermatazoon belonging to the body of its father, that the egg (i.e. the ovum fertilized) is a connecting link between the two progenitors since it is common to their two substances, we shall realize that every individual organism even that of man, is merely a bud that sprouted in the combined body of both its parents. Where, then, does the vital principle of the individual begin or end?18

While the first part of the quote gives a source for the subject of the three works, the latter supplies a paradigm for the formal discussion of the problem of non-differentiation and differentiation. Indeed, the sculptural solution to the problem Bergson poses at the end of the quote is obviously: the vital principle of an individual begins with the Newborn and ends in sexual reproduction, with Princess X, or in other words (or in this case forms) with Sculpture for the Blind. In this context, it should be recalled that Bergson opposes sexual reproduction to the tendency to individualism.19 Bergson re-iterates that concept in the context of the statement by showing how it favors a concept of life which "... forms a single whole... and which co-ordinates not only the parts of an organism itself, but also each living being with the collective whole of all others."20 Sexual reproduction, in fact, links all life: plant, animal and human. The history of each can be traced back to the splitting of the first cell. This concept adds complexity to Brancusi's Sculpture for the Blind. As a cosmic egg, it should not only solve the problem of the origin of human life but also that of
other species... This, in turn, leads directly into the next two series which deal precisely with that of which Bergson speaks, animal life.

Reviewing the first two series, it becomes evident that they form a parallel progression of related binary oppositions which are joined at both points of origin and termination. Lévi-Strauss offers a conceptual paradigm for this type of structural arrangement. "Sequences arranged in transformation groups, as if around a germinal molecule, join up with the initial group and reproduce its structure and determinative tendencies."21

The relationships of the units also operate in accordance with Lévi-Strauss' theories on "primitive thought." Brancusi uses parallels, transformations and oppositions based on metaphorical and metonymical relationships, codified in units in semantic chains, to categorize and reconcile dualities and contradictions inherent in empirical reality. As has been shown, this progression corresponds precisely to Lévi-Strauss's theories. It also reflects ideas expressed, albeit less systematically, by Bergson.

Concepts . . . generally go together in couples and represent two contraries. There is hardly any concrete reality which cannot be observed from two opposing standpoints, which cannot consequently be subsumed under two antagonistic concepts. Hence a thesis and an antithesis which we endeavor in vain to reconcile logically, for the very simple reason that it is impossible, with concepts and observations taken from outside points of view, to make a thing. But from the object, seized by intuition, we pass easily in many cases to the two contrary concepts; and as in that way thesis and antithesis can be seen to spring from reality, we grasp at the same time how it is that the two are opposed and how they are reconciled.
Mythological origin of life & sexual creation

Mythological denial of life & sexual creation

Sacred Artistic Creation

Male

Female

Result of sexual creation — agony

Level of ambiguity

Cause of sexual creation — pleasure

Bergsonian (scientific origin) of life

Level of non-differentiation

Figure 4
It is true that to accomplish this, it is necessary to proceed by a reversal of the usual work of the intellect.22

Brancusi has, it would seem, following Bergson, posed a set of related philosophical and sculptural problems by stating them in terms of thesis/antithesis, and resolving the contradiction in an "intuitive" concrete object synthesizing both. Brancusi has also used a reversal of normal logic, i.e. the form of "primitive" thought. The sexual opposition between male and female was stated in the Kiss. The two sexes were then separated in Prometheus and the Danaide, and given distinct identities in George and Mile Pogany. The Newborn and Princess X, on the other hand, disguised the differences by the ambiguity of their images and allow us to "... pass easily ... to the two contrary concepts" of male and female. Finally, the non-differentiated Sculpture for the Blind synthesized the two aspects in a single image. The series can be seen to proceed philosophically from the statement of a problem on dualities, through its exposition and the clarification of its terms, to its eventual resolution in a form of "concrete logic" which overcomes the contradiction by disguising and obscuring the differences.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., pp. 40-41.

4. Ibid., pp. 64-65.

5. In historical context, the sexually attractive female murderer/beheader/castrator or femme fatale has played an important role in symbolist thought and iconography. Gustav Moreau, for example, executed paintings of both Salome and John the Baptist. It could also be noted that Moreau also painted a striking image of Prometheus. It is not, however, in these symbolist circles that one needs to search in order to discover the significance of the Danaides to Brancusi. It is rather the structure of the myth, its representation and its place in his sculptural oeuvre that are most revealing. Brancusi had, however, experimented with a somewhat similar theme at an earlier date. A photograph of his studio in 1905 shows a small representational study showing a female resisting the advances of a male.


7. Ibid., p. 60.

8. Ibid., p. 62.

9. Ibid., p. 29.


11. Some problems seem to have occurred. Possibly dissatisfied with the first configuration, Brancusi refined the forms in 1919 and again in 1931. The alterations resulted in a tighter conception; the elements which characterized the original were, however, preserved in each case.

12a. de Caso and Sanders, p. 65 and p. 66 n. 5.

12b. Ibid., p. 173.

13. A bronze version was shown as Princess Bonaparte at the Society of Independent Artists, New York, April 10-May 6, 1917. Geist, 1975, p. 181. The title may thus well refer to the famous work by Canova, Pauline Bonaparte as Venus Victrix of 1808 in the Galleria Borghese, Rome, or it may be the portrait of a specific person alive in Paris. See Geist, 1969, p. 78. In either case, what is important is that the name was subsequently omitted.


16. Epstein's copulating Doves of 1914-1915 are a notable exception. For a discussion of the relationship between Epstein and Brancusi, see Geist, 1968, p. 149.


18. Bergson, Creative, p. 45.


20. Ibid.


22. Bergson, Selections, p. 211.
CHAPTER V

Although seemingly complete in themselves, the two series of human heads constitute only half of Brancusi's stone sculptures. The remainder of his oeuvre is devoted to animal and bird images. This division of Brancusi's sculptural universe into humans and animals must, if our methodology is correct, be one of opposition. Lévi-Strauss indicates that this precondition is, in fact, common to all primitive mythological systems, and that the opposition between animals and humans is related to that between gods and humans and ultimately, nature and culture. Leach explains this important division which lies at the core of much of both primitive and modern philosophical systems.

Lévi-Strauss' central intellectual puzzle is one to which European philosophers have returned over and over again; indeed if we accept Lévi-Strauss' own view of the matter it is a problem which puzzles all mankind, everywhere, always. Quite simply: What is man? Man is an animal, a member of the species Homo sapiens, closely related to the great Apes and more distantly to all other living species past and present. But Man, we assert, is a human being, and in saying that we evidently mean that he is, in some way, other than 'just an animal.' But in what way is he other? The concept of humanity as distinct from animality does not readily translate into exotic languages but it is Lévi-Strauss' thesis that a distinction of this sort—corresponding to the opposition Culture/Nature—is always latent in men's customary attitudes and behaviours even when it is not explicitly formulated in words. . . .

Lévi-Strauss's central preoccupation is to explore the dialectical process by which this apotheosis of ourselves as human and god-like and other than animal is formed and reformed and bent back upon itself. . . . to discover the nature of Man we must find our way back to an understanding of how Man is related to Nature.
Henri Bergson as well was preoccupied with the problem. Indeed, the difference between humans and "all other living species past and present" was one of the primary concerns of his philosophy.

We shall therefore not lose sight of the fact, in following one direction and another of evolutionary chains that our main business is to determine the relationship of man to the animal kingdom, and the place of the animal kingdom itself in the organized world as a whole.²

Brancusi, it will be demonstrated, did exactly this, although the conclusions he reached were the inverse of Bergson's and more in keeping with Lévi-Strauss, particularly in that Brancusi introduces man's god-like nature into the question. Brancusi resolved the problem of the relationship between animals and humans with a series of logical transformations which have as their underlying structure a paradigm which may graphically be represented as:

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gods

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animals — humans
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The first, and most important, operator in this transformation is, once again, the semantically precise, yet formally ambiguous Sculpture for the Blind. As it joins the two opposing human series it also links the human and animal works with each other, although it itself does not deal with the divine aspect.

It was proposed in the previous chapter that the Sculpture for the Blind mediates between the oppositions of male and female and life and inert matter. It accomplishes this by being both sexes and
also egg and pebble simultaneously. Occuring at the philosophical point where opposites coalesce, it was its own first cause, its own point of origin. This philosophic and semantic function must, if our proposal is correct, also serve to overcome or mediate between the oppositions of human and animals. It must disguise their differences in a statement of unified dualities and origins of species as well as of sexes; it must truly function in the structure of the oeuvre as the 'cosmic egg' as which it has often been intuitively interpreted.

In order to comprehend this function, and the significance of the problem, one must turn again to Bergson. It will be recalled that Bergson spent much time explaining the processes of parallel evolutionary development which led to the differentiation between animals and humans. At the origin of these "evolutionary chains" at the point in time at which life first invested inert material, lay the common vital impetus which links the various forms of life. It was only subsequently that the divergent species began to emerge. At the end of the previous chapter was outlined the philosophical paradigm for the Princess X-Sculpture for the Blind-Newborn sequence. This also demonstrates the principle by which the animal and human are linked through a common point of origin. Bergson worked backward in time to the initial point of non-differentiated life and continued his argument against "finality" by speaking of the search through past generations in order to find the first source of individuation in various life forms.
Gradually we shall be carried further and further back, up to the individual's remotest ancestors, we shall find him solidary with each of them, solidary with that little mass of protoplasmic jelly which is probably at the root of the generalized tree of life. Being, to a certain extent, one with this common ancestor, he is also solidary with all that descends from the ancestor in divergent directions. In this sense each individual may be said to remain united to the totality of living beings by invisible bonds. So it is of no use to try to restrict finality to the individuality of the living being. If there is finality in the world of life, it includes the whole of life in a single individual embrace.\(^3\)

By taking the influence of Bergson's philosophical concepts into account, Brancusi's Sculpture for the Blind, can and must be interpreted as its alternative title—Beginning of the World—implies, as the initial point where the vital impetus met with matter and first created non-differentiated life that was capable of reproducing and perpetuating itself and thus initiating the process of the evolution of new, distinct, and opposing forms. It can thus be seen as conceptually and formally linking both human and animal series by being their common point of origin. Both male and female, it is also both human and animal; it is the concrete equivalent of Bergson's philosophic concept.\(^4\)

Given then, that the Sculpture for the Blind is semantically and philosophically capable of joining the human and animal series, we can turn our attention to the first of the animal sculptures. Of these, the first three are bird images: The Maiastra, 1910/1912, the Penguins from 1912/1914, and the Leda, 1920. The fact that these first works are all avian cannot be accidental. The question appears: Why has Brancusi chosen bird images to effect the transformation from human to animal? Is there any link between birds and humans which
tends to disguise their differences, make them ambiguous and thus assist in the transition from one opposing realm to the next?

Lévi-Strauss points out that birds, of all animals, occupy a special place in their relationship with human society. He explains:

Birds . . . can be permitted to resemble men (in primitive thought) for the very reason that they are so different. They are feathered, winged, oviparous and they are also physically separated from human society by the element in which it is their privilege to move. As a result of this fact, they form a community which is independent of our own but, precisely because of its independence, appears to us like another society, homologous to that in which we live; birds love freedom; they build themselves homes in which they live a family life and nurture their young; they often engage in social relations with other members of their species; and they communicate with them by acoustic means recalling particulated language.

Consequently everything objective conspires to make us think of the bird world as a metaphorical human society: is it not after all literally parallel to it on another level? There are countless examples in mythology and folklore to indicate the frequency of this mode of representation.5

Given Lévi-Strauss' theories on birds and primitive (mythological) thinking the importance of Bergson's philosophy to Brancusi's thinking and the analysis of the human series in the previous chapters, the underlying structure of the animal works should be predictable. Having established the principle of symmetrical development as a paradigm of the human heads, the animals should consist of two parallel, yet opposing series, joined at the top and bottom. The two series must also be developed chronologically, as well as logically, although parallel with rather than after the humans. The first works in the two series should be the Maiastra and the Penguins. Both of these should be formally and semantically related to the Sculpture for the Blind, and in each instance, the birds should be employed in a
manner which incorporates a direct transformation from human to animal.

Generally the initial developments should look like this:

Consequently, $A_1 - m - A_2$ should parallel, $H_1 - M - H_2$.

As it transpires, however, the animal series are not without problems in their development. Whether this is a matter of shortcomings in the methodology or shifts in Brancusi's thought will be discussed later.

