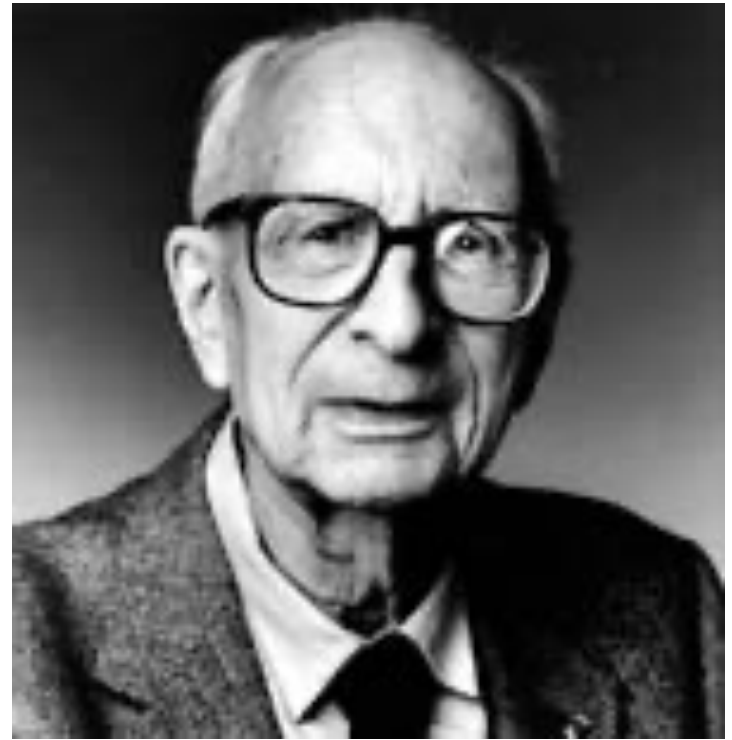Claude Levi-Strauss then...

self-portrait (with monkey) in Brazil, 1938.
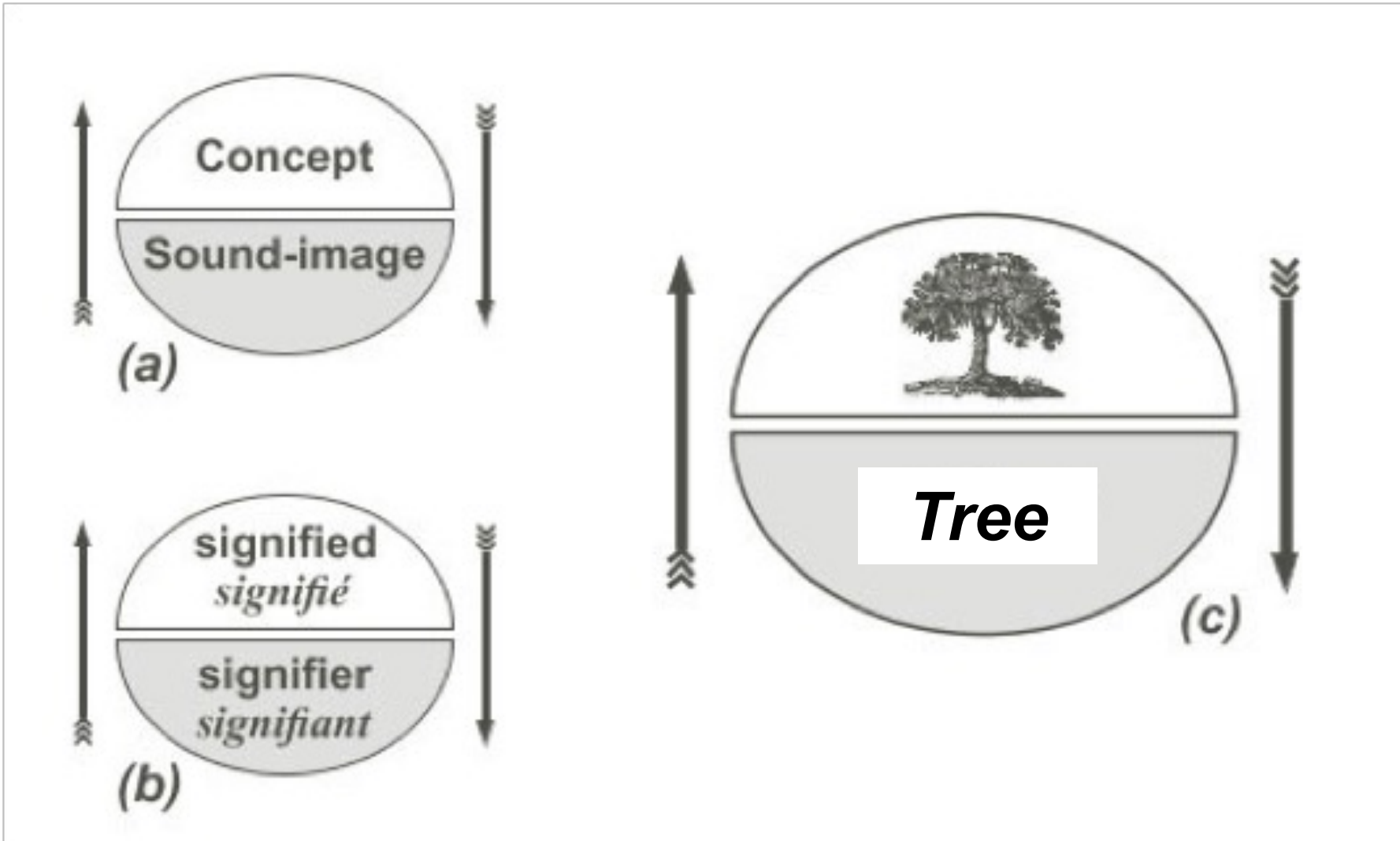
Claude Levi-Strauss more recently...Paris, 1991.

