

cooking

It is clear that in respect to cooking the raw constitutes the unmarked pole, while the other two poles, the cooked and the rotted, are strongly marked, but in different directions: the cooked is a cultural transformation of the raw, whereas the rotted is a natural transformation. Underlying this original triangle, there is hence a double opposition between elaborated/unelaborated on the one hand, and culture/nature on the other.

The two most prominent modes of cooking must be roasting and boiling - in what does their difference consist? Roasted food is directly exposed to the fire; with the fire it realizes an unmediated conjunction, whereas the boiled food is doubly mediated, by the water in which it is immersed, and by the receptacle which holds both water and food.

On two grounds, then, one can say that the roasted is on the side of nature, the boiled on the side of culture: literally because boiling requires the use of a receptacle, a cultural object; symbolically inasmuch as culture is a mediation of the relation between man and the world, and boiling demands a mediation (by water) of the relations between food and the fire, which is absent in roasting.

This observation establishes a double affinity: the roasted with the raw, that is to say the unelaborated, and the boiled with the rotted, which is one of the two modes of the elaborated, the other being the cooked. The affinity of the roasted with the raw comes from the fact that it is never uniformly cooked, whether this be on all sides, or on the outside and the inside.

As for the boiled, its affinity with the rotted is attested in numerous European languages.

The boiled can most often be ascribed to what might be called an 'endo-cuisine', prepared for domestic use, destined to a small closed group, while the roasted belongs to 'exo-cuisine', that which one offers to guests. Formerly in France, boiled chicken was the family meal, while roasted meat was for the banquet.

The same opposition is found, differently formulated, in exotic societies. The extremely primitive Guayaki of Paraguay roast all their game except when they prepare the meat destined for the rites that determine the name of a new child: this meat must be boiled. The Chaingang of Brazil prohibit boiled meat for the widow or widower, and also for anyone who has murdered an enemy. In all these cases prescription of the boiled accompanies a tightening, prescription of the roasted a loosening of familial or social ties. Following this line of argument, one could infer that cannibalism (which by definition is an endo-cuisine in respect to the human race) ordinarily employs boiling rather than roasting, and that the cases where bodies are roasted must be more frequent in exo-cannibalism, where the body of an enemy is eaten, than in endo-cannibalism where it is the body of a relative or family member that is eaten.