In order for the integrity of the semantic and philosophic infrastructure to be maintained, all of its parts must be coherent and even predictable. The forms must in each case signify the same things. The relationships along the various axis must be either oppositional or parallel. The terms of the initial birds must correspond to those of their respective counterparts in the human series. For example, the *Maiastra* and *Penguins* must be based on an underlying ovoid form which makes a reference to sexual reproduction. Furthermore, both the *Newborn* and *Princess X* are sexually ambiguous, i.e. both male and female. A similar conceptual and formal joining of sexual oppositions can be expected in the corresponding birds.
Other levels are, however, more complex. Insofar as the series beginning with the *Maiastra* and the *Penguins* leads to a series of animals, a mediating link between humanity and the animal kingdom must be present. A double transformation must occur. The first of the animals must mediate between sexual opposites by being both male and female, and between opposites of species by being animal and human. But Lévi-Strauss has led us to expect the introduction of an additional distinction and reconciliation, that between the first two and the world of the gods. Brancusi has, in fact, overlaid his system with an opposition between the sacred and the profane. As shall be shown, he does this in a manner similar to that found in other mythological systems.

The parallel oppositions and transformations along single axes must also be precise. Let us begin with that of $H_1 - H_2$, the *Newborn* and the *Maiastra*. It must be demonstratable that no element of one is without a direct correspondence in the other. As well, the *Maiastra*, as the first animal figure, and in correspondence with the *Newborn*, must be simultaneously male and female, and animal/human/god. It should, however, be specifically the product of sexual activity: i.e. it must contain a connotation of birth. It must move, as does the *Newborn*, from darkness to light and from womb to world and from blindness to sight. The *Maiastra* must also have a cry which signifies this transition. If this complex set is not present, then the relationship between the two could at best be seen as fortuitous, or based only on a common form and possibly related,
but not necessarily systematized ideas. If, on the other hand, they can be demonstrated, then the analysis fulfills its preconditions and can be termed valid.

It can easily be demonstrated that the Maiastra contains a god, animal and human transformation. The Maiastra fulfills these conditions on both the formal and mythological plane. The form is that of a bird. But as Tucker points out, it is also that of a human head and neck. The human/animal transformation also occurs on the mythological plane. Spear has documented in some detail the variants of the Rumanian folklore from which the Maiastra is drawn. The word itself comes the designation for fairies and genii. The bird Pasarea Maiastra (an alternative title) is thus mythological and magical, it belongs to the sacred realm of the gods rather than the zoological, although like Zeus, in the myth of Leda, it manifests itself in birdlike form. But it is more than a sacred animal. A popular variant on the Maiastra story, published in 1872, indicates that the Maiastra was a princess transformed into a magical bird as the result of her incestuous love for her brother. In both a formal and contextual sense, then, the Maiastra may be read as animal, god-like being, or human. The mythological, sacred aspect of the work effects the transformation between the two realms. The Maiastra thus serves, in conjunction with the ambiguous Sculpture for the Blind, as a mediator between the opposing world of humans and animals.
This complex transformation is, however, insufficient in itself to complete the necessary requirements of the system. The Maiastra must also be capable of being either male or female, or at best sexually non-differentiated. The foregoing, in conjunction with the Rumanian designation for Maiastra, which is feminine, would tend to indicate an exclusively female interpretation rather than a conceptual and formal balance between the two sexes. Spear has, however, demonstrated that the forms of the Maiastra may be broken down into male/phallic shapes and female/egg forms in a manner which parallels that of Princess X. This sexual ambiguity is also inherent in its mythological aspects. In an important version of the myth, published as a poem by G. Baronzi in 1909, Pasarea Maiastra, poema poporala, the magical bird is a transformed prince rather than a princess, male rather than female. Although this poetic-mythological interpretation of the Maiastra as male appears unique, Spear postulates that it played an important part in Brancusi's conception. The poem appeared just prior to Brancusi's first marble version and could have served as one of the direct inspirations for the carving. Thus, depending on whether the traditional or the new myth is followed, the image may be interpreted as either a transformed male or female in the guise of a sacred bird.

Having demonstrated that the Maiastra is, as Lévi-Strauss leads us to expect, and as the system demands, male/female, and human/god/animal simultaneously, we may now turn to the correspondences between the Maiastra, and its counterpart, the Newborn.
The formal relationship between the Maiastra and the Newborn indicates their parallel conceptual basis. Both are based on a continuous ovoid which has been given some minimal and stylized surface articulation to create a definite, although ambiguous image. In this case, the head and tail of a bird project from the top and bottom of the central ovoidal, egg shaped body. It is tempting to interpret this as a bird form hatching from the dark, enclosed interior of an egg. The Maiastra and the Newborn could then be read as images signifying the emergence into light from a dark womb/egg of a sexually differentiated progeny, in one case human, in the other animal. Although such an interpretation is inherent in the form, and within keeping of the logic of the system, none of the published commentaries on the Maiastra have explored this particular image. As will be shown, however, the concepts have been reported as occurring in other aspects of the sculpture, thereby confirming the analysis. This will be dealt with later.

The Newborn, it will be recalled, was engaged in uttering a cry. As Lévi-Strauss has indicated, the presence of sound in mythological systems is always of great importance.\(^1\) It is thus necessary to find a parallel feature in the Maiastra. This exists. The open mouth of the Maiastra's outstretched head is interpreted by Spear as "... singing or announcing some message."\(^11\) At first, the element of sound, unique to these two sculptures, appears to be in opposition. The song of the mythological creature is characterized as sublimely beautiful rather than a squalid wail of agony. On closer
examination, however, both cries have a common significance, they both announce the first experience of light after a period of darkness. The equation of sound and light has already been established for the Newborn. In the Maiastra, it is presented in the nature of the bird itself, and in the specific place of its song in the mythological story. The Maiastra is associated with the sun, it is seen as a source of light. But the association between its cry and the first experience of light after darkness is more direct. "In the widespread Munteanian version, 'Peter and the Fox,' related by Maldarescu, the king [who sends his sons in search of the bird] is blind and only the song of the magic bird can restore his sight." Spear continues, "... careful consideration of the characteristics of the magic bird reveals its unquestionable luminary nature. It is a light giving being, even in the metaphoric sense of restoring sight to the blind." Thus, both the Newborn and the Maiastra involve a transition from the darkness, suggested by the form and title of Sculpture for the Blind, to the world of light. It is in each case associated with the presence of a cry, one with its source in a transformation between human, god and animal, one exclusively human. One is temporal and operates on the profane plane, one is mythological and therefore outside of time. This suggests that the relationship between the Newborn and the Maiastra is both apposite and opposite. The cry of the human Newborn is the unpleasant result of an infant confronting its first experience of light; conversely, the cry of the mythological bird, Maiastra, is the beautiful cause of an adult first experiencing light.
The parallels and correspondences between the two works are, however, not yet complete. It has been noted that the Newborn is associated with a physical transition, a "delivery" from an enclosed world of darkness, to the world of light. It has also been postulated that the form of the Maiastra signifies a similar transition, in that it suggests a hatching bird, but the formal interpretation is insufficient without a mythological counterpart. This may be found in other variants of the myth. "The Romanian Maiastra, in the widespread version related by Isperescu, dwells in the underworld." Further, Spear associates the Maiastra with the Pajura, a solar eagle-like bird of Romanian folklore which delivers "the hero thrown into the underworld by his jealous brothers ... into sunlight." The two deliveries from darkness to light and from underworld to this world may be seen as a metaphorical equivalent of the delivery of an infant. In this respect, one last equivalent should also be mentioned. The Sculpture for the Blind is associated with death in the metaphorical sense of its skull-like shape which was suggested by Brancusi himself. It thus takes part in the continual cycle of life and death and suffering and joy which make up
the human temporal world. Mythological beings live outside this cycle in a timeless realm. As the Newborn conquers death in the temporal sense, so the Maistra must conquer it in the mythological realm. Spear notes that in the Munteanian version narrated by Popescu, the song of the bird, in this case the transformed princess, "... can even resurrect the dead."^{16}

The semantic parallels and oppositions between the units of the Newborn and the Maistra are complete. Nothing is accidental, no part is meaningless. The logical system maintains its integrity. The mediating element between the two is the highly ambiguous Sculpture for the Blind. It is evident from this analysis that Brancusi systematically transformed all his concerns into this unifying work. It is both the source and termination of his series, their origin and first cause and their resolution.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the series of images which Brancusi developed from the Maistra, let us first examine its counterpart in the transition from human to animal. This position (A₂ in the diagram on p.124) is at once the most problematic and the most rigorously complex of the animal works. It is also significant in that it illustrates an ideological shift in Brancusi's sculpture from the social idealism of the pre-war sculptures to the spiritual idealism of the post-war work.

Both the semantic and ideological problems appear when the position is occupied by Brancusi's second animal/bird sculpture: The Penguins. Two versions of this image exist: the first from...
1912 contains a group of three birds, the second, from after 1914, two. The works stand outside the oeuvre in that they are the only group sculptures in Brancusi's entire repertoire. This fact must be, then, of great importance and deserves to be examined first. As groups, the Penguins must signify either the social or the familial. This is indicated by the closeness and intimacy of the elements, which are well integrated; and abstracted ovoidal forms that bear, however, little resemblance to their namesakes. Their closeness is confirmed in another feature. Geist notes, "On the left side of Three Penguins is an ambiguous enveloping element, one of the few unexplained forms to be found in Brancusi's sculpture."\(^{17}\) Taken in the context of the Penguins as a community or a family, the function of this form becomes quite clear. It draws the individual elements together much like an encircling arm, thereby again stressing the concept of a unified group.

The question arises, then, can the groups of Penguins be interpreted as signifying an intentional metaphor for human society, as their position dictates; do the Penguins embody the necessary transformation between the opposing realms of animals and humans? Both the subject and the forms indicate an affirmative answer to both questions. Geist has stated on two occasions that the form of the Penguins resembles that of humans. He points out, "The Penguins are huddled together, like people." As well, he notes that, "... in Brancusi's sculpture (of the Penguins) we see only heads, that is, truncated figures—the only such among his animal sculptures,
but the usual mode for his human images, although it will be recalled that Tucker also saw it occurring in the Maiastra. An examination of the subject confirms Geist's observations of the human-like quality of the forms. Of all the bird family, penguins bear the closest resemblance to people. Penguins are, like humans, flightless. Their movement in water as opposed to air will be discussed later. Their distinctive black and white feathering appears to mimic human formal dress, the most socialized and ritual laden form of human attire. In addition, penguins stand upright and congregate in groups. Thus, as a species, they are the most fitting metaphor in the bird kingdom for human society, short of a direct mythological transformation. They serve as operators in the transition for the human series to the parallel bird series. They are images of bird societies and families that mimic human societies and families. As Lévi-Strauss states, they resemble humans closely, yet belong to a group that is distinct and separate from them.

But given the point by point correspondence between the Newborn and the Maiastra, should we not also seek a correspondingly precise relationship between the Maiastra and the Penguins? Should we not expect the Penguins to also have an explicitly magical/mythological transformation between animals and humans that introduces the realm of the sacred? Further investigation shows this to exist.

Geist has indicated that Brancusi's Penguins probably originated in Anatole France's Penguin Island. It has already been established that Brancusi would have been familiar with France through Otilia
de Cosmutza. This book, published in 1908, is a satire on French history in which a race of penguins is magically transformed by God into a race of humans after the bungling of a misdirected myopic saint raised the problem of their divinity. The transformations from soulless birds to beings with a divine nature is described in the text and the illustrations.

After an extensive debate on the consequences of the action, God summons the archangel Raphael:

"Go and find the holy Maël," said he to him; "inform him of his mistake and tell him, armed with my Name, to change these penguins into men."

Consequently, Raphael informed Maël:

"...know they error, believing thou wert baptizing children of Adam thou hast baptized birds, and it is through thee that Penguins have entered into the Church of God."

... . . .

Maël . . . said to the birds:

"Be ye men!"

Immediately the penguins were transformed. Their foreheads enlarged and their heads grew round like the dome of St. Maria Rotunda in Rome. Their oval eyes opened more widely on the universe . . . their beaks were changed into mouths, and from their mouths went forth speech . . ., a restless soul dwelt within the breast of each of them.

However, there remained some traces of their first nature.20

The development of the book follows this origin myth to describe the development of Penguin/human civilization down to the present.

Thus, the Penguins can be said to incorporate a mythic, metaphoric and formal transformation which mediates between the world of animals, humans and even gods. Like the Maiastra, it answers
the question of the dialectical process by which humanity's view of
itself as "human and godlike and other than animal is formed and
reformed and bent back on itself." The element of the divine mediates
between nature and culture. Yet this, while necessary, is not
sufficient. The Penguins must also be both male and female and imply
sexual activity in the same manner as Sculpture for the Blind and
Princess X. This, they do. The second Penguins contains an image of
two birds. It was not, however the only such image created at this
time. It has been noted that, by 1914, Epstein had created his Two
Doves, the erotic image of copulating birds. It is also known that
Epstein and Brancusi were in communication in 1913-1914, and that
Epstein had spent time in Brancusi's studio. Thus, we may fairly
interpret Brancusi's Two Penguins as another copulating couple,
male and female, and thereby paralleling Princess X. This interpre-
tation is confirmed by the forms. Ovoidal, with single oval eyes and
all other detail eliminated, the Penguins appear more like splitting
or joining cells than birds. Brancusi's interest in this image of
procreation has already been documented. The metaphor also embeds
the work in Bergson's philosophical concepts, as it is one of the
images he employs in illustrating the process of the evolution of
different species and sexes. The image thus coherently relates the
Penguins to Sculpture for the Blind and to Princess X.