1908-2009

The Levi-Straussian structuralist method:

1) define cultural phenomena as a relation between sets of binary categories;

2) make a table of possible permutations of these pairs of categories;

3) make the table your object of analysis. Look for non-obvious patterns among linked categories to draw conclusions.

*"Language (langue) is a **system** of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas"* (Saussure, p. 10)

Concept

Sound-image

(a)

signified
signifié

signifier
signifiant

(b)

Tree

(c)

Saussure's Binary Sign
(Levi-Strauss, p. 18)

Levi-Strauss applies Saussure, p. 18-20

Concept

Sound-image
(percept)

(a)

Force of a deity
(punishing you)

Feeling of
weightiness/falling

(b)

Particular culture filters

"Gravity" (force that
attracts two bodies,
higher mass, greater pull)

Feeling of
weightiness/falling

(c)

transparent/ universal

transparent/ universal

L-S claims such a "scientific" concept is closer to reality/nature, thus breaks out of scientists' received cultural structures of signs.
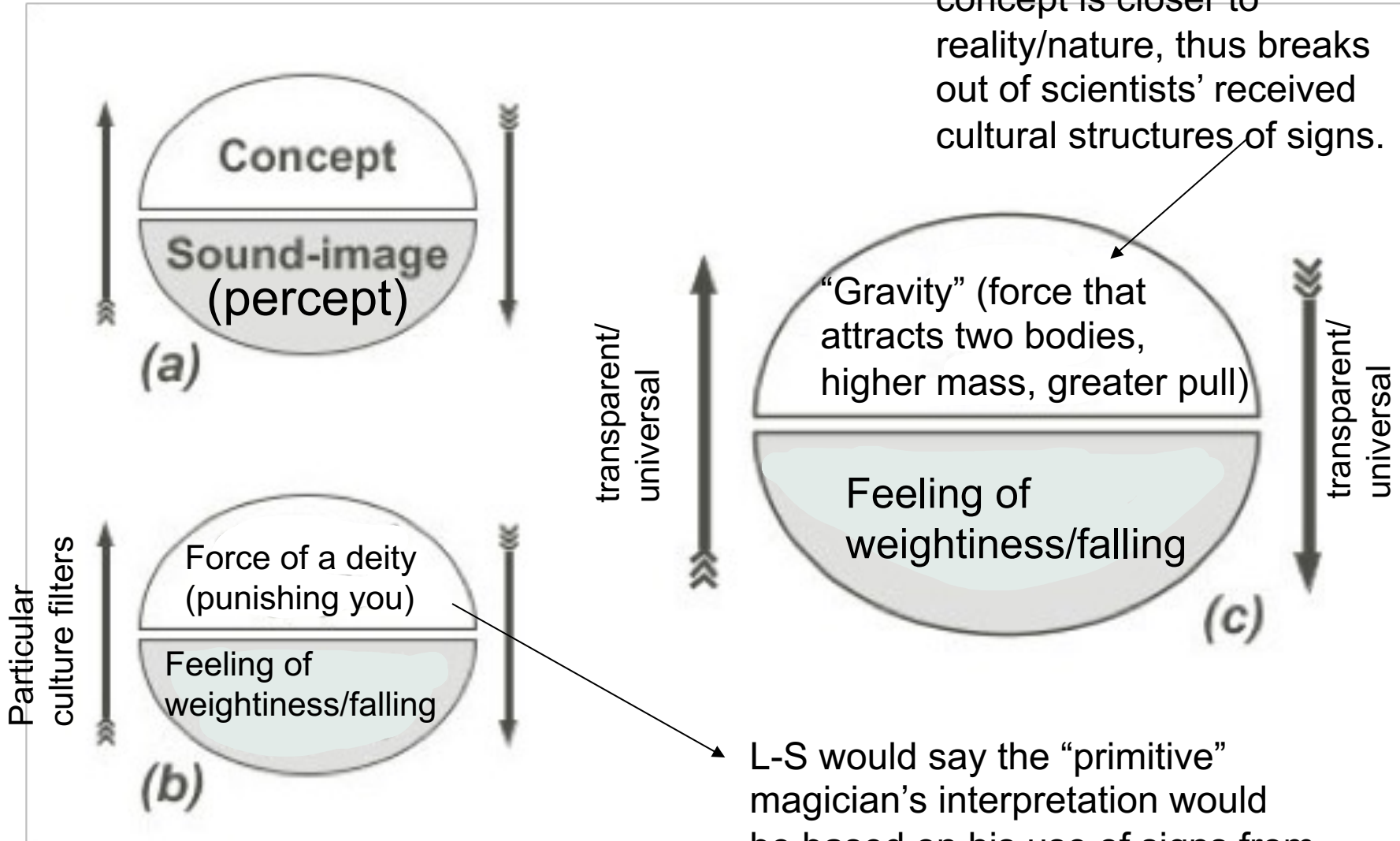
L-S would say the "primitive" magician's interpretation would be based on his use of signs from a bounded/limited toolkit of cultural structures he is stuck in and can't/does not want to leave.

Culture	vs.	Nature
Structure: particular system of categories		Events: contingent, real-world occurrences
Langue: particular system of signs		Parole: shifting, situated speech

Bricoleur	Engineer
Magic/Mythical thought	Science
Uses own senses with limited tools of own culture/langue	Uses technology/tools to perceive, tries to transcend own culture/langue