Nevertheless, a small degree of semantic imprecision can be noted
in this bird/human/sexual metaphor, and transformation. The Penguins,
although male/female and human/animal/god, lack the perfect visual
pun of Princess X and the Maiastra which combine and unify aroused male forms with sensuous female forms into a single, synthetic image. In this, the correspondence between the Penguins and their counterparts is not as exact as the system seems to demand. This then, is their problematic aspect.

If, however, a concession is made to a possible change in Brancusi's thinking, then the imprecisions of the Penguins disappear. For the sake of argument, as this point, let us allow the second waterbird image, that of Leda, to replace the Penguins. The new grouping would then look like this:

![Diagram]

The Leda must have all the features ascribed to the Penguins: i.e. be male/female and animal/human/god. It must also supply what the Penguins do not: it must be a precise visual male/female pun relating to sexual activity, and thereby correspond precisely to the Princess X. It must also express this using ovoidal forms.

These conditions are met, in part, in the classical myth itself. The story in which Zeus (god), transforms himself into a swan (animal) to seduce Leda (a human) is as well known now as it was in 1920. The myth denoted by the title thus begins to establish the mediating
link between the human and animal world through the sacred animal which is half nature, half god. This sequence of events, according to Lévi-Strauss, is common to many mythologies. He explores in some detail the equations between the polar oppositions of god : man, wild : tame and animal : human in an extended discussion of the Minotaur, and the story of Europa and the Bull (again Zeus transformed). Just as the divine bull forms the link in these equations, so in Leda it is the swan that supplies the transforming link between oppositions. But while the image of Brancusi's Leda is that of the sacred swan, a problem occurs. Given the classical source, the swan is a god transformed, not a human, and it is a male image, not, like Princess X, male and female simultaneously.

The transformation both between the sexes and between man and animals is thus not explicit in the classical myth itself. It is, however, in the sculpture, if Brancusi's personal interpretation of the myth and his representation of it is taken into account. Brancusi, transposed the transformation between male god and animal to one between female human and animal. He said of the work, "It is Leda, not Jupiter, changing into a swan." Brancusi has thus, as in the Maiastra, deliberately inverted the sexual identification of the work so that the image of the sculpture as a representation of a swan can be read as either male or female depending on whether the classical or Brancusi's version of the myth is followed. Simultaneously, the new myth allows for the metamorphosis between humanity and the animal realm. The necessary transformations are thus complete.
These are, however, not the only parallels between Leda and Princess X. Both refer to the fusion of the opposite sexes in the act of procreation. As Geist points out, "ultimately Leda composes an image fundamental to both Greek myth and Brancusi's own fancy: an image of fertilization. A reproduction of the piece in a Bucharest journal of 1924 is, indeed, labeled "Fecundity." Both Leda and Princess X also are producers of fertile eggs, in the case of Leda this is literal in the myth. Like Princess X, the image of the swan refers directly not only to female procreative powers, but to those of the male counterpart as well. This is inherent both in the image of Zeus and in the image of the swan as it was interpreted in French popular folk culture around the turn of the century. Lévi-Strauss points out that the name associated with swans in France at this time was "Godard," a name which "... refers to a significant social condition for it was applied to husbands whose wives were in labour." Thus, the Leda is at once male (Zeus), female (Leda), tame (swan/human), wild (swan/animal); this image of sexual creation uses the element of the divine to mediate between culture and nature and the duality of the sexes. In both form and content, Leda and Princess X are apposites, yet they are opposed in that one represents a bird, the other a human, one is sacred, the other profane. They are, however, joined through the mediating link of the Sculpture for the Blind. Their relationships are among the most precise and rigorous in Brancusi's sculptural system, but only when Brancusi's
personal interpretation and deliberate inversion of the image of the Leda myth is taken into account. To suppose that his statement was merely whimsical does injustice both to the integrity of the system and to the depth and quality of his thought.

Thus, all the aspects of the Leda take on a very precise significance when they are placed in relation to the total context of Brancusi's sculptural oeuvre. Leda's complexity goes far beyond those features noted by Jack Burnham in *The Structure of Modern Art*, although Burnham was correct in many of his observations. In particular, he noted Geist's assertion of Bergson's influence, the sculptures androgenous nature, "neither one sex nor the other," that its "metalanguage is the form of the myth itself," and that, the "representation of the characters has been distorted and displaced to the point where mimetic identification is not possible without reference to the myth. Thus the empirical sign is taken over by the Plane of Connotation."\(^{26}\) (Burnham's emphasis.) Burnham was, however, incorrect in not realizing that the Leda gained this significance from its relationship to the other units in Brancusi's sculptural mythology.

From the foregoing, it would seem then, that Leda is the ideal operator in the transformation from the human realm to that of animals, and directly parallels the Maiastra, and Princess X. Its presence seems to be predicted by the shortcomings of the Penguins which it appears to replace. The questions arise then, why does the methodology not account for the Penguins elsewhere, and why did Brancusi
not destroy the works, as he had other pieces? In response to the latter it must be noted that both Penguins left his studio shortly after they were produced. Unlike the Maiastra and many of his other conceptions, he never again worked on this theme. On the other hand, he did keep a version of the Leda in his studio, although here again he only produced two copies. It would appear then that Brancusi explore the penguin theme/image but discarded it. His reasons may have been more ideological than semantic. It is evident that the Leda functions better within the system than the Penguins but there is another essential difference: the Penguins are based on a concept of social idealism whereas the Leda is not. As has been pointed out by Geist, France's book was a critique of French society and politics, and a reflection of his socialist sympathies. So too, it seems, was Brancusi's Three Penguins. Geist speculates that Brancusi's work may even have its source in "three jailed labour leaders who had gone on a hunger strike" in 1911, and whom France had publically defended. France and Brancusi had also contributed to the pre-war socialist artists' commune, the Abbeye de Creteil. Following the war, however, after the collapse of the commune, and much of international socialist movement, Brancusi moved more towards spiritual ideals expressed in animal images. Indeed, by 1924, he seems to have been deeply influenced by the writings of Milarepa, a Tibetan mystic saint. As will be seen, his animal series terminates in an image of spirituality rather than political reality.
This transition from social to spiritual is contained, in part, in the replacement of the Penguins by the Leda. But this transposition involves more than just a change in ideals. On a broader level it signifies the transition from a progressive concept of society to a static invocation of the spiritual, from cultural evolution to cultural conservatism, and ultimately from a diachronic to a synchronic concept of reality.

The reasons for this change in direction can be found in the synchronic nature of Brancusi's developing sculptural structure. It was observed in Chapter I that timeless mythological structures collapse in the face of dialectic or diachronic historic concepts which embody cultural evolution. History, based on social change over time, and mythological structures which exist only in static, ahistoric cultures are innimical. We have, however, observed Brancusi's strategies for subverting art history by turning it back on itself, using timeless images like the Kiss. But socialist ideals are also predicated on evolving societies, they are historical and dialectic rather than mythological and synchronic. Nonetheless, up to the Penguins, Brancusi had been able to reconcile or at least obscure this contradiction.

Shortly after 1914, however, the contradiction between the two became too great for the system to support. Rather than disguising the contradictions in Brancusi's ideas between cultural conservatism and social progress, the Penguins begin to expose it. The uncomfortable truth becomes explicit rather than hidden.
The situation was exacerbated by its temporal context: the beginning of World War I. The war was an historic event of mythic proportions that produced monumental cultural alterations. Brancusi, although he withdrew, could not ignore it. As we shall see in the next chapter, he did attempt to mythologize the war, and turn it into a timeless event by making it cyclic and synchronic rather than progressive and evolutionary. The conservatism which is embedded in the timeless classical Leda but contradicted by the war-time Penguins emerges more completely when Brancusi's 1914-1915 sculptures are examined collectively.

But before an examination of this period can be undertaken, it is necessary to re-examine the Maiastre since it was conceived at a time when Brancusi's socialist ideals of brotherhood were still intact. It should, then, contain an element of these ideals. By 1913, a bronze version (now in the Tate Gallery) was mounted on a pillar in Edward Steichen's garden at Voulangis. Placed on this elongated pedestal, the Steichen Maiastre sends its cry skyward. Geist refers to the image as a "... heraldic presence, noble and gentle." Brancusi said of it, "J'ai voulu que la Maiastre relève la tête, sans exprimer par ce mouvement la fierté, l'orgueil ou le défi." The setting of the Steichen Maiastre and these descriptions may indicate another possible source for Brancusi's conception.

In September of 1911, a realistically portrayed crowing cock, the work of Jean Gasper, was mounted on a sixteen meter obelisque in Jemmapes, Belgium. A "coq Gaulois," the symbol of France's
glory, the monument was erected to commemorate the first French military victory on foreign soil following the Revolution. L'Illustration, a popular French journal much like present-day Life Magazine, carried both illustrations and a description of the monument.

... la signification de ce beau monument de Jemmapes, qui dresse son coq symbolique sur la plaine fameuse où les troupes françaises triomphèrent, en 1792, des forces coalisées de l'Autriche et de la Prusse.29

Another item elaborated on its significance.

Il traduit par sa simplicité même cette vérité générale que de la France de 1792 data le commencement d'une profonde évolution spirituelle et matérielle dont la Belgique bénéficia la première ...30

The French monument expressed the exact reverse of Brancusi's conception: "... la fierté, l'orgueil, ... le défi" are its inherent expressive qualities.

If Geist is correct in his analysis of Brancusi's socialist sympathies and if the Maiastra was in turn inspired by a war monument, then once again Brancusi has inverted his original source of inspiration in both form and content. The Maiastra is a personal image, in a modern, abstract idiom, of life and love, based, however, on timeless Rumanian folklore; conversely, the Jemmapes cock is a realistically portrayed monument to war and death, based on French heraldry. Through this inversion the Maiastra could be interpreted as a monument to brotherhood and socialist values.31

When the war became a reality, however, the Maiastra underwent a change once again reflecting Brancusi's shift from the social and progressive to the spiritual and conservative which parallels the shift from the Penguins to the Leda.
Footnotes: Chapter V


2. Bergson, Creative, p. 111.

3. Ibid., pp. 45-46.

4. Although such ideas may seem foreign in the present context of art, they enjoyed some popularity in the Parisian avant garde at the time Brancusi's Beginning of the World was created. Blaise Cendrars, for example, wrote a description of a "cosmic sponge" which closely parallels the meaning of Sculpture for The Blind.

Cette éponge est Éponge des Ténèbres, Touffe des Langues, Orgue des Origines. Comme un cerveau dans un crâne, elle se moule dans la première forme. Elle est l'échantillon primaire le plus simple, le plus élémentaire d'une famille d'êtres à rebours, inqualifiables et inadmissibles, aux Antipodes de l'Unité.

Blaise Cendrars, L'Eubage aux antipodes de l'unité (Paris, Au Sans Pareil, 1926), but written between May and December, 1917. Brancusi knew Cendrars intimately. In fact, the Sculpture for the Blind's alternative title, Beginning of the World, was used as the title of a ballet with scenario by Cendrars, music by Milhaud, and costumes by Leger, which was first performed in 1923, Brancusi was reportedly in the crowd on opening night.


7. Spear, p. 4.

8. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

9. Ibid., pp. 4, n.8.

10. Leach, p. 86.

11. Spear, p. 11.

12. Ibid., p. 4.
13. Ibid., p. 5.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 4.
17. Geist, 1969, p. 46.
21. Leach, pp. 73-74.
22. Geist, 1969, p. 101. The complete quote is worth citing in this instance. Malvina Hoffman reports of her visit to Brancusi's studio in 1938 his statements concerning *Leda*.

"'You remember the story in mythology, when a god was changed into a swan and *Leda* fell in love with this bird?' . . . 'Well,' he whispered, 'I never believed it!' . . . 'You see,' said Brancusi, 'I never could imagine a male being turned into a swan, impossible, but a woman, yes, quite easily. Can you recognize her in this bird?' . . . 'She is kneeling, bent backwards. Can you see now? These high lights were her breasts, her head . . . but they were transformed into these bird forms. As they turn they are forever transforming into new life, new rhythm . . . do you feel it?"


23. Geist also recognized *Leda*'s transformative imagery, although he saw only part of it: "*Leda* is a metaphoric creature: womanbird." Geist, 1975, p. 18.
27. Geist, 1969, p. 50.
The possibility that Brancusi's Maiastra may have been inspired by the Jemmapes monument or a similar image deserves serious consideration. Certain problems arise, however, especially concerning their respective dates. The first marble version of the Maiastra has been given an earliest possible date of 1910, the year before the Jemmapes coq. This date is, although generally accepted, conjectural. It is based on statements Brancusi made more than a decade and a half after the event. (Geist, 1968, p. 178). A photograph of the work inscribed 1910-1912, "in Brancusi's hand," (Ibid) does not confirm 1910 as the earlier date, but only indicates that it was again added well after the photograph was taken and again expresses some uncertainty about it. It seems possible then, that Brancusi was thinking of the idea as early as 1910 but not until 1912 did he execute it. It is possible that in this time Brancusi learned of the Jemmapes commission and the form it would take. Furthermore, it was not the only 'coq gaulois' of this form to be mounted on a pillar as a war monument—others predate it. An earlier example was discovered in Africa in 1912. (L'Illustration, 13 April, 1912, p. 310) Both Brancusi's comments on the Maiastra and the fact that he was shortly to begin work on his own 'coq gaulois' also indicate a possible connection. The latter was, in fact, intended as a national monument although it had its source in a personal metaphor. Brancusi was to say, "I am the Cock." (Geist, 1968, p. 137)

Finally, both the image and the idea may, once again, be a direct inversion of a work by Rodin: The Call to Arms. This monument to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870/71, shows a winged female figure rising over the body of a slain soldier. The female is, like the Maiastra, half-human, half animal. But instead of invoking peace, she "hisses the spirit of revenge and anger." She is the "Genius of War, who rises like a Phoenix behind the dying warrior" (de Caso and Sanders, p. 199). As shall be seen, the Phoenix plays a role in the development of the Maistra theme during the war years.
CHAPTER VI

Although the tensions between the social and the spiritual, the progressive and the conservative and the diachronic and the synchronic are as explicit in the Maiastra series as in the Penguin/Leda transposition, and although these problems also occur during the war years, the two series are distinguished by their approach to the problem and its resolution. Brancusi handled it with more finesse in the sequence of sculptures following the Maiastra; the uncomfortable ideological contradiction was more successfully overcome and disguised, but reconciliation was not the answer. Committed at an earlier stage to the Maiastra, Brancusi did not abandon it, but transformed it by minute and barely distinguishable graduations into its opposite. As the series moves from one polar opposition to the other, Brancusi abandoned all socialist concerns.

Although Spear missed this transition she has categorized and explored many other pertinent developments of the series. It is unique in that it contains more individual works than any of the others; the classifications, however, are the most limited. Indeed, the ideas linking the various birds proceed with a directness that borders on the single-minded. This indicates that Brancusi was working towards a single, preconceived idea which was inherent in his pre-war work and was, as we shall see, also grounded in Bergson. But to these concerns he added the problem of overcoming the contradiction
between history and concomitant cultural change on the one hand and the denial of time and cultural stasis on the other. As was indicated by the Leda/Penguins problem, even in times of historic upheaval, mythology triumphs over history in Brancusi's universe, but not without sacrifice.

The initial works in the Maiasttra series are direct variants of the Maiasttra, and as such maintain, albeit in a diminished basis, the balance between Brancusi's socialist sympathies and mythological proclivities. In 1915, at the beginning of the war, a Maiasttra of a slightly different image appeared. Brancusi streamlined the upper portion of the body by joining the head, neck and body in a single attenuated form. He enhanced the vertical dynamic by straightening the neck so that the open mouth at the top issued its cry directly to the sky. In keeping with the upward thrust, the tail section was proportionately lengthened, although it still retained the angular configuration of the initial conception. By contrast, Brancusi added a stylized claw motif to the bottom of the sculpture. The image, in its smooth contours and aerodynamic form, is both modern machine and timeless mythic bird.

Just as its hovers between the mechanical, the zoological, and the mythological, the new Maiasttra also hovers between flight and rest. Its upper section aspires to the heavens, its lower part firmly grips the ground. The concept is thus also one of tension between the earthbound and the airborn. For the Maiasttra to leave the earthly realm of humans and animals, it would have to alter its meaning, its
form and its designation more completely. Nonetheless, this version establishes the direction of subsequent formal and semantic transformations. It indicates, above all, that the concept of motion, here expressed as flight, is to be of fundamental importance to each of the animal images. But the tension expressed goes beyond mere direction and type of motion, as both have a broader importance in the problem of the diachronic versus the synchronic. This becomes evident when the significance of flight, as it is expressed in the aero-dynamic form of the Maiastra, is explored. As with the Steichen Maiastra's pillar, the use of flight is not without contemporary social parallels and possible wartime associations.

In the winter of 1912-1913, "L'Apotheose de l'aviation francaise" was held in the Grand Palais, also the site of the official sculptural salons. The purpose of this show was to exhibit the latest developments in the evolution of mechanical flight in France. Brancusi, it appears, attended this exhibition. Christopher Green reports that "Leger told Dora Vallier of a visit to the Salon d'Aviation 'before the 1914 war' with Marcel Duchamp and Constantin Brancusi." The visit had a deep effect on Leger, and, it seems, on Brancusi. The response of the painter, however, is in direct contrast to that of the sculptor. In 1923, Leger recalled, "'beautiful hard metal objects, complete and functional, treated in pure local colours, the steel playing against vermillions and blue with infinite variety of effect,'" he remembered also "geometric power." Although a painter's impressions, what is important is that Leger began translating "the
real drama of machines experienced at first hand;" he "presented on canvas . . . that intense sensation of . . . metallic solidity and of power in motion that he experienced in the machinery of modern life." For these reasons Green calls him a "realist," despite his fragmented, stylized forms.

Leger developed these ideas in a series of works conceived during the war when he was at the front lines. Leger's declaration of realist intentions does not lead him to demand the depiction of modern mechanistic subjects, but it does lead him to demand that the raw material of modern life should be related to every pictorial statement in a very tangible way. This became particularly evident in his choice of subject matter. He was to say in 1954, that his war time experiences led him "'deliberately to extract his subject from the times.'" Brancusi in the 1915 Maiasta, also exhibited an interest in aerodynamic forms drawn from modern industrial society, but several fundamental differences separate him from Leger. Brancusi combines these mechanical forms with a subject drawn not from contemporary existence, but from Romanian folklore. In so doing he mythologized mechanical flight. The diachronic evolution of technological innovations was reconciled with a synchronic, static, mythology by dressing one in the guise of the other. The opposition was overcome, or disguised. As with art history, however, Brancusi subverted technological history, by expressing it in a timeless, mythic image. Brancusi remained a mythologizer, rather than a realist, despite the outward modernity of his forms.
Significant differences between Leger and Brancusi can also be observed in their respective approaches to art historical traditions. By 1920, Leger was under the influence of the "call to order," which developed among the artists around Léonce Rosenberg's l'Effort Moderne gallery, which included some of the artists involved in the Abbeye. This "call to order" demanded a recognition of the evolving traditions of French art through a return to classical values. In such works as the hieratic "Le Mechanici.en" of 1920, Leger was "openly asserting his belief in constant pictorial principles to be found as much in the past as in the present.... He adds to his new classicism a strong sense of tradition." He still, however, retained modern subject matter drawn from his experience at the Salon d'Aviation. He also used modern mechanically inspired forms to assert his contemporary place in time. His references to the antique are subordinated to both of these elements.

It seems that some overlap between Leger's "call to order" and Brancusi's Maiastra occurs. On closer examination, however, this turns into an opposition. Brancusi, as has been shown, denies or subverts the concept of an evolving French tradition by emphasizing timeless, Romanian (or classical) mythological subjects, and, as much as possible, timeless, albeit, mechanically inspired, forms. In contradiction to Leger, Brancusi's modernism is always subordinated to the eternal rather than vice versa. The significance of this shall be examined presently.
On the other hand, Brancusi's mechanical Maiastra would still, it seems, allow him to harbour his socialist sympathies, although its connection with its inspiration is becoming more tenuous, just as is its connection with the earth. As the war progressed, both connections were severed, as the tension between diachronic social evolution and the synchronic cultural conservatism of mythologies became too great for his mythology to disguise successfully. Spear points to the origins of this problem by indicating another possible source of inspiration for the 1915 Maiastras, and later works in the series. She links technological evolution with social upheaval.

In World War I for the first time the battlefield was extended into the air. The Zeppelin warship and airplane raids must have been an impressive experience for generations which had grown up in the nineteenth century. Obviously the original Maiastra was ineffective as a symbol and call to brotherhood and peace. But the war, and flight, produced more telling blows against Brancusi's mythological structure. The war, as has been said, produced dramatic social and technical changes of which the Zeppelin was only one example. Now, just as he had mythologized technological evolution, Brancusi was obliged to mythologize social change, and to alter the war from a diachronic historic event to a synchronic mythological structure. This posed a problem of no small proportions.

We have already examined part of Brancusi's solution. The Princess X, the Sculpture for the Blind and the Newborn were all created during 1915-1916. These works express a cycle of birth and death, of creation and destruction. They arrest time by turning it
back on itself into a repeated cycle that is both its own end and its own beginning. It would be expected, then, that Brancusi would use a parallel paradigm for the birth and death of culture.

With this in mind, one may follow Spear's suggestion and see the later Maiastra as the incarnation of another mythological solar bird related both to the cycle and its historic context—the Phoenix. Spear in fact indicates that a possible source for Brancusi's Maiastra may have been Diaghilev's Russian Ballet's performance of Stravinsky's Fire Bird in Paris in 1910. She also notes that "The Phoenix, always reviving himself, is the symbol of eternity." Others have shared Spear's impression. The Maiastra has been endowed with Phoenix-like qualities by various poets, who found in it a source of inspiration. The Phoenix would be a timely symbol. Its cyclic self-destruction by fire in the pyre composed of its own nest is a mythological metaphor for the destruction of western civilization in the conflagration of the war. In the myth, the heat generated by the flames causes an egg laid by the Phoenix before its immolation to hatch, and a new incarnation of the Phoenix arises. Sculpture for the Blind could be the Phoenix's as well as Leda's and Princess X's egg. In conjunction with the Newborn and Princess X, it would thereby acquire an additional dimension of meaning as a metaphor for the renewal and creation of culture and civilization, as well as for the renewal and creation of animal and human life. A new cycle of life and culture (initiated, it will be recalled with the Prometheus) would thus begin again following the war. The idea of flight introduced
in the 1915 Maiastra could be seen as the new Phoenix leaving the ashes of its predecessor's nest.

The concept of cyclic regeneration may also have a source in another work by Stravinsky. In May, 1913, Stravinsky's Le Sacre du Printemps, performed by the Ballet Russe, opened in Paris. According to Green, its impact "on the Pariasian avant-garde was profound ... and of significance to all the arts. Stravinsky's theme was not modern life, it was the cyclical energy of all life as a continual process of regeneration—the theme so deeply explored by the Abbaye poets and all followers of Bergsonian philosophy." Brancusi may well have responded positively a second time to Stavinsky's theme, particularly since it was based on Slavic mythology.

In this context, the Newborn, Sculpture for the Blind, Princess X, Maiastra (as phoenix) grouping is both timely and timeless. Although strongly related to Bergson's concept of evolution and duration, the group is, nevertheless, opposed to it. As the Maiastra uses mythological subjects and structures to subvert mechanical evolution, so the group uses the same means to turn social and cultural history back on itself into an endless and repeated cycle, with no beginning, no end, and no progression. Repeated mythological cycles, which are synchronic, run contrary to diachronic evolutionary continuums.

But although Brancusi successfully mythologized historical and social evolution as expressed in the war, he was obliged, at this point, to abandon his socialist ideals. These are based on the perception of history as progressive and society as a changing, evolving
continuum. They, like Bergson's concepts, also run contrary to repeated mythological cycles and concepts of time and society. As this opposition became explicit in the face of the war, Brancusi was obliged to deny social evolution, and opted, of necessity, for social conservatism. Socialism, history and time perished in the flames of the Phoenix.

This conservatism corresponds precisely to Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the role and function of time and history in mythological thought. Lévi-Strauss calls myths, which he compares to music in the introduction of The Raw and the Cooked, "machines for the suppression of time." That is to say, myth, like Brancusi's sculptural system, is synchronic and cyclic rather than diachronic, dialectic or evolutionary. Both unfold over time, yet in the final analysis, they result in the suppression of the temporal by the timeless. This paradoxical situation is somewhat complex, but deserves some discussion. An extensive quotation from Lévi-Strauss will clarify is components.