Creates more 'signs': ideas that reflect own culture	Creates 'concepts': transparently/objectively reflect nature/'reality'
synchronic: nothing really changes	diachronic: create new knowledge that changes the world

Modes of Scientific Thought

Levi-Strauss, p. 20-33

Culture/ (Particular) Structure/ Langue/ Necessity/ Internal

synchronic

synchronic

"axis of opposition" (p. 20)

Bricoleur/ Mythical Thought

*Work mostly via the concrete: produce limited <u>signs</u> (mediate images and concepts) by interposing culture with direct perceptions.
*Work within a fixed, closed, structure of categories.
*Use events to create structure: "new arrangements" (ie., myths).
*Move from diachronic to synchronic: means and ends cyclically related.

Ritual: Conjoins/ symmetrical

Artist/ Art

*Create "aesthetic emotion" by balancing structure and event.
*Always impose on external events internal structure of categories.
*Work primarily via <u>metaphors</u>: discover homologous structures between disparate things.
*Produce a homologous image (vs. the real thing).

Primitive art

Western academic art

Engineer/ Science

*Work mostly via the abstract: produce <u>concepts</u> (transp. to reality)
*Work with an open structure, addresses universe.
*Work primarily via <u>metonyms</u>: replace one thing for another,
*Use structures to create events, tries to break out.
*Move from synchronic to diachronic: means and ends linearly related

Games: disjunctive/ asymmetrical

diachronic

diachronic

Nature/ Event (reality) / Parole/ Contingency/ External