... music and myth share (the characteristic) of both being languages which, in their different ways, transcend articulate expression, while at the same time—like articulate speech, but unlike painting—requiring a temporal dimension in which to unfold. But this relation to time is of a rather special nature: it is as if music and mythology needed time only in order to deny it. Both, indeed, are instruments for the obliteration of time. Below the level of sounds and rhythms, music acts upon a primitive terrain, which is the psychological time of the listener; this time is irreversible and therefore irredeemably diachronic, yet music transmutes the segment devoted to listening to it into a synchronic totality, enclosed within itself. ... It follows that by listening to music, and while we are listening to it, we enter into a kind of immortality. ... It can now be seen how music resembles myth, since the latter two overcomes the contradiction between historical, enacted time and a permanent constant.
Brancusi's work establishes a similar relationship and performs a function similar to Lévi-Strauss' model. The correspondence between Lévi-Strauss' musical metaphor and Brancusi's structure may well explain Brancusi's propensity for employing musical sources as well as his close association with composers like Satie and Stravinsky. Lévi-Strauss' concept may also, however, be applied to individual sculptures within the structure. *Sculpture for the Blind*, for example, compresses both the origin of life and its continual recreation into a single object that is perceivable in a single moment. It is a "permanent constant" par excellence. The same will be shown to occur with the developing *Maiastre* series which seems to state the contradiction between the historically conditioned and the timeless or mythological by a series of gradual transformations in which the former is suppressed by the latter. Indeed, it is true of the entire oeuvre. Brancusi himself recognized this relationship in his work in a discussion of motion, which is, it will be recalled related in Bergson to the idea of duration, and hence to the problem of time.

*Qu'est-ce qui définit notre époque? La vitesse. Les hommes s'attaquent à l'espace et au temps, en accélérant sans cesse les moyens de les traverser. La vitesse n'est que la mesure du temps que l'on met à traverser une distance. Et parfois il s'agit de la distance qui nous sépare de la mort. L'oeuvre d'art exprime justement ce qui n'est pas soumis à la mort. Mais elle doit le faire dans une forme qui soit un témoignage de l'époque dans laquelle vit l'artiste.*

This statement is worth examining in some detail. His approach to motion places it firmly as a diachronic element; as it progresses in time, it progresses in speed. Brancusi, however, arrested this
evolutionary quality and mythologized motion and aerodynamic speed in the later *Maiastra*. But speed as equated with technological progress, motion and time also leads to the ultimate unpleasant truth: death and war. Brancusi successfully subverted all of these with the *Sculpture for the Blind*, and the continual renewal of the *Maiastra* as Phoenix. With them we "enter into a kind of immortality." Finally, he dealt with the evolution of forms, which are also diachronic. Here, however, he says forms are secondary, it is only that which goes beyond death, and hence speed, time and evolution, that is important in art. In Brancusi's view, as in Burnham's, art history is mythology.

It is here that Brancusi separates himself from the other artists of the avant-garde in the post-war period, particularly those, like Lipchitz and Leger, who were under the influence of the "call to order." These artists also sought out what they considered the eternal laws of art, yet they viewed them as the continuum of a tradition or an evolution through history. Brancusi, conversely, continually subverted traditions (in the evolutionary sense) through both his mythological subject matter and his timeless technique.

The *Maiastra* in its various versions is multi-layered, and complex, yet its themes are consistent. With it Brancusi tried to stave off, and failing that, to mythologize the war. With it he created a timeless image "from the debris of historic events." In so doing he had to face the contradictions in his works in order to disguise them. His system would not support both social evolution
and social conservatism. The former was abandoned. Having subverted history, and produced a static, cyclic, non-dialectic image, Brancusi turned, after 1918, from social idealism to spiritual idealism. This shift, away from reality and the mechanical, and towards the eternal and the spiritual dominates the rest of his animal images.

The underlying tension between the socio-historic and socialism and the transcendental and eternal and spiritual was resolved in favour of the latter as the Maiastra, or bird, series progressed. The Yellow Bird of 1918 points in this direction. It contains subtle, but important transformations of the forms found in the 1915 Maiastra. Brancusi increased the vertical emphasis by further straightening the back, streamlining the contours and creating a more continuous surface. He enhanced the upward thrust by assimilating the angular forms of the Maiastra's tail section into a smooth, spindle-shaped body which bulges slightly at the breast and tapers at either end. The fellow Bird rests on a dangerously narrow footing. The claws along with most other biological references have been eliminated. The mouth, which no longer seems to sing, has now been reduced to little more than an indentation interrupting the upward flow of the torso/neck/head. Although the entire body is composed of a single, compressed and continuous form, the title prevents it from being seen as a final stage of generalization or abstraction.

An analysis of the forms and title demonstrates the transitional state, or transformative operations, of the Yellow Bird in the series. The title, Yellow Bird, stands in opposition to the Maiastra in that
it belongs to the profane realm rather than the sacred or mythological. It will be recalled that a similar opposition, also obscured by close formal similarities, characterized the relationships between Prometheus and George, and the Danaides and Mlle Pogany. This parallel development indicates that to some extent, the human series and those of the animals may be isomorphic, despite the differences of their concerns. On the other hand, it may be argued that while the humans have proper names, the Yellow Bird can at best be part of a species. On close examination, however, the difference is actually a parallel. While individual humans have proper names, individual animals, (unless tame or part human, such as Leda and Maiastra) do not. Thus, for animals, the exact species becomes, like human proper names, the finest possible classification. It will also be recalled that following this extreme of classification, the human series increased in abstraction and generalization. To what extent the bird series follows a similar structure will be seen shortly.

Motion is, however, not incompatible with spirituality. Oppositions between methods of propulsion and media through which motion occur are the principle preoccupations of both the animal and bird series, and it is here that we find the most telling statement of the shift in Brancusi's political sympathies.

The aspect of motion, however, constitutes an opposition between the Maiastra and the Yellow Bird. The Maiastra, in all its forms, is like the humans and Leda, earthbound. Nonetheless, the potential for light and free movement through the air was expressed in its
later versions. The *Yellow Bird* realized this potential. As Spear points out, an impression of "the idea of flight, of the 'aerial,' the unbounded by laws of gravity," is created by "its elongation and its extremely diminished lower end [which] show Brancusi's efforts to detach the work from the base and from the ground, to lighten the form and push it upwards." On the other hand, as has been noted, the *Yellow Bird* operates as transition—it is thus not totally freed from the earthly realm. The *Yellow Bird* mediates between the earthbound and the freedom of flight, between materiality and its dissolution, and between political reality and spirituality. Yet this mediation is no longer mechanical, nor does it seem to involve any hint of the underlying social protest which grounded the *Maiastra* in its historic matrix. As Brancusi's works leave the earth, they also abandon the human situation.

Another significant difference also separates the two conceptions. There is no reference to sexual differentiation or activity in the *Yellow Bird* as there had been in the *Maiastra*, and even more so in the *Leda*. This characteristic holds true for all of the remainder of the animal works yet to be explored. It seems, speaking in advance, that Brancusi deliberately deleted sexuality from his post war creations. Its conspicuous absence seems particularly odd when it is considered that motion, especially mechanical motion from which the *Maiastra* draws inspiration, was often used as a metaphor for sexual activity in the pre-war and war time work of Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp, both friends of Brancusi. Furthermore, all aspects
of human sexuality were the primary focus of the surrealists in the post war period. They used it to both point out and free themselves from social repression. In his asexual animals, however, Brancusi distinguished himself from this section of the avant-garde and his pre-war work. Here again, he seems to overlap somewhat with Leger and consequently, the "call to order." Green notes that Leger's figure paintings of the early 1920's are also completely asexual. Green states, "... the mechanical classic nude remained for him essentially the vehicle of ... a purely asexual power held in check by an exact, modern, sense of structure." This "... classical idea of order was inevitably associated with the machine and the manufactured object, since these created the feeling for order special to the time."17 As we shall see however, Brancusi did not hold sexuality in check through the modern mass produced machine, but rather through the eternal spirit. His alliance with Leger and the "call to order" was, once again, only illusory.

Brancusi's denial of the mechanical, the material and the historical, and his quest for the absolute, the eternal and the spiritual expressed through the metaphor of flight reached its final state in the *Birds in Space*. First appearing in 1922 (or 1921), these images were continually refined by Brancusi until the early 1940's. The *Birds in Space* take the trend towards verticality and abstraction found in the *Yellow Bird* to its furthest possible extreme. The basic conception consists in each case of an upright, attenuated, elliptical shape. An angular truncation at the upper end is the result of the
further simplification of the mouth to a flat oval. The whole is set on a small, flared base. In profile, a straight spinal ridge contrasts with a gently arching breast. The anatomical designations are, however, arbitrary as nothing of the shape, except its precedents, contains any biological reference to a bird. The drive towards abstraction and generalization continued as Brancusi refined the formal configurations in the following decades. Step by step he increased the height, and inversely narrowed the girth. The footing was integrated into the sculpture as a whole by modifying the first triangular shape into one that gently curved upwards.

The *Birds in Space* deny all the inherent qualities of marble, except its ability to take a polish. Difficulties in adapting the form to the material resulted in delays in its production. (The first known photograph of this idea dates from 1922. The first extant version, from the following year. Jianou dates its first appearance as 1921.) Several versions have broken at the narrow juncture of the footing and the body. The early versions were, in fact, composed of two joined pieces. To stabilize and strengthen the form, Brancusi drilled a hole about two-thirds of the length of the piece, and inserted a brass rod.

The denial of materiality and the abstract representation of flight and space, have resulted in a generally held interpretation of the work as the expression of spirituality. Its Romanian designation confirms this observation. Spear points out the title "Pasarea vazduhului (Bird of the Ether) . . . implies that the bird,
freed from its earthly bounds, already belongs to a different world, to a higher and lighter atmosphere."

Geist has issued a similar set of statements. "Bird in Space, in its later examples, releases a euphoria of elevation. Its shaping ultimately answers the needs not of a poetry of the avian, but of an imagination of flight, flight as ascent, as effortless rising, as freedom from gravity, as transcendence of the earthly human." Although Geist's later observations added certain secondary characteristics, he preserved his original perception "Brancusi's image of dream flight, rising with a grace and ease that leave behind its own heavy matter." "It makes an image of spiritual flight, at once the nocturnal and euphoric flight of erotic dream and the flight of the soul in its urge to transcendence."

While the spiritual aspect of the Birds is important, it cannot be taken as a complete interpretation.

The use of motion as a means of overcoming or controlling the limitations of material existence, here embodied in Brancusi's triumph over the limitations of marble, combined with an evolutionary process involving the invention of ever newer forms directed by a spiritual presence has already been observed in Brancusi's earliest keyworks—the Kiss, the Sleeper and the Muse. They are all directly related to Bergson's philosophy of creative evolution and elan vitale. Indeed, the minute graduations of change which characterize the entire series are also strongly related to Bergson's concept of duration. Each work, it is true, was created and must be perceived separately
in time. Yet when seen as a whole, they collectively present an almost cinematic series which draws them together into an unbounded continuum. As closely as stable sculpture can, then, they approximate the continuous process of an evolution, directed towards the final freedom of the spirit.

Taken as such, they also confirm Brancusi's continued adherence to another of Bergson's concepts, that of intuition. According to the philosopher, only intuition can perceive this continuous evolutionary process—it is beyond the powers of reason. Reason, to the contrary, breaks things down into individual, isolated movements and entities. "The intellect is not made to think evolution . . . the continuity of change that is pure mobility . . . . the intellect represents becoming as a series of states, each of which is homogeneous with itself and consequently does not change."\(^{22a}\) Brancusi's use of intuition is emphasized by his statement that "the ideal of the realization of this object [The Birds in Space] would be an enlargement to fill the vault of the sky."\(^{23}\) The concept underlying this statement emphasizes the ideal of the continuous over the discontinuous, and hence intuition over reason.

The conjunction of intuition with spirituality and the concept of the continuous in Brancusi leads us to seek a precise correspondence in Bergson. Indeed, Bergson states that we recognize the " . . . unity of spiritual life . . . only when we place ourselves in intuition in order to go from intuition to intellect."\(^{23a}\) But Bergson goes further; he, like Brancusi, places the material body in
opposition to the spirit:

... a philosophy of intuition will be a negation of science, will be sooner or later swept away by science, if it does not resolve to see the life of the body just where it really is, on the road that leads to the life of the spirit. But it will then no longer have to do with definite living beings. Life as a whole, from the initial impulsion that thrust it into the world, will appear as a wave which rises, and which is opposed by the descending movement of matter.23b

As a material expression of the immaterial, that is the spiritual, Brancusi's *Birds in Space* are as paradoxical as the *Kiss* and *Sculpture for the Blind*. Indeed, the *Birds in Space* bridge the gap between materiality and spirituality by showing how one can be transformed into the other, just as a discontinuous finite object (a sculpture) can be conceived as continuous and infinite—i.e. it can both express duration, evolution and it can "fill the sky." Thus Brancusi has assimilated the spiritual into the material and vice versa. As Lévi-Strauss says, "L'esprit aussi est une chose, le fonctionnement de cette chose nous instruit sur la nature des choses: même la réflexion pure se résume en une interiorisation du cosmos. Sous une forme symbolique, elle illustre la structure de l'en-dehors."23c

Brancusi's continued adherence to Bergson's value of intuition and spirituality over reason and science separated him further however from other members of the avant garde of the post-war period. This was the case with those, like Leger and Lipchitz, who were under the influence of the "call to order," as well as the dadaists and surrealists. The former were, by 1920, using mathematical propositions and rational structures to create an art based on reason. As Green points out:
... between 1917 and 1920 Léonce Rosenberg, Severini and Paul Dermée had stood together for the reinstatement of reason as the only instrument by which to fashion an aesthetic and therefore a style. Reason gave intuition a direction, and its most uncompromising product was science.24

The dadaists, on the other hand, rejected reason wholesale, although intuition was not their aim. The surrealists also rejected reason, but glorified intuition only to the extent that it could be confused with Freud's concept of the subconscious.

Furthermore, the series of Birds in Space also separates Brancusi from Leger's adherence to the machine aesthetic of mass production, as expressed in his paintings of the early 1920's. Despite their close similarities of their evolving forms, none of Brancusi's Birds in Space could have been made by mass production. In 1936 Brancusi looked back on his series of birds: "'In the last Birds, the differences between them hardly appear in photographs. Each, however, is a new inspiration, independent of the preceding one. I could show your friend their subtle differences on some plaster casts.'"25 Each one, in Brancusi's eyes, carried with it the idea of the absolutely new. Thus they carry the Maiastra's negation of technological development to an extreme of denial. They are not mass produced, repetitive and mechanical, but individual, unique and hand crafted. Their intention is not to be contemporary, but timeless, eternal. But while their subtle differences subvert the idea of mass production while simultaneously seeming to express it, these same minute distinctions make it, as Brancusi's statement indicates, almost impossible for the rational mind to perceive the distinctions
between them. The changes are, as has been said, more of a continuous flow than an abrupt and discontinuous series of states homogeneous with themselves.

One cannot say, however, that Brancusi's series, or his oeuvre as a whole, is a programmatic sculptural illustration of Bergson's philosophy, despite the fact that he remained faithful to its basic precepts and premises into the twenties and later when most others were abandoning them. Significant differences also separate the two. For example, in Bergson's philosophy animals and humans are arranged in separate, parallel and hieratic evolutionary orders with humans at the apex. The two divergent evolutionary paths were joined only once, at the original point at which the vital impetus entered matter. Much of this overlaps with Brancusi's system. Animals and humans are joined at their point of origin, the *Beginning of the World*/*Sculpture for the Blind*. Yet as in many mythological systems, the two species are interchangeable through magical transformations, as embodied in the *Maiastra*, the *Penguins* and *Leda*. Furthermore, Bergson considered humanity to be the zenith of the evolutionary process.

Radical therefore, also, is the differences between animal consciousness, even the most intelligent, and human consciousness. For consciousness corresponds exactly to the living beings power of choice: ... consciousness is synonymous with invention and freedom. Now, in the animal, invention is never anything but a variation on the theme of routine. ... With man, consciousness breaks the chain. In man, and in man alone, it sets itself free. The whole history of life until man has been that of the effort of consciousness to raise matter and of the more or less complete overwhelming of consciousness by the matter which has fallen back on it. The enterprise was paradoxical. ... It was to create with
matter, which is necessity itself, an instrument of freedom, to make a machine which should triumph over mechanism, and to use the determination of nature to pass through the meshes of the net which this very determinism had spread.25a

With the *Birds in Flight*, Brancusi has inverted Bergson by using flying birds as a metaphor for the free motion of the spirit, liberated from confines of matter over consciousness. In fact, flight would appear to be a more appropriate metaphor for freedom from the struggle of *élan vitale* over material existence. Technological flight, seen in the first *Maiastra*, only follows in imitation of that of birds.

The equation and transformation of animals and humans is conversely in keeping with mythological systems in general. Brancusi may thus have been modifying aspects of Bergson's philosophy that were incompatable with mythology.

But above all, in placing a bird, or rather the objective representation of the subjective idea of bird as spirit at the apex of his creation, Brancusi again disavowed the diachronic elements introduced in the *Maiastra* at the beginning of the series. He repudiated technological development, as represented by mechanical flight, and history, through his timeless, mythic image of the flight of birds and the spirit.

*Timeless is once more the operative word here. As is the case with Lévi-Strauss' metaphor of music, Brancusi's *Birds in Space*, which developed over time and must be seen over time (especially now that they are scattered) use time only to deny it. Lacking a classical or Romanian mythological subject, they deny time through*
Figure 5
the continuity of their evolving forms. Like the intuitive perception of Bergsonian evolution, which would occur, it would seem, in a single instance, these birds can be held by the mind in a single instant. They are irredeemibly synchronic despite the diachronic nature of their production and the perception of their material expression.

Herein lies the final underlying reason for his shift to the spiritual. For his birds to get off the ground Brancusi had to jettison, in Geist's words, "the earthly human," i.e. Brancusi's socialist ideas and sexual content. Faced with the dilemma of choosing between an eternal and unchanging mythology and a progressive social consciousness during World War I Brancusi opted for the former. He was therefore obliged to move to a "different world, to a higher and lighter atmosphere;" the spiritual was his only alternative. In so doing, he created a final work which was the precise opposite of his first important piece: the Kiss.

The Kiss emphasizes the nature of the material from which it is composed. The Birds in Space deny it. The Kiss is about sexuality and thus about cycles of life and death. The Birds in Space are about the spiritual, and the eternal and absolute. The Kiss initiates the cycle of material existence, the Birds in Space terminate it. The Kiss is based on social idealism, the Birds on spiritual idealism. Thus, the two works form the central oppositional axis around which all of Brancusi's works rotate. The Birds in Space stand not only at end of the Bird series, but also at the end of the system as a whole.
They represent the furthest possible extension of the ideas inherent in the original works and in Bergson's philosophy which could be expressed in sculptural form.

As was the case with Bergson, the whole of Brancusi's sculptural philosophy was constructed around an inherent dualism between the material (body) and the spiritual realm. Thus the termination was implied by the point of origin. Edmund Leach makes this point by extending Lévi-Stauss' musical metaphor: "the last movement of a symphony is presupposed by its beginning just as the end of a myth is already implicit where it began."26 The whole, seen in retrospect, as returning to its point of origin with another timeless statement, is beginning to form a "synchronic totality, enclosed within itself."
Footnotes: Chapter VI

1. Spear.

2. Christopher Green, *Leger and the Avant-Garde*, p. 84. Geist gives the date of this visit as 1920, but, as no report of a Salon d'Aviation was found in that year, and as he does not cite his source, Green seems more correct. Geist, 1975, p. 116.

3. Cited in Green, p. 84.

4. Ibid., p. 85.

5. Ibid., p. 93.

6. Ibid., p. 96.

7. Ibid., p. 120.

8. Ibid.


10. Ibid., pp. 9-10.

11. Ibid., p. 6.


14. See Leach, p. 115.


17. Green, p. 249.


21. Ibid., p. 133.

22. See especially, Bergson, Creative, pp. 252-253.

22a. Ibid., p. 171.


23b. Ibid., pp. 283-284.

23c. Lévi-Strauss, La Pensé Sauvage, cited in Marc Liphnisky, p. 238.

24. Green, p. 203.

25. Ibid., p. 115.


26. Leach, p. 115.
CHAPTER VII

The fourth and final series in Brancusi's stone works completes the symmetrical arrangements discovered in Brancusi's synchronic system thus far. This series, like the Birds which it parallels, has been observed by Spear, although she did not investigate its development, significance or historical setting. In opposition to the Birds, this series is composed, with the exception of the mediating Leda, of non-bird forms. The two series were developed during the same period, that is from the end of World War I to the early 1940's. They are, like the two human series, both logically and chronologically parallel.

The bird and animal series form a coordinated group when seen as a totality. They share a common point of origin—Sculpture for the Blind—and a common termination—the Birds in Space. When these two linked series are jointed to the human series through the mediating element of the Sculpture for the Blind, a symmetrical arrangement results in which both larger groups also stand in a parallel and an oppositional relationship. When this final configuration is investigated, the broader underlying ideas and categories which unify Brancusi's sculptural universe finally become clear. To paraphrase Brancusi, the whole is simultaneously simple, yet complex. A detailed examination of the components of the animal series and a discussion of the general context of the animal images in the
sculpture of the first decades of this century are, however, essential
to understand the place of Brancusi's animal images in his oeuvre
as a whole.

Brancusi's use of animals as subject matter for sculpture
was not unique. In fact, small scale animal works which fit into
apartment environments were popular with both bourgeois collectors and
artists since the decline in state commissions for monumental public
works during the late 1800's. These academic pieces became increasingly
popular in the first three decades of this century, with a sufficient
demand to support a small group of artists who exhibited regularly
at the Salon d'Automne in the Grand Palais.

Two factors, however, indicate that Brancusi was not simply
responding to the exigencies of the marketplace. The first of these
lies in the forms he employed. A comparison between a piece such
as Francois Pompon's Coq and the bronze work of a similar name by
Brancusi illustrates the difference between the two artists'
concerns. Although Pompon was, like Brancusi, formerly an assistant
to Rodin, and reportedly carved "en taille directe," their respective
conceptions bear little resemblance. Pompon's Coq is decorative,
and borders on being merely a realistic figurine of a popular
subject with nationalistic connotations, an oversized bibelot,
very close in form to Gasper's Coq Gaulois. Brancusi's Coq is,
by contrast, challenging and innovative in a manner that bespeaks
of his self-conscious place in avant-garde developments. A new form
in Bergson's terminology, and hence an advance in artistic evolution,
Brancusi's *Coq* is related to its ostensible subject only through its title and the expressive power of its nearly abstract forms. As a consequence, it had a very small market appeal. Brancusi, had, in fact, abandoned his facile ability to produce pleasing, realistic and readily saleable forms early in his career. His refusal to exploit this talent after 1907, at a time when avant garde sculpture had little market at all, indicates that the source of his animal imagery, unlike that of Pompon's, lies elsewhere than in the nexus of supply and demand. Furthermore, unlike other sculptors such as the prolific Bugatti who created whole menageries, Brancusi created only a limited number of animal works, and sold only a portion of these, even after the market for his work increased.

One must not assume, however, that animal images were unknown in avant garde sculpture around the time of Brancusi's first use of them, or that the avant garde, or Brancusi for that matter, were completely divorced from the necessity of selling their work. Duchamp-Villon's four animal relief panels depicting cats, dogs, parrots and doves, shown at the Salon d'Automne in 1913 are direct evidence that even members of the most advanced circles could and did create pleasing decorative work. Nor should we overlook his realistic *Coq* relief panel of 1916, which was used as an ornament for a theatre set up for the troops at the front and hence necessarily representational in nature. At the same time, animal sculpture occupied a significant place in the subject matter of less decorative and more experimental work by the avant garde, including Duchamp Villon.
His Horse of 1914 comes immediately to mind, as does Gaudier Brzeska's Stags and Birds Erect of the same year. Brancusi was then, working within a convention and employing a vocabulary which had already been established.

But despite their relationship to other animal sculptures of the period, both academic and avant garde, Brancusi's series is of a different nature. This difference lies as much in their content as in their forms. In the final analysis Brancusi's choice of animal subjects consisted of a limited but interrelated repertoire. They must be seen in their relationship to each other to be fully understood. Although diverse in form, they had a common— and given their relationship to the Bird series—even a predictable preoccupation.

Nonetheless, this series is the most problematic in Brancusi's oeuvre: the problematic nature is first apparent in the determination of its origins and scope. It will be recalled that Brancusi seems to have replaced the Penguins with the later Leda, which effected an easier transformation between the animal series, the Maiastra and Sculpture for the Blind, as well as conforming to his ideological reversal. A second problem of inclusion and exclusion arises with the aforementioned Cog. It, like Leda, the Penguins and the Maiastra, is a flightless bird and has been seen, like the Birds in Space, to represent the aspirations of the spirit. Unlike these works, and all the others examined here, however, it was originally carved in wood, and was never recreated in stone, only bronze. It is doubtful if its top heavy form, set on a thin leg, could ever have been success-
fully executed in marble, even if a system of internal support was arranged. In keeping with the methodological outline, based on a grouping by material, the Coq must then be excluded from this study, despite the apparent overlap in its conception.

The second problem with the animal series lies in the forms themselves. The animal works do not evolve with the smooth, minute and continuous transformations which characterize Brancusi's development of the Birds in Space from the initial Maiastra and Sculpture for the Blind. This process seems to have been rendered impossible by the diversity of creatures which he used. Nonetheless, a coherent concept links the various animals. Each is concerned not only with an animal subject, but also with the medium through which that animal moves. Brancusi's preoccupation with motion and its relationship to Bergson need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that each work in the series implies through either its forms or its title, or more commonly, through both, a state and medium of motion and that the major problem of the series is effecting a transformation from the earth/water world of Leda to the airborne Birds in Space, following however, an alternative oppositional path to that of the Bird series.

Since most of this series was created after the first Birds in Space, its direction was predetermined and predictable. Given this condition, and Brancusi's growing isolation from his own historical situation and the avant garde during the creation of the animal series, it lacks much of the semantic richness found in the humans and the early war-time work. In fact, Brancusi appears to be working
backwards to a solution already established as early as 1920. As we shall see, this synchronic denial of time and evolution results in his final conception of the early 1940's linking up conceptually and formally with the first *Birds in Space* of twenty years earlier. The length of time it took Brancusi to resolve the series is indicative of both the underlying continuity of his ideas, which he did not abandon but continued working on, and his trouble in finding an effective transformation. Indeed, the final resolution although precise and unmistakeable in its intention, has the appearance of the makeshift about it.

The first work in the series following *Leda* isolates the medium of motion which distinguishes *Leda* from the *Maiastra*—that of water. In 1922, Brancusi carved a marble *Fish*. Despite the continuity of concept between the aquatic *Leda* and the *Fish*, the forms are dissimilar, although the ovoid of *Sculpture for the Blind* underlies each. The *Fish* flattens this ovoid and becomes a long, thin ellipse, pointed at one end, which bulges slightly at the centre and tapers towards the edges. In defiance of gravity, the *Fish* is mounted on its thin edge, floating over a polished metal mirror.

The appearance of motion through water as the principle meaning of the *Fish* is unmistakable. Geist confirms this aspect of the work. "*Fish*, while a poetic version of the natural forms, is essentially the image of fluidity, of floating, of passage without friction."² He describes a larger later version in blue marble as "an image of a large, blunted submarine creature which seems to hover
on its small mounting. The polished and veined surface carries an illusion of passage through water." Brancusi, in his customary cryptic style, was to emphasize the importance of motion in his conception of the Fish. "When you see a fish, you do not think of its scales, do you? You think of its speed, its floating, flashing body seen through water... Well, I've tried to express just that. If I made fins, and eyes and scales, I would arrest its movement and hold a pattern and a shape of reality. I want just the flash of its spirit."4

But the Fish should, if the problem posed at the outset is correct, also suggest a transition to flight, or movement in air. In fact, like a flying fish, it floats above a mirrored surface, in the air, as it were. This is accomplished by balancing the Fish carefully on its plate. This combination of equilibrium and flight suggests a source for Brancusi's unique conception. In 1911, L'Illustration carried an article on "L'Équilibre des Poissons dans l'eau" by F. Honoré.

Etudier les conditions d'équilibre du poissons dans l'eau avec l'espoir de trouver des préceptes applicables à l'équilibre des navires aériens semble au premier abord une entreprise chimérique.

L'air et l'eau, les gaz et les liquides, possèdent, en effect, des propriétés générales fort différentes. Les gaz sont compressibles, l'eau ne l'est point; le milieu liquide, dit-on, est, contrairement à l'air, dépourvu d'élasticité.5

However, as the article points out, the contradiction is only apparent, not real, and may be overcome. Indeed, it illustrates wooden
models of fish, (with fins), which were used to study forms ideal for flight. The studies were particularly useful, as "Pour ne citer qu'un example, un simple poisson nous révèlera tout à l'heure certains défauts du Zeppelin." 6

Just as motion and Zeppelins were a source of images for Brancusi, so was the concept of evolution. The article explains that "les poissons, au cours de l'évolution durant des milliers d'années qui a produit les formes actuelles, furent modelés peu à par les tourbillons de l'eau qu'ils déplacent en avançant." 7 This form seems to be what Brancusi tried to capture.

Brancusi's Fish was, however, a denial of evolution rather than its affirmation. Brancusi's "spirit" of fish represents his ideal of its essense, that is, the form which underlies all fish for all time; it is timeless in intent, despite the fact that, like the Yellow Bird, its forms coincide with contemporary technological innovation. Thus, once again, Brancusi subverted biological and technological evolution by using a timeless synchronic statement. The combination of mechanical and animal motion expressed in an aerodynamic form in the Fish is however, in opposition to that of the Yellow Bird: as the Yellow Bird ascends to the heights, the Fish descends to the depths. Nonetheless, as has been the case throughout the oeuvre, this opposition is made explicit and obscured at the same time. It has not yet, however, been resolved. The last remaining problem with the Fish is its possible personal connotations. Given Brancusi's identification with the other works in his oeuvre, it would be sur-
prising if this image of the spirit of fish did not have a broader personal significance. Giedon-Welder reports that Brancusi, in fact, regarded the Fish almost as his emblem as "he was born on February 21st under the signs of Pisces and Jupiter." The emphasis on the Fish as spirit also suggest possible early Christian iconographic associations, as the fish was a symbol of Christ. It will be recalled that the impulse towards spiritual purity suggested here is made more explicit in later works. If the conjunction of Christ and the personal symbol are acceptable, we see again the appearance of an elevated concept of the artist, which was first expressed in the Muse and Prometheus. Indeed, it would appear that Brancusi remained faithful to his ideal of the artist as someone in touch with the divine who suffered.

This concept of artist as a Prometheus/Christ figure, such as we see implied here, is a throwback to Gauguin, the symbolists and Rodin. As Caso and Sanders point out in their commentary on Rodin's "Christ and the Magdalene:"

The self-concept of the late-nineteenth-century artist naturally included an identification with Christ. Gauguin, for one, had repeatedly painted himself as Christ. Rodin's intentional use of Christ as a type for the man of genius in this group is elucidated by alternative titles for the work, Prometheus and an Oceanid and Prometheus Bound. Throughout the century Prometheus, who was frequently identified with artist, was also associated with Christ. Both were superior men who suffered for mankind. The artist and poet frequently saw themselves in this light, and on more than one occasion Rodin compared himself with the Greek hero and a sympathetic woman with the Oceanid. . . . Seen in this context, then, the Christ and the Magdalene seems to be one more of Rodin's speculations on the nature of genius and the role of the artist. If the work can be associated in the most general sense with the suffering man of genius and his consoling muse or lover, the associations with Christ and Prometheus suggest subtle shades of meaning that enrich the essential idea.
It also cast subtle shades of meaning on Brancusi's Fish and consequently, its relationship to the Muse and Prometheus. Indeed, it completes the meanings inherent in the latter two works. It also indicates that Brancusi was both adhering to ideas he first expressed in 1911 and remaining true to his first sources of inspiration. Like so much else in his oeuvre, his concept of himself did not alter with the vagaries of time.

The idea of personal spiritual fulfillment, which ultimately suggests the Birds in Space, also points in the direction of the next work in the series of animals. It will be recalled that this impulse is contained in a metaphor of motion and that the Fish moves in water, while the Birds in Space are, as the title states, in space. The disjunction and opposition between heights and depths implies, then, the expectation that the next work in the series must in some way form a link which begins to resolve this opposition. The Seal, finished about 1936, but started, according to Geist, shortly after the first Fish, that is, about 1924, meets these requirements in both its form and its content.¹⁰

The Seal combines the forms of Leda with those of the Fish, and as will be seen, of the Birds in Space. Geist has again pointed out the first of these formal relationships. "Almost as minimal in its elements as the Fish, the Seal like the Fish imposes itself by its size. Nor is it an altogether new image: the disposition of its volumes is similar to that of Leda."¹¹ The joining of the unitary form of the Fish with the shape of Leda should also accompany a
joining of the two states of motion. The Seal must join the submarine world of the Fish with the surface water and landed world of Leda. This is in fact the case. Seals move in all three realms. They mediate between these oppositions and serve as ideal operators in the conceptual transformation between them. Geist has noted this necessary ambiguity. The Seals' "ambiguity reflects that of its natural model, a legless mammal with fishy powers." 12

The Seal does not yet complete, however, the link between the animals and the Birds in Space. Nonetheless, the Seal does seem to aspire to flight with an upward movement much like that of the Golden Birds. Indeed, the formal similarity is very close. Geist points out that the Seal's "facial plane is similar to the bevel in Birds in Space... if the neck of the Seal is projected beyond the head, the facial plane bears the same relation to the tapering mass thus produced as the bevel to the Bird. (The last Birds and the Seal taper at the same speed).... Unitary, unaccented on its great surface, the Seal is situated formally between Leda and Bird in Space." 13 The formal kinship becomes clearer if the Seal is seen at a low angle from the front so that its mass is obscured and its upward motion emphasized. Yet the Seal does not attain flight; despite its alternative title, the Miracle. 14

We come then, to the final work in the animal series. The foregoing should allow certain predictions to be made about both its form and content. It must involve the idea of motion. Furthermore this motion must be capable of being an operator in the transformation
of the earth/water realm of the Leda, Fish and Seal into the opposition of the open sky of the Birds in Space. Its form should also be predictable. It should, in some manner, combine features of the Seal with those of the Birds. Finally, it, like the Birds in Space, should sublimate sexuality into spirituality. But of most importance, the work must be the final conception in the oeuvre. Hypothetically, nothing beyond it, except the Birds in Space, should be possible, if the oeuvre is to maintain its integrity and the analysis of the concerns is to be deemed correct.

All of these conditions are met in the Flying Turtle of 1940/1945. It is, in fact, the final new conception introduced into the oeuvre. It is problematic however in that the subject of the turtle was first carved in wood, although this piece has been destroyed. This is the only point, in the work examined, of a crossover between the two media. The form and significance of the wooden Turtle, however, are entirely different from those of the marble Flying Turtle. As Geist points out, "Like Bird in Space and Fish, it is a creature that moves in a fluid medium, satisfied to plane determinedly in low flight, a foot above the ground." But although Geist's assertion of movement and flight is correct, he is overly precise as to where the turtle moves. He does not realize that ambiguity can have a very specific significance, and Flying Turtle, as its name implies, is ambiguous. It may, as a turtle move both underwater and on land. But when Brancusi turned it on its back and named it, he gave it the magical power of flight. Thus Flying Turtle
contains the necessary transformative functions to mediate between the world and motion of the Seals and that of the Birds in Space.

It also has a form that is midway between the Seals and the Birds in Flight. In order to see the similarity between the three works, the Turtle must be seen from the side rather than from the front or the top. The profile image disguises the spade like wing forms by showing, as in the Seal, an elongated form slightly bent upward to emphasize the possibility of ascension. On the other hand, and distinct from the Seal, the angle is reduced so that it becomes very close to the bulging chest of the Birds in Space on one side and to their straight spine on the other. The head section is even truncated, although in this case, the underlying form is angular rather than round. Formally as well as conceptually, the Flying Turtle is an intermediary in the linguistic transformation from the realm of the animals to that of the Birds.

No commentary exists on the question of the sublimation of the erotic into the spiritual, but if one instance of symbolic speculation may be offered, it does seem to be present. The projecting head of the Flying Turtle does seem, in the same way as Spear observed in the Maiastra, to have a phallic cast. Furthermore, the spade shape of the body may also be interpreted as phallic. Thus a sexual referent may be inferred. This is tempered, however, by its ability to fly. This has been seen as a move to the spiritual, both in Bergson's universe, in which even the humblest creature aspires to overcome the limitations of material existence, and in Brancusi's
Birds. Indeed, the *Flying Turtle* seems to have jumped several stages in creative evolution, and aspires to a union with the spiritual. Lewis has stated that with "the *Turtle* sculpture, Brancusi . . . wished to show that the lowliest and most modest was capable of 'the journey towards God.'"  

Thus although the idea of a flying turtle may seem absurd, given the context of the oeuvre and the logical necessity of forming a link between the animals and the birds so that the two series could be joined, its existence becomes not only significant, but a categorical imperative. Geist sees this work as having a "finality in the oeuvre" although for different reasons; he supposed that through it "Brancusi was refusing at the last moment the logical outcome of both his sculptural and spiritual progress." He does, however, agree that "Brancusi's ascensional nature would have found the earth hugging image intolerable as a way to close the oeuvre" and hence endowed it with the ability to fly.  

Brancusi may also have identified personality with the *Turtle*, which was created in the first years of the Second World War. It has been established that following World War I Brancusi was becoming increasingly hermetic in his concerns, and more closed off from the social and political events which inspired his earlier work. The Impasse Ronsin seems to have become, from reports of later years, something of a refuge, if not a hermitage. Like the turtle, Brancusi was providing himself with a protective armour from the outside world while maintaining his spiritual aspirations. It remains quite possible,
then, that as Geist says, "Flying Turtle in Brancusi's défi flung in the face of fate." ¹⁸

With the Flying Turtle, Brancusi finished the oeuvre, both physically, semantically and philosophically. He had completed the whole.

... the [total] body of work is easy to consider as a whole because of the clarity of its physical outlines. Brancusi's studio was not cluttered by the sketches and unfinished projects common to most sculptors' studios. Besides the finished works, there is a sacred and abandoned marble head of a child; a Bird in Space in the initial stages of being roughed out; some plasters... Thus the oeuvre that Brancusi left us gives the impression of having no loose ends, no gropings in many directions, no ultimate frustrations. Here is a body of work whose limits appear to be perfectly contained by the artist.¹⁹

The last work of the oeuvre in place, it is now possible to join the two series of animals and to link these up with the humans. When this is done, as in diagram vi, the clarity of the structure as a whole becomes apparent. Indeed, this clarity almost obscures its inherent complexity and the profundity of its themes. It is possible now to see that a central axis runs from the Kiss through the Sculpture for the Blind to the Birds in Space. This oppositional axis is based on the Bergsonian division of spirit and matter, here expressed as the sacred and the profane, or the spiritual and the sexual. All the works are grouped around this central axis. At its end points, culture is transformed into nature. In order to go from one end of the opposition to the other, one passes from the specific, through the ambiguous to the non-differentiated Sculpture for the Blind and then back along a reverse path. This central internal structure both obscures and reconciles the oppositions and contradictions in Brancusi's sculptural discourse. It also corresponds very closely
Immaterial Nature > Spiritual > Culture

Male (passive) ↔ Female (active)

Human

Animal

Nature ↔ Immaterial Spiritual Sacred → Culture

(Flying) High (Air) ↔ (Swimming/Crawling) Low (Water/Land)

Figure 6
to Bergson. "Behind 'spirituality' on the one hand, and 'materiality' ... on the other, there are then two processes opposite in their direction, and we pass from the first to the second by way of inversion, or perhaps even by simple interruption."

Other oppositions, it becomes clear, are arranged in isomorphic series. These are arranged symmetrically, and divided into two larger symmetrically arranged opposing groups, divided between animals and humans. The human series are paired into dyadic relationships according to sex, i.e. male and female, the animals are divided by the medium through which they move, i.e. air and water, or high and low.

But the structure itself, now seen as a totality, also reconciles the opposition between dyadic and concentric forms of symmetry. Although the series themselves are arranged in symmetrical oppositions, joined at the top and bottom, the progression of states through which each series passes, i.e. from the non-differentiated to the ambiguous to the specific, which run in each direction, is concentric, radiating outward from the central Sculpture for the Blind. In each case, both above and below the Sculpture for the Blind, is a triadic arrangement, i.e. Princess X—Sculpture for the Blind—Newborn, or Maiastra—Sculpture for the Blind—Leda (or animal-god-human). Lévi-Strauss in Structural Anthropology has pointed out at great length that when a triadic arrangement is grouped so that a symmetrical opposition occurs, the result is, as we have here, a concentric transformation. This structural arrangement lies at the core of many forms of primitive
social groupings. Shalevy has distilled Lévi-Strauss' observations on these structures. "The problem is, then, threefold: (1) to explain the nature of diametric structure, (2) to explain the nature of concentric structure, and (3) to explain how most diametric structures present both a symmetrical character... and an asymmetrical character, so that they are midway between absolutely symmetrical societies and the asymmetrical concentric forms."21

This overview of the entire structure also reveals other previously concealed relationships. For example, the first works, the Muses, are inspirational in nature, they sublimate the spiritual into the sexual, the final works are aspirational, they sublimate the sexual into the spiritual. The Sleeper is static, the Birds in Space, conversely, are free to move in all directions.

The entire oeuvre exhibits a highly disciplined and coherent intellectual infrastructure. Like a piece of music it may be enjoyed on many different levels. Also like mythologies in general it... makes demands primarily on the neuromental aspects because of the length of the narration, the recurrence of certain themes, and the other forms of back references and parallels which can only be correctly grasped if the listener's mind surveys, as it were, the whole range of the story as it unfolded.21a

The whole becomes, also like a piece of music, an enclosed synchronic totality. The final stage in this denial of time would be to return to the point of origin, the Kiss. Indeed, as has been stated, Brancusi did this. The last stone work that he created was a final version called Boundary Marker, of 1945. Significantly, this may have been his final statement against a second war. Although
Geist believes that it may have been done in response to Stalin's partitioning of Romania in the late years of World War II, and thus a statement of nationalistic sentiment, this is probably not the case. Its protest lies in a different area. More likely, this image of love, which Geist also recognizes, is in keeping with its point of origin, a call to the dissolution of boundaries through love, be it sexual, spiritual or that of brotherhood. Whatever the case, this image returns us to the initial work with which Brancusi began his sculptural language. The final boundaries which Brancusi erased were ultimately those of time.
Footnotes--Chapter VIII


2. Geist, 1968, p. 82.

3. Ibid., p. 107.


5. F. Honoré, "L'équilibre des poissons dans l'eau... in *L'Illustration*, 16 December 1911, p. 500.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.


9. De Caso and Sanders, p. 94.


14. It seems that seals had a deep personal significance for Brancusi. Various reports indicate that he kept a file of pictures of them in his atelier. No statement has been found, however, on this significance, either by Brancusi or his commentators. A possibility also exists that the Seal contains a reference to Rodin's Balzac. Elsen has pointed out that "small plaster caricatures of the sculpture... were made and sold in the streets of Paris. One of these in the Rodin Museum at Philadelphia shows a seal in the position of Balzac; on its base is written "One Step Forward," a jesting reference both to the pose and to the notion of Rodin's leadership in sculpture."

16. Lewis, p. 38.
18. Ibid.
21. Shalevy, p. 89.
CONCLUSION

Brancusi's stone works, when seen as a totality and examined in a structuralist framework based on Claude Lévi-Strauss' theories, form a rational whole. This totality may, in turn, be accurately termed a language system. As in any language system, nothing is without significance. Information is coded in the forms and content of each piece. All its parts are coherently related. Yet these relationships are of a special order, that defined as "concrete logic" or "mythological thought" which Lévi-Strauss says characterizes primitive societies. One is, in fact, tempted to call Brancusi's sculptural system a mythology. He is, at any rate, an ideal model of reality. The system is so precise that once its major premises are stated, the presence of much of the rest is predictable. This quality of predictability is, in the final analysis, the standard of validity for both the methodology and its application. It also underlines the inherently rational, binary character of Brancusi's thought, as well as his consistency throughout the entire period of his production.

This structuralist analysis, which combines the historic with the linguistic, and the synchronic with the diachronic, also overcomes a frequent criticism of Lévi-Strauss' theories. It is sometimes stated that, even if valid, his methodology often impoverishes rather than enriches that to which it is applied. It has been
suggested that it reduces mythological structures of infinite variety to a few pre-established oppositions: nature/culture, wild/tame, life/death etc. As can be seen, however, while these oppositions are embedded in the conceptual infrastructure of Brancusi's sculpture, the methodology in no way reduces it solely to these concerns. If anything, the study reveals the surprisingly rich field of associations on which Brancusi drew to create his oeuvre. In fact, the structuralist analysis makes it apparent that it is an exclusively formal approach which impoverishes our understanding by bypassing the semantic relationships found in the content of art. Used properly, a structuralist analysis enhances our knowledge of both the subjective thought processes and objective cultural matrix of artists such as Brancusi, as well as showing how their art constitutes the nexus between the two.

Consequently, one of the major contributions of this analysis is that it shows the multi-layered significance of such works as the Kiss, the Muse, Princess X, the Maiasra and the Leda. Their richness of meaning goes well beyond the significance of their form, and makes them "bonnes à penser" as well as beautiful to behold. Indeed, as can be seen with the Sculpture for the Blind, even the simplest and purest of forms can be endowed with a complex, yet precise significance when examined in its relationship to the rest of the oeuvre, and to the historical period of its creation.

The contribution of the analysis goes further. Although the four series which constitute Brancusi's stone works have been perceived
before, a structuralist methodology is necessary to place them in their logical relationships with each other. It demonstrates that, when seen in retrospect, Brancusi conceived his subjects in parallel isomorphic series which are both oppositional and appositional. These four series are, in turn, grouped into two oppositional systems. When the metaphoric and metonymic transformation of each series are examined, it becomes apparent that the works progress as much by semantic meaning as by form. The Sculpture for the Blind sits at the centre of these coherently arranged series, its own first cause and its own point of origin.

The simplicity and rationality of this underlying structure also demonstrates the validity of the analysis on the grounds of intellectual parsimony, or the principle that the simplest explanation is the truest. Geist, and others have noted that Brancusi's work forms a coherent and rational whole, but when they attempted to analyze it, they produced unrelated series which crossed and recrossed at random, in effect having a very complicated underlying structure. The structuralist analysis indicates that the underlying structure is much more rational than originally perceived. It is the simplest possible solution that integrates all aspects of the form and content of the works, with their development, and their historical setting.

In turn, the analysis indicates that Brancusi's works fall into three main periods. These begin with his joining the avant garde in 1907 and the Kiss, and end in his relative isolation in the cul-de-sac of the Impasse Rosin. Nonetheless, the continuity of the
The underlying concepts relate the end to the beginning and established that, as Geist proposed and as Brancusi indicated, the works were largely conceived more or less at one time and worked out over the remainder of the sculptor's life.

The first of the three periods dates from 1907 to 1913, and begins with the *Kiss*. With this work Brancusi declared himself in alignment with an avant garde which was, at the time, fascinated with "primitive" art forms and techniques. Symbolists like Gaugin, the Fauves like Derain and Matisse, and possibly Picasso, all of whom were collecting primitive art objects, proved to be sources of inspiration for Brancusi. This rejection of his long academic training, which Geist has noted but for which he offers no clear explanations, must be related to the sympathy between Brancusi's "primitive" nature and the avant garde's "primitivising" tendencies in the crucial period of 1906/1907.

Paralleling Picasso, Brancusi at first assimilated and then rejected the technical and formal influence of Rodin. With the *Kiss* Brancusi turned to direct carving. Nonetheless, until the First World War, several of Brancusi's mythological subjects were drawn from Rodin. Yet Brancusi's choice, and his use of these subjects tended to be very much his own, and fit in perfectly with the infrastructure that he was creating. So too, did his portraits of this period. After 1914, however, Brancusi completely abandoned Rodin as a source for his stone work. He also stopped introducing new subjects to his human head series, which, for all intents and purposes, came to an end.
Aside from these influences, the analysis also clarifies Brancusi's relationship to the philosopher, Henri Bergson. The structuralist analysis establishes that Brancusi understood and employed the interrelated concept of creative evolution, intuition, duration, motion, time, elan vitale and the opposition between spirit and matter. Furthermore, it shows how Brancusi transformed and expressed these ideas in terms of concrete logic in sculptural form. The analysis demonstrates that Brancusi adhered to these ideas into his second and third periods when other members of the avant garde were dropping them. In fact, Bergson's ideas, which Brancusi would have encountered as soon as he reached Paris, are the constant in all his works. The analysis also demonstrates, that while Brancusi's works refer to and draw their meaning from philosophic texts, they are not dependent on them, but form their own system, parallel to, but independent of literature.

The remaining feature which characterized Brancusi's works of the first period were related to his alignment with the artists of the Abbaye de Cretiel and his socialist sympathies. These concerns and sympathies were, however, demonstrated to be based on the diachronic idea of social evolution and were inimical to timeless qualities of a synchronic mythological structure. The methodology points out and even predicts how he disposed of them during the war years and thereafter, by first replacing the Penguins with the Leda and then by transforming the Maiastra into its opposite. As Brancusi developed, it was his adherence to his timeless structure
that separated him from other progressing movements in the evolving avant garde.

In the second period of Brancusi's work, which occurred during the war, he created a sequence which embodied the concept of the cyclic regeneration of both life and culture. In so doing he drew on several sources—monumental, mythological, musical and mechanical. But while employing modern and mechanical forms and associations, Brancusi, with a characteristic paradox, subverted social evolution and technological progression and turned history back on itself. This, in turn, isolated him from his contemporaries in the avant garde like Leger, who were, by this time, emphasizing the diachronic aspects of their work.

In the post war period, operating more and more from a position of isolation in the cul-de-sac of the Impasse Rosin, Brancusi moved out of line with other avant garde movements and more and more towards spirituality. In the face of the appeal to reason by the "call to order" artists and to the subconscious by the Surrealists, Brancusi remained faithful to Bergson's concept of intuition, durée and élan vitale. Abandoning socialism and the human condition, however, Brancusi also abandoned human subject matter and worked out his remaining problems in his two series of animal subjects. These constitute the overwhelming proportion of his new post-war subjects. In finalizing his structure, he returned in 1945, to his original point of departure, and thus attempted to the end to turn back time.
The methodology, as applied to Brancusi's unique situation of a primitive embedded in a modern society, answers a second major criticism of Lévi-Strauss, that is that he denies the idea of social progress and evolution. This challenge has been leveled from several fronts, but here is proven to be groundless. While Lévi-Strauss' subject, i.e. primitive mythological structures, may be synchronic, as are the societies which produce them, the methodology of structuralism still allows for, and indeed, demands the inclusion of the diachronic. In fact, this study has demonstrated how the synchronic responds to the diachronic. It gives validity, however, to each. Lévi-Strauss continually insists that both must always be included in any study of myth.